

THE BLOTTER

SPRING NEWSLETTER

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ALUMNI!

If you have news you would like to share with the department, please contact The Blotter's faculty sponsor at jarcho@nyu.edu.

From *The Canterbury Tales*:

GENERAL PROLOGUE

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote,
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye,
So priketh hem Natúre in hir corages,
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

Bifil that in that seson on a day,
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay,
Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght were come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye
Of sondry folk, by áventure y-falle
In felawshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.
The chambres and the stables weren wyde,
And wel we weren esed atte beste.
And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,
So hadde I spoken with hem everychon,
That I was of hir felawshipe anon,
And made forward erly for to ryse,
To take oure wey, ther as I yow devyse.

But nathelees, whil I have tyme and space,
Er that I ferther in this tale pace,
Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun
To telle yow al the condicioun
Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
And whiche they weren and of what degree,
And eek in what array that they were inne;
And at a Knyght than wol I first bigynne.

THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LITERARY STUDIES

SMRITI BANSAL

Every course has a larger narrative—a cluster of ideas that form the framework that connects the various pieces of literature together, forming a cohesive whole. This semester, Professor Wendy Lee started British Literature II by introducing her students to the exhibition at Brooklyn’s Smack Mellon gallery titled “Respond.” The art in the exhibition was in response to the December 3rd Eric Garner verdict, in which the grand jury declined to indict a New York City police officer for holding an unarmed black man in a chokehold that led to his death. The exhibition was a response to the flawed political and judicial systems, and to the institutionalized racism that allowed this to happen. Professor Lee placed these artworks next to the works that we were about to spend the semester studying and pointed out that art has always responded to the political climate in which it was created. What if we flip that, and ask: what about the political responding to art? And what if, implicating ourselves further, we ask: what can the political influence of literary studies be?



“Respond” exhibition at the Smack Mellon Gallery

It might seem that literature has only very rarely led to the implementation or change in policy. But the political extends beyond the direct practice of government. Jamaican novelist and poet Oliver Senior speaks about humans being inherently political due to their status as *citizens of somewhere*. In her keynote speech delivered at the 2013 Edinburgh World Writers Conference, she explains, “the larger politics of the nation, inescapably shapes us in a trickle-down effect from the cradle to the grave... shapes the world into which we are born, our daily environment, and leads to what we might call ‘small p’ politics; that is, all those decisions of personal governance that we are forced to make, both externally and unconsciously, every moment of our lives.” If one views literature as inextricable from its context, then literature becomes a re-presentation of life in various forms, and life becomes a sum of “small p politics.”

That field of re-presentation offers another way to conceive of where the political influence of literary studies lies. In our conversation with Professor Crystal Parikh, she defined literature as a “repository of imagined realities”—an open space where one can imagine a superior alternative reality that shows how our present can improve, or a lesser reality that brings out the flaws of existing structures. Either way, a study of these imagined realities social and political consciousness, and it might even incite us to action. For example, in Thailand, in order to protest against the 2014 coup led by Prime Minister Prayuth Cha-ocha, Thai students put their hands up in the iconic three-finger silent protest taken from Susanne Collins’ *Hunger Games Trilogy*—a sign against an authoritarian structure. In that moment, there was direct link between the study of a literary (and cinematic) text and the desire for political change. In the space created by Collins, the students saw the possible dismantling of an oppressive government.

Our favorite authors are like stranger-parents, shaping our opinions and worldviews.

At the Blotter when we asked several English majors about what they associated with literary studies and its political influence, we got several answers. Ari Liberman, a senior, views literary studies as “the study of expression, without which there can be no political change.” Tyler Burr, a junior, called literary studies an “igniting force towards change.” For Evan Marcy, a junior, the political influence of literary studies stemmed from the “examination of subversive texts,” and Stephen Sutton, a senior, suggested that political influence of literary studies had to do with “inter-sectionality and including minority voices in literary discussions—making anthologies more inclusive.” This small sampling is representative of the influence literary studies holds over our perspectives; Professor Gregory Vargo says that the literature that he has read and taught “informs every question, topics and frameworks” that he looks at. As we grow, we are continually influenced by what we read, by our favorite authors who are like stranger-parents, shaping our opinions and our worldviews. So even if the political influence of literary studies cannot be quantified through statistics, it is reflected in its profound engagement with life, and through its study, our own maturation as citizens of the world.

CHARLES MEE AND THE (RE)MAKING PROJECT

GIANT OF CONTEMPORARY DRAMA JOINS HIS DAUGHTER, PROFESSOR ERIN MEE, IN THOUGHT-PROVOKING Q&A

JESSICA CHACE



On a cold afternoon this February, the multi-award-winning playwright Charles Mee paid a visit to 244 Greene Street. Mee conversed with his daughter, director and NYU Professor of English and Dramatic Literature Erin Mee, in front of a rapt audience of scholars, students, dramatists, actors, and fans. Many in the audience had recently attended the Signature Theatre's production of Mee's play *Big Love*, a contemporary remaking of *The Danaïads* by Aeschylus which follows the lives of the Egyptian king Danaus' fifty daughters as they flee to an Italian villa to escape marriage. Witty, soft-spoken, and an intellect of the highest order, Mee spoke about the production, directed by Tina Landau, as well as his artistic process, his main sources of inspiration, and his thoughts on rehearsals. While Mee has attended many productions of his plays by theater groups large and small, he rarely attends rehearsals because, as he explained, "It's the dead playwrights who get the best productions." For many of the attendees

(including a group of Tisch Drama students who were in the process of staging his play *Trojan Women*), the event felt like chatting with a living Euripides—someone who can be counted among the most important and influential contemporary dramatists.

Mee has drawn inspiration not only from the classical authors whose work he "pillages" (in his own words) but also from modern artists like Max Ernst and Robert Rauschenberg, whose artistic creations can be found at MoMA, the Met, and other local cultural institutions, which Mee visits often. And like his modernist influences, Mee assembles his plays like a collage or a stew, collecting sumptuous scraps of stageworthy material from daily life, literature, and art; chopping them up; and mixing them into his plays, several of which he has brewing at once. "I work on things over a period of time so that it's gone through all of my moods," Mee said. "It's gone through the time when I'm euphoric and when I'm depressed and when I'm angry and when I'm impatient—so that by the end of a certain period of time this piece has passed through and been approved by every state of mind I have." Given the emotional depth and intellectual richness of Mee's plays, it is no surprise that they are so attractive to college students throughout the country (*Big Love* is, in fact, one of the most performed plays on college campuses).

When Mee took questions from the audience, many were curious about the intentions behind his plays; in response, he emphasized how much is up to actors and directors. Asked if he intends his work to be political, Mee responded by quoting the Italian theater-maker Pippo Delbono who spoke at the Avignon Theater Festival a few years ago. "He was interviewed," Mee said, "and somebody said to him, 'Do you feel your work is political?' And he said, 'I hope my work is deeper than that. I hope it's about the culture that produces the politics.' And that's what I'm trying to do." Mee also discussed his use of digital media to make his plays available to the public. Aptly titled "the (re)making project," Mee's website (<http://www.charlesmee.org/>) contains full scripts

of his plays, which he invites his visitors to use as inspiration and raw material for their own work or to perform in the original. Mee offers only a note on casting, however, declaring, "There is not a single role in any one of my plays that must be played by a physically intact white person. And directors should go very far out of their way to avoid creating the bizarre, artificial world of all intact white people, a world that no longer exists where I live, in casting my plays." For Mee, life, like his plays, is fragmented, transitional, and messy. The (re)making project is an expression and extension of that philosophy, inspiring plays that are concerned not with sewing up life's rough edges, but with laying them bare.

For Mee, life, like his plays, is fragmented, transitional, and messy. The (re)making project is an expression and extension of that philosophy.

FROM “PAPYRUS TO PDF”

THE DEPARTMENT’S NEW COURSE ON THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK

JESSICA CHACE

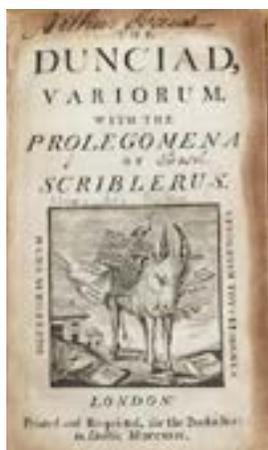
If you’ve ever taken an NYU English course, you’re likely familiar with the “archival field trip”—typically a one-day visit to Fales during which students examine a selection of items from the library’s collection of old and rare materials, ranging from the library’s expansive Lewis Carroll collection to the Fales Manuscript Collection, which contains correspondence, manuscripts, and other items by and about English and American authors from 1700 to the present. Often led by a Fales librarian in partnership with the course instructor, these special sessions offer a quick dip of the toes into a vast ocean of archival materials possessed by New York City’s many world-class archives.

But what about a whole course devoted almost exclusively to the archive—a course designed for graduate and undergraduate students alike? A course that ambitiously casts its eye beyond Fales to the collections of the New York Public Library and even further afield? Welcome to “Papyrus to

PDF: An Introduction to Book History Now,” a new course co-taught this spring by NYU English Professor Paula McDowell and Fales Librarian for Printed Books Charlotte Priddle. Before planning for the course began nearly a year and a half ago, Professor McDowell had taught several courses in book history that were oriented toward her areas of expertise and included archival visits to Fales, which were extremely popular among her students. But as she explains, she felt a more sweeping introductory survey to book history was needed as undergraduates selected their majors and moved toward larger theses. McDowell and Priddle secured a co-teaching stipend from the Humanities Initiative that would allow them to take their students on field trips to the New York Public Library, the New York Society Library, and the New York Center for Book Arts during the course of the semester. In addition to archival visits, students complete a variety of assignments, including a book description essay, an in-class presentation on useful digital tools, and a final project narrating the life of a book. Both the field trips and class assignments aim to equip students with a core set of skills that broadens the possibilities for literary and cultural analysis.



Prof. McDowell and Fales Librarian Charlotte Priddle



The Dunciad

The course, moreover, highlights the particular strengths of the department in the burgeoning field of book history. In our conversation, McDowell cited Professors Pat Crain and Tom Augst, who work on nineteenth-century history of the book, as exemplars of the kind of work that can be done in the discipline. While much of McDowell’s own work of late extends beyond print to consider oral culture, sound, and digital media, McDowell said she is proud to teach her students the basics of traditional book history, because “having an advanced vocabulary for describing physical texts helps them see and read those texts in new ways.” The far-reaching nature of the field—what McDowell likes to think of as “a nexus of fields” that reaches into the world of book arts, publishing, and library science—became strikingly clear to students of “Papyrus to PDF” during their trip to the New York Center for Book Arts, where class participants with the help of MC Hyland, a Ph.D. student in the department who works at the Center, typeset their own names onto miniature calling cards. Though the task may have seemed easy in theory, students quickly found that the hands-on activity of typesetting came with a bundle of challenges.

Several students spilled their type on the floor, others accidentally misspelled their names, and McDowell notes that the process was enormously time-consuming. “All of a sudden it just seemed so obvious some of the things that historians have been trying to tell us—to question our retrospective notion of how texts are disseminated back onto periods before the machine press,” McDowell said. “I don’t want it to sound like we do nothing but field trips in our course, although it’s tempting. But the field trips enable my students to be key thinkers as well as doers in the field.”

With the development of manuscript studies and recent advancements in digital humanities, this is truly an exciting time for book history. In a discipline in which so much time is spent in the solitary act of writing, participating in the very cultural activities that helped shape the periods under study can “open” the book in stimulating new ways.

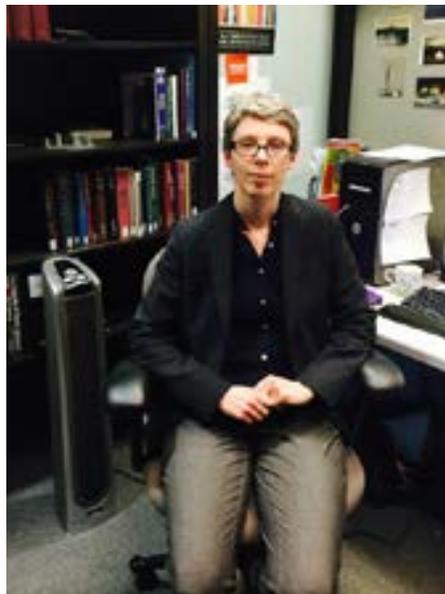
WHAT AMANDA WATSON CAN DO FOR YOU

SMRITI BANSAL

Amanda Watson is the English and Comparative Literature Librarian. As our subject librarian, she works to put students and faculty in touch with the vast wealth of information NYU's library system possesses. We sat down with Amanda one afternoon to get to know more about her and the work she does.

ABOUT AMANDA

Amanda didn't always want to be a subject librarian. She was on the PhD track at the University of Michigan, studying early modern English literature, with a focus on the relationship between poetry and theories of memory, when she realized that her true passions lay in research. She began her career interning at the Swarthmore College Library, while working on her Library Sciences degree at Drexel University. Always a "generalist" at heart, she found that pursuing a career in the library sciences was perfect, as being a subject librarian entailed having a vast knowledge that extended not only across the canon of the English literature but could also cross over to other disciplines. It is this exact requirement that Amanda loves most about her job: "Doing this job, you get all kinds of off-the-wall questions; they can



Amanda Watson

range all over the place and so every day I learn a lot about different things."

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

On an average day, Amanda can be seen doing several different things. She could be manning the reference desk or helping out students through the virtual chat: Amanda is one of the many people who stand by to answer those quick reference questions that come up in the library stacks—or when you're at home in your pajamas, doing research online! Amanda also talks to upper level English classes about possible research methods, acquainting them with all the tools that Bobst has to offer; and she can sometimes be seen giving tours to prospective MA students.

A LIBRARIAN'S FAVORITE LIBRARIES

New York Public Library, The Morgan Library and Museum and The New York Historical Society Library are among Amanda's favorite "other" libraries in New York.

HOW CAN SHE HELP YOU?

Amanda occupies a key position in the workings of the English department. Her job includes building the collection of the library, ensuring that the books that professors think are necessary can be made available to them. This privilege doesn't only extend to the faculty; students can also request the addition of certain titles to the Bobst collection. And students and faculty alike can consult Amanda on digital projects like text mapping or social network analysis.

But according to Amanda, the most important part of her job is her ability to help faculty and students in the arduous process of writing and researching for papers. As she sums it up herself, "We help our constituents research; we help connect them with the information they are looking for, formulate the early stages of a project and do exploratory research for faculty members working on a book." Her services are free of cost and are available to anyone who feels overwhelmed or stuck on any kind of literary project. The best part? She is always just an email away.

PERSONAL PASSIONS

When asked what her literary passions were, Amanda replied that she was primarily drawn to poetry. Today, she is translating that interest into an ongoing research project about how people in 19th century America encountered and read poetry. Amanda's research stems from a collection of 19th century notebooks she came across in another university. "I got really interested in these documents, and identifying what kinds of poems appeared when and how often. A lot of these notebooks will have poems by people who have sunken into obscurity; a lot of poetry is of the style that went out of fashion around the time when the modernists became active. It's the poetry that the modernists were reacting against—there's didactic poetry, sentimental poetry and poetry that uses language that would now be considered trite, but these people clearly cared about it enough to preserve it and read it again." She hopes one day to convert her studies into a book—as for now, she is working on publishing her findings in the form of short articles that provide a unique lens into the 19th century.

Here is one of Amanda's favorite poems found during her research. It is by a poet named Mary Newmarch Prescott (1839-1888), and was first published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1870:

Two Moods

I plucked the harebells as I went
Singing along the river-side:
The skies above were opulent
Of sunshine. "Ah! whate'er betide,
The world is sweet, is sweet," I cried,
That morning by the river-side.
The curlews called along the shore;
The boats put out from sandy beach;
Afar I heard the breakers' roar,
Mellowed to silver-sounding speech;
And still I sang it o'er and o'er,
"The world is sweet for evermore!"
Perhaps, to-day, some other one,
Loitering along the river-side,
Content beneath the gracious sun,
May sing, again, "Whate'er betide,
The world is sweet." I shall not chide,
Although *my* song is done.

INTO THE ARCHIVE

EXPLORING FALES LIBRARY WITH MA STUDENT AND FALES EMPLOYEE JEREMY CULVER

JESSICA CHACE

Lurking among the 350,000 volumes of book and print items, 11,000 feet of archival materials, and 90,000 media elements boasted by Fales Library and Special Collections is a paper-mâché wolf head from the papers of David Wojnarowicz—a New York City-based artist, writer, and AIDS activist who made waves in the art world during the second half of the twentieth century. The head, made from newspapers displaying headlines about the AIDS crisis, is just one of the many unique items stored in Bobst Library and its offsite storage facilities which are available for viewing by the NYU community. Hoping to get an insider's view of the collections, we spoke with Jeremy Culver, a second-year MA student who has worked at Fales since 2013 and recently completed his thesis on *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and the legendary fame of Romantic poet and public figure Lord Byron.



Jeremy Culver with fellow graduate student MC Hyland

On a typical workday, Culver juggles any number of tasks, from ensuring that items are marked and prepared for storage, to receiving materials from donors, to aiding visiting scholars with the proper handling of archival materials. Culver has assisted several graduate and undergraduate students from the English department during both independent research visits and group archival field trips, which have become a staple of several NYU English classes. Items of interest to these visitors include first editions of texts, such as the first American edition of *Pride and Prejudice* entitled *Elizabeth Bennet*, as well as irreplaceable items such as Fales' copy of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which contains copious marginalia from its nineteenth-century owner.

Materials from mid-century New York City are also popular among visitors. The director of Fales Library, Marvin J. Taylor, attends to the construction and curation of the Downtown Collection, which contains many rare and fragile New York art objects and records from the 1960s to the present day and is often the source of materials for exhibits held at the library. Items of note include clippings, photographs, and manuscripts from the Magie Dominic Off Off-Broadway Collection; invitations to downtown galleries, performance spaces, and nightclubs circa 1980 from the Downtown Flyers and Invitations collection; and videorecordings by Pat Ivers and Emily Armstrong of the New York City punk scene from the NIGHTCLUBBING Archive.

For Culver himself, the experience of working in Fales has been academically productive in many ways. "My main interest lies in the field of materiality and textual studies, so simply being around this many primary sources is very exciting," Culver said. "Working at Fales helps provides a sense of scale to literary history. It's a means of visualizing the sheer space required to include more modestly known figures, suggesting how without critical support, writers and artists can seem to disappear."

"Working at Fales helps provide a sense of scale to literary history. It's a means of visualizing the sheer space required to include more modestly known figures, suggesting how without critical support, writers and artists can seem to disappear." —Jeremy Culver

Visiting the archive entails certain rituals which are helpful to know before your trip. Pens are prohibited, as are beverages and food items, and be prepared to stow your personal items in a locker outside the reading room. To ensure their preservation, books are placed on foam boards and held open by cotton book weights or heavy cords known as snake weights. Permission must be obtained to photocopy materials. Don't let these procedures stop you from visiting, however. "Fales is a multi-headed beast," Culver explained. "It's not just a repository for old books, and it isn't just a series of shelves and boxes. The material can assist someone with nearly any kind of research, and the staff is always willing to help." Fales is open to students and faculty Monday through Friday from 10 am to 5:45 pm. Contact the Fales staff at fales.library@nyu.edu for assistance. The wolf head beckons.

SCI-FI, WESTERNS, AND WATER

UNCONVENTIONAL COURSES IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

JAZMINE GOGUEN

Alongside the standard English department fare of Brit Lit survey courses and Intro Shakespeare, every semester's course catalog offers up a class or two that might be called "unorthodox." These classes often expand our notions of the genres and categories of literature we can study, allowing us to apply our skills of literary analysis to more unconventional subjects than, say, the 18th-century novel. The Spring 2015 English department course bulletin offers several intriguing examples of such courses: Professor David Hoover's Science Fiction course, Professor Bridget McFarland's "Film as Literature," and Professor Sukhdev Sandhu's "Hydropoetics: Art, Activism, and Water." We spoke to all three professors to find out more about their approach to these unconventional topics and how they differ from the typical literary fare.

Prof. Hoover's Science Fiction class focuses mainly on apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic novels like *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, and *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Leguin. Prof. Hoover says he is "mainly interested in science fiction that presents fully-realized alien worlds and species. I set myself the goal of not assigning any books where the writing itself is mediocre. Although I include some classic science fiction novels in which character development is not the central focus, I also prefer novels with well-rounded characters." He says that students might initially underestimate the complexity of good science fiction, a genre that is not often taught in an academic setting, and find the inclusion of text-world theory and text-alteration to be unfamiliar to many lit majors. In order to combat some of these initial hurdles, Prof. Hoover assigns some unorthodox paper topics meant to "spur critical and analytic discussion rather than substituting for it." One such paper assignment asks students to create their own aliens, a topic meant to prompt commentary and analysis of the aliens in the books they've read in class. Prof. Hoover says his students have shown themselves to be enthusiastically engaged in the literary analysis of the assigned books; as an example of this, he recounted a time when he was delayed on the subway getting to class. "When I arrived almost 25 minutes late, not only were almost all of the students still there, they were engaged in an in-depth discussion of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The satisfaction of that is hard to underestimate."

Prof. McFarland's "Film as Literature" course focuses on the American Western this semester as a way of exploring "sexuality, gender, race, nation, and the self in films produced between the Silent Era and today." Students watch over twenty Westerns by filmmakers like John Ford, Akira Kurosawa, Alejandro Jodorowsky, and Joel and Ethan Coen among many others, applying the skills of close reading and literary analysis to a different medium. Prof. McFarland specializes in Early American literature in a transatlantic context, with a particular interest in the sentimental literature of the long 18th century; she says she's interested in how many of the same tropes of sentimental literature are repeated in the Western. Of the particular challenges of analyzing film from a critical perspective, she says that "film feels more familiar than writing from the 18th century. It is easier to create the distance that allows for critical analysis when reading works from centuries ago," rather than the very familiar-seeming medium of film. Nevertheless, she says that students have wholeheartedly engaged with the various critical

issues raised by the films; she says, "The class has attracted students from a range of majors so we have a variety of viewpoints represented. Students have discussed the

legacy of racism and sexism in

these films and I think that the opportunity to approach these topics in the classroom has been one of the best parts of the course."

Prof. Sandhu's Hydropoetics course brings together "a broad range of material—literature, philosophy, photography, sound art, the moving image, history, environmental studies—that explores different aspects of water." He elaborates: "We read publications by American photographer Roni Horn, theorist Allen Sekula, the French-Norwegian sound poet Caroline Bergvall, the Anglo-Guyanese art historian David Dabydeen; we also explore 'low' genres such as science fiction and graphic fiction (in the form of J.G. Ballard, China Mieville and H.P. Lovecraft); listen to the sound of deep-ocean fibre-optic cables and Drexciyan techno; discuss *Godzilla* as well as films by Anand Patwardhan, CAMP, Jia Zhangke; attend art shows and visit the Seafarers International House which helps destitute sailors and trafficked individuals." He says he enjoys teaching a non-survey class that allows you the freedom to move between mediums, time periods, and genres without worrying about "covering" certain topics. There's also a "hemispheric range" to his class that might not otherwise be possible – his class looks at materials from Bangladesh, China, Greenland, the Gulf States, the Caribbean, and the Atlantic among many others. But he also acknowledges the inherent problems with obtaining and sourcing much of the material he uses in class: "A fair bit of the material is not in the public domain so it has to be begged from its owners—or obtained by nefarious means. Those are both fun challenges though: I hate academic books (especially those set 'abroad') which barely cite anything published in the places they're about. Also, I think there should be a show-and-tell, thieves' den element to classes and to classrooms. We study different histories and theories of piracy in the class, look at water-hacking and privatization schemes too: it makes sense for questions of resource equity and distribution chains to be concretised in terms of the materials we ourselves use or aspire to have access to." Prof. Sandhu acknowledges that many will find the material quite challenging and unconventional, particularly if you're accustomed to the standard "close-reading" model of literary analysis. The best approach, he says, is to ask the question "What is this thing we're studying?" in the knowledge that I don't necessarily have an answer."



Silent Western film still

BIG LITERATURE

FRANCO MORETTI DELIVERS THE GOLDSTONE LECTURE

JAZMINE GOGUEN



Franco Moretti during the Q&A of his lecture

In his March 4th lecture entitled “Micromegas—The Very Small, The Very Large, and the Object of Digital Humanities,” Franco Moretti presented the results of his team’s experiments in Stanford’s Literary Lab, which “applies computational criticism, in all its forms, to the study of literature.” Moretti’s work is part of a growing expansion in the world of “digital humanities,” a concept that NYU has itself explored with great curiosity in recent years. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Moretti was chosen for the department’s annual Goldstone lecture, which allows English faculty members to choose the scholar from whom they would most like to hear speak on the topic of their choice.

Moretti’s work has been described as a “planetary endeavor” that attempts to measure the literary canon against the “archive”—those books that the passage of time and the production of literary criticism have rendered less important. When asking the question, “How do you decide what does and does not make it into the canon?”, the most obvious responsibility lies with readers: as a collective, they determine which books fall squarely within the margins of both popularity and prestige. Moretti’s lab looks at both the ar-

chive and the canon in 19th century literature in order to identify certain characteristics that inform our understanding of each.

In order to explore their own curiosity about the canon-vs.-archive question, Moretti and his team used the paragraph—“an undertheorized unit of prose writing”—as their unit of measurement for a “slice” of text. Paragraphs are useful as a literary measuring device because they typically represent particular themes; a discrete paragraph may explore an idea before moving on in the next paragraph to a related or different idea. On these grounds, it is easier to make a thematic analysis of thousands of archival and canonical texts. In one instance, Moretti charted the number of topics/themes in any given paragraph, and found that monotypical paragraphs foreground a particular character or event, while multiple themes might signify a narrative flow. Thus, Moretti’s data affirms what we already intuitively (and academically) know about the narrative strategies that fore- or background certain characters at particular moments in a novel.

Moretti’s work has been described as a “planetary endeavor” that attempts to measure the literary canon against the “archive”—those books that the passage of time and the production of literary criticism have rendered less important.

In the seminar portion of the lecture, which took place the following day, Moretti once more asked his audience whether an innovative technology like the media lab can produce intellectual or critical novelties in the field of literature. Can we operationalize the canon in order to derive certain conclusions about the relationship between canon and archive? Another of Moretti’s tactics for quantifying literature was the type-token ratio, which is a measure of lexical diversity in any given work—i.e. how many different kinds of words are used in each paragraph? Interestingly, *Middlemarch* by George Eliot had the lowest type-token ratio of all the many thousands of novels measured. As it turns out, a low type-token ratio often signifies greater rhetorical sophistication, as it is often used to indicate trauma through repetition and cyclical sentence construction in response to an important or traumatic event. In contrast, a greater number and variety of adjective/noun constructions typically indicated a work outside the canon, using language that modern (or contemporaneous) scholars might consider inelegant. A high type-token ratio seemingly represents a “pathology of precision” that obscures rather than clarifies its intended narrative effect.

Although his experiments reveal a lot of interesting data on the organization of literature and its placement within the canon, its value as a critical tool is still being debated; how would we achieve a critical stance using quantitative methods? Do Moretti’s results more or less confirm what we already know? How do his results allow us to form a new, “macro” analysis of the corpus? Many professors in the audience offered their own potential uses for his data; our own Wendy Lee wondered whether Moretti’s work could be applied to the longstanding debate about the novel as a deliberately constructed art form, rather than the stereotypical “loose baggy monster?” In response, Moretti agrees that his work does possibly tip the scale in favor of the novel as a structured entity with easily identifiable elements, though of course further research and focused analysis would be required. Overall, Moretti was frank and optimistic about the possibilities for further critical work in the digital humanities. Since their results are relatively moderate and not necessarily “paradigm-shifting” (in spite of the powerful tools and scale of the study), he leaves it, in an appropriately collaborative gesture, to the academic community at large to conceive of their own critical uses for his grand-scale literary schema.

GLOBAL DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR

RAJESWARI SUNDER RAJAN EXPLORES “THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE IN THE ANGLOPHONE NOVEL”

SMRITI BANSAL

Professor Rajeswari Sunder Rajan is part of NYU’s Global Distinguished Professorship program, which brings internationally acclaimed scholars to NYU as fully involved researchers or teachers. These scholars work with FAS for six to eight weeks, becoming a part of NYU’s extended permanent faculty. Prof. Sunder Rajan has taught in several other universities, including Delhi University and Oxford. This semester she’s back with us, teaching “Topics in Post-Colonial Studies” and “World Literature.” Her work focuses on the relationship between gender, culture and post-colonialism, chiefly in the context of post-independence Indian nationalism.



Prof. Sunder Rajan

On February 19th, Professor Rajan gave a lecture drawing from her latest work, a book-length project called *After Midnight’s Children: The New Indian Novel in English*. The purpose of this work is to bring into view not only Salman Rushdie, who “writes the [Indian] nation,” she explains, “but also the precise way in which the nation is reproduced by people who are deeply invested in it.”

The paper she presented is based on a chapter of the book, titled “Inheriting the Nation: Father, Sons (and Daughters), and the Anxiety of Influence in the Anglophone Novel in India.” “Inheriting the Nation” observes the filial relationship between the protagonists of the post-colonial novels and their forefathers who took part in the freedom struggle—a result of the complex legacies of the Indian Independence movement. This relationship, Professor Sunder Rajan notes, is an important factor that has shaped the Anglophone novelist’s representation of the nation. “Such an account” she says about the work of the novelist, “highlights the continuities of post-colonialism (as a period) with the colonial-nationalist era, as a matter of generational inheritance.” In the lecture Professor Sunder Rajan gave several instances of how this influence plays out. She explained that important figures of the nationalist movement like Gandhi and Nehru, who took on the roles of moral exemplars in post-Independence Indian culture, would often be inserted into the family structure as symbolic fathers in the filial relationship. Prof. Sunder Rajan observed that this relationship produced a feeling of inheritance—as the post-colonial generation struggled between feelings of reverence and resentment towards their nationalist fathers. Professor Sunder Rajan’s analysis also takes into account the political and ethical conundrums that are embedded within this anxiety of influence. Not only that, “Inheriting the Nation” is also a feminist work; taking gender seriously, it acknowledges that the relation between the individual and nation as mediated by the novel is often masculinized.

Professor Sunder Rajan’s book tracks the phenomenon that took place after Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* came out in 1981. Before that time, Anglophone writers were not taken seriously in India because they were writing in English, or abroad since their work didn’t cater to the international market. Rushdie’s novel changed everything—these writers finally started being noticed by the world literary scene; this coincided with the beginnings of a market for India as a subject. Having taught at universities in India, the UK and the United States, and therefore familiar with the different milieus that composes the Anglophone writer’s audience, Prof. Rajan is perfectly positioned to make these observations. “Inheriting the Nation” offers an exciting new perspective on the rich narrative of Anglophone literature as it relates to its own past, and how we view it in its present.

GEOPOLITICS

THE MANEUVERS OF THE GRADUATE ENGLISH ORGANIZATION

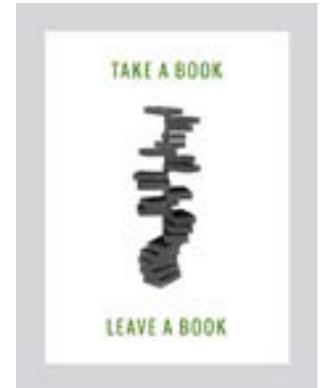
JESSICA CHASE

Like undercover agents with a penchant for literature, the student representatives of the Graduate English Organization (GEO)—Ph.D. candidate Kim Adams and M.A. candidates Seth Koproski and Sara DeLozier—have spent the past year working behind the scenes of 244 Greene Street to improve graduate student life in the department. Thus far, the GEO has updated the very outdated graduate student listserv and opened a student lounge in the first floor event space. Additionally, Adams, Koproski, and DeLozier were able to work with faculty members to gain M.A. students after-hours access to the Greene Street building and make more funds available for travel grants so that students can attend conferences and visit research libraries. They have also organized a few social events, scoring free tickets to see the Globe Theater's performance of *King Lear* and hosting a Holiday party complete with eggnog and other seasonal treats.

Perhaps one of the GEO's most anticipated projects is their plan, spearheaded by Kim Adams, to fill the bare shelf space on the eighth floor with books—everything from an illustrated edition of Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, to the *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, to the collected works of Michel Foucault. The space would serve as a permanent library for graduate students. Adams approached Professor John Guillory, current head of the building committee, with the idea last semester and, with his approval, sent an email to the graduate student listserv asking for book recommendations. Students responded enthusiastically; after some thirty-five replies, a Google Doc was created to keep track of students' suggestions. The total clocks in at around 180 books—see the list at right for a sampling. Adams says she was surprised by the level of energy surrounding the library—a project that was undertaken during one of the busiest periods of the fall term—and decided to postpone the project's completion until the spring, so she could give her full attention to its implementation. Until then, a makeshift book exchange has been temporarily established in the eighth floor space, after several boxes of books were left by an anonymous donor. (A word to the wise: if you'd like to contribute books to the eighth floor's "permanent" collection, leave them clearly marked—or someone might take them home.)

While the idea for an English department library came directly from the GEO itself, a few of the group's recent initiatives have been based on fellow students' suggestions (M.A. student Tanya Schmidt, for example, suggested the *King Lear* event). Of special note is the upcoming graduate student conference, organized by Ph.D. students Ruby Lowe and Gina Dominick and entitled "Sovereignty and Metaphor," that will take place in September. The plan for a graduate conference hosted by the English department had been in the works since the summer of 2014, when Lowe and Dominick drafted a proposal that included a CFP, a budget, and a list of speakers to invite. Adams, as the graduate student representative of the events committee, wrote on their behalf, and the event was approved. It will be the first graduate student conference in the English department in several years. Papers from the conference will "explore the reciprocity between sovereignty and metaphor in English and continental (Latin and vernacular) writing from the medieval to early modern period," and speakers include Victoria Kahn of UC Berkeley, Paul Strohm of Columbia, and NYU's own Jacques Lezra from the Comparative Literature department.

In the coming months, the GEO will sponsor another trip to a local performance, a spring happy hour, and an end of the year party to round out the 2014-15 academic year. Visit the [English Channel](#) for details!



A SELECTION OF GRAD STUDENTS' SUGGESTIONS FOR THE 8TH FLOOR LIBRARY:

- Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the Arthur Golding Translation of 1567 (ed. Nims)
- Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records Collection
- Call and Response: Key Debates in African American Studies*, ed. Henry Louis Gates and Jennifer Burton
- Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*
- The Spenser Encyclopedia
- The First Folio of Shakespeare: The Norton Facsimile. Ed Charlton Hinman (1996)
- Edgar Allan Poe, *Collected Tales*
- Henry James, *Collected Short Works*
- Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*
- William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain*
- The Letters of Samuel Beckett*
- Robert Creeley, *Collected Poems*, 2 vol.
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*
- Giorgio Agamben, *The Man without Content*
- Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*
- Roderick Ferguson – *Aberrations In Black: Toward A Queer Of Color Critique*
- Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*
- Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*
- Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*
- Zoontologies*, Ed. Cary Wolfe
- Robert Smithson, *The Collected Writings*
- Codex Seraphinianus* – Luigi Serafini
- The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*
- Introduction to Manuscript Studies*, Clemens and Graham
- Complete Works of Sigmund Freud

READING SERIES IN THE CITY

JAZMINE GOGUEN

NYU itself hosts plenty of fascinating author readings and class visits each semester; this month, in addition to the CLS events (see page tk), Visiting Professor Daniel Kane has organized a series of three poetry readings to be held in the English Department's Event Space, featuring Anne Waldman (April 14), Miguel Algarín (April 23), and Bruce Andrews (April 28; check the English Department web site for more info). But students here also have the unique advantage of living and studying in close proximity to countless other literary events all around the city. Here are some of our favorite reading series in the NYU area:

THE POETRY PROJECT

131 East 10th Street

Housed in St. Mark's Church, The Poetry Project offers weekly reading series and writing workshops, in addition to an annual literary magazine and access to archival material. It aims to promote a wide range of contemporary poetry in a "community setting in which poets and artists can exchange ideas and information." Recent events include readings by Alice Notley, Eileen Myles, and our own Prof. Noel, who read from his latest work last spring alongside Rodney Koeneke.

KGB BAR

85 East 4th Street

A Soviet-themed bar that offers a wide range of literary events in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. The success of its Sunday-night fiction series inspired the creation of a Monday night poetry reading and a Tuesday night nonfiction event, attracting authors like Jonathan Lethem, Amanda Fillipacchi, and Phil Klay. The bar also hosts a series with the Creative Writing Program at NYU called "Emerging Writers," which showcases the work of students in the graduate department alongside guest authors like Catherine Lacey and Nick Lantz.

MCNALLY JACKSON

52 Prince Street

This independent bookstore and café offers several literary events each week alongside book clubs in poetry, international literature, essays, and Spanish literature. After enjoying an espresso at the upstairs café, head down to the lower level to enjoy upcoming readings by Renata Adler, Meg Wolitzer, and Lydia Davis among others.

A READING AT MCNALLY JACKSON

I attended a recent reading event at McNally Jackson, where acclaimed poets Claudia Rankine and Elizabeth Alexander recently read excerpts from their latest work. Rankine read from her recently published work of poetry, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, which was a finalist for both the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. Alexander, who read her poem "Praise Song for the Day" at President Obama's first inauguration in 2009, shared poetry and an excerpt from her forthcoming memoir *The Light of the World*, which explores her feelings of grief and loss after the sudden death of her husband.

Citizen, a work of prose-poetry punctuated by visual images, examines the unsettling moments of racism, both subtle and not, that many still face in a supposedly "post-race" society. Rankine explained that the work was very much an archival project that draws from the experiences of friends and colleagues in order to question what it means to be a "citizen" and a person of color today. Alexander read first from her poetry collection *Crave Radiance*, selecting poems that she felt were in dialogue with Rankine's work and the current discussion around race in America. She then read several excerpts from her memoir, a portion of which was also excerpted in a recent issue of the *New Yorker*. The memoir is a deeply personal exploration of her own grief in the days and weeks after his death, as well as a recollection of the events that brought Alexander and her husband together – one born in Harlem, USA, and the other around the world in war-torn Eritrea.

Both Alexander and Rankine expressed a deep affinity for the other's work and a shared concern for the constantly shifting landscape of American race politics. Cast in the somber light of recent events in Ferguson, Missouri, both Rankine's and Alexander's art seems increasingly important to a national conversation about what it means to be black in America. Judging by the enthusiastic reception their work has received, and the large audience gathered at McNally Jackson that night, there are many who are interested in furthering that conversation and many venues (including literary ones) in which to have it.

THIS SPRING AT THE CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE SERIES

SMRITI BANSAL

On the evening of 7th April, the English Department's Contemporary Literature Series hosted a talk and reading with poet and memoirist Brian Turner. This event was organized in collaboration with the Cultures of War Research Collaborative under the Humanities Initiative of NYU, a program that brings NYU's humanists together to explore the role of humanities in the university and the global community. Brian Turner, an Iraq war veteran, read from his collection of poetry, *Here, Bullet* (Alice James Books, 2005) and his latest work, *My Life as a Foreign Country: A Memoir* (W.W. Norton, 2014). In conversation with Associate Professor of English Patrick Deer, Turner discussed the sources of his inspiration, and the experience of a veteran as translated into the written word.

Poet Turner started with "Here, Bullet"—"if a body is what you want, then here is bone and gristle and flesh"—setting the tone of the evening. Turner's work attempts to convey the experience of a soldier at war—his poetry captures the sadness, loneliness and the fear felt amidst unimaginable violence. "Here, Bullet" was born out of his experience as part of task force in Mosul, Iraq; perhaps more surprisingly, it was written to the songs of the rock band Queens of the Stone Age. But Turner also revealed that his project took root during his time as an undergraduate in California, when he came across poet laureate Phil Levine's "They Feed They Lion" and was inspired by the musicality of the poem. Turner's work also aims to bring into discourse issues faced by veterans during and after war that often remain unaddressed, such as the high instance of sexual assault, which is forcefully brought to the fore in one of the poems he read, "Insignia." He worries about the distance and the lack of understanding between the veteran and civilian populations, and ultimately hopes to bridge that gap through the literary medium.

In the second half of the evening, Professor Deer conversed with Turner about his creative process and his goals as a writer. Here is an excerpt from their exchange:

Prof. Deer: What motivated you to write the memoir in prose?

Brian Turner: Initially I didn't plan on writing a memoir. However, I won the Amy Lowell Travelling Fellowship that sends one American poet every year outside of North America, and while I was on that fellowship, I started writing *haibun*s—a prose-travelogue type form that is encapsulated by a haiku—that ultimately became a larger project. Prose, for me, unlike the encapsulated spaces of poetry, is like a space where the walls have been blown down. It feels like an open field; as a digressive, tangential person, it was the perfect medium for me.

PD: There seems to be a fairly consistent thread in your memoir where your narrator is realizing that it is going to be an intense struggle to return [psychologically from the war]—do you feel that writing the memoir helped you return?

BT: Reading and seeing films, it seemed like most of the art forms [related to war literature] I've come across, like *Slaughterhouse-Five*, books by Tim O'Brien, etc.—seem to have similar structure going back to the *Odyssey*, where the protagonists must leave and go to a place where they would be tested...often times losing people around them; it's usually in a foreign land and then there is a return and through all of that we learn more about our own internal struggles. That basic skeleton, if you de-bone the fish of my memoir, you can find the traces of that: the deployment stage, going into combat, and then returning. So there is a return—it's all there.

PD: To what degree do you see your work as trying to challenge that gulf [between veterans and civilians], and to what degree can writers do something about this?

BT: I guess one of the things that could help mitigate the gulf is... for us to write in conversation with our times. This is tricky because there is criticism rightfully pointed towards appropriating and not having access to certain things through our



Prof. Deer and poet/memoirist Brian Turner

own experience; but our lack of access is our access. For example, I can write about the fact that I am not in Afghanistan by talking about how it is something that is constantly hovering over the moment. We need to use the larger world we live in to talk about this frustrating lack of connection.

Brian Turner also visited Professor Deer's class, "Topics: Transatlantic Contemporary War Literature," which explores contemporary American, British and Anglophone war fiction, war poetry and non-fiction representations of war, contributing to the discussion about recent wave of literary and non-fiction representations from Iraq, Afghanistan and the "global war on terror."

As part of the CLS initiative, other professors also invited contemporary writers to their classrooms this spring. Poet Ron Padgett, a Pulitzer prize finalist for poetry visited Visiting Professor Daniel Kane's class, "Topics in 20th Century Literature: The Poem and the City," to discuss his translation of Blaise Cendrars's poem "Easter in New York." Professor Kane also hosted poet Brenda Coultas, who is the author of three poetry books of poems including her latest work, *The Tatters* (Wesleyan, 2014).

The semester, the CLS visits also branched out into other media: Professor Gregory Vargo invited New York-based visual artist Benin Ford to his class on "Fictions of Empire," which examines visual cultures of transatlantic slavery. Visual Artist Jennie C. Jones visited Professor Nicholas Boggs' class "20th Century African American Literature," where she added to the discussion on how recent contemporary visual artists have contested and expanded the traditional representations of African American literary culture. Professor Simón Trujillo, teaching a course on "Latina/o Cultural Studies and the Politics of Comparative Racialization," invited esteemed filmmaker Alex Rivera to discuss *Sleep Dealer*, a film that uses the genres of dystopia and science fiction to tell the complex story of racialized labor, hypercapitalist resource extraction, and the possible futures of cross-border Latina/o coalition.

Finally, CLS will also be hosting a fiction reading by NYU Visiting Scholar Lucy Neave on April 16th. Neave will be reading from her book *Who We Were* (Text Publishing, 2013)—a powerful love story about two microbiologists working on a weapons project during the Cold War. Thanks to all the artists who have shared their work and their thoughts with us this year—and stay tuned for another round of events in the fall.

ENGLISH DEPT. THESIS ROUNDUP, SPRING 2015

THE PROJECTS OUR GRADS AND UNDERGRADS HAVE FINISHED UP THIS YEAR

THIS SPRING'S M.A. THESES:

"Where is nowhere?: Digital Methodologies and Cultural Geographies in *Open City*" by **Grace Afsari-Mamagani** considers the ways in which digital mapping, collocation analysis and network analysis can shed light on character formation and the sociopolitical margins in Teju Cole's 2011 novel.

In her thesis, **Sara DeLozier** explores the ways in which the 18th-century coquette re-emerges in Brontë's *Villette* and Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* as a social space and figure of female masculinity.

Julie Dreyfuss brings the book to life as she attempts to craft the three-dimensionality of the Fales copy of the *Eikon Basilike* and to argue that books are more than their covers.

Danielle Haviv explores how Frantz Fanon's works vehemently proclaim the condition of nativity as a construct of colonial rule. In

what ways do our conceptions of the 'native,' of foreign alterity, form the identity of ourselves and others? Self-consciousness becomes a product of external forces which permeate the mind and ways in which we view the disparate Orient.

Seth Koproski's "The Boundaries of Belief" looks at the puzzling theology behind St. Brendan's 8th century Voyage past the edge of the world.

"Time-Space Compression, Disorientation, and Problematic Homecomings" by **Peter Krause** applies to contemporary Iraq and Afghanistan war literature the work of David Harvey, Paul Virillo, and Jean Baudrillard in order to expose specific postmodern paradoxes both in the texts and the events themselves.

Rubi Mora argues that Eva Khatchadourian, narrator of Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, exemplifies the concept of Indi-

vidualism as explained by Tyler Burges. Her thesis examines how Eva uses her body, the ultimate individual unit, to reject the American identity, particularly through her food attitudes and aversion to maternal body changes.

Morgan Shnier explores Frank Norris's *McTeague* and Erich von Stroheim's adaptations *Greed* through each text's inclusion of and allusion to the ancestors, relatives, and rivals of their respective media.

"Cheers and Jeers: Camp and Intersectionality in *But I'm a Cheerleader*" by **Ellen Tagtmeier** explores how the film engages and challenges the literature of third wave feminism and classical camp works, specifically in relation to its depiction of race and gender.

Matthew Weintraub is studying Samuel Beckett's recently published letters and their relation to his oeuvre and to past critical approaches to his work.

A SELECTION OF THESES FROM LAST SEMESTER'S M.A. STUDENTS:

"Lerwick's Lyric Lady: Gender and Geography in Margaret Chalmers's *Poems (1813)*" by **Wendy Byrnes** analyzes the Shetland poet's rhetorical efforts to parry hypothetical dismissal of her collection on the grounds of her gender and peripheral geographic location.

"I am not now that which I once was: Refiguring Lord Byron in the 1832-33 Complete Works" by **Jeremy Culver** considers issues of celebrity, advertising, and authenticity in an exploration of the unseen influences that govern posthumous editions of a writer's work.

"Rags to Respectable Radicalism" by **Adina Goodman** resituates John Cassell, printer and publisher of 1850s London, within the

world of mid-Victorian journalism, focusing specifically on his *Literature of Working Men* magazine, written exclusively by the working classes.

Helen Huang's thesis examines Kepler's *Somnium*: editions, transmission, the paratextual apparatus & sci-fi's search for an ur-text.

PLUS A FEW OF THIS SEMESTER'S DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS:

David Sterling Brown: In "Placing Parents on the Early Modern Stage," I assert that parental authority offered the prospect of an effective, influential form of social power that differed from monarchical and patriarchal authority—and sometimes even challenged those modes of power in the early modern period. I examine dramatic works written by several dramatists, including Shakespeare and Webster, because early modern plays

are culturally and socially significant texts that reinforced and challenged norms related to domestic life. The plays offer an imaginative site, I contend, for transcending common structures of dominance.

Rajiv Menon: In contemporary transnational popular culture, the representation of suicide illustrates changing codes of masculinity and globalization.

Randie Sessler: I suggest that the Romantic era marks as an early multimedia moment in which writers described, debated, and defended their work in terms of medium as well

as genre.

Ada Smailbegovic: "Poetics of Liveliness: Natural Histories of Matter and Change in Twentieth and Twenty- First Century Poetry" examines the work of twentieth-century and contemporary poets who use descriptive qualities of poetic language to encounter the recalcitrant and lively configurations of primarily non-human, varied material worlds, ranging from bacterial DNA, to the lives of small and slimy creatures such as snails and fungi, to the vaporous and always-changing bodies of clouds.

HAPPENING SOON AT 244 GREENE, EVENT SPACE

Undergraduate Honors Thesis Jamboree,
Friday, April 17th

M.A. Thesis Jamboree,
Wednesday, April 29th, 3:00-5:30 pm

FALL 2014 M.A. THESIS AWARDS

This year our second-year M.A. students are working towards their final projects not only with the guidance of their individual supervisors, but also in the context of two thesis writing workshops. Students chose to work either last Fall, with Professor Maureen McLane; or this Spring with Professor Greg Vargo. The fall workshop met every two weeks—food and wine were served; ideas and drafts were exchanged; and on December 4th Wendy Byrnes, Jessica Chace, Jeremy Culver, Adina Goodman, Helen Huang, Michelle Koh, Allie Lehrer and Josh Wilbur stepped to the podium to present their work. The quality of these presentations, and of the work from which they were drawn, was remarkable; Chris Cannon was heard to remark that they matched, and in some cases over-matched, the quality of those he

had just heard at the New Chaucer Society Congress. One week later the students submitted their final drafts to be examined, and when grades, comments and recommendations were in, the MA Committee began the work of choosing the thesis to be awarded the single prize available. Deciding that this could not be done, they sought permission from the department to make three awards, and are delighted to announce this semester's recipients of the Millicent Bell Prize for the Best Master's Thesis in English: Jessica Chace, for *Spectacular Webs: Medieval Care Networks in the Lives of Three English Saints*, Ryan Cunningham for *Dialogic Resistance to Domination in Gravity's Rainbow*, and Joshua Wilbur for *Another Aspect of Her World: Virginia Woolf and the Astronomical Sublime*. Below you will find a description of their projects and a brief set of advice for those faced with a similar task of research and writing (for example, and not to be forgotten, the eight students who will be working on their theses in the spring semester!).

The MA committee would like to warmly congratulate our Fall semester thesis-writers and thank those—friends, teachers, supervisors, and examiners—who aided their success.

—Juliet Fleming, M.A. Program Director

JESSICA CHACE

My M.A. thesis explores representations of disability in Matthew Paris' thirteenth-century illuminated lives of Alban and Edward and a twelfth-century illumination of Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*. Using a hybrid ecocritical and disability studies approach, I investigate encounters between disabled saints and supplicants and the environmental forces that constellate around the bodies of saints. I ultimately argue that the medieval care networks emerging from these encounters reveal a novel understanding of medieval disability that envisions medieval impaired persons as co-weavers of a luminous web of human, animal, elemental, and prosthetic relations.

JESSICA'S ADVICE

In advance of writing your thesis, see if you can find a Call For Papers that interests you and submit an abstract. If you do get the chance to attend a conference, the paper topics are likely to be so diverse that you are bound to find something that sparks your interest. It will also give you a good sense of the state of the conversation in your area, which is crucial in determining the kind of intervention you want to make.

RYAN CUNNINGHAM

The works of Thomas Pynchon, far from be-

ing relics of the 1960s, are increasingly relevant against the neoliberal social context of growing disparities of wealth and power. Paranoia, that famous Pynchonian pathology, is less a psychological malady than an eminently rational response to a mode of social and economic organization that mistakes the ends for the means, funnels vast resources to purposes of destruction, and gives inordinate power to an elite cadre of individuals in government, industry, business, and the military. These people are the paranoid's They, and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is dedicated to bringing them down to Our level.

Employing M.M. Bakhtin's concept of speech genres, my study shows that *Gravity's Rainbow* subverts the established power relations embedded within language by valorizing discourses of humor, drug use, deviant sexuality, and popular culture over and against the hegemonic They-discourses. Although the play of *différance* ensures that these subversive discursive modalities are always already complicated in their opposites—see especially the novel's treatment of sexuality, for which pleasure is never separable from violence—the gesture of resistance enabled by their dialogues with their others ensures that Their domination is never absolute. Tyrone Slothrop, the novel's protagonist, therefore stands as a warrior in a Manichean linguistic struggle, and his Rock-etman guise focalizes the novel's dialogic

showdown. *Gravity's Rainbow* is thus a great novel of resistance to domination, and Pynchon a great novelist of the American left.

RYAN'S ADVICE

Do your homework before you put even a single word to page. Research every possible facet of your subject, and follow every loose thread, no matter how tangential it may initially appear. If this leads you far afield, that's good; my initial proposal concerned not *Gravity's Rainbow*, but detective fiction tropes in *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*. Find the established scholarly line on your subject, and don't be afraid to challenge it. And when it comes time to write, just write. Throw words across the page if you're ever stuck—they could very well take you where you need to go.

JOSHUA WILBUR

My essay investigates Virginia Woolf's treatment of "the dark places of psychology" in relation to her lifelong interest in astronomy. During the 1920s and 1930s, psychoanalysis blossomed in Great Britain; new advances in astronomy, too, contributed to the sense that mankind is "not master in its own house." Woolf was keenly aware of these developments, and she reacted to the new psychology and the new astronomy in decidedly different ways. On the one hand, she vocally resisted psychoanalytic ideas, ridicul-

ing friends who sought analysis and fellow authors who incorporated Freudian ideas. Astronomy, however, fascinated her—she owned a telescope and often wrote about her stargazing experiences. In my view, these two strands of thought are commingled in Woolf's fiction: astronomical observation becomes a vehicle for thinking about the repressed past. In *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf repeatedly situates her characters in relation to the night sky, a broad vastness that evokes introspection. Woolf employs the moon and the stars as a means of exploring difficult psychological themes; in short, the serene expanse of space represented a neutral place for Woolf, who struggled with mental illness throughout her life, to think about repression and psychodynamic forces.

JOSH'S ADVICE

The biggest difficulty I encountered in writing my thesis was wading through the vast amount of scholarship on Virginia Woolf. For weeks, I read avidly; and for weeks, my page count remained low. If I could impart a single piece of advice, it would be: quit reading and start writing! The "hunting and gathering phase" (as my adviser called it) of reading and research is vital, of course. But ultimately it is the writing process—and the writing process only—that will make ideas clear and truer interests evident. When in doubt, write your way through, as tough as it may be.

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT HONORS, 2014-15

This year, the English Department Honors Program was led by Professor Pat Crain and featured a cornucopia of topics, from William Langland to Stephen King, eighteenth-century editions of Shakespeare to paratext in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the performance of drag to the production of landscape. Students conferred to exchange ideas and drafts in a biweekly colloquium, while meeting individually with their advisors over the course of the year. We asked thesis writers to submit short descriptions of their projects early in the spring term. Here's what they produced:

Cara Cifferelli: What are the spaces which edit, perpetuate, or destroy history? By looking at the infamous history of Henry VIII through an early modern history book, a Shakespeare play, and a modern day museum, I demonstrate that an ever-changing collaboration between history, media, and interpretation creates a unique historical narrative through the mediation of various spaces.

Chris Feldsine: Editions of Shakespeare's plays produced during the eighteenth century document the editor's reading of the texts of Shakespeare's plays.

Jazmine Goguen: In contrasting the hip, cynical world of postmodern fiction with the unrestrainedly sincere and empathetic world of Alcoholics Anonymous, I argue that David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* embodies a more humanist postmodern work that values storytelling and lived experience over the isolation and anhedonia of modern consumer.

James T. Kirk: Drag performance is a fringe theatre based in homosexual Camp and the embodiment of a distorted femininity. Through analysis of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* and Taylor Mac's interpretation of Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan*, I establish drag as an expressive mode whose

emphasis on revelation provides a model for acting, character, and performance lying outside the conventional theatrical frame.

Jamie Lutz: The Romantic era inspired multiple incarnations of the fictional monster, including the sympathetic Creature from *Frankenstein* and the sexualized Lord Ruthven from "The Vampyre." I argue that the differences between these types of monsters derive from varying combinations of Romantic aesthetic categories and suggest that these categories could play a role in the creation of modern monsters as well.

Brittany Mania: Hey literary scholars, Gossip Girl here... and I have the biggest news ever. Mary Haines' husband is cheating on her—with that trappy shopgirl Crystal Allen! And did you hear the recently widowed Lulu Ames has a new beau? Sources tell me he's *much* younger. Rumor has it that women like to gossip. While emotional and often misinformative, gossip is a uniquely female form of communication that offers women a defense against patriarchal claims to superior authorship. Don't believe me? Read for yourselves. XOXO Gossip Girl

Clio McConnell: Would George Bernard Shaw be pleased with the state of contemporary theatre? Not bloody likely! While his *Pygmalion* reveals him as one of the wittiest and brashest authors in the Western canon, his supplementary writings reveal a unique theory of drama that prioritizes the education of an audience. This notion is extremely useful for modern day production dramaturgs.

Grace McLaughlin: My thesis is based on the premise that not only do people unavoidably judge books by their covers, but that the same text can take on vastly different meanings and connotations through variations in its covers and other paratextual devices. Specifically, I explore editions of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* published from 1890 to 1939, arguing that before a scholarly apparatus developed around Wilde's works and before they became established as classics,

the paratexts served as sites in which *Dorian Gray's* narrative and cultural status and Wilde's role in relation to the text were contested and managed.

Dilyn Myers: Feminine landscapes entice lone male figures into the wilderness, and the twentieth-century result is a series of disillusioning road trip novels: Steinbeck's and Kerouac's inability to find the mythical western frontier in an already conquered California.

Samantha Nicholson: While there are many aspects in common between the works of Shakespeare, Tolkien, and Martin, one of the most interesting commonalities is the use of cross-dressing heroines. By examining these characters, my reading shows a growing complexity in the way writers conceptualize gender while also acknowledging that many nuances haven't changed in this progression of writers.

Abby Novak: Stephen King consciously draws on the rich tradition of Gothic literature in crafting his modern-day horror tales. Through the comparison of atypical notions of narrative time as they appear in a sampling of novels, both Gothic and King, my thesis examines the ways the past comes back to haunt this genre, and the horror that happens when we come face-to-face with those pasts.

Eamon Schlotterback: Oscar Wilde was committed to socialism, political change, and the betterment of society throughout his career so why is his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* such a downer? An examination of the text, drawing from queer theory, shows how Wilde critiqued a strand of queer pessimism that continues to this day.

Olga Shkolnikov: Using the analytical lens of indigeneity, I study the trends of environmental production of indigenous race in *Avatar*, investigating the forms that science fiction can take in order to prevent the generation of subalternity.

“WHAT DID YOU DO ON LEAVE?”

JAZMINE GOGUEN

Though I've always generally understood that a professor is “on leave” in order to work on a book project for an extended period of time, I've never been quite certain: just what do professors do while on leave for the semester or the year? Are they shut in their offices, scribbling madly on scattered pieces of paper? Are they hidden in the stacks at some distant university? What are they writing about, and what sorts of problems emerge when confronting literary questions on such a large scale? To answer these questions definitively, I spoke to three professors—Elaine Freedgood, who was on leave last semester, Elizabeth McHenry, currently on leave this spring, and Jini Kim Watson, on leave this year—about what they're working on and how it came together during their time away from NYU.

While on leave last semester, Prof. Freedgood did extensive research on theories of narration in order to complete her book on shifts in critical perception of the 19th century novel. She completed much of this research the previous year as a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies, which brings together scholars and artists from vastly different disciplines to complete their projects at Harvard University. While completing her own research, she heard bi-weekly presentations from other scholars, including a lawyer, astronomer, painter, poet, novelist, art historian, and architect, all presenting on such varied topics as dark matter, drawing in the 18th century, and worm motility. She also had two undergraduate research assistants with whom she enjoyed discussing literature and answering their many questions, a dynamic she found most like the teaching she does while at NYU.

Of the book-writing process itself, Prof. Freedgood acknowledges that it is often difficult and overwhelming work. Because she considers this book, her third, to be the most abstract and conceptually ambitious, she found it more difficult to know immediately where to direct her research. Once the book is actually complete, she says, all the associated editing, proofreading, copyediting, and indexing can be quite time-consuming—a problem one doesn't encounter when simply publishing articles. But nevertheless, the end result of these efforts is worth it, she says; “even if they don't like it, you give them something to chew on.”

Prof. McHenry is working on a book tentatively titled *Remaking Negro Literature: Writing, Literary Practice, and African-American Authorship, 1895-1910*. In her own words, “The years covered by the book are among the most understudied, least understood periods in African-American literary history, in part because there are relatively few conventional markers of literary achievement (major authors or well-known works of fiction) to study during these years. This gives the false impression that these years were largely unremarkable; but my book aims to grapple more fully with this largely unmapped moment in African-American literary history by considering a series of genres, institutions, and conditions of authorship and publication that allow us to reflect more fully on situations of literary engagement for African Americans.”

She notes that this project has forced her to think about certain subjects that are not normally given much attention in scholarly inquiry, including writers or literary projects that have failed to achieve success or recognition for one reason or another. “Sometimes these failed literary projects tell us more about the literary atmosphere of a particular time period than do the published texts and successful authors,” she

observes. Her work this semester has been focused mostly on Booker T. Washington, a figure she admits she didn't particularly want to write about at first, but who emerged over the course of her research as a crucial part of her project. The process of interpreting his published work, much of which is kept at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., proved difficult because “much of what Washington wrote and published under his name was actually written by other people”; this understandably complicates the process of analyzing Washington's cultivated image as “an author and a literary man” who is also a political figure with a public disdain for literature. Much of the challenge at this stage of her writing will be synthesizing and reworking what she has already written in her chapter about Washington.

So how does she feel about being on leave? “It's reminded me that writing is fun (especially when you have the time to dedicate to it), but hard.” But she also notes, “It's also sometimes very lonely! I will be glad to get back into the classroom this fall.” Prof. Freedgood has expressed similar feelings of happiness upon returning to the classroom; this semester, she's teaching a freshman seminar called Writers, Notes, and Notebooks, as well as Major Texts in Critical Theory.

Prof. Watson is currently on leave in Melbourne, Australia at the School of Culture and Communications at the University of Melbourne, her undergraduate alma mater. She's working on a book project entitled *Ruling Like a Foreigner: On Postcolonial Authoritarianism*, in which she addresses “writing that examines the capitalist-authoritarian regimes of several Asia-Pacific nations (South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore) during the 1970s and 80s.” For this project, she says it's been incredibly helpful to actually be in the Asia Pacific region while conducting her research, and to “recognize the different circuits of intellectual exchange that go on between and across Asia and Australia.” She's also begun learning Indonesian this year in the hopes of including literature about the Suharto regime in her project, and plans to visit Indonesia, Singapore, and Hong Kong in the coming months to present some of her work.

Prof. Watson says that her leave has thus far been “restorative and productive,” allowing her to focus her attention on her academic interests while also volunteering for an organization, the Refugee Action Collective, which works with detained refugees in the Pacific region. She says, “I think sabbaticals are much-needed opportunities to clear the head and do some serious research and thinking, but also opportunities to re-humanize and re-balance after a number of years of intense teaching, advising, deadlines, and administration.” In addition to all her academic achievements, another recent accomplishment has been potty-training her two-and-a-half-year-old son, which “wasn't as bad as I thought, but did require a lot of M&Ms.”

“I think sabbaticals are much-needed opportunities to clear the head and do some serious research and thinking, but also opportunities to re-humanize and re-balance after a number of years of intense teaching, advising, deadlines, and administration.” —Prof. Watson

DEPARTMENT NEWS IN BRIEF

*What have you been up to?
Please send your faculty news to
jarcho@nyu.edu.*

On April 30 from 3 to 8pm, the department and the Office of the Dean for Humanities will sponsor “Poetics and Life,” a conference in honor of Professor Emeritus **Anselm Haverkamp**. Speakers will include NYU Dean for Humanities Joy Connolly as well as scholars Stephen Greenblatt (Harvard), Martin Harries (UC Irvine), Michèle Lowrie (U Chicago), and Erica Weitzman (Northwestern). The conference will take place in Hemmerdinger Hall in the Silver Center.

Sonya Posmentier has received a 2015 Career Enhancement Fellowship for Junior Faculty from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

Martha Rust has been granted a Huntington Library NEH Fellowship for 2015-16.

John Guillory is the recipient of the Francis Andrew March Award for Distinguished Service to the Profession of English. The award will be conferred at the MLA convention in January 2016.

Patrick Deer has been awarded an NYU Humanities Initiative Faculty Fellowship for the 2015-16 academic year to work on his latest book project, *Surge and Silence: Understanding America's Cultures of War*.

Gregory Vargo, now in the final year of his Faculty Fellowship in the department, will be staying on with us as a full-time Assistant Professor. He has accepted a joint appointment in English and the Gallatin School of Individualized Study.

David L. Hoover has published a Digital Humanities book entitled *Digital Literary Studies: Corpus Approaches to Poetry,*

Prose, and Drama (Routledge, 2014) with Jonathan Culpeper and Kieran O'Halloran.

In timely commemoration of the year of James Baldwin, **Nicholas T. Boggs** has an essay forthcoming in *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin*, ed. Michele Elam, entitled “James Baldwin and Yoran Cazac’s ‘Child’s Story for Adults’.” He is also currently at work on a book concerning Baldwin’s collaboration with Cazac, for which he has received fellowships from the MacDowell Colony and Yaddo, as well as a grant from the Jerome Foundation.

In March, **Catherine Robson** participated as a judge in the national finals of “Poetry By Heart,” a recitation competition for 14-18 year olds held at Cambridge University, which then hosted a conference on “Poetry, Memory, and Performance” to celebrate the paperback publication of her book *Heart Beats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem*.

In December 2014, a professional reading of **Una Chaudhuri**'s stage adaptation (co-adapted with Gabrielle Cody) of J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* was held, with Kathleen Chalfant in the role of Elizabeth Costello. Prof. Chaudhuri's collaborative creative project *Dear Climate*, which has traveled to Dublin, New York, and the NYU Abu Dhabi group Ecoherence in the past year, received a Creative Climate 2014 Award from the Human Impacts Institute.

Ph.D. candidate **Omar F. Miranda** has a forthcoming article in the *European Romantic Review* entitled “Romantic Celebrity and Exilic Romance: Francisco de Miranda and Lord Byron.”

Erin B. Mee's *Smartphone Play for Staten Island Ferry*, a self-scheduled performance staged on the eponymous ferry, is now available for download via her website, www.thisisnotatheatrecompany.com.

Sylvia Marks' article, “*Delectando Monemus: An Examination of the Books That Delighted and Instructed Young Readers 1700-1840*,” was published this past fall in the journal, *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*.

Toral Gajarawala gave the keynote lectures both at UCLA's graduate student conference in Comparative Literature, called “The Politics of Excess,” in February, and at “(Re)Presentation: Problematizing Authenticity” at St. John's University on March 28th. This month, she was quoted in an article on Dalit literature in *The Times of India*: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/deep-focus/Dalit-literature-goes-global/articleshow/46810541.cms>

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