

## Disputation CC

March 28, 2019

Dear Peucinians:

We made it. This is the big one: Disputation CC. Two hundred Thursday nights around the table since the refounding of Peucinian in 2007 by Pericles, Machiavelli and Faust. Something slightly south of four hundred orations from passionate Bowdoin students. [REDACTED] So many memories and myths: [REDACTED]

Two hundred disputations elicits reflection. It is a marvel that every Thursday during the semester about 30 Bowdoin students gather—of their own volition—to hear other students deliver original philosophical orations and to continuously ask each other what the good life is. Of course, Peucinian is more than just this, and so it is pertinent to direct our inquiry at ourselves for at least a night. Have our disputations, [REDACTED] Nostoi, [REDACTED] and explorations of man with no arts or letters been for our benefit or detriment? What about our decorum, our Homerathons, our rituals, and our attitudes? Are we good or bad for Bowdoin?

“Do we elevate the life of mind and spirit among the pines? Or are we just a bunch of preening wannabe aristocrats squabbling pettily over meaningless abstractions?” —W.H. Auden, 2013

At Disputation C, a fledgling five-year-old Peucinian Society convened 16 members at an apartment on School Street to tackle these questions. The resolution was the same as it is tonight. President Maimonides '13 denied the resolution; soon-to-be President Allan Bloom '14 affirmed it. Egos were exposed and obliterated; truth, beauty, and justice were affirmed; a [REDACTED] occurred. “This society will only bring infamy to your house and family.” “We brought the intellectual apocalypse; we are wandering in the desert.” (I cannot say more, but if you are sufficiently curious, please contact the Chronicler.)

A hundred disputations later, lucky for you, we've got better disputants than yours truly and whichever of these miserable schlemiels succeeds me. Sappho, winner of last year's Charles S. Davies Award for Best Peucinian, will defend the essentiality of Peucinian against the inimitable and iconoclastic Olympe de Gouges.

### **RESOLVED: BOWDOIN COLLEGE NEEDS THE PEUCINIAN SOCIETY**

**Affirmative: Sappho of Lesbos '19**

**Negative: Olympe de Gouges '21**

“If a Bowdoin student expresses derision toward the Peucinian Society or its members, it is hardly notable and may be seen as quirky. But if a Peucinian says anything negative about non-Peucinians, she is marked a cold churl.” —AJ Liebling, probably.

This group has changed in many ways since 2007, and in typical Peucinian fashion, some would say for the better while others for the worse. For the seniors, it sometimes feels like a completely different place from when we walked through the door for the first time. Tonight is about reflecting on what the Society is, our history, and our future. Of course, Bowdoin wouldn't close shop if Peucinian stopped existing. The

question is whether we are doing something essential for fulfilling the mission of Bowdoin College, articulating the Goals that unify Culture and exploring the Sources that inspire Virtue, or whether we're here for group masturbation ("circlejerk", I've heard it called), to hear ourselves talk, and implicitly—and maybe even explicitly—denigrate those not in attendance. Does Peucinian intellectually humble us or build us up? Can it do both? Is Bowdoin College incomplete if no one stokes the flames of intellectual passion on Thursday nights?

I've got more to say but I'll leave it for later. I've got a dog in this fight and a few bones to pick. But this we all must do: Leave pride behind. Bring a sense of humor. Celebrate radically free inquiry.

With breathless anticipation, and for the last time,  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

**PEUCINIAN SOCIETY DISPUTATION CC**

**Thursday, March 28th, 7:45 PM\***

**Third Floor of Massachusetts Hall, *to start***

**Semi-formal attire**

**\*Orations will be at 8:00 PM, no cap. Don't be late. Seriously. Not a joke.**

*Pinos Loquentes Semper Habemus*