

Special Issue: Creative Writing

Poems and stories, stories about poems, books full of stories and full of poems . . . and more!



"I've never written a book of poems intentionally," says Prof. Ed Haworth Hoepfner, describing his award-winning manuscript *Blood Prism* (see story, p. 1). "That is, I don't imagine an over-arching subject. I usually write for 3 or 4 years, publish ten or twenty individual poems over that time span, and then haul them all out and see what I have. I print up 100 or 150 of the poems and scatter them on the floor. I walk around them and see what lifts out: common themes, recurrent images, dominant moods. Essentially, I'm finding out what I've been feeling and thinking about in the past several years, what patterns emerge. This is the process I began with *Blood Prism*, and I became aware

immediately that I'd done something I hadn't before; I'd spent a good bit of time trying to deal with political issues. I guess I'd always had some social or political pieces previously but I realized that, since 9/11, and the alteration in the national climate that resulted, I'd been struggling with working politics into my sensibility. *Blood Prism* tries to triangulate on three subjects, to combine the personal lyric and my impressions of the earth with a social landscape. The book reflects that attempt: its three sections, Memory, Politics and Age, are joined by repetitions on the color red and the image of blood taken as a lifeline and a historical marker. There's something else as well, likely the result of my struggling with these notions. That is, I've experimented in this book with prose poems and exploded forms, trying to use a variety of techniques to feel my way through the difficulties I encountered in trying to combine subjects in what was, for me, an unnatural and troubling enterprise that nonetheless means to find some recourse to peace."

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. . . and that's just the creative writing part!

There's also the latest news on departmental happenings and events, faculty and student achievements—and what's in store for next year

The English Channel

The Alumni Newsletter of the Department of English

A Blockbuster Year for Creative Writing at OU

English Department Set to Launch Creative Writing Major

On March 30, the OU Board of Trustees voted unanimously to approve the English department's Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing. The program will officially begin in the fall of 2012. With the approval of the program, Oakland becomes one of only three institutions in Michigan to offer an undergraduate major in creative writing.

Although the English department has offered courses in creative writing for at least three decades, the department didn't seriously begin considering a creative writing major until the fall of 2007, encouraged by the Dean's office. Professors Gladys Cardiff, Annie Gilson and Ed Hoepfner began scouring the country for undergraduate program models. There were plenty to review since the B.A. or B.F.A. has doubled its popularity since 1994, when there were 84 such programs; now more than 160 colleges or universities offer majors in creative writing. While the department worked at constructing a program that would meet Oakland's needs, it bolstered the creative writing staff in 2009 by hiring a new assistant professor specializing in fiction, Jeff Chapman. Professors Cardiff, Chapman, Gilson and Hoepfner decided to model Oakland's program after the very best programs in the country, which are committed to the link between creative writing and literature. As a result, Oakland's new B.A. contains a strong academic component, in part because all four of the tenure-track professors at Oakland who will teach creative writing hold a Ph.D.—something of an anomaly where creative writing programs are

concerned, making an emphasis on literary preparation both logical and desirable.

The new major also responds to feedback gathered during the department's recent assessments of its program offerings. When students are asked to make suggestions for course improvement for the English department, the most frequent response has mirrored student interest in more courses in creative writing. The vitality of creative writing at Oakland is evident in other ways—most notably the annual contests in ekphrastic poetry and “flash” fiction contests, the Poetry Bash on April 15th, sponsored readings by well known novelists and poets, and the annual Maurice Brown Poetry Reading. The department believes the new major responds to the wishes that OU students have expressed and will provide them with a course of study that will reward their patient support. The department and the creative writing faculty look forward to this new phase in English education at Oakland University.

The tracks in poetry and fiction writing are fully staffed and courses offered this coming year would count toward the degree. While students may take courses in screenwriting in the fall as well, full implementation of the track in television/screen writing will depend on departmental hiring, and is not anticipated to take place for a year or two. Details of program requirements will appear soon on the English department website. Questions may also be addressed to any of the instructors in creative writing

Haworth Hoepfner Wins Prestigious National Poetry Prize

Last spring, OU English's own Ed Haworth Hoepfner was chosen as 2011 winner of the Charles B. Wheeler Prize, sponsored by the Ohio State University Press and its literary magazine *The Journal*, for his collection of poems *Blood Prism*. The book is scheduled to be published by OSU Press this coming August. Hoepfner's manuscript was selected by a panel of judges from over 700 entries. In addition to publication, the award comes with a \$3000 prize.

Most books of poetry, Professor Hoepfner points out, are published as the result of competitions, making publication “a challenging process.” Hoepfner's previous book, *Ancestral Radio*, was “over the course of almost three years named a semi-finalist or finalist in 19 such contests, before it finally found a press.” “But,” Hoepfner adds, “neither it, nor my first book, actually won a contest that

entailed more than publication and the gift of 100 copies. So, when Kathy Fagan, the editor of *The Journal*, called me to let me know that *Blood Prism* had been selected for the Wheeler prize, I was stunned.”

As the 24th recipient of this prestigious prize, Hoepfner joins a distinguished list of poets that also includes OU grad Mary Ann Samyn, and Albert Goldbarth, the featured poet of the 2009 Maurice Brown Poetry Reading. Asked to describe how it feels to earn such a distinction, Hoepfner recalls, “I pulled over to the side of the road, as I'd been driving, and I sat in my car watching the snow fall through the dark. It was a beautiful night. I also remember that, on the phone with her, I'd been fairly speechless with pleasure. But that's only appropriate, I guess. If I could talk easily, I would never have been drawn to poetry.”

Department Welcomes New Secretary



The English department is pleased to welcome a new addition to its staff. Shawn Rasanen joined the department in the spring as a part-time secretary. Shawn comes to us as a seasoned professional, having worked at OU for more than 16 years, first as an office assistant in Graduate Admissions and, more recently, as a Registration Agent. Upon starting her new position, Shawn says, "I am excited to work in such a caring and welcoming office. Everyone has been helpful as I learn the routine here." She adds, "To quote my mentor, Cynthia Ferrera, I will 'go above and beyond what is expected.'" Welcome Shawn; we're lucky to have you!

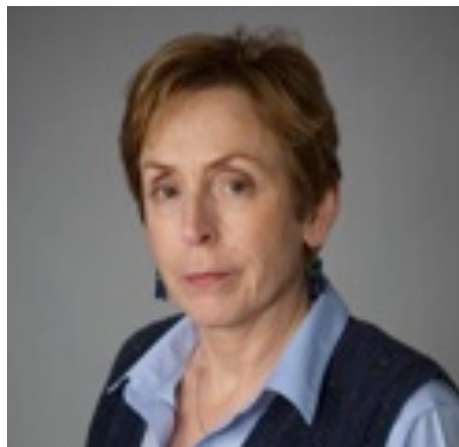
LETTER FROM THE CHAIR by Susan E. Hawkins

The department has just finished an extremely exciting and busy year of readings and read-in's, faculty lectures and presentations, student and alum writing contests. The English Honor Society, Sigma Tau Delta, has finished a splendid year of events with the induction of twenty-eight new members, and department faculty continue their outstanding work. In particular, Professor Ed Haworth Hoepfner's third poetry collection, *Blood Prism*, won this year's Wheeler Prize in poetry given by Ohio State University Press (see p. 1.)

And Professor Andrea Knutson received the Judd Family English Department Faculty Award for the publication of her book, *American Spaces of Conversion* by Oxford University Press (see p. 4-5). Bravo to all!

For the department, however, our BIG news is the successful approval of the new B.A. in Creative Writing (see p. 1.) Students are extremely excited about this new degree, and our first offering of Eng 216: Introduction to Creative Writing hopefully will be offered in winter 2012. In the meantime, Cinema Studies continues its successful progress with sixty majors in its second year. Plus the program welcomes two new cinema faculty this fall: Hunter Vaughn, specialist in European and Global film, and Ross Melnick, specialist in silent cinema.

And speaking of excitement, fall semester is going to be a blockbuster! This year's Maurice Brown



Memorial Poetry Reading, October 11, 4:30—6:30 p.m., will feature Michigan poet Robert VanderMolen. He is the author of nine poetry collections, the most recent of which is *Water*. His poems have appeared in numerous publications, and he is the recipient of an NEA award. On November 7, a Detroit native, poet Michael Heffernan, will be here for a reading (see p. 15 for more details). And to finish off the hat-trick, our featured fiction writer, yet another Michigania, is Bonnie Jo Campbell, finalist for the National Book Award for her 2009 short story collection,

American Salvage. Her 2011 novel, *Once Upon a River*, has received exceptional critical praise. Mark your calendars, tentatively, for March 8th, 5—7 p.m.

Also, on October 19, we will host documentary filmmaker Nancy Porter for a screening of her award-winning film, *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women* followed by a Q & A. Porter's visit is part of a series of programs on Alcott's life and work funded by an NEH grant awarded to the Rochester Hills Public Library (see full story, p. 16).

For details on these and other events, visit our website and our [Facebook page](#).

“Free should the scholar be – free and brave”

Andrea Knutson Honored with 2011 Judd Family Faculty Achievement Award

[On April 18th, English department faculty, students, alumni, and family gathered to honor Andrea Knutson with the Judd Family Faculty Achievement Award. Department chair Susan Hawkins was kind enough to allow the Channel to print a portion of her eloquent tribute to Professor Knutson, delivered at the ceremony. Prof. Hawkins's remarks are followed by the text of Andrea's gracious acceptance talk.]

WELCOME TO THE 14TH Judd Family English Department Faculty Achievement Award Ceremony at which, as you know, we are honoring Andrea Knutson. I am particularly pleased to welcome Randy Judd who, along with his wife Pat, and with the leadership of Joan Rosen, established this award.

The Judd Family Faculty Achievement Award was created to recognize outstanding achievement in the areas that broadly define our professional mission: teaching, scholarship/ creative work, and service. We are honoring Andrea today for her outstanding contributions to scholarship, most particularly for the November 2010 publication of her first book, *American Spaces of Conversion: The Conductive Imaginaries of Edwards, Emerson, and James*, by Oxford University Press. As a colleague, and department wit, put it in his letter of nomination: “Unless I’ve forgotten something (and this is not entirely unlikely), this book certainly qualifies for a department award for Best Sustained Original Work of Scholarship Not by an Eberwein in the Last Twenty Years. And since we don’t have that award, I am nominating Andrea for the Judd.” Or, to reprise comments made by her colleagues during her recent review, Andrea’s book is “sophisticated and readable,” “the beautiful and elegant close reading is complemented by an amazing historical knowledge,” and the text presents “intellectual history in the best sense.” Perhaps the most acute and accurate response to the book is summarized in this statement, again from a nominating letter.”[W]hat I’m really interested in is not the authors or the works themselves but what Andrea has to say about them. It’s her mind at work that I’m finding interesting.”

In addition to her new work on Edwards, she is deeply engaged in her study of Emerson’s life and work. As any of us know who have also shared her Emerson students, they are passionately alive with her Emersonian delight; she has converted quite a few. In pursuit of her passion for Emerson, and with an Oakland Faculty Research Fellowship, she spent

the summer of 2009 at Harvard’s Houghton Library doing archival research on the correspondence between Emerson and his aunt, Mary Moody, as well as Moody’s diaries.

We all know that Andrea is a fine teacher of early American literature. Her scholarship and her teaching are complementary in the best sense. Her students find her 317, and/or her seminars, either undergrad or graduate—on Emerson, or After the American Renaissance, or Early Women Writers, or Conversion Narratives—to be something of a revelation to them. And her service within the department has been generous and unstinting. She is an exemplary colleague.

But I want to end my remarks here by returning to the achievement of the book itself. And here I freely steal from Jeff Insko’s nomination letter:

“American Spaces of Conversion offers powerful ways of returning us to matters of interiority—by way of religious affection, aesthetic experience, the activity of perception—without sacrificing either historical understanding or theoretical skepticism. In that sense—and perhaps this is what is most powerful of all about the book—Professor Knutson reminds us that inquiry in this field we call ‘the humanities’ is, first and foremost, about a

dedication to and respect for what it

means to be human. Which is just to say that as much as I admire the scope of the book’s project, its lucid prose, and all it has to teach about U.S. intellectual history, its greatest strength of all may simply be that it is just so humane.”

It is my great pleasure to present this year’s Judd Family English Department Faculty Achievement Award to Andrea Knutson. The dedication reads: “In appreciation of your work as a Scholar” and is accompanied by a most felicitous and utterly fitting quotation: “Free should the scholar be – free and brave. Free even in the definition of freedom.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar.”

CONGRATULATIONS, ANDREA!!!

—Susan Hawkins



From left: Susan Hawkins, Randy Judd, Andrea Knutson.

The best criticism I've ever read about Ralph Waldo Emerson's writing is recorded in his aunt Mary Moody Emerson's personal papers at the Houghton Library at Harvard. I had already finished the manuscript for my book and was stunned to find such a gem. She wrote in a letter to him in 1826: "I know the value of your letters dear Waldo sufficiently enough to excite a lively gratitude; they generalize, concentrate, and panamoris (if that is the right word) the mysterious tides of human life: they swell at times, at others lessen the little puddle stream that is hastening one on. They give me a great deal to say, but lessen my ability to do it."

"They give me a great deal to say, but lessen my ability to do it." I laughed at myself for having spent hundreds of pages trying to articulate this moment in consciousness in the book and aunt Mary was able to convey it in fifteen words. Mary Moody Emerson, in speaking about the experience of reading her nephew's words and sentences, conveyed what I had worked so hard to demonstrate was the preoccupation of the writers and thinkers I included. I had become obsessed with the Puritans in graduate school because their testimonies of conversion are tortured expressions of this experience. I love reading Jonathan Edwards because of his heroic measures at

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saying what escapes language, and I'm drawn to William James's images which seem to say everything. And,

obviously, I love Emerson for exactly the same reason aunt Mary did.

But the timeliness of having discovered this letter took on a more personal dimension. I had just mailed the manuscript for the book that had been, in its early stages, in danger of never having been written. Having been in lower Manhattan on September 11th, I found myself, as many did that morning, in a new world that needed saying, but suffering from an inability to do it. Life, language, imagination came to a halt and we inhabited that gap. I had to inhabit that gap in order to continue in life. The book, when I finally resumed writing it, became my own testimony to the value of bridging that gap.

Emerson would say we are "advancing spirits." And to "restore our sight" is the work of the "advancing spirit." To be able to overcome the impasse aunt Mary describes demands new direction and a new conviction. The search, for Emerson, then leaves "ornaments along its path, and carries with it the beauty it visits." It is a "song" which then "shall draw beautiful faces, warm hearts, wise discourse, and heroic acts, around its way." I am not a

Calvinist, but a long time ago I discovered the beauty and the terror of the gap from the Puritans and Jonathan Edwards (and Emerson and James, the honorary Puritans). To inhabit that gap,

There is not enough cake and applause to celebrate the achievements of this department in recent months.

Emerson claims, demands heroic acts of seeing, of restoring our sight. How lucky am I to find myself at a place in my life and career to be among colleagues who are my contemporary reminders of the necessity to inhabit that gap and sing a song that will draw wise discourse and warm hearts along the way.

There is not enough cake and applause to celebrate the achievements of this department in recent months. And while cake is yummy, I like to think of these remarkable achievements as efforts at restoring our sight, personally and professionally, departmentally and pedagogically. We are a collection of prize-winning poets, cutting-edge researchers and writers, inventive teachers, and we have a department chair whose attention to the gap and her ability to draw beautiful faces and warm hearts has not only inspired me but guided this department on a path which has left a trail of ornaments evidencing—in the face of unyielding resistance—the attempt to draw wise discourse into the fold. Our successes are clear—we amass research grants, prizes, publications, and awards. These are undeniable ornaments. But each ornament is preceded by the courageous and often painstaking search for a conversion of experience into a new mode of sight. Those are the real ornaments that provide a new direction. They are the abstract relations to language and thought that the gap demands that we renew, and in turn the

relationships they build and honor become real and practical webs of power. This award is most certainly an ornament, but I receive it as evidence of a long process that began with one tragic version of the problem aunt Mary describes and ends with membership among colleagues and friends who continue to enable the happy work of advancing the spirit. Like the webs that Jonathan Edwards's spiders weave, these relations are real yet invisible, practical yet glistening and beautiful, and the result of purpose, faith, environment, and a "nervous" apprehension of the next tree to land on. I'm

privileged to be among those who do not simply welcome the active search for experience and new language, but who cultivate and defend an environment that energizes and sustains that search. Thank you for this award. Thank you for recognizing this achievement—it is one achievement among many in our department this year.

—Andrea Knutson



From left: Gladys Cardiff, Andrea Knutson, David Mascitelli

POETRY (MAJOR NATIONAL-AWARD-WINNING POETRY, THAT IS)

Hatred: On Returning to a Poem with Language Backwards

i.e. I wake in solid walls of milk. i.e. "The Cut,"
before they went to Spandau, got Ballet; that is, younger.

So: I wake younger, then the eyelid circus stops.
I wake at 2:
33, I wake at 4:16 and then, again, 5:57.
I can't find out
who's sending me these messages. i.e. Juggler.

Two weeks ago last night I read: rape
and murder, the unnamed girl, 14,
who died, not from multiple penetrations of her
anus, mouth, vagina, but from the last of 4
heart attacks she suffered over hours.

So: This morning loosed, so: "through the mud of just
before dawn, white-tailed..." I can hardly read.
And a scrap of someone saying something "smile,
like a white bird."

I know
there is a dream I had I can't recall, one to carry me
through the traffic, i.e.: Stupid acrobat.
The missing dream's a little lightness
and a thumping, almost, in my forehead. New
sinus trouble. i.e. almost a scent too faint.

So: no trail is. And now, as always, the music played
backwards holds no clue: so: "...deliat-etihw eht,
nwad erofeb tsuj fo dum eht hguorht" echoes
"drib etihw a ekil, elims" and so what?

There's light enough to read and I've learned how, i.e.
I'm 59 and still alive in this world,
etc. with love and with its palindrome and

so: there's light enough to read, many
years of it.

and so I tell you here
the imagination's worthless.

i.e. she was 14

i.e. etc.

—Ed Haworth Hoepfner

POETRY

Literacy: A Family Affair *by Gladys Cardiff*

The literal English translation for river in Cherokee is “long person.” The quintessential river, for me, is the beautiful Oconoluftee because it passes through my father’s birthplace on the Qualla Boundary Reserve in North Carolina. As a member of the Owl family, “long person” symbolically links my family story to a specific historical place and mythic landscape. It is the confluence of these ideas, and the legacy of literacy and respect for education, that makes me especially proud to have poems included in *The People Who Stayed: Southeastern Indian Writing After Removal* (U of Oklahoma Press, 2010), the first anthology to focus on the literary work of Native Americans who trace their ancestry to people who stayed in the southeastern states after 1830. Several years in the making, this collection, edited by Gary Hobson, Janet McAdams, and Kathryn Walkiewicz, covers the entire post-Removal era to the present. While I am, of course, pleased to have my poetry included, the larger significance for me is that it also includes a magazine article “Life Among the Catawba,” written in 1914 by my Aunt Lula; another article written in 1920 by my Uncle Frell Owl; and the 1918 Hampton Institute Commencement Address written and delivered by my father, Henry Owl. While each speaks in a different way about the gains and losses of acculturation, we continue to honor our Cherokee identity and the power of language.

Two Plots: Qualla Boundary, Cherokee

Steep, narrow, as any rural mountain road is,
this one winds up Rattlesnake,
past cousin Dan’s modern cantilevered house.

On the side of this mountain, the space allotted is carved and fitted,
like the stone of Yellowhill Baptist, Grandmother Nettie’s
small country church. Only the bell-steeple is made of white wood.

Some things won’t fit in a photograph, though the sense of things suspended
would be true. After the car doors and gravel, we were hushed in the grass.
If there were birds, I didn’t hear them. A faint breeze blew across my ears, felt,
but not heard.

But, here, under the cross, it is the sun that is most fitting,
laying our portion across our shoulders as we look off into space.
Here, two little cemeteries are fitted on either side of the road.

On this side, one stands, shelved on a small green apron
downside of the church. It hardly has room for itself.
Small, white, regimental wood crosses are packed in rows
to the verge and open sky.

Across the way, a little bigger, starting right on the shoulder
of the road, the other cemetery dissembles, yellow and overgrown.
In the shadows, crosses and headstones, dull bronze plaques,

and inconspicuous flowers strewn like afterthoughts. Members
of my family are buried here. Their graves are well marked.
The nestling hackberry and huckleberry respect the preference
of others here, not to be noticed, except by a few, and pokeberry,
too, tangles, pushing up against the side of Rattlesnake.
Steep, blue, sheer, thick with trees, stolid, you think, solemn,
until, leaning back, one notices the tops barely swaying. White pine,

pitch pine, sweetgum, like coming home after a boat trip,
grabbing the sides of the shower stall so you won’t fall down,
blackgum, cucumbertree, silverbell, and hemlock, and shining sumac.

WRITER'S SKETCHBOOK

Carnet de Voyage: Sketches from Romania *by Jeff Chapman*

In April 2010, thanks to an Oakland University research grant, I traveled to Romania in order to conduct research for a graphic novel I'm writing. A good portion of the graphic novel will concern Ovid, the great Roman poet. I followed his footsteps to the shores of the Black Sea, to the town of Constanta, Romania—called Tomis back in Ovid's time—where he spent the final eight years of his life from 8-16 CE.

Since I am both writing and drawing my graphic novel, my research involved spending the better part of a month

inhabited primarily with Getaen natives. What were the limits of the city? What elements of it would have resembled a Greek polis; what elements would resemble a Dacian village; what elements, if any, would have been brought with the Romans when they conquered the region in 29 BCE?

Mostly I tried to imagine what it would have felt like to live here back then.

One afternoon I visited the nearby ruins of the town of Histria, where I wandered down the Roman roads, still

immaculate after two millennia, to stand by the seaside. No one else was at the ruins and I could feel viscerally I was walking the same roads as those ancient people walked. I could feel and hear them around me. When I stood staring out at the sea, I felt I was seeing what they saw. Or perhaps, even better, what Ovid saw.



sketching around this area, to get a visual sense of the landscape of Ovid's exile that I would never be able to get from photos. I thought I would share some of my travel sketchbook with *The English Channel*, but first a little bit of background:

In 8 C.E., Roman emperor Augustus exiled the poet Ovid to Tomis; Ovid would eventually die there after eight years in what he described as a cold, isolated place surrounded by barbarians. He wrote that the Black Sea was the edge of the world.

Ovid grew up in Italy and lived his adult years in Rome where he was the center of the social scene. He was a superstar in his own time. What would it be like to be exiled to the farthest north-east borders of the Roman Empire?

I imagine it would be like this: send George Clooney—in my mind, the quintessential Los Angelean—to a small town in the Upper Peninsula from which he's never ever allowed to leave. And he can't wear any modern winter clothes. He lives there for eight years and then he dies. That seems close.

Poor Ovid.

[And no, I'm not saying that the UP is occupied by barbarians.]

The challenge of my research project was to try to imagine this spot, exactly 2000 years ago. To do that I had to strip the landscape of the modern city that covers that stretch of the coast, and then rebuild it with a Greek trading town

(continued on next page)



Chapman's Carnet de Voyage (continued)



FICTION

The 2011 Flash Fiction Contest Winners

An Island for June *by Alexandra Giese*

June collected lost words. She would unscrew empty jars, whisper one word into each container before closing it. She wrote the words delicately with a thick, black marker before putting them on a shelf. She took the time every few days to dust the jars. The most recent words to be added were cosmogryal and eternitarian.

She liked the way the words felt on her tongue when she whispered them. She said them all every morning as though she were calling roll. She said them in front of her mirror. Her dark eyes focused on her mouth as it changed shapes between the words.

She threw a blanket over the collection when she left during the day, and when she returned, she pulled the silver fabric – better suited for a magician's cape – off of the containers.

June kissed the ridges of the other girl's spine, working her way along the curve of her back.

"What do you dream about?" Velvet asked.

"Words. Words moving across the page, wiggling through my every thought," she said.

"I dream about fires, large fires burning through my core, consuming everything," Velvet whispered.

June kissed along her back again before kissing her neck. "Words and fire are a dangerous combination."

In the morning, the girl who dreamed of fire left. She picked her clothes off the floor with her fingertips before putting them on. She kissed June's temple before she left, pausing to look at the jars.

Velvet smashed the jars. She plucked each one from the shelf, dropping them like bombs.

June watched every jar explode into pieces like delicate shrapnel. The words left her as the jars broke, escaping like murmurs. She just stood there and stared, her dark eyes only watching the movement of the glass containers being lifted and then abandoned in the air.

Glass pieces shimmered on the otherwise clean floor. Velvet wore shoes; she turned her head to meet June's eyes.

June felt all of the words escape from her memory, especially as Velvet swept up the shards with such an ordinary plastic broom.

"Aren't you going to say anything?" Velvet asked.

June sat on her knees, staring at the shelf. "What can I say?"

"You could get mad. I destroyed your stupid collection, and you're just sitting there like a cow with big dumb eyes," she said, her fingers wrapped tightly around the broom handle.

"You took my words," June said, staring at the floor as though she could still see the shards of glass.

Velvet left June's apartment. How boring the words in June's mind felt. She stared at her reflection in the mirror, and having no rare words, she ran through her vocabulary, watching her lips change between the words.

Emphasis. Prickle. Emptiness. Cloud. Nymph.

Flash Fiction Winners

Congratulations to this year's Flash Fiction Contest winners!

Undergraduate Category

1st Place: Alexandra Giese, "An Island for June"

2nd Place: Andrew Waggoner, "Incident, October 1957"

3rd Place: Becky VanBuskirk, "Dinner for One"

4th Place: Christina McDaniel, "Foreclosure"

Honorable Mentions: Jason Storm, "Death is Not the End" and Becky VanBuskirk, "Daisies"

Graduate/Alumni Category

1st Place: Scott M. Contor, "A Road from Earth to Sky"

2nd Place: Randolph Judd, "The Side of the Road"

3rd Place: Christina Fontana, "Myriam in the Middle"

Want More Flash Fiction?

You can read all of the prize-winning entries on the English department website.

You know what to do: just click [here](#).

A Road from Earth to Sky *by Scott M. Contor*

The initial symptoms were slight enough to obscure the gravity of the situation—patients complaining of swollen glands, raspy breathing, the taste of tin on their tongues. More were reported ill than was expected in a typical downturn month in the cycle of cold and flu seasons, but it was nothing to become alarmist about.

Just over two weeks after authorities noted a national increase in hospital admittance (seventeen days to be exact), many patients were stricken with inky stools and traces of blood in their sputum. Edema in the hands and feet was reported in a few isolated cases, but its connection to the more dominant symptoms remained, despite the best efforts of doctors to prove otherwise, spurious at best. After a month had passed, most had a close acquaintance, if not a family member sharing the very same household, who was infected.

This nascent contagion was marked not by its virulence, but instead by its level of communicability. The media sounded a daily clarion call to ready for Armageddon, but not a single death could be conclusively linked to the infection; however, at two months in, most of the population had contracted it. The quarantine of the sick ceased and all citizens were instructed to return to their places of work—an economy already destabilized before the outbreak dictated nothing less—and to carry on with their routines as if all was in working order.

A drive-thru line is held in a state of stasis as the window attendant excuses herself momentarily to vomit; pruning is suspended as a particularly nasty spell of faint headedness prompts a gardener to lie facedown in a swath of petunia bedding; sexual gratification is delayed as a phone sex operator casts the phone receiver aside when her newly discovered, and newly profitable, huskiness devolves into spasmodic coughing—these minor inconveniences caused productivity to slow, but never to stop.

People adapted to a new way of life that they struggled to understand, and it was not long before the usual functionaries and scaremongers surfaced in order to cultivate their anxieties. Doctors hypothesized that the continued absence of lethality 211 days after the onset of the illness suggested that the body may naturally develop immunity, yet they also warned that the emergence of a more virulent mutation could not be ruled out. The government reassured the public through PSAs and Presidential addresses that there was no cause for panic, while military personnel entertained doomsday scenarios in darkened rooms. Corporate nabobs flooded shelves with miracle products that supposedly minimized the severity of the symptoms. Religious leaders mobilized their congregations: some organized televised prayer rallies in major cities; others used fire and brimstone oratory to blame the sodomites and heathens for inviting such a punishment from God. Literary theorists even weighed in on the subject, characterizing the threat not so much as a disease, but instead as “an all-encompassing sense of ennui

symptomatic of the post-modern experience” (qtd. in *The Journal of Literary Aesthetics and Modes*).

Day 259 brought reports of a mass suicide in a small, undisclosed coastal town. A group of people had gathered in an abandoned warehouse once used for processing fish, the concrete in places forever stained from gutting. Loved ones accompanied them in solemn procession, the chosen few who pay witness to the end. Many had access to powerful sedatives and prescription pills; those less fortunate simply mixed lethal cocktails of bleaches and common kitchen cleansers. The body of one young man showed evidence of prior failed attempts to open his wrists; another had rope abrasions ringed around his neck. The powerful sway of groupthink finally saw the perverted desires that they had long harbored realized.

People did their best to stay positive in the face of such gruesome details, like a terminal cancer patient grasping at rosary beads. However, when their gods failed to answer their prayers, they soon promoted science to their Savior. Researchers believed they were on the verge of isolating the contagion, an apparent mongrelized strain of documented influenza neuraminidases and diseases that targeted the neuromuscular system. They temporarily named it Beta-13; it became more colloquially known as “The Sadness.” The possibility of a cure was typically the first thought upon waking, yet it was rarely, if ever, discussed aloud.

Today I buried my daughter in a small pine box in our backyard. There was little ceremony to be had—no fellow mourners, no hymns, no plaintive farewells. Just me in my high-collared sheepskin, my worn gloves. I read from an old dog-eared collection of poems by Rossetti. There was a full year when she refused to fall asleep until I comforted her with the one about the rainbow. The medical examiner had listed her death as “complications arising from chronic asthma,” a once common post-mortem now rendered suspect in these, our current times. The viscous fluid had welled within her tiny lungs; she had been drowned from the inside out.

The sky was overcast, only a faint penumbra at the edge of a distant cloud betraying where the sun now hid its face. It is hard to tell if I vomited from the grief coiled in my belly or from the alien contagion that multiplies in my bloodstream, that dances in the marrow of my bones. The disturbed earth at my feet emitted a musky odor that evoked in me hard to place memories. The soil was redolent of the sweat on the angular bodies of boys toweling off in a high school locker room, the dampness on my inner thighs after my first sexual experience. An unforgiving cruelty in me, the source of which I hope to never realize, surely caused me at this moment to remember the prime of my own adolescence.

This disease. This terrible, unknowable disease. We have all been infected—the young and the old, the haves and the have-nots, the just and unjust alike. I am still alive, but I admire those who dare to escape it.

EKPHRASIS

The School Teacher

Based on a 2011 art sculpture in the Detroit Institute of the Arts of a swelling, dripping, peach-toned alphabet, shaped like intestines with a single drop about to plop down at the end. Also based on a photograph of the drop before its fall.

It was the endless
possibilities that lay
between the oozing “A”
and the dripping “Z.”

Spaghetti-o’s for some, the makings
of intestines themselves
for others; and she ached
to pull them long, pull
them apart, but they stuck
and swelled in the summer
city heat, luminous with perspiration,
like the gleaming girls running
up and down the sidewalk
before the bells and whistles,
screeching and slapping
boys who chase-reach-pull
their backpacks and black braids.

It was the pressure of making
“t” with “h” with “e” — the “d” and “a”
so much easier to extract, to pull
like a bulbous, hanging drop.

—*Chelsea Grimmer*

GRAPHIC FICTION

by Ron DeVillano



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BOOK REVIEW

A Book that is Elegant and True *by Annie Gilson*

In an interview with Mary McMyne called “Turning Inward,” Kevin Brockmeier mentions his fascination with what he calls the “ground rules” that govern his works of fiction. He observes, “I usually don’t get the chance to talk about those rules, and I always presume that they’re more fascinating to me than they would be to anybody else, but the truth is that they are fascinating to me[.]”

Fascinating and, I would add, of vital importance to his fictional projects. In his latest book, *The Illumination*, the rules seem to be governing the new set of problems with exquisite precision and emotional perfect pitch. The novel’s central event is an odd phenomenon that has changed the way humans experience suffering: all pain has suddenly become, in a word, illuminated. Light-giving. The light given off by people’s wounds and diseases glows through their clothes; everyone can see it, both the sufferers and the well (who are, the book reminded me, only the temporarily-well). The novel is composed of six sections, each of which focuses on a different character. In this regard, it feels similar to David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* or Tom Rachman’s *The Imperfectionists*, a bit like a set of interlocking short stories. But unlike the latter book, *The Illumination* feels much richer in terms of characterization, especially with regard to the texture of its people’s interior lives. Indeed, the characters illuminate this novel as brightly as their pain lights up their days; this book is inhabited by richly-drawn, deeply-felt people who stayed with me long after I’d finished the book.

A second rule or device around which the novel is structured is a handwritten book. This book is a compilation of the daily testaments of love written by a man to his wife. He posted the love notes on their refrigerator and the woman transcribed each one of them into the waiting pages of her book. However, after the woman is injured in a car accident, she gives the book to the woman sharing her hospital room. She tells this woman that she can’t bear to look at the book now that her husband has died. This book resurfaces in each section of the novel, and lives out its own life (and, perhaps, after-lives) as it changes hands and affects the people who briefly possess it throughout the arc of *The Illumination*.

I will confess that, when I first started the novel, I wasn’t certain it would work. I was afraid that the rules, the complex problems Brockmeier set for himself in this project, would make the unfolding of the narrative feel forced, that it would seem over-contrived in the way that *The Brief History of the Dead* felt at the end. But this wasn’t the case at all. In spite of confining six different protagonists (as well as their lovers, friends, and acquaintances) to sections of about 30-40 pages apiece, Brockmeier makes this anthology of lives work as a whole. In part, this is because of the phenomenon of illumination. It is at once beautiful and painful to witness this spectacle of suffering, just as it is beautiful and painful to watch the characters learn to live with light-giving pain. This piece of fantasy is imaginatively exhilarating; it invigorates the

POETRY

novel’s premise and the mundane sorrows of being an animal in pain in the way that all great literature employing the fantastic does: by briefly freeing us from the tyranny of the everyday, and allowing something scientifically implausible to become stunningly true. (Think Gogol, Kafka, Calvino, Borges, Saramago, John Berger, Hilary Mantel.)

The homely and touching book of love-notes also helps to make connections between the characters, but the real virtuoso element of this novel, with regard to characterization, is Brockmeier’s deeply felt understanding of and empathy for suffering. Humans are full of sorrow. Brockmeier understands this. Humans are so full of sorrow that they can barely stand to look at other people’s sorrow. Brockmeier understands this as well, but he doesn’t avert his gaze. Moreover, he represents this suffering in an imaginatively fresh way that allows the reader to be able to bear watching other people suffer. This is no mean feat.

Not all of the characters are equally well realized, but this is no surprise. Some of them have lived fuller lives than others. All of them are guilty of averting their own gazes from others’ suffering, or, if not of averting their gazes, then they are guilty of distancing themselves in an effort to protect themselves from the terrible weight produced by the accumulation of witnessed sorrow. Brockmeier encourages us to believe that we are stronger than we think; that we can bear to empathize more than we have thus far. This too is no mean feat.

But what also makes the book marvelous is the aliveness of the writing. (And no, I don’t mean “liveliness.”) The imagery and metaphors are fresh and original; they slip into the reader’s sense-memory like a sea wind that has found its way far inland, carrying a trace of salt and the mystery of the sea. For example: a woman coughing up blood says to her brother: “Who brought that garden inside?” and in a sunburst of intuition he realized that she saw the seven stained tissues on her bedside table as roses, the same lustrous red as the Apothecaries their mother used to cultivate when they were kids.”

Quite simply: Brockmeier has written a beautiful book, a book that is elegant and true. On every level of the text, from the barely-visible set of rules that it obeys without flinching or hitch, to the rich lives of its characters, to the lyrical beauty of its prose. I have to say that I’m pretty excited about this guy, Kevin Brockmeier. I’m pretty excited and very thankful. He is making the job of living a bit easier; he is doing the work of writing in a way that is engaged, and earnest, and inspiring. It makes me go all English major, to be honest. And so I close: We, we lucky few, we readers: in the course of our lives, our blood may be shed (metaphorically or literally), but we have Kevin Brockmeier to illuminate the loss for us.

*Prof. Gilson’s review originally appeared in **Bookslut**.*

Four Poems by Joseph DeMent, *introduction by David Mascitelli*

When Joe Dement died last July, he left behind a considerable body of unpublished poetry and short fiction – a side of Joe that few of us were aware of. Some of his short fiction has been published in the Spring issue of *The Oakland Journal*, and you will find samples of his poetry printed here.

In addition to the poetry and fiction, there are other facets of Joe that people who did not know him well would not have been aware of. From a distance, he could appear crusty and intimidating. He was a man of strong opinions and could be very blunt in expressing his likes and his dislikes. While his manner frightened some, one always got honest feedback from him. You always knew exactly where you stood with Joe. Behind the crusty manner, Joe was a very caring and generous person. It is not generally known that he devoted a great deal of time and energy to counseling and supporting recovering alcoholics. And those of us who were fortunate enough to be his friends were often the beneficiaries of his generosity and concern.

One of the things I will personally miss most about Joe is his conversation. We were colleagues twenty-five years and friends for over forty; over the years we had innumerable conversations about topics ranging from literature and music to films and golf. He loved to discuss ideas, and while he held strong opinions, he enjoyed intellectual give and take and was always willing to accept well-reasoned arguments. I still find myself automatically waiting to hear what Joe will have to say about a film or a new recording or the outcome of a golf tournament. He is sorely missed.

We hope you will enjoy the following samples of his poetry.

All's Well That Ends Well

Helen or Helena: is this the choice?
Rapist or raped, what difference does it make?
Distinctions between Adam and the snake
Are meaningless as the apple: order's root
Resides in long white fingers molded into fruit.

So Trojans defend your prize;
Bertram, reject Diana's law of lust;
Both must wear white on a field of gules.
Helen and Helena make the rules.

The Last Time

The last time
People at dinner talking muzak
You and I dying
I puzzled into rigor
You icy winged
Silently gathering for the last flight

Where?
I never knew.

Poor almost enchanted princess
Frightened that her prince
Might turn into a frog.

No matter now, she flew.
And you still in me unkissed question mark
I find myself almost enchanted too.

After Reading Diane

Only love could allow such a revelation
Letting the eyes' hands explore heart and nerve
Tolerating the interloper in your bed
Feeling the strange hand on your breast, your thigh
Greeting the uninvited guest at the tying of shoelaces,

Only love could understand
That galaxies are connected by nothing
So tightly that they cannot live without each other.

Art, 1964*

Now that Rembrandt has made five million dollars
With the help of Homer and Aristotle
The rest of us can relax, no longer merely seeing
Through a glass darkly.
Art has been reinvigorated
And the swish of the brush is heard throughout the land.

*For those who have forgotten, Rembrandt's painting, "Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer" was sold at auction in 1964 for the sum named in the poem.

Aw Yiss!: New Directions in Writing *by Jeff Chapman*

On Friday, April 8, four exceptional up-and-coming writers—Geoffrey Babbitt, Jackson Connor, Kathryn Cowles, and Traci O'Connor—visited Oakland University and gave a phenomenal reading titled *New Directions in Writing*.

A quick pause: I need to confess my conflict of interest. All four of these writers are former classmates of mine from the University of Utah creative writing graduate program. They are some of my favorite people in the world. So you might suspect I'm biased when I say they are also some of my favorite writers in the world.

But here's the thing: based on the fabulous reading we were treated to in April and the enthusiastic reception from our students, I think there's good empirical evidence in favor of bias.

Traci O'Connor started the reading with a piece from a novel-in-progress (her first collection of short stories, *Recipes for Endangered Species*, was published last year). She read about a number of people who occupy their local bar the way my guppies occupy their fishbowl: entirely natural but not entirely comfortable. They suspect there's something bigger out there. The characters' dialogue was at times funny, at times sad, and at times ribald (ie. swearing). Several students commented to me that they appreciated characters that talked like them. I said, in response, What, Shakespeare not good enough for you any more?

Geoff Babbitt read second and gave a more subdued reading than O'Connor. His poems are introspective and intelligent. He writes about illuminated manuscripts, ancient Greece, religion. I loved the juxtaposition between his pensive poems and O'Connor's brash story.

Next, Jackson Connor. One thing you have to know about Connor: he has the best, biggest beard this side of Alaska. And because it's practically a prerequisite for those among us blessed with the best, biggest beards, he's a hell of a storyteller. He read a segment from his fabulous blog, "Daddy or Something" (daddyorsomething.blogspot.com), about a family trip to the beach, starting with the game of 21 Questions one always plays on the family road trip. Here's a petite excerpt:

"And it was Sam's turn.

Sam thought for a few minutes, and he said, "Okay, I got one. It's a good one. But it's way too hard to guess. So I'll just tell you. It's Nothingness."

Zac said, "That was going to be my first guess."

Sam said, "Okay, it's your turn."

Zac said, "Got one."

Traci said, "Is it bigger than a breadbox?"

Zac said, "You know, Mom, that's a relative question. A breadbox, after all, could be as big as the ocean."

Naomi said, "Is it the ocean?"

Zac said, "Yes. gg." (gg is video game player, or "gamer," lingo for "Good Game." Traci and I hold five English degrees between the two of us, and neither of us can explain to the kids why they shouldn't use such shorthand in their speaking or writing, so we lol when Zac ggs us and move on.)"

The blog is charming and funny, but also thoughtful. I highly recommend that you all take a gander at it. As we move forward, how much great writing is going to appear in blogs or something similar?

Finally, Kathryn Cowles read several poems from her brilliant collection, *Eleanor, Eleanor, not your real name*. Her poems are stylistically playful and utterly delightful. After reading a few poems she pulled out her guitar and sang a few of the songs she has written. Cowles is a truly talented singer and songwriter; her understanding of poesy allows her to write lyrics that are unique. I'm always struck by her amazing enjambments; one of my pet peeves about most lyrics

is that

every line is

end-stopped.

In the end, each writer read for around 15 minutes. The reading was lively and fast-paced. I was most excited that within an hour and a half, Oakland students got such a broad taste of what's happening in the writing world: they heard a novel-segment, bookish poetry, a blog post, poetry experimenting with form, and songs. I think it's wonderful to see that innovative writing can come in so many different packages.

Let's hear it for bias.

Poet Michael Heffernan to Read from his Work on November 7

The Department is very excited to announce a poetry reading by Michael Heffernan, 4:30 – 6:30 PM, on Monday, November 7, 2011, in the Banquet Room of the Oakland Center. Heffernan is currently touring Michigan in support of his ninth volume of poetry, *At the Bureau of Divine Music*, published by Wayne State University Press.

Heffernan is a Detroit native who has taught poetry in universities in Michigan, Kansas, Washington, Ireland, and, since 1986, at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. His awards include the Iowa Poetry Prize, the Porter Prize for Literary Excellence, two Pushcart Prizes, and three grants (the maximum awarded) from the National Endowment for the Arts.

In fact, his first faculty appointment was in the English department here at Oakland, and one of his first students was honorary alum, frequent visitor and reader, and friend of the department, Thomas Lynch. Lynch writes, "I met my friend and writerly mentor, Michael Heffernan, when he took his first teaching job [at OU] in 1967 and I was a lackluster undergrad. He moved to Kansas and then to Arkansas to work, as [writers] do, among the studios. I moved to Milford to do funerals. I owe to him all of my early literary impulses."

Lynch will be honoring his mentor by providing the introduction to his reading. We hope that you will be able to attend this very special homecoming event.

Program on the Woman Behind *Little Women*. Coming this Fall

Professor Jeffrey Insko is teaming up with the Rochester Hills Public Library (RHPL) for a series of programs on the extraordinary life and work of Louisa May Alcott. *Louisa May Alcott: The Woman Behind Little Women* is a documentary film co-produced by Nancy Porter Productions, Inc. and Thirteen/WNET New York's American Masters, and a biography of the same name written by Harriet Reisen. Louisa May Alcott programs in libraries are sponsored by the American Library Association Public Programs Office with the support of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Louisa May Alcott is recognized around the world for her novel *Little Women*, but few know Alcott as the bold, compelling woman who secretly wrote sensational thrillers, lived at the center of the Transcendentalist and Abolitionist movements, and served as a Civil War army nurse. RHPL's public programs will present a story full of fresh insights about Alcott and a new understanding of American culture during her lifetime.

RHPL was one of only 30 libraries nationwide to receive the NEH grant to present a series of programs this fall. As project scholar,



Insko is working with Sheila Konen, Adult Services Manager of RHPL to plan the season-long project, which will include scholar-led discussions of Alcott's lesser-known works and of Harriet Reisen's biography of Alcott. Two additional events—a panel discussion of Alcott and social reform, and a screening of the documentary film and Q and A with its producer and director Nancy Porter (on October 19th— mark your calendars!)—will take place at OU. A kickoff event is also planned for early fall, which will take place at the Rochester Historical Museum at Van Hoosen Farm, RHPL's partner in the project.

"I'm thrilled to have the chance to help bring an extended discussion of Alcott and nineteenth-century America to a

broad audience," says Insko. "OU and the Rochester Hills Public Library are two vital institutions in metro Detroit. And it's been a pleasure working with someone as smart and experienced as Sheila. This kind of public outreach project represents a great opportunity—both to provide a view of Alcott that goes beyond the writing of *Little Women* and to promote the humanities beyond the walls of the university. Sheila and I are really excited about the ambitious program we have planned."

For more details on the Alcott program, including additional event dates as they become available, stay tuned to the RHPL and OU English websites.

OU English in the News

Reading the OU student newspaper *The Oakland Post* this past year, we were struck by just how often the English department made news—and nearly all of it good! So for those readers who don't regularly read the *Post*, we thought we'd compile a list of stories that featured OU English this year. Just follow the links below—and happy reading.

[On the development of the new Creative Writing major. And a follow-up.](#)

[On Prof. Hoepfner's exciting poetry award.](#)

[A faculty profile of Kevin Laam.](#)

[On Rachel Smydra and Pam Mitzelfeld's service learning course.](#)

[On Prof. Insko's "Authors at OU" presentation.](#)

[On student Marta L. Bauer's Wilson Award.](#)

[On Prof. Pfeiffer's "Brother Mine" event.](#)

Connery Takes on New Role in International Education

Professor Brian Connery has been appointed as OU's Director of International Education after having served as interim director for the past year. Connery's ventures into international education began with an English graduate seminar which traveled to the Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare festival in the early 90s. More recently, he has taken three student groups to tour Ireland during winter breaks, and he has directed the British Studies at Oxford Program for the past five years.

Being in a different country and a different culture "wakes you up," Connery says, "and that makes learning more possible and probable. You're sort of overstimulated 24/7, and everything, from crossing the street to buying your morning coffee to talking over dinner becomes new and interesting. So there's a lot more going on than just seeing strange sights in foreign lands."

His goal for the office during the past year was to make the programs that are available more visible to students, and he was assisted by English majors Becky VanBuskirk and Beth Roznowski, Oxford alums who interned in the IE office and facilitated the marketing plan that the office has begun to

implement, developing brochures, creating and moderating Facebook pages, and developing the office's new website which will go live at the end of the summer.



Connery acknowledges that going abroad is a lot of work, both for faculty involved and for students. His current goal is to review all of the processes involved in faculty organizing international programs and to make them simpler.

The position in International Education is half time, and so he will continue to teach a course every semester for us in the Department.

"It's really sort of ideal," Connery says. "They'd been thinking about making the position full time, and I asked them not to. Personally, I need a

course a semester to keep me engaged with students and with my scholarship. The prospect of a full-time administrative position isn't very attractive to me." Nonetheless, he has relocated to 160 North Foundation Hall (the former haunt of such illustrious Department alums as Mindy Booth and Paul Trumball), where he has not only office hours but regular visiting hours for students and departmental colleagues. He hopes you'll stop by to say hi.

Winter Break in Ireland '11 by Jesse Williams, Junior, Writing and Rhetoric

This past February, Professor Brian Connery and thirteen eager OU students spent eight amazing days enjoying Ireland. It was a whirlwind trip that took us through Dublin, Galway, the Aran Islands, and various places throughout Eire's countryside.

From the very first day, the tempo was set to prestissimo. With our bags promptly tossed into the hostel, we were on a walking tour of sites in Dublin. Our adventures in Dublin included seeing the Book of Kells at Trinity College, a visit to the National Leprechaun Museum, a tour of the Kilmainham Gaol, and a wonderful showing of *The Cripple of Inishmaan* at the Gaiety Theatre. During our down time, many students also visited St. Patrick's Cathedral and the Guinness factory. While we were on that side of the country, we also took a bus trip to see the Hill of Tara and Trim Castle, one of the oldest stone castles in Ireland and a set location for many scenes in the movie *Braveheart*. A remarkable city of old and new—I even happened across a bridge with a cornerstone dating from before the birth of the United States—Dublin was a wonderful start to our trip.

By day five, we were whisked away from the city to visit Yeats country. County Sligo, with its beautiful, rolling country and spacious pastures, was a real treat. For us Americans without much exposure to ancient homesteads, the sweetest of those treats may have been the numerous cairns dotting the landscape. Despite the wonderful ancient artifacts, some sojourners among us seemed particularly fond

of the free-roaming sheep; there certainly were a lot of them. While in Sligo, we stopped at the Model, host of the famous Niland Collection, which was featuring a Jack B. Yeats exhibit. A trip to Yeats country, however, would not be complete without a visit to W.B. Yeats' gravesite at the Drumcliff Churchyard; we were not remiss.

Continuing our tempo without missing a beat, we left Thursday and made our way to Galway where we visited the Aran Islands and Dún Aengus, and the Cliffs of Moher. The rocky, cragged landscape of Innis Mór offered perfect contrast to the grassy hills that we had mostly seen throughout Ireland. We biked along the road from the port to Dún Aengus itself; it's nigh impossible to see this landscape and not to vividly imagine the difficulty of pre-modern life in these conditions. However, the beauty of this cliff-side fortress universally overwhelmed us. Built at least 3,000 years ago, this magnificent landmark offers a view of the sea from the interior of the stone walls and along a sheer cliff. Several adventurous students peered over the edge to the water 90 meters below.

On the ninth morning, we boarded our very comfortable chariot to complete our 552 kilometer circuit to the airport for a very sad flight home to a very cold, gray Michigan. We saw many sites, drank many drinks, and ate many eats, but none of us was ready to go home. The commentary on the return trip often revolved around when each of us planned to go back to visit the Emerald Isle; I hope every one of us gets that chance.

News Shorts

Cinema Studies to Welcome Two New Faculty

Ross Melnick earned his PhD from UCLA, recently completed a post-doc at Emory, and specializes in film exhibition and media convergence. Next year, Ross will be offering classes in silent cinema, Middle Eastern cinema, Moviegoing in America, and Film and Media Industries. Ross also created the Cinema Treasures web site (<http://cinematreasures.org/>).

Hunter Vaughan earned his PhD from Oxford, recently taught at Washington U, and specializes in French cinema and film philosophy. Next year, Hunter will be offering classes in Film Theory and Criticism; Masters of Suspense: Hitchcock, Chabrol and DePalma; and French Film Culture. Hunter is currently working on a documentary on the history of popular music in St. Louis.

Insko Chosen for Authors at OU Event



Jeff Insko

Jeffrey Insko was chosen as one of the two featured speakers for Kresge Library's annual "Authors at OU" celebration. This year's event celebrated the publication of journal articles by OU faculty. Insko spoke about his article "The Logic of Left Alone: *The Pioneers* and the Conditions of American Privacy," which was published in the journal *American Literature* in 2010. Video excerpts of Insko's presentation are [available for viewing here](#).

Smydra, Mitzelfeld Present Research in Progress

In March 2011, Rachel Smydra and Pamela Mitzelfeld shared their Service Learning experiences with faculty in a Research in Progress talk entitled "Using Service Learning to Enrich the Study of Literature."

As 2010 Academic Service Learning Fellows, Smydra and Mitzelfeld attended several workshops on planning and implementing service projects into their English 200: Blogging and Literary Self Narrative class. Taking 20 students to the Baldwin Center in Pontiac, the students worked collaboratively to assist in organizing the food pantry and clothes closet. Back in the classroom, students used this experiential to create blogs to persuade the Oakland University Community to consider service learning projects.

Highlighting their experiences with English 200, Smydra and Mitzelfeld discussed the possibilities of integrating service learning into other literature courses in an effort to enrich the connection between students, the text, and the community. Smydra and Mitzelfeld plan to continue researching service learning and its effectiveness in the classroom and to contribute an academic article to the discussion of experiential learning.

Insko, Anderson Talk Blake, Whitman at Sigma Event

As part of Sigma Tau Delta the English Honors Society's ongoing series of presentations by OU English faculty, Rob Anderson and Jeff Insko spoke on March 9th on "Poets' Work: Time and Labor in Blake and Whitman." Anderson and Insko's continuing project explores a number of affinities between the two poets within the context of changing conceptions of time (as a mode of discipline) and work in late-eighteenth-century England and nineteenth-century America. The project began life as an experiment in team teaching. Their collaborative teaching earned them a Faculty Achievement Award in 2009. They hope their collaborative scholarship will one day bear similar fruit.

Pfeiffer Joins Golden Key



Kathy Pfeiffer

Kathy Pfeiffer has been inducted as an honorary member of the OU Chapter of the Golden Key International Honors Society, thanks to our own Ashley Botheul who is an officer.

English Faculty Contribute to The Oakland Journal

The most recent issue of *The Oakland Journal* features work by four professors in the English Dept.: Department Chair Prof. Susan Hawkins reviews the film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* in her essay "The End of the World as We Know It."

Film prof. Hye Seung Chung explains the politics in certain South Korean horror films in her essay "Monster and Empire: Bong Joon-Ho's *The Host* (2006) and Anti-Americanism." Prof. Niels Herold offers a fascinating consideration of how professors and students understand and respond to Renaissance texts with religious imagery and ideology, in "Ironic Pedagogy: Teaching Sacred Texts in Academic Settings." And Joseph Dement, Professor Emeritus, penned a war story based on his fighting in the South Pacific in WWII, entitled "The Winner."

Faculty Attend Writers' Retreat

Professors Natalie Cole and Kathy Pfeiffer, and Lecturer Dawn Newton all attended the 2011 Bear River Writers' Conference on Walloon Lake at Camp Michigania in June. The four day conference provides a retreat and workshop experience for writers working in various genres.

Student News

English Major Honored with Prestigious Wilson Award

English major Marta Bauer was selected for the 2011 Matilda R. Wilson Award. The award is given annually to a senior woman who has achieved academic excellence while also contributing to the campus and beyond. The department is exceedingly proud of Marta's well-deserved honor. She has been accepted into a number of Student Affairs Administration advanced degree programs and will enter one of them in the fall. For much more on Marta and her award, [click here](#).

Students Present Papers at 19th Annual Meeting of Minds Conference

Once again, several English majors presented papers at the annual **Meeting of Minds Conference**. The one day event, held this year at OU, provides a forum for the presentation and possible publication of undergraduate student research and creative endeavor. This year's presenters, faculty advisors, and paper titles were:

Alexandra Allen (Faculty Advisor: Gladys Cardiff), "Geryon's Picture Book: Modes of Self-Definition in Autobiography of Red."

Alexa vanVliet (Faculty Advisor: Gladys Cardiff), "Red Reality."

Audra Pieknik-Shewell (Faculty Advisor: Brian Connery), "The Ideological Conundrum: The King of Coramantien in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*."

Alexis Nemeth (Faculty Advisor: Kyle Edwards), "The Man with the Golden Arm (1955) vs. The Production Code Administration."

Mayuri Munot (Faculty Advisor: Kyle Edwards), "Tom Powers: A Menace who Escaped the Chains of the PCA."

Shannon Cooley (Faculty Advisor: Jeffrey Insko), "American Literature and the Penny Press."

Cinema Studies Majors to Intern on Film

At least ten current OU Cinema Studies students are serving as production interns on the zombie-horror-comedy feature film, *Detention of the Dead*, which shot in Oakland County in May and June. OU Cinema Studies students will also be creating a behind-the-scenes documentary short to be included on the film's DVD.

English Major Receives Travel Grant

English/History double major and American Studies concentrator Adam Hobart received a University Research Committee travel grant to conduct research for his American Studies project entitled, "Upton Sinclair's *The Flivver King* and United Auto Worker Organization at Ford Motor Company during the late 1930s." Hobart begins graduate school in History this fall.

Student Writers Publish in Literary Journals

Freshman English major (yes, we said freshman!) Christina McDaniel took first place in the fiction category in a contest sponsored by *Polaris*, an undergraduate journal of arts and letters. Her story, "My Shepherd, My Madman," is a fictionalized account of the Bath Michigan School Massacre of 1927, the biggest incidence of school violence in American history. Her poem, "First, Look," was published in the same issue of the journal.

Also appearing in the spring 2011 issue of *Polaris* is graduating senior Chelsea Grimmer's poem, "Mango." Grimmer has also had two poems accepted for publication in the University of Illinois literary magazine, *The Packington Review*.

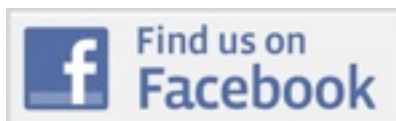
Chelsea and Christina's work in *Polaris* is [available for online reading here](#).

Student Plays Hit the Stage

These plays by current and former English majors were produced in April at a one act festival at Seaholm High School in Birmingham: Elizabeth Frazier, "The End of the World"; Jeremy Bruce, "Settling Scores"; and Linda Curatolo, "The V Chip." Bravo!

Grad Student Papers Accepted for 2011 Dickens Symposium

Continuing a string of active MA students presenting their work at professional conferences, graduate students George Walsh and Joanna Dressler have had papers accepted for the 16th annual Dickens Symposium on July 21-23 at Saint Anselm's College in Manchester, New Hampshire. Both papers originated in a course with Prof. Natalie Cole. Congratulations George and Joanna!



2010 Scholarship Winners Announced

Once again, the English department is pleased to announce another fine crop of scholarship winners. The Holzbock Humanities Scholarship has been awarded to Kaitlin Huff. Alexandra Allen and Bethany Boutin have won the Mr. and Mrs. Roger Kyes Scholarship. The Doris J. Dressler Scholarship will go to Patricia Giacona-Wilson and Elizabeth Frazier. Angelica Labadie and Angela Zkyskowski have been awarded the Eva Otto Award.

We would like to express our tremendous gratitude to the Kyes, Dressler, and Otto families for their continuing generous support of our English majors. Congratulations to all of this year's recipients!

Stay Informed

You can keep up-to-date with all of the latest English department news, look for announcements of events, find a faculty member, read back issues of the newsletter, find information on course offerings and scholarship information—and lots, lots more—by visiting the English department website.

[Just click here.](#)

Sigma Tau Delta Wraps-up Another Eventful Year

Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honor Society, has had an excellent year in 2010-11. Our e-board members (Caitlin Callaghan, President; Kaitlin Huff, Vice President; Allison Graves, Treasurer; and Gabriella Passarelli, Secretary) were all new and inexperienced with running Sigma, let alone a student organization at OU. But by the end of the year, we were all honed in our skills and had become experts.

In the fall, we sponsored a lecture on East Asian cinema by Professor Chung, a most insightful and wonderful event. Many of us learned new things about Asian Cinema and its unique traits, and how it compares to American film and cinema.

This winter, Sigma had quite a semester lined up with events. We had our annual African-American Literature read-in in February marking Black History month. We had a decent turn out of students coming to read and to listen to great literature from some excellent writers of both prose and poetry.

Professor Cole graciously opened her home to Sigma members and some faculty for an evening of food, fun, games, and great conversations on the eve of the winter break. A group of Anglophiles getting together for anything is always a great time.

Sigma also sponsored a lecture from Professors Rob Anderson and Jeff Insko on time and work in the poetry of William Blake and Walt Whitman. The sheer enthusiasm of both professors was inspiring and encouraged great conversations, discussions, and questions among the large attendance of students at the event.

Finally, Sigma had our annual induction dinner for new members. This year the event was held at Lino's Italian restaurant in Rochester Hills. Professor Cole gave a speech and some opening remarks to the new inductees, their families, and current members and e-board members on the importance of books in our lives. *[See below for the full text of Prof. Cole's remarks.]* She said she was preaching to the choir, but it was incredibly relevant. Our faculty advisor, Professor Bailey McDaniel, assisted her in the de-flowering of a book. She had brought with her an old book on which some of the pages had not yet been cut, so it was still virgin and unread. This was a wonderful sight to see.

We had 22 new members inducted altogether. This was an inspiring event as well as bittersweet for those of us who are graduating and leaving Sigma, and OU English behind.

Sigma Tau Delta would like to thank all the English faculty members at Oakland for all your support and dedication to Sigma and to the English students of Oakland University.

All in all, Sigma had a great and a successful year and we are looking forward to another good year with new board-members starting up in the fall. Next year's officers are Ashley Gordon, President; Kaitlin Huff, Vice President; Allison Graves, Treasurer; Bethany Boutin, Secretary; Shannon Waite, Webmaster.

—Caitlin Callaghan '11,
outgoing President of Sigma Tau Delta

Books We Can Touch *by Natalie Cole*

Sigma Tau Delta Induction Ceremony, April 8, 2011

Thank you, Sigma Students and Professor McDaniels, for inviting me to say a few words tonight. I will be talking about celebrating the book made of paper and ink, hardcover and paperback, pristine off the retail shelves or dusty and gently used in the back corner of a used book store. Our books whisper to us from the bookshelves in our bedrooms and studies; they murmur to us with their different colored spines: read me, remember me. They are strong threads woven into our lives, and sometimes lifelines thrown to us when we least expect it but most need it.

Books both connect us to and distract us during, different seasons in our lives, sometimes with tough love. You might first read "The Wasteland" in a class with Professor Hoepfner, Cardiff or Gilson, and feel bummed out by Eliot's claim that "April is the cruelest month, breeding lilacs out of the dead land." But the bitter beauty of this paradox lingers in the mind, and, one day, it may seem exactly right to you in its tough acknowledgement of the proximity of death and life.

We can take books with us as talismans and refuges as we journey to the hard places in life—the hospital waiting room, the doctor's office, the long waiting for a job offer.



Books offer respite from the bad break up; my personal favorites are *Madame Bovary*, *Of Human Bondage*, and Renaissance revenge tragedies such as *The Duchess of Malfi*—perhaps because of their worst case scenarios. Books require us to be literary pilgrims, knights "pricking on the plain" in Spenser's *Fairie Queene*; King Arthurs rising from

Books We Can Touch (continued)

the sea foam and gallantly assembling the members of the Round Table; small, plain Jane Eyres, cast out into the world, having left our purse on the seat of the coach, and running from what seems like our only true home.

Although reading is a solitary act, even as we sit alone and read, we join other communities of readers, sharing observations inside and outside of classrooms, as well as connecting ourselves with much earlier readers in human history. Owning a used book makes these connections palpable, as I will show in two short demonstrations in which Professor McDaniel will assist me.

Prof. Cole: *Here is a very old book from 1914 that just found its way to me today [Thank you, Kevin Grimm, for snagging for me this tasty copy of Gaskell's CRANFORD]. Would you please open it and read the name on the inside cover?*

Prof. McDaniel: *"Helen Weep," it says.*

Prof. Cole: *Cool name! Helen Weep and I now belong to the living and ghostly community of Gaskell readers and owners of this book we can touch—part of the wonder of used books.*

Now, for the second demonstration: here in my hand is a volume from George Meredith's *Collected Works*, 1898 Constable edition, the novel *The Tragic Comedians*, whose pages are uncut—and thus unread. (There's a good story behind this book: this collection was given to me when I was teaching at the U.S. Naval Academy—the set was divided up between a dozen midshipmen in London and travelled, two volumes in each mid's suitcase, back to me in Annapolis!) You can see [holding book up to audience] that it is printed in small quarto pages, and that it must be cut in order to show the two interior pages. Thus this copy has never before been read and is still waiting for its first reader to see its hidden pages.

Prof. Cole: *Professor McDaniel, will you do the honors?*

Prof. McDaniel: *I don't know if I should, it's kind of like deflowering this book! [She takes the table knife Prof. Cole hands her, and gently slits open a quarto fold to reveal 2 more sides of the four pages. The book is passed around to each table.]*

The physical book is a portal through which we pass, Harry Potters all. We are Alice down the rabbit hole, Robinson Crusoe, alone on an island, and the native Friday, come to relieve Crusoe's loneliness. We are the ship's crew, troubled and fascinated by Ahab's pursuit of the Great White Whale; we are Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, Sam Spade and Miss Marple, driven by inky clues to pursue the narrative wherever it takes us. Who has not read through the night into the dawn—transfixed by Stephen King, J.K. Rowling, or Jeffrey Eugenides?

While some books calm and reassure us, others are volatile and thrillingly dangerous. It is no coincidence that in

Angela Carter's retelling of the Bluebeard story, a library full of dangerous surprises precedes the protagonist's discovery of the Bloody Chamber's corpses. We can hold such books in our hands, handling them carefully like fragile birds, but inside the covers are narrative explosions that can set our thinking on a new course, energies that can stir us and make us more awake to our experiences and to those around us.

Books can be bawdy or ruthless. Who has not smiled when reading *Romeo and Juliet*: "the bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon"! The sharp-toothed satire of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Austen's *Emma* are there to remind us of all our foibles and the follies of human institutions.

Finally, the physical book remains a perfect, compact, rich gift that we love to give and receive. When the choice is



From left: Caitlin Callaghan, Prof. McDaniel, Kaitlin Huff, and Allison Graves

right, there's a powerful sense of coming home, of returning to all that is wonderful in the book by inviting someone else to experience it for themselves. How would we survive in a world without books? It would be bleak, as Ray Bradbury's dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451* shows us. In a futuristic society in which books are illegal, police scour people's homes, burning any books that they find. But out in the countryside, hiding from the book police, is a community of people who are living books—who have undertaken to memorize a whole book to preserve it and make sure it passed down orally and eventually written down and printed again. Bradbury's story makes clear the ways in which we carry the books we read around with us, inside us, and how this revitalizes us and connects us with others.

Sigma students and families, you belong to the community committed to keeping books alive, sharing them, and celebrating the physical book that is beckoning from the library shelf or bookstore rack. You can have confidence that in time, your own creative and scholarly work will join that world of books that we celebrate tonight.

True Confessions of a Successful Student *by Chelsea Grimmer*

[Ed. Note: Chelsea Grimmer is graduating from the English Department with a 3.86 GPA. She won the Honors College Arts & Sciences prize for her thesis, "Creative Writing within Academia: An Action-Based Approach to Creative Writing as a Necessary Field of Literary Academia"; she also won the 2010 Keeper of the Dream Award, numerous scholarships from OU, the Michigan Merit and Promise Awards, as well as many prizes in the English Department poetry and fiction contests. She was a volunteer and then a staff member with Beyond Basics, a non-profit partnering with Detroit public schools to help build students' literacy skills; she is also a published poet who will begin her MFA in poetry next fall at Portland State University.]



Students who are successful—multiple awards and scholarships, publications, a high GPA, and all while juggling volunteer work and multiple jobs—seem like they have it all together. Those students must be confident with so much success under their belt, right? Isn't that why they are heading into graduate school or looking for a start in their career?

The thing is, we're all just students at the end of the day who are uncertain about our future; and success typically only arrives after (multiple) rejections or failures. When I started out at Oakland University, I was determined to graduate with the GPA I lacked in high school. I didn't believe publication in undergraduate school was even possible. When I saw the awards and scholarships available, I felt inadequate to even apply. Surely I couldn't win any of those awards, right? I was just a normal student trying to pay for college while maintaining a high GPA.

I applied anyways, though, and at first, the results were discouraging. It seemed like no matter how many awards I applied for, or how many literary magazines I sent my writing to, I just couldn't win anything. It would have been easy to give up, and if it weren't for the support of several English Department Faculty members, I maybe would have given up.

I didn't, though; I pressed on in my passion for community action and writing, and in 2009 I won the Keeper of the Dream Award -- my first big award. Emotional girl that I am, I even cried when they called and told me. That was when I began to believe in myself, but most of all, when I began to believe in applying for things regardless of the fear of rejection.

I knew many students that I felt were more qualified than me to win the awards I won in the English Department, the Honors College, and just the general University; yet, none of those students had the confidence to apply. This isn't to say that I didn't deserve the awards I received (though at times, I did feel that way); I had worked hard for my GPA, and I was extremely involved in the community. When I talked to other students, though, I realized that I wasn't the only student who doubted herself (or himself).

You see, no matter how many awards we win, or how many times we have a success, for many of us, the tendency is to blame it on luck or assume it won't happen again. The first time I got published, I felt certain it wouldn't happen again until graduate school. But I kept sending my work out (arguably doggedly), and it did happen again, but only after I withstood dozens of rejections.

After each rejection, we feel more convinced to stop applying, stop trying, and start underachieving to make the rejections less personal and painful.

I think we need to have the opposite view, though, because it was when I really began to struggle to believe in myself, but refused to stop trying, that success finally arrived. It was then that I worked hardest for confidence to try for something -- and with more confidence, came more effort. It was then that my grades began to rise, and it was then that I began to realize: we are all capable of much more than the credit that we give ourselves. We really are our own worst critics.

Now, I'm finally graduating from Oakland University, and as much as my resume may indicate that I am prepared for the world, I am as intimidated as most of the other students graduating. I am lucky enough to have gotten into the Masters of Fine Arts program at Portland State University for Poetry, but I first had to receive six rejections from other programs to which I had applied.

Just preparing for graduate school and convincing myself that I will achieve what I desire is a daily struggle. Above all of this, I have to remember -- as many of us do -- that there will be rejections and failures throughout life, but it isn't until we stop applying and submitting and trying that we truly fail ourselves.

So yes, I am a terrified student graduating from Oakland University. Still, no number of successes could change this feeling, and so the most important thing is to press on in the pursuit of the most important quality that we as students may possess: a belief in ourselves and the courage to keep moving forward, even in the face of adversity or in the face of our own insecurities.

Faculty Notes

PODIUMS AND PRINT

Natalie Cole delivered a paper at the 2011 Dickens Symposium at Saint Anselm's College in New Hampshire, July 21-23, entitled, "Her Girlish Manner: Ten Girls from Dickens (1902) and Dickens's 'Girls' in the 21st Century." Cole also received a scholarship for creative non-fiction from the Bear River Writers Conference, June 2-5 in Petoskey Michigan.

Niels Herold was on medical leave winter semester undergoing right shoulder replacement surgery to become the world's first bionic violist. Professor Mascitelli, Lecturer Pamela Mitzelfeld, and Teaching Assistant Heather Bonner were most gracious and capable substitute instructors while he convalesced. In early April, Herold felt fit enough to attend the annual meeting in Seattle of the Shakespeare Association of America, where he joined a special seminar devoted to Shakespeare's late, great play, *The Winter's Tale*. Herold's particular conference paper was about the 2010 Shakespeare Behind Bars production of this play, truly a memorable experience for all OU students and family who attended. This year, the company's play was *The Merchant of Venice*. The customary meet and greet with company players and a post performance dinner in Louisville were welcome parts of this trip.

Gladys Cardiff's poem "Becoming" was among the finalists in the 2010 Joy Harjo poetry contest sponsored by *Cutthroat: a journal of the arts*. The poem was published in the January 2011 issue.

Kathy Pfeiffer chaired a panel on "Negotiating Whiteness in Literature and Film" at the American Literature Association Conference in Boston at the end of May.

Pam Mitzelfeld's and **Rachel Smydra's** essay "Classrooms w/o Boundaries: Using Blogging to Enhance Teaching and Learning," has been accepted for the volume, *Transformation in Teaching: Social Media Strategies in Higher Education*. Edited by Cathy Cheal, the book will be published in October by Informing Science Press.

Kyle Edwards presented "'A Delicious Torture': Edgar Allan Poe and Universal Pictures' *The Raven* (1935)" at the 2010 Film & History Conference; Milwaukee, WI in November. His essay, "'Poe, You Are Avenged!': Edgar Allan Poe and Universal Pictures' *The Raven* (1935)" is forthcoming in the journal *Adaptation*.

The world premiere of **Doris Runey's** English translation of Lucian Blaga's play *Zalmoxis* took place in Washington DC last spring. Prof. Runey first published the piece as grad student at Wayne State U. The production had an advance premiere at the Romanian Embassy, Washington DC, on April 14th that was very well received. Runey's screenplay adaptation of Ionel Teodoreanu's *Lorelei* has found a home with an

American-Russian production studio in California. It is in pre-production.

Jeff Insko's essay, "Eye-witness to History: The Anti-Narrative Aesthetic of John Neal's Seventy-Six" will be published in the collection *Headlong Enterprise: New Essays on John Neal and Nineteenth-Century American Culture*, now accepted by Bucknell UP. Insko gave a paper on "History without Experience" at the International Conference on Narrative in St. Louis in March. In May, he delivered a paper (co-authored with Rob Anderson) on William Blake and Walt Whitman at the American Literature Association conference in Boston in May. This fall, his review of Jane Eberwein's latest book, *Reading Emily Dickinson's Letters*, will appear in *The Oakland Journal*.

Rob Anderson's book chapter, "Godwin Disguised: Politics in the Juvenile Library," has been published in a beautiful volume, *Godwinian Moments: From the Enlightenment to Romanticism*, by the U of Toronto P in conjunction with UCLA. Additionally, his is co-editor (with Chris Clason) of the volume, *Literary and Poetic Representations of Work and Labor in Europe and Asia During the Romantic Era: Charting a Motif Across Boundaries of Culture, Place, and Time*, published by Edwin Mellen Press, 2011.

Heidi Kenaga's essay "Promoting Hollywood Extra Girl (1935)" appeared in the spring 2011 issue of the journal *Screen*, as part of a collection on "Small Parts, Small Players." Kenaga has been asked to serve on the editorial board of an online periodical called *The Projector*. General editor Cynthia Baron (Bowling Green State University) has transformed the publication into a peer-reviewed research journal on film and media.

On March 23, **Distinguished Professor Emerita Jane Eberwein** delivered the keynote address, "Wider than the Sky: The Paradoxical Appeal of Emily Dickinson," for Detroit's Big Read of Emily Dickinson at the Detroit Public Library. The Big Read has been going on since last August with talks and readings in various settings, a birthday party for the poet on December 10 at the College for Creative Studies, and Camp Dickinson programs in the Detroit Public Schools. It culminated in a marathon reading of Dickinson's poems on the May 15 anniversary of her death. The Big Read is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. Detroit activities are organized by the InsideOut Literary Arts program under the leadership of Oakland University alumna, Dr. Terry Blackhawk.

Alumni Corner

Heather McMacken Trahan (2006) received her Master of Arts degree in English and Comparative Literature from the University of Cincinnati in 2010 and is currently studying for her Ph.D. in Rhetoric & Writing at Bowling Green where she is a Teaching Assistant. Her essay, "Teaching the Texts We Love," will appear in the most recent issue of the journal *WOE* (Writing on the Edge), Volume 21 Number 2, Spring 2011.

Jane Asher, M.A. graduate in English, defended her dissertation proposal on May 5 at Wayne State University. Her topic is "'She Had Power in Her Purity': Feminist Potential and Intertextuality in 'New Woman' Texts of 1895."

Aaron Hall was accepted into University of Detroit law school with a generous financial package.

Amanda Beldo writes with this report: "Recently, I self-published a novel. The title is *The Runaway* and it is available on Amazon.com. It is a little less than 200 pages and falls into the Chick Lit category, although that distinction wasn't available from the publisher."

Melanie Zynell was accepted into Wayne's PhD program and received a teaching assistantship!

Jennifer Kraft Sischo, graduated as an English major and soon after joined the Navy. She came back to campus in December to see her professors Kevin Grimm and Gladys Cardiff, and regaled them with tales of being off shore in Yemen and other locations. Happily married to a Navy midshipman, she made Second Class Petty Officer on December 17th 2010. She writes "I was frocked by our Captain this morning and I am truly excited. I am now officially STG2 Sischo." Congratulations Jennifer!

Blake Kleiner provides this update: "Although this achievement is slightly outside the realms of English, I did graduate from OU with a degree in English, and the skills I accumulated by studying there have vastly improved my writing and had a huge impact on me as a filmmaker. This last December, a film I co-wrote, produced and directed called "Purple Heart's Final Beat," which exposes one of the main root causes of veteran suicides, won the Mitten Movie Project film festival award for Best Short Film of 2010. Conceived of as the "flagship film" for Second Class Citizen, a non-profit organization that seeks equal rights for non-custodial parents, the film has over 20,000 YouTube views, has screened at two different film festivals (the Blue Water Film Festival and Mitten Movie Project), and is in consideration for others. I'm hugely honored and humbled by the success of this film, which was produced on a budget of less than \$100. It has the potential to reach out and touch many people on a variety of levels, and if nothing else, it certainly makes you think. Please spread the word about the film and the organization. It is a terrific cause, and I hope to keep making films for them as they rally and fight for what they believe in. Here is a link to the [organization's website](#) and a link to the [film itself](#)."

And the rest of you?

As always, *The Channel* wants to know—and report on—your doings. Big news or small or no news at all (maybe you just want to say hi or get in touch with an old classmate!) the Alumni Corner is here with a sympathetic ear. In fact, before you forget, you might as well send that update right this very second. Go ahead:

[Just click here.](#)

SPACE FILLER

What We're Reading

The Channel queried English department members about what they're currently reading. Without commentary, here are their selections (all available, presumably, from your book purveyor of choice):

Natalie Cole: *The Woman Who Did* (1895) by Grant Allen

Annie Gilson: *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, David Shields.

Cyndie Ferrera: *Housekeeping*, by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Marilynne Robinson.

Susan Beckwith: a boatload of free Kindle books from the Victorian era

Kyle Edwards: *The Hollywood Economist: The Hidden Financial Reality Behind the Movie* by Edward Jay Epstein,

Jeff Insko: *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know* by Alexandra Horowitz

Kevin Grimm: *The Only Game in Town*, a collection of Sportswriting from the *New Yorker*.

Rachel Symydra: *Water for Elephants* by Sara Gruen

Heidi Kenaga: *Angels and Ages: A Short Book about Darwin, Lincoln, and Modern Life* by Adam Gopnik

Amy Spearman: *My Antonia* by Willa Cather

Ed Hoepfner: *Streets of Laredo* by Larry McMurtry

Pam Mitzelfeld: *The Paris Wife* by Paula McClain

Linda McCloskey: *Bossypants* by Tina Fey

Rob Anderson: *Something Red* by Jennifer Gilmore,

Chris Apap: *The Pale King* by David Foster Wallace

Kevin Laam: *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England* by Mary Lund.

Gladys Cardiff: *Wolf Hall* by Hillary Mantel

Andrea Knutson: a stack of *New Yorkers*

Kathy Pfeiffer: *The Unwritten Rules of Baseball* by Paul Dickson.

Jeff Chapman: *Acme Novelty Library #20* by Chris Ware

Dawn Newton: *Lord of Misrule* by Jaimy Gordon

Susan Hawkins: *Freedom* by Jonathan Franzen

APPEAL

The Department of English depends on the continuing contributions and support of our alumni and friends to fund special student events such as lectures and readings, to support student research and travel, and to purchase special video and book materials for classroom use. We ask you to please consider making a contribution (which is tax deductible and doubly deductible for Michigan residents).

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