



UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

ARTS & LETTERS



2022

SENIOR THESIS PROJECTS

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Greetings!

I'm delighted to present this collection highlighting senior thesis projects completed by students in the College of Arts & Letters Class of 2022.

Within these pages, 280 seniors describe their 298 theses, capstones and creative projects. This package represents countless hours of original research, practice, analysis, interviews, writing, and creative work.

The projects detailed here are as interesting and diverse as the students who chose them. They include exploring the foundation for cluster algebras, writing a musical comedy, studying the role of faith in political participation, preserving an endangered language, and examining discrimination in the mortgage lending market.

During these endeavors, seniors have worked one-on-one with their advisors, who have provided valuable support, expertise and guidance. Many students also have benefited from generous grants that enabled them to travel, view archived manuscripts, purchase materials, and gain knowledge and cultural experiences. They have also demonstrated tremendous resiliency throughout the many challenges that COVID-19 has posed to their undergraduate careers — including the ways it forced many of them to reshape or recalibrate their projects.

Each year, seniors affirm that both the process and knowledge gained are invaluable, and often transformative.

I am proud of these seniors for pursuing their interests, making discoveries, and contributing to academic scholarship and the creative arts. I'm also extremely pleased that the percentage of Arts & Letters seniors completing theses, capstones, and creative projects has increased from 8% in 2008 to approximately 40% the last few years.

I hope that you enjoy learning about their projects as much as I have.

Sarah A. Mustillo

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I.A. O'Shaughnessy Dean
College of Arts & Letters



Zef Crnkovich

- Major: Classics
- Minor: Constitutional Studies
- Advisor: David O'Connor

The Shipwrecked Sailors: The Shared Nostos and Bliss of Penelope and Odysseus

My thesis attempted to show how essential the restoration of Odysseus' marriage to Penelope is to his return home. I argued that Penelope herself undergoes a sort of homecoming in parallel to Odysseus, which manifests the mutuality of their relationship. Without Penelope's own homecoming to the marriage bed in Book 23, Odysseus would experience a homecoming like that of Menelaus or, worse, Agamemnon.

I wanted to write about this topic because I believe Penelope is the best female character in all ancient literature, and definitely among the best of all time. However, Odysseus' return takes center stage, and I wanted to explore how Penelope's share in their marriage relationship helps Odysseus truly return home.

**Julia McSpedon**

- Majors: Neuroscience and Behavior and Greek and Roman Civilization
- Advisors: Christopher Baron and Catherine Schlegel

Sympathy for the Murderer — Gender Norm Defiance in Euripidean Tragedy

The Athenian woman in 5th century BCE held almost no autonomy, yet Euripides' tragedies provide supportive contexts for female rule-breakers. My study examined three Euripidean women — Helen (*The Trojan Women*), Electra (*Electra*), and Medea (*Medea*) — who function independently within this gender system. The text, however, defends their actions; they do not receive punishments proportional to their crimes.

When comparing these characters and the historical context, it is evident that at least one man pondered the position and trials of women by supporting the most infamous mythological women in tragedy. I find it fascinating that the mythological women in these plays act beyond the real-life position of Athenian women. By looking at plays and literature such as the tragedies in this study, we understand that the public opinion of women at this time was not a misogynistic monolith.

Thomas Moynihan

- Major: Program of Liberal Studies
- Minor: Business Economics
- Advisor: Elizabeth Mazurek

The Dehumanizing Effect of War in the *The Aeneid*

Using Anchises' framework for the ideal Roman from *The Aeneid*, I examined which characters, if any, best conformed to the Roman ideal. Virgil's increasingly complex characterizations resist simple assessment as he not only conflates characters on the two sides of battle but identifies strictly Roman virtue with both the Italians and Trojans. We find that Virgil's *The Aeneid* is much more complex than simple praise and that his various descriptions of war contain a veiled call to peace.

I'm intrigued by the intricacy of *The Aeneid* and the subtlety of Virgil's meanings. I closely examined Book 10, a book which seems to add little to the plot but actually contains a rich commentary on war. Virgil describes the gods and founding Romans as deeply flawed characters, constantly subverting one-dimensional interpretations and asking a question that is still relevant today: is war ever worth its costs?

Received the Monteverdi Prize from the Program of Liberal Studies.



Christopher Parker

- Major: History
- Supplementary Major: Classics
- Minor: Journalism, Ethics and Democracy
- Advisor: Elizabeth Mazurek

Science Fiction and Ancient Epic

I wrote the first book of a science fiction story in the style of an epic poem. Then, I critically analyzed Virgil's *The Aeneid* and showed how my poem borrowed from and responded to Virgil's. I love *The Aeneid* and wanted to show how it inspired me as a student. The creative route seemed like the most interesting way to do that.

