

## Introduction to *Zeal* 3.1

Robin E. Field

King's College (PA)

October in Northeast Pennsylvania ushers in a glorious display of autumnal foliage, crisp air scented with the musk of earthly decay, and the ever earlier darkening of late afternoons. As the end of the year approaches, I encourage you, dear reader, to accede to the urge to ruminate and rest, rather than push on with the demands of our hustle and bustle culture. The essays in the fifth issue of *Zeal: A Journal for the Liberal Arts* offer space for contemplation, inspiration, and anticipation of the seasons to come.

The three Provocations & Occasions essays in this issue showcase the range of topics and treatments of interest to our readers. David H. Sick's "Etymologies of the Liberal Arts" delves into the meaning of the Latin phrase *artes liberales* to ask: "What are the liberal arts? What benefits do they provide to their students? Are these benefits sufficient for the costs levied on the students and their families? What must the liberal arts become in order to survive in the United States?" Sick underscores the importance of the liberal arts to undergraduate students and alumni in order to ascertain an accurate perception of the world around them. Our second contributor, Elizabeth Robertson Hornsby, explores how to create the transformative and innovative learning environments that foster creativity and critical engagement for students. In "Moving from Polarization to Possibility: Navigating the Challenges and Opportunities of Educational Innovation," Hornsby demonstrates how to incorporate technology such as micro-credentials and generative AI while also implementing such pedagogical strategies as co-constructed knowledge, reflection, and flexible pacing, in order to "foster lifelong learning and create pathways to lifetime earning." The final Provocation & Occasion piece is Spencer French's "Delight: The Politics of the Sidewalk," a meditation on the beauty of rambling across one's campus. French's evocation of Ross Gay, Robert Frost, and Wendell Berry in his lyrical essay reminds us to relish the delights of the natural world—to look away from our screens (after reading his essay!) and revel in the seasonal shifts of October.

The imperative of bringing the natural world into our classrooms and our teaching is subject of the Transformative Teaching forum curated by Matthew Eaton entitled "Ecological Pedagogies." Eaton reminds us that "Learning to love the world requires, I suggest, an interruption of the typical

collegiate discourse with creative and perhaps radical pedagogies that help move teachers and students into closer proximity with the planetary and creaturely vulnerability at risk in our current, anthropogenic ecological crisis.” The three essays in this forum offer concrete strategies to engage students in Environmental Humanities: Mariana Past rescripts students’ understandings of the Caribbean through literature and the arts; Dave Afandilian challenges the alterity of non-human animals by facilitating meaningful interactions between students and animals; and César Baldelomar and Emeline Dickinson remind us that “Questions of meaning and purpose, especially in relation to our shifting places on the pale blue dot and the expansive cosmos, are questions open to all, not just scholars and students.” Ideally, ecopedagogies disrupt traditional methodologies of the classroom; as Baldelomar specifically writes, “I ask myself how to channel those precious moments of ecstasy, awe, allurement, and desire into my teaching and learning.”

Ecstasy, awe, allurement, and desire—certainly these are all responses that may be derived from the work of Marilynne Robinson. In the Author Meets Critics forum curated by Regan Reitsma, three scholars offer spirited responses to Ryan S. Kemp and Jordan Rodgers’s book, *Marilynne Robinson’s Worldly Gospel: A Philosophical Account of Her Christian Vision*. Naomi Fisher commends Kemp and Rodgers’s use of Feuerbach and Nietzsche to frame their discussion of Robinson’s Christian vision; however, she contends that Kierkegaard offers a more convincing critique for the character Jack in Robinson’s novels *Home* and *Jack*. Proffering observations about Robinson’s work alongside Kemp and Rodgers’s own argument, Steven DeLay critiques Robinson’s Calvinistic theological underpinnings for her depiction of Jack. Comprehensive and complimentary in her summation of Kemp and Rodgers’s argument, Sára Tóth then notes how their analyses of two characters—Ruth and Ames’s grandfather—needed more careful treatment. Yet, the beauty of Robinson’s oeuvre is undeniable; for as Delay writes, “As Robinson’s phenomenology shows, this present world is affirmable, not merely for the sake of its beauty unveiled here and now, but for its prefiguration, revealed to those with the eyes to see, of an even more beautiful one to come. It is to Kemp and Rodgers’s great credit to have shown why that aesthetic, religious vision is not at all life-denying, but on the contrary, life-affirming.”

I am grateful to our contributors for entrusting their scholarship to *Zeal*; to our peer reviewers for their kind and careful evaluations of submissions for Provocations & Occasions; and to our editorial and advisory board members who have edited forums for this issue and forthcoming issues. *Zeal* is an open access journal; submissions for the peer-reviewed

Provocations & Occasions section may be sent to [zeal@kings.edu](mailto:zeal@kings.edu). I also welcome proposals from our readers for our various forums: Author Meets Critics, Transformative Teaching, Ethics in Focus, Liberal Arts Starts & Circuitous Routes, Powerful Expressions, Overheard in the Academy, and Reappraisals. Full descriptions of these forums may be read at our website: <https://zeal.kings.edu/zeal/about>.

May the end of 2024 offer you the time and space for reflection, the pleasure of wonderment, and the anticipation of hope, and, yes, zeal, in the year to come.