

Close Reading Cooperative

OU English Set to Collaborate on Literary Studies Podcast



The **OU Department of English** has joined forces with our friends in the **English department of Eastern Illinois University** to participate in the Close Reading Cooperative, a podcast in literary studies for English majors.

The brainchild of Professor Christopher Hanlon of EIU, the Close Reading Cooperative has been delivering brief and useful lessons on a range of literary topics, everything from etymology,

metaphor, and metonymy to irony, paradox, scansion— and much more. The podcast aims to hone students' skills in "close reading" and help them have things to say in class, wowing their professors and peers alike! It's an invaluable— and entertaining— resource

For OU's first contribution to the project, Professor Jeffrey Insko joins Professor Hanlon to talk about puns. You can view that video lesson by visiting the **video gallery** of the department website or **by clicking here**.

But the best way to view Close Reading Cooperative podcasts is by **subscribing through iTunes U**. You can download the entire run of the podcast straight to your iTunes library; subsequent podcasts will download automatically as they are released. And best of all: it's free!

(Oh! And don't think you have to be a current English major to subscribe. Anyone can subscribe!)

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Our biggest event in 2010

. . . and that's not all

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The English Channel

The Alumni Newsletter of the Department of English

Pulitzer Prize-Winner Diaz Draws Hundreds

Award-winning fiction writer Junot Diaz visited OU in early November, completing a twenty-four hour whirlwind schedule with grace and magnanimity: following his morning arrival by air, he lunched with thirty students; spent the afternoon being interviewed by *The Oakland Post*, WDET, and WCBN's "Living Writers" program; and then presented a fiction reading, with two question-and-answer sessions for the greater OU community.

Attendance at the early evening reading, which was close to 500 people, might very well have been record-breaking for an English Department sponsored event, if records were kept, which they are not. Diaz's visit was orchestrated by Professor Rob Anderson and supported by the English Department, including contributions from its Alumni Gift fund, and by The Judd Family Foundation, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Department of Writing and Rhetoric, and the Department of History.

Born in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic and raised largely in New Jersey, Diaz has staked out a position for himself as a writer with strong bonds to multiple communities: raised in a working-class Latino community, Diaz's academic success took him from the local college (Kean State) to Rutgers University, where he majored in English, and then to completion of a creative writing MFA at Cornell University. He currently teaches creative writing at MIT and serves as the fiction editor of *The Boston Review*.



His is a classic American success story, and he exudes gratitude to the people and the country who have made it possible, yet remains critical of the country and the policies which continue to make life difficult for his extended family and childhood friends.



Deeply loyal and full of affection for his community, he nevertheless conveys his continuing resentment of the lack of support and prestige within that community for writing and the arts. A native Spanish speaker, his prose is in English, heavily

inflected with Spanish, Spanglish, and street language. The stories in his first fiction collection, *Drown* (1996), and his 2007 novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, speak from a subjectivity at a complex cultural crossroad. In spite of, or perhaps because of his culturally itinerant life, many of his remarks at the reading explored the nature and the importance of a sense of "home," which he expressed largely in terms of personal relationships. Students seemed to respond particularly to his comments about his life as a process of movement through a series of selves, all of them different and all of them nonetheless fully authentic.

Diaz began the evening event with thanks to the organizers and then read his short story, "Alma." As evidenced by the subsequent questions from students, many in the audience responded strongly, and many attributed the strength of their response to the language of the story, specifically to the graphic depiction of sexuality in colloquial language (which some students, oddly, characterized as "curse words"). Diaz's response was generous, earnest, sincere, and yet playful, as he noted that fiction is a lie, that the language in the story is to a large degree a function of point of view, and that the point of view in the story is not uncommon among American men.

(cont'd on p. 2)

Junot Diaz (cont'd from p. 1)

Next, Diaz read an excerpt from *Oscar Wao*, the section in which Oscar's mother is diagnosed with and treated for breast cancer. Again, the audience was gripped not only by the intensity of the pain of the characters, focused upon the audience by the use again of second-person narration, but by the intensity of the language itself. As one student said afterwards, he "made me feel the characters in my body."

In response to the second set of questions from the audience, Diaz again deftly baffled attempts at simplification: the characters are not him, they are characters; the language was chosen because it was appropriate to the characters and the situations; to exclude such language would be to exclude such characters and situations from our world, which is largely a world of language.

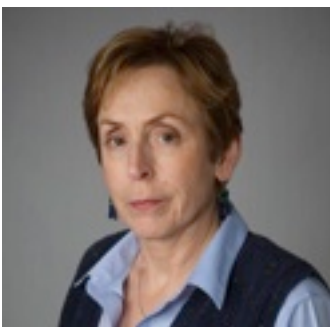
Even those attendees who expressed some discomfort or even some sense of offense acknowledged that the works Diaz read demonstrated the power of words when deployed by a master artist, and that they had been held in the grip of this artistry for almost two hours. One student seemed to speak for many: "I was supposed to leave at 6:00 PM for class, but I didn't budge."

Diaz has received a Eugene McDermott Award; a Guggenheim Fellowship; the 2002 PEN/Malamud Award; and the Rome Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. *Oscar Wao* earned him the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, and Miramax has acquired the rights for a film adaptation. Diaz is serving this year on the jury for the 2010 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction.



In addition to his public reading, Diaz also met with a small group of students for a luncheon q and a.

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR by Susan E. Hawkins



What an amazing whirlwind of events swept through the department this fall. Our new faculty member, world cinema specialist Hye Seung Chung, brings an exciting dimension to our growing (over sixty!) Cinema Studies program. In winter she will teach the department's new course, English 260: Masterpieces in World Cinema, which serves as an elective choice for English majors with the added bonus of fulfilling the General Education Global Perspectives category. Finally English majors get a two-fer!

Molly Peacock, who served as this year's featured Maurice Brown Memorial Poetry reader on September 29th, appeared before an attentive and appreciative audience (if you missed it, **you can watch it online!**). Students, faculty, and community members were moved and delighted by her lively delivery and her poems' variety. We are, as ever, thankful to Judith Brown's attendance at, and support of, this annual event in memory of her late husband.

The blockbuster event of the year, however, has to have been the reading by Junot Diaz on November 4th. A standing-room only audience of 500 plus showed up to hear the Pulitzer Prize winning author of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* read from his fiction. He proved to be quite a performer—funny, thoughtful, serious, and entertaining. His responses to students' questions were notably respectful and well-considered. We owe a debt of gratitude to Rob Anderson, the Cultural Events committee, and Cyndie Ferrera for this great event (**also available for viewing online!**).

Finally, and as always, I want to thank those of you who contributed to the department gift fund through this fall's **AUFD**. As you know, our gift account supports student travel and research, Sigma's activities, special library acquisitions, as well as our many events for students, colleagues, and the community. Your contributions make all of these possible. The department could not thrive as it does without your continued support.

STRETCHER

Eard Stapan Moves It Like This, Shakes It Like That *by Brian Connery*

Maggots half-formed in rhyme exactly meet,
And learn to crawl upon poetic feet.
-Pope, *The Dunciad*

The mighty metaphorical feet of the Department's marathon relay team, Eard Stapan ("the Earth Steppers" (OE)), kicked the collective synecdochal hindquarters of 497 other five-person teams, including nineteen of the twenty-eight teams in the Universities/Colleges division in which we annually compete in the 2010 Detroit Free Press Marathon.

Sagacious readers with fundamental mathematical skills may discern from the preceding that the team had its own figurative hindquarters kicked in turn by eight of the Universities/Colleges teams, finishing ninth in its division and 104th overall.

Veteran runner Andrea Knutson was sidelined this year after a series of unfortunate events involving inanimate objects, deciding instead to spend the late summer and early fall preparing the manuscript for a major contribution to American literary criticism now available from Oxford University Press (see p. 16). Replacing her on the team roster was graphic-fiction writer and assistant professor Jeff Chapman, who was recruited out of Utah in 2009 in preparation for exactly such an eventuality and who had been showing promise in a number of minor local events. Veterans Kevin the Grimm "Reaper," Susan "the Blur" Beckwith, Kevin "the Laaminator" Laam, and Brian "Trainwreck" Connery returned to attempt to duplicate last year's astonishing feat of completing the 26.2 mile course in 3:42:22, at a gazelle-like average pace of 8:29 per mile.

After reviewing the current condition of individual runners and the record of the team, team captain Connery had decided to stick with the two-part secret strategy that has sustained the team over the past several years: 1.) Everybody would run really really fast, and 2.) Everyone would try not to get hurt. Rookie Chapman volunteered a third component to the training and racing plan, "Everybody should have a lot of fun." After demurrals regarding the ever-increasing complexity of the team's strategy, this proposal was unanimously adopted.

Sports fans know that the relay, perhaps more than any other team sport, is a game of logistics, and the pre-race can make or break a team: getting every team member to his or her respective place uninjured and properly equipped can be a challenge even when not working with a group of temperamental literature Ph.D.s in the dark of pre-dawn, and

the morning of October 18 did not begin auspiciously, as Laam and Connery rendezvoused at the University to carpool south to meet the rest of the team and the Laaminator started in with snide and disparaging remarks about "Funkytown" by Lipps Inc. which, entirely coincidentally, was playing on the stereo in Connery's vehicle.

Following a long drive in what might be best described as contemplative silence, Connery and Laam arrived outside the secret Fortress of Speed to find Beckwith and Grimm already waiting and watching as Chapman's car took several seemingly aimless and sometimes erratic passes up and down the street before suddenly disappearing back out onto Woodward Ave. The assembled runners laced up, pinned on their numbers, high-fived and knuckle-bumped, and upon Chapman's reappearance, piled into two vehicles for the trip downtown.

At this stage, timing is everything: after thorough background checks only Grimm and Chapman had been cleared by Homeland Security for the trip across the border to and from Canada, with Grimm running there via the bridge and Chapman, presumably delivered by a bus, waiting there to make the return trip via the tunnel. Everything depended upon getting Chapman to his bus before its departure at 6:25

AM. The Cobo exit from the Lodge was, unfortunately, backed up about a mile, but after creeping at about 1 mph for ten minutes or so, team members noted that while the lane exiting south to Cobo was, in fact, thoroughly backed up, the left-hand lane was inexplicably vacant. Doctoral-level syllogistic logic kicked in: if the lane is vacant, either a.) it leads into a road closure, or b.) it's perfectly fine but no one else is daring to try it.



From left: Chapman, Trainwreck, the Blur

Further, if the lane does in fact lead to a road closure, what are they going to do? Send us backwards up a one way exit ramp? Boldly, the team vehicle moved into the left hand lane, heading for the road less traveled, and leading what would turn into a surge of vehicles out onto Fort Street and into the Promised Land of Ample Parking, demonstrating once again the leadership role that higher education can and should play in Michigan.

Having delivered Chapman and Laam to their respective buses, Connery was repairing with *Moll Flanders* to the MGM Grand Starbucks, conveniently located a few blocks north from his relay station where he expected to relieve Chapman several hours later, when he bumped into and exchanged greetings with Steve Shablin, the OU Registrar, hustling Mad-

Hareishly toward the buses. “Hmmm,” Connery thought. This, however, being a pre-coffee moment, as evidenced by his relatively low-level ability to articulate his thoughts on the encounter, he immediately forgot about it and went in search of a venti coffee in a warm clean well-lighted place.

Eard Stapan, as always, was pure poetry in motion, with all of the team members turning in memorable performances. The poetry was not, however, as fast as some of the other teams’ poetry, although the other teams’ poetry was all undeniably far less pure. The run itself went like clockwork: fast running punctuated by knuckle-bump relays (with the team’s signature secret thumb-wiggle action), the Reaper and Chapman between them completed the first twelve plus miles at a sub 8:00/mile pace, leaving Trainwreck, the Laaminator, and the Blur in fast company; the final trio nevertheless completed the course at a collective sub 9:00/mile pace, and the team was jubilant at the finish, finding their time to be 3:45:51, only a couple of minutes off their previous year. Everyone had run really really fast, no one had been hurt, and we’d all had fun.

In a bitter surprise, when results were published the following day, Eard Stapan learned that it had been beaten by newcomers, the OU Golden Grizzlies, comprised of administrators from around the university: in reviewing the tapes, we find that the Reaper totally dominated the first leg, getting a full ten-minute lead over Steve “Now-You-See-Him-Now-You-Still-See-Him” Meyer (OU English circa ’99), Assistant Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences; Chapman had added another minute between the teams while running against Dave “Twinkle Toes” Tindall, the Assistant Director of Residence Life and Student Housing; Connery, however, gave up four minutes to Wayne “Tippy Cup” Thibodeau, the Director of Career Services; and Laam and Beckwith were no match for OUGG team captain Steve “the Flash” Shablin, the OU Registrar, who ran both the fourth and fifth legs for the Grizzlies. While Eard Stapan had structured their race to allow the fastest runners to go first, followed by the three most attractive members of the team, the Grizzlies, having more limited resources, had put their fast runner last and made him do double duty.

In a moment of distasteful triumphalism and bad sportsmanship, Assistant Dean Meyer began to circulate a poem of his own composition beginning

The English department was ready,
They had trained all year,
They got fired up
Reading Shakespeare.

Little did they know,
In the back of the pack,
Wayne, Dave, and Steve squared
Came ready to attack.

The gun went bang,
The English department was stunned,
There went flying past them
Team Golden Grizzlies of Oakland.

We shall spare the sensitive reader from much further quotation. The Reaper immediately objected to the grammar, punctuation, and scansion of the poem, as well as the counter-factuality of its conclusion:

Team OU Golden Grizzlies
May not have the best grammar,
One thing is for certain,
They were two minutes faster

When confronted with the nine-second discrepancy between the official record and his verse, Meyer claimed poetic license. The matter was expeditiously referred to Distinguished Professor Emeritus Jane Eberwein for adjudication. Following a virtual trip to the poetic woodshed, Meyer admitted that “I was smart to get out of the literary field for a career in education administration.”

Eard Stapan has challenged the Grizzlies to a rematch in 2011 and the gauntlet has been picked up by team captain Shablin. Training has begun, and bookies are busy laying odds even as you read this dispatch. You can [follow the team’s adventures on Facebook](#).



Above, Eard Stapan 2010. From left: the Reaper, Trainwreck, the Blur, Jeff Chapman, the Laaminator. Below, rookie Chapman, apparently having fun.

Meet the New Graduate Assistants

With the new major in Cinema Studies, the Department secured more Graduate Assistantships to be awarded to students in our M.A. program. We're pleased to welcome and introduce the following graduate assistants, who join Heather Bonner, now in her second year as a graduate assistant.

After receiving her B.A. in English from Oakland in 2009, **Joanna Dressler** knew her academic journey had just begun, and she subsequently entered Oakland's M.A. program. Her academic focus is Romantic literature. She plans to use her experience as a Graduate Assistant to gain the tools necessary for professional success in teaching. Joanna grew up and continues to live in Royal Oak. She spends her free time with her husband Brian and daughter Leia.



Sean Milligan graduated from Rochester College in May 2008 with a degree in English and Elementary Education. While at Rochester, Sean served as Student Body President and Editor-in-Chief of the school newspaper. Upon graduating, he worked as a substitute teacher, an English tutor, and an assistant editor for an educational publisher. He has been enrolled in the M.A. program since fall 2009. His primary academic interests are 20th century American literature, critical theory, and film history and aesthetics. When not compulsively reading and writing, Sean enjoys spending time with his wife, Allison, and Gizmo, their dog.



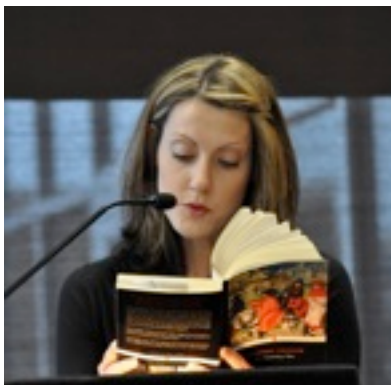
Emily Schwartz is in her first year in the M.A. in English program. She received her Bachelor's from Oakland in May of 2010, majoring in Cinema Studies. She is currently a graduate assistant in the Cinema Studies department. In her spare time, Emily enjoys attending flea markets and collecting vintage movie memorabilia.



Tara Taylor graduated from Clarkston High School in 2005 and graduated from Oakland in 2009 with a B.A. in English. She is mid-way through the English M.A. program and plans eventually to pursue a doctoral degree. Post-structuralist theory is her current focus. In the Fall semester, Tara proctored film labs for Professor Hye Chung.

Fifth Annual Read-In Features Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

On November 22nd, the English Department held its Fifth Annual Read-In. The featured work this year was Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. The event began at 8 am in the Fireside Lounge of the Oakland Center. Some forty members of the OU community, including faculty, students, and friends of the department took turns reading from the Tales in 10-minute blocks. In all, the reading lasted about 12 hours.



Reading Chaucer (from left): Professor Andrea Knutson, graduate assistant Joanna Dressler, and Professor Kevin Grimm.

EXHIBITION (I)

Installation Presents Visual Responses to Literature

This fall, students in Professor Gladys Cardiff's seminar ENG 400: Literature of the Borderlands created a 14 panel art installation as part of their response to critical and imaginative literature by Canadian Aboriginal and Native American writers. With the expert assistance of Professor Sally Schluter Tardella, Director of Studio Art, students rendered their personal responses to native experiences on the northern and southern borders of the United States in weekly visual art exercises as an added dimension to their academic reading and study of border theory. The end result incorporated elements of Codex Espangliensis, a contemporary version by Gomez-Pena and others of the Mayan codices, and the traditional wampum belts of the Haudensaunee. When asked how their project differed from these influences, they agreed that it felt important to be able to respond to the literary and cultural traditions and histories in very personal, individualized expressions and allusions. "I felt these stories so strongly," one student said. They concurred that the communal act of creating one unified piece that was driven by many strongly felt individual responses was a fitting adjunct to their study. The installation was displayed as part of the Department of Writing and Rhetoric's Festival of Writers in the Oakland Center on November 29th. Although the installation was not entered as a contender for prizes, the judges welcomed the entry and awarded it an Honorable Mention.



Clockwise from top left: Marta Bauer (on right) and friends, student art, Graham Kubn, Jackie Manning

EXHIBITION (II)

OU Alum Creates “Haiku Middle Passage”

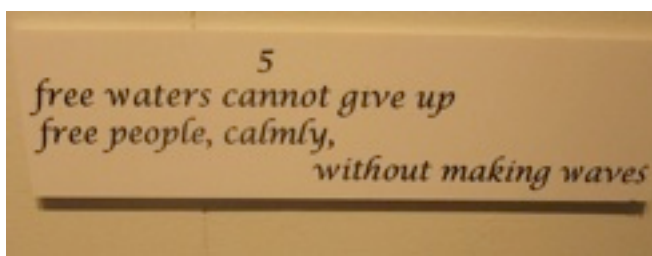
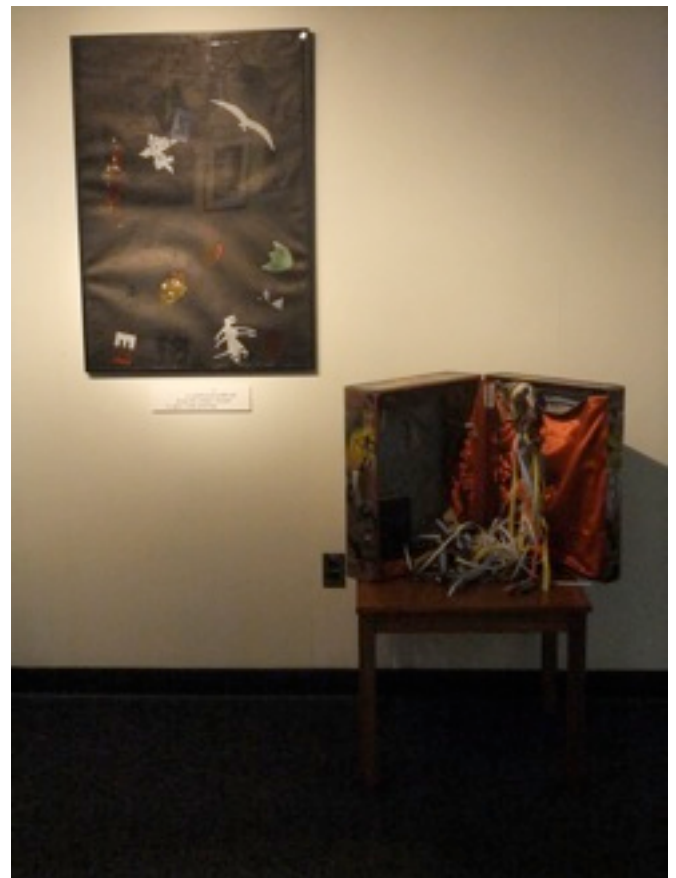
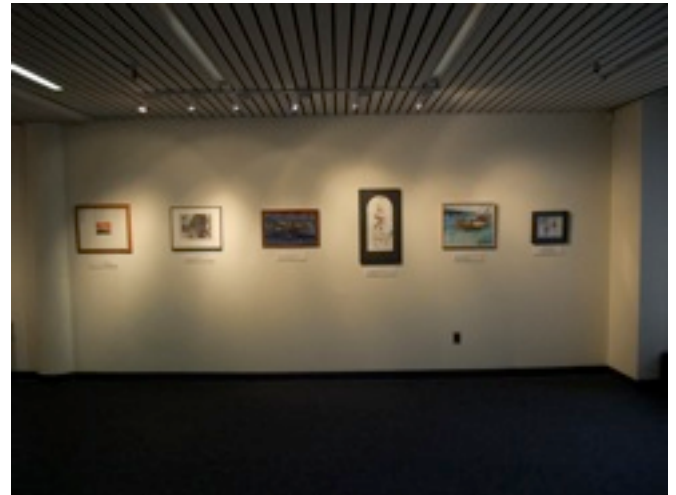


While a doctoral student at Penn State University in the late 90s, poet and teacher Mursalata Muhammad (OU BA '92, MA '94) spent some of her rare spare time composing haiku about the Middle Passage, the section of the trans-Atlantic trade triangle that sent enslaved Africans across. The poems remained quietly in her notebooks until 2007, when she saw the commemoration of the two-hundredth

anniversary of the end of the slave trade as an appropriate occasion to share her work. Soliciting visual artists to create works responding to her verses, she created “Haiku Middle Passage,” a traveling multimedia exhibition. The display includes paintings, drawings, collages, digital works, sculpture and photography from twenty-two artists from throughout the U.S.. The pieces, despite their varied media, create a quiet choral testament to the horrific effects that human trafficking had — and continues to have — on people everywhere.

One could think that haiku may not be the poetic form best suited to representation of the horrors of the Middle Passage, but the exhibit is extraordinarily effective. Each poem focuses upon a single moment of realization in a historically informed re-imagining of the experience of the Middle Passage, and uses a variation on its traditional compressed form written in the present tense to bring that moment into the present. The paired works of graphic art and sculpture offer complementary imaginings of that moment. Muhammad says that part of her purpose is to allow readers and viewers to experience the ways in which the past is already integrated into our present. She adds that contemporary human trafficking was never far from her mind while writing the poems and creating the exhibit.

Muhammad is currently Associate Professor of English at Grand Rapids Community College. The exhibit has been shown thus far at Marygrove College, Wayne County Community College, Holy Family University, and Muskegon County Museum. Look for it at a library, gallery, or museum near you!



[Click here to view a video version of the exhibit.](#)

PEDAGOGY

The Most Awful Thing: A Struggle Against Silence *by Annette Formella*

Somewhere during the fourth week of classes, I became painfully aware that my literature students were silent. That is not to say they were completely without voice; they made in-depth personal connections to the literature we were studying. However, they were suffering a severe case of laryngitis when it came to critical discussion of literature.

The first problem was that I was trying to get my students to think and write critically and they were seeking the “right answer” to store in their notes for essay writing and the final exam.

Our classroom interaction baffled me. For this course, I assigned a large writing project in the shape of a blog. Each week, the students were having deep, critical conversations in their blogs and exploring all sorts of interesting ideas. In class, I asked them the same types of probing questions as I did for blog prompts, but the conversations were lacking. The difference was that online, the students run the show (behind the safety of a computer screen) and I primarily lurk; in the classroom I was trying to set up the same kind of environment, but it seemed that no activity, question, or multi-media showcase was producing the same effect.

The second problem was that I needed to figure out how to give students the sense of anonymity I felt allowed them to engage online and become a lurker in my own classroom so that students would generate discussion that would force them to think and write critically about literature in our face-to-face interactions, as they had been doing all along (and exceptionally well) in their online interactions.

The third problem was that I had this epiphany just as I was about to introduce critical literary theory to the class. I had a long moment of panic about throwing the complex concepts of deconstruction, new historicism and queer theory into the mix and removing myself from the conversation. In the past, my attempts at teaching critical literary theory in a survey class had led to confusion and silence. The last thing I wanted was more silence.

Critical literary theory—one of my problems—turned out to be the solution.

Right in the middle of teaching the course, I decided the only thing that would solve the problem was to abandon my carefully plotted lessons, discussion questions and blog prompts in favor of a little controlled chaos in the shape of a big group project that would introduce all three theories at once and put control of the conversation and the class directly in the hands of the students while forcing me, for the most part, to become a lurker.

Since I assigned a novel about vampires, I introduced the concept of critical lenses by having students research different vampire myths. We had a lively debate about what Bram Stoker would say about the vampires portrayed in *The Historian*, *True Blood*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Interview with the Vampire* and *Twilight*. Not one student mentioned any personal connections to the literature or the words “right answer,” and what was more, I barely said a word! What they discovered and discussed was that it was much easier to talk about the literature when filtering it through someone else’s

point of view. It seemed I had succeeded in giving them their anonymity back.

Suddenly, teaching critical literary theory became simple because the debate over vampires put an abstract concept in terms everyone could understand, even if the particulars were a bit difficult to work through.

After a very basic introduction to the concepts, I put them into groups to figure out how to think as a particular theoretical school. They were instructed only to speak from the position of a new historicist, deconstructionist or queer theorist when discussing assigned questions in their groups. The idea was for them to play in the flexibility these schools of thought provided. And they did. The room was abuzz with conversation – first confusion and then, as they began to get it the students were excited at the prospect of working with the theories. The discussion in the classroom was dominated by which theory made more sense or why one theory was better than the other in the context of *The Historian*. The element of personal response had been removed and the barrier that had kept conversation from developing face-to-face faded away.

The following week, after they got comfortable with their own groups and new theoretical personas, I pushed them outside of their comfort zones and into interacting with other students representing different schools of thought. The project is still a work in progress, for me and for them, but I think I can call it a success. The students are bringing the conversation to the table, and I get to witness their excitement and help them construct new ideas instead of feeling like I’m just dumping information into their heads. They tell me I’m hurting their brains, and I couldn’t be happier.

At the end of the first class period, my students told me that they liked theory much more than they liked *The Historian*, or anything else we had read up to that point in the semester because it made class fun. I tried to argue that they liked the novel more because of theory, and lost. It hardly matters to me which they would rather discuss though because my classroom discussion has transformed because of critical literary theory. No longer am I faced with the problem of trying to drum up deep, critical conversation. Instead, I have to figure out how to make sure everyone gets to contribute and develop their ideas during class discussions. The students are having conversations with each other, and my role is not to drag them through three hours and forty minutes of awkward silence, it’s to make sure the discussion follows the most productive path. It’s the best three hours and forty minutes of my workweek.

The fact that critical theory engenders interesting conversation is not new. But, it’s important not to underestimate what undergraduates can handle; even though the curriculum I teach fully integrates critical theory into the instruction of literature, I made a choice to hold back until I felt the students were ready. In the end I learned a valuable lesson as I worked through how to teach one.

OU M.A. alum Annette Formella is Department Chair of English/Communication at Baker College of Clinton Township

BOOK REVIEW

Fleshing out the Pixilated Image *by Rob Anderson*

When I was in graduate school, someone told me that the novel of ideas was almost a contradiction in terms, and that, especially in America, it is very hard to find a successful one. This assessment, as far as I understand it, seems to be based on two assumptions. The first is that novels of ideas tend to be heavy-handed in expressing ideas, coming off as wooden, or pedantic. The second is that Americans don't have much patience for ideas. That the word pedantic (which the OED defines as "related to teaching") has become a pejorative term might lend support to this second concern.

Being something of a professional pedant myself, it may come as no surprise that I tend to like novels of ideas. Indeed, I am writing here to praise a novel of ideas that features a pedant as its main character: Chandler Burr's *You or Someone Like You*. Ideas are indeed central to *You or Someone Like You*. In fact, they are so central, that saying too much about them may spoil some of the pleasure of the novel. I found the novel immensely pleasurable. A large share of that pleasure came from the fact that the ideas the novel explores—even advances—are so unsettling.

What makes the novel so successful as a novel is that the ideas, and indeed, the novel's argument, emerges naturally out of the characters and their relationships. As I suggested, I don't want to reveal too much about those ideas for fear of spoiling some of the pleasure. For my part, this pleasure came from the excitement of having my own ideas and assumptions challenged, and seeing just how far the novel was willing to push its argument. It turns out that the novel was willing to take it quite far.

I am willing to say this much: the novel's ideas concern books and reading (the pedantic central character has a Ph.D. in English literature and leads book clubs for Hollywood industry members), identity, and tribalism, or the way we divide the world up into camps of us and them.

I would like to point to one passage in the novel that raises those concerns, and does it by attending to the minute details of the characters' relationships. After a book club discussion of loss in some of John Cheever's short stories, Anne Rosenbaum describes what happens "when we read fiction." "We pour our own particular store of emotions . . . into the characters set before us." We take "the few words with which the author sketches these characters" and then "our own emotional stockpile fleshes out the pixilated image" (148). This results in a kind of collaboration between writer and reader. The reader's participation, however, involves a fair amount of projection—in other words, when we read this way, we risk reading a reflection of

ourselves in the text, thus missing out on the opportunity to encounter something new or different. After relating her own experience of losing her parents, she moves on to discuss the death of her husband's parents, and concludes thus:

"They exit one by one, or sometimes two by two. You scatter pieces of them on the snow in the woods and run away as fast as you can, and then you turn and run back toward them, once they're beyond your reach" (149).

These last two sentences shift to second person, generalizing from hers and her husband's losses to a kind of generalized pattern of how we experience loss.

In the next paragraph, however, Burr merges (brilliantly, I believe) the two subjects: our responses to loss and reading. Speaking of her son Sam's response to her mother-in-law's death, she explains that,

"I did not know Sam had felt this great loss from his bubbe dying, or rather I didn't know he was feeling it to such a degree. He was seventeen. The young sometimes show

much less, and I simply didn't see it, or wasn't looking, or didn't know how to look. Degrees of culpability, I suppose, but little difference in the end."

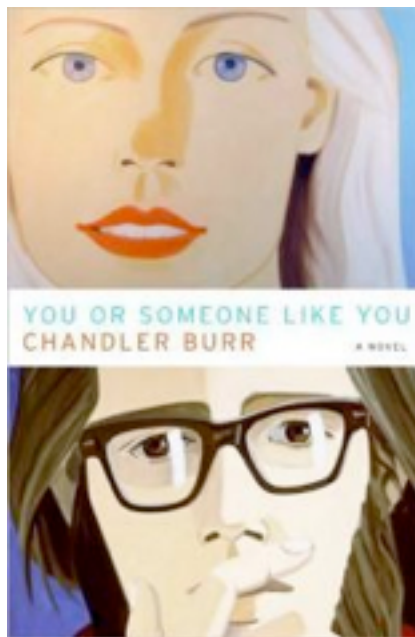
The one explanation Anne leaves out in her listing of the degrees of culpability is "did not want to see." Anne's inability/unwillingness to see her son's grieving stems from her own distaste for her husband's mother. The fact that the distaste is probably justified makes "little difference in the end." Anne believes Sam is not grieving because she is not grieving and projects her own emotional reaction onto the "sketch" of her son: her "own emotional stockpile fleshes out the pixilated image."

It is not clear until much later how important this little scene is. What is striking about the passage is how moving it is. For me, it is moving because, having experienced loss myself, I am able to supply details from my own "emotional stockpile" and flesh out the story. Does it make a difference that I have a son named

Sam, and that I certainly assume that he would naturally feel closer to my parents than his maternal grandparents?

As I said, the ideas articulated in this brief passage are closely linked to the larger argument the novel seeks to make. That larger argument is sure to offend many readers. Along the way, it will challenge and provoke many more.

Prof. Anderson is currently on sabbatical. No one knows what he is reading.



MOVIE REVIEW

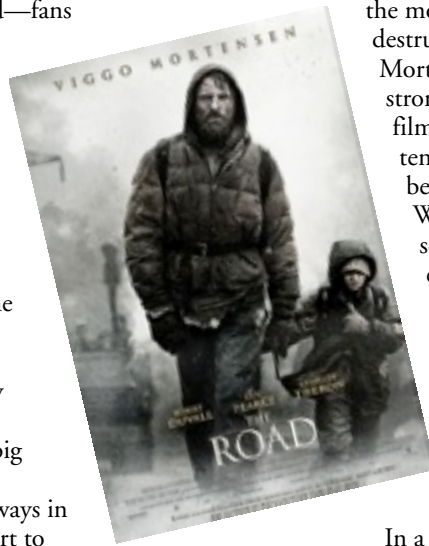
Adaptation of *The Road* “Weirdly Uneven” by Susan Hawkins

As a Cormac McCarthy fan, and long-time member of the Cormac McCarthy Society, I was eager to see how John Hillcoat, Australian filmmaker and director of *The Proposition* (a 19th century outback western) had translated the writer's 2006 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Road*, to the screen. Given the grisly and dystopian details of McCarthy's post apocalyptic America—the unnamed father and son spend all of their energies surviving, scavenging for food as they make their way south to the sea on a state highway, constantly in hiding from the devolved “bad guys,” sub-humans moving in packs, raping, torturing, and finally consuming their human food—fans wondered how any director would manage to create a film equal to McCarthy's rendering of the end of the world. And while the casting of Viggo Mortensen as the father made sense, the addition of Charlize Theron as the mother raised eyebrows. Just how different was the script going to be? As it turned out, not too different, but the director's choices in terms of focus, tone, and pacing turned what could have been a great film into a weirdly uneven viewing experience.

As a viewer who saw it on the big screen, I was impressed by the film's fidelity to McCarthy's text and the ways in which it provides a visual counterpart to the novel's bleak and blighted landscape.

The constant grey skies, the cold and snow as they begin their journey south, the deserted gas stations, looted grocery stores, destroyed cities, industrial remains—such images are not, for the most part, the product of special effects magic. Rather Hillcoat and his team shot the film in four states, utilizing as the director puts it, “An apocalypse we've already seen”: post-Katrina New Orleans, Mt. St. Helens, abandoned mines in Pennsylvania. The desolation is established early and, with the exception of the beautifully captured respite the two enjoy in an abandoned but fully stocked bomb shelter, they are constantly on the move, ever in danger of being prey.

The film establishes the utter desolation of the present in relationship to the fullness of life in the past. In the present father and son are alone, the world has changed utterly, and the father's role is to re-assure his son that things are “okay.” (“Okay,” repeated innumerable times in the novel, works as the linguistic equivalent of the father's physical and emotional re-assurance.) The film's trajectory, like the book's, involves the love story between father and son, and as in the novel, the father's life, even as he weakens from hunger and illness, is devoted to keeping his son alive in the after math of an unspecified, global disaster. They are the “good guys” who “carry the fire.” They represent what remains of decency, morality, and ethics arrayed against those “others” who, in



one graphic example, lock up their naked human food in a cellar, amputating body parts as needed.

The elegiac poetry of McCarthy's evocative prose, employed to express the father's memories not only of his wife but also of various animals, trees, flowers, his childhood home, an uncle he worked with as a boy—all of this is dispensed with. Hillcoat and Penhall consciously eliminate McCarthy's poetic prose beginning with Mortensen's voice over. The actor's tone remains insistently mournful and uninflected throughout; everything he tells us sounds precisely the same. The audience's experience is built, for the most part, on scene after scene of wretched destruction, interrupted by brief flashbacks and Mortensen's occasional, sorrowful commentary. Despite a strong opening and any number of successful scenes, the film's pacing, which is to say its editing, falters, lacks tension. The film's tone, both visually and aurally, becomes largely monotone.

What the film does best is capture the smaller, quieter scenes, scenes in keeping with the novel's spirit and effect: the son's memory of an emaciated dog and his certainty, in one moment, that he hears one barking; the father's discovery of the planet's last can of Coke, which he gives to the boy as a treat; the son's fascinated stare at a mounted deer's head on the wall of a deserted drug store; the father's hypnotic attention to a sudden massive blaze along the mountains, the flames' colorful intensity in contrast to the present world's pall.

In a world headed for extinction, we may be doomed, but that doesn't mean humans have lost their sense of irony. It is McCarthy's dark comedy that Hillcoat misses altogether, not that there's a lot of it, but it's there, and it functions the same way that comic interludes do in Shakespeare's tragedies. You gotta' give the audience a break. And while his style is utterly different, McCarthy on occasion evokes that Beckettian blend of verbal wit and utter existential despair.

The other, and in my view unforgiveable, error the film makes is the Oprah-licious ending. As in the novel, after his father's death, the boy meets a man in the road. This man has a family, and he is willing to take the boy with him. The novel ends with a quite mysterious paragraph that speaks to the beauty of trout and the disappearance of nature. The film, on the other hand, invites the entire family to meet the boy at ocean's edge. I guess this would have been okay; they all look filthy and ragged, all of them except for the dog. Huh? A dog? Yes, a great looking dog, so well-fed. OMG. And they all go off together. And this is how focus groups have ruined American movies: the apocalypse meets Lassie.

In addition to her duties as Department Chair, Prof. Hawkins continues to read, teach, and write about McCarthy's fiction. This review is an excerpt from Prof. Hawkins's more extended review forthcoming in the The Oakland Journal.

Warren Keith Wright, 1954-2010

Keith was my student at Oakland University; at least that's how our acquaintance began. Yet the second course he took with me was a group independent study in which his friend Cindy Dooley, Keith, and I got a brief overview of Canadian literature before plunging into intensive reading of Margaret Laurence's novels. From that point on, we learned with and from one another, and I expect to keep learning from Keith's letters, presents, and writing even now that he is so suddenly gone.

A particularly striking memory from Keith's Oakland days relates to his experience as a teaching assistant in a freshman writing class. He had been assigned to accompany the students for a week of instruction in library research. After one of those sessions, he burst into my office aglow with excitement about discovering how he could put resources from the Government Documents room to use in his research on the poet Louise Bogan. He had the true scholar's delight in tracking down information sources but also the true friend's generosity in putting his research skills to use for others. Keith's letters used to arrive in large envelopes stuffed with newspaper clippings about books and art exhibits and felicitously selected articles suited to my husband, Bob, and me. In recent years, the computer opened new possibilities for discovery. Just a few months ago, he took an interest in a paper I was writing about Emily Dickinson's knowledge of George Eliot and sent me a link to an early biography of Eliot that Dickinson had read (an edition that happened to have an exceptionally informative introduction).

Keith was even more my teacher with respect to his passions for music and the visual arts. As I look over our stacks of compact disks, I am struck by how much my Bob and I have been enriched by Keith's choices of music for us (generally with a note attached calling our attention to some special beauty of a composition or performance). Ideally, one would have expected him to pursue a cosmopolitan life in a big city with museums, concert halls, theaters, and universities.

Instead, circumstances or choice led to his Thoreauvian choice to settle down in the familiar environment of Arbyrd, Missouri and simplify radically the outer circumstances of his life in order to accomplish the disciplined work of imagination. He went there to write a novel and poems but also to assist his mother in caring for invalid grandparents and, after their deaths, to care for his mother in her own old age. It was no easy matter for him to solve the problem of

making a living by his literary talents so far from major publishing centers, though his critical abilities eventually gained him work reading for the Library of America and writing reviews for Opera.

Keith's letters and emails from Arbyrd conveyed a lively eye for descriptive detail about the natural environment, the cycles of the agricultural year, and local rituals – never any gossip but always points of interest. When he wrote about it, “the matter of Arbyrd” came to have literary interest for his Michigan friends like Homer's “matter of Troy” and Faulkner's of Yoknapatawpha. I shall miss learning about the watermelon harvest, the history of the New Madrid fault, the blooming of “Easter lilies,” and menus for holiday dinners. Was his death announced on the radio?

Keith had an exceptional gift for appreciation. He took interest in almost everything and responded warmly to all kinds of beauty and accomplishment. His work for the Library of America gave him ample opportunities to admire widely disparate kinds of writing from Emerson's journals through immigrant narratives, spy fiction, John Adams, Ambrose Bierce, and stories about boxing. Two of his poems

won first prizes in Oakland University's annual ekphrasis poetry contest – an especially suitable lyric genre for Keith because it calls for the poet to respond imaginatively to a work of art.

Perhaps his greatest gift was for friendship. Keith maintained close ties across distances of time and space. He offered comfort in times of grief, support in times of trial, and sincere rejoicing for his friends' accomplishments. His calls relieved depression in an elderly friend; his letters brought amusement as well as consolation. All his friends knew how much he cared about them and their families – even their pets.

In this time of grief, Bob and I grieve the absence of our steadfast friend. We shall miss Keith's frequent messages, his overflowing Christmas boxes, and his strikingly graceful prose. Yet we feel profound gratitude for the gift of his friendship. As Emily Dickinson wrote:

Of so divine a Loss
We enter but the Gain,
Indemnity for Loneliness
That such a Bliss has been. (Fr 1202)

—Jane Eberwein



EKPHRASIS

the fields of heaven *by Warren Keith Wright*

[In 2005 Warren Keith Wright submitted the winning entry to the annual English department Ekphrasis contest. The Channel is pleased to re-print the poem here in tribute.]



View of Haarlem, by Jacob van Ruisdael

From Heaven we look out upon the bleaching fields of Haarlem,
 women stretching long stripes of linen to size and dry
 across the yellow lawns, down the polder from the dunes
 which filter pure the water of that sea never far from thought.
 Above them mount the aerial landscapes of the clouds, twice
 the size of the land, eleven birds to knit together
 height, breadth, volume, airiness, space.

Though of the earth, nothing confines us there:
 suspended, as one of the birds, or the winds, or some lesser deity,
 above us is always so much sky, and for drama the progress
 and decline of day, warm and cool sunlight and shadows,
 lozenges of fields and windmills and roads, havened with trees.
 This is no waking dream, but consciousness itself:
 here is the mind alive and at repose with living.
 Soon evening light cuts low across the roofs and chimneys,
 the bronzed towers of the visible city and its invisible port
 to end a summer's day, like thousands past and thousands to come:
 in blessed repetition the mundane spreads its gold to heaven,
 while the women are forever raking its bright cloth smooth.

ESSAY

Shipwreck as Spectacle *by Natalie Cole*

Shipwrecks are ubiquitous throughout Victorian fiction, and nowhere more so than in the novels, stories and essays of Charles Dickens. Both a fact of 19th century trade and travel, and an icon for Victorian cultural anxieties, the image of a shipwreck invited readers and viewers into the romantic sublime, a state that can “excite ideas of pain and danger, . . . and the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (Burke, 1757). The success of films about doomed ships throughout the history of cinema indicates we are still intrigued by shipwreck. Classic examples are *Lifeboat* (1944), *A Night to Remember* (1958), *Das Boot* (1981), *A Perfect Storm* (1991), and *Titanic* (1997).

In the Victorian era, shipwreck narratives abounded—in newspapers, theatrical spectacles, and in novels—fascinating audiences as they embodied Victorian perils such as bankruptcy, the dissolution of families, the dangers of imperialism, and the growing Crisis of Faith in the Anglican church. (*cont'd on p. 13*)



Fig. 1

Dickens not only wrote but read about shipwrecks; his library, catalogued when he died, contained numerous books about sea travel and shipwreck disasters. In fact, Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is perhaps the single most influential text for Dickens.

“The Abandoned”

“The Abandoned” (see Fig. 1) was a painting that Dickens deeply admired, calling it “magnificent” in a letter to his wife Catherine in 1856, the year it was exhibited at the Royal Academy Exhibition. The painter, Clarkston Stanfield, R.A., was a distinguished painter of maritime scenes and seascape, and his inspiration for “The Abandoned” was Washington Irving's 1820 story “The Voyager” in *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon* (see Letters 8:68).

Presenting a medium-distance perspective of a boat in trouble in high seas, “The Abandoned” shows an empty deck, presumably abandoned by a crew unlikely even in lifeboats to survive the rough sea around them. The absence of human figures on the ship's deck intensifies the viewer's sense of the vessel itself as animistic, having a life and spirit of its own. The boat's precarious placement dramatizes its plight of being beyond rescue, of soon being swept under the waves now surrounding it. The painting insists that its audience confront terrifying boundaries of surface/underwater, presence/erasure, breath/suffocation, and alive/dead.

Jane Eyre

This terror evoked by shipwreck also appears in one of the title character's drawings in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Nineteenth-century gentlewomen were encouraged to study painting and drawing as part of a uniquely “female” education, but portraits and bucolic, pastoral scenes were more typical subjects for women than shipwrecks. Jane's vivid imagination and her visionary, dreaming self are communicated in her unusual choices in the art she creates. Perhaps most striking is Jane's drawing of a shipwreck, including the arm of a drowning woman and a waiting bird of prey. This particular drawing catches the eye of Rochester, Jane's employer, when he asks to see evidence of her educational qualifications. He says of her drawings, that they “are, for a schoolgirl, peculiar. As to the thoughts, they are elvish” (Ch.13). Jane's art defies conventional expectations of female “dabbling” in art. Her painting of shipwreck challenges the privileges of upper-class society and wealth by showing their powerlessness to stave off death and disaster, as seen in the following passage:

“[In a swollen sea] one gleam of light lifted into relief a half-submerged mast, on which sat a cormorant, dark and large, with wings flecked with foam; its beak held a gold bracelet set with gems, that I had touched with as brilliant tints as my palette could yield, and as glittering distinctness as my pencil could impart. Sinking below the bird and mast, a drowned corpse glanced through the green water; a fair arm was the only limb clearly visible, whence the bracelet had been washed or torn.”

Dickens' “favorite child,” *David Copperfield*

In Dickens's 1849 novel *David Copperfield*, shipwreck constitutes the novel's emotional climax, the final conflict of working class and upper class played out in the attempted but

failed rescue of the former by the latter. Even before this climactic scene, characters describe their feelings of isolation by saying they are “feeling shipwrecked.” But shipwrecks are also the source of entertainment, as characters draw together by fires to enjoy yarns about “dismal shipwrecks.” The Peggotys, an extended family of fisherfolk whose members have all suffered the deaths of relatives at sea, live in an upside down boat on the Yarmouth beach, a perfect image of being “at home at sea.”

Dickens Visits Welsh Shipwreck Site

Dickens travelled to Wales at the end of 1859 to talk to the people on the coast who had witnessed the wreck of the Royal Charter and its aftermath. The Royal Charter, a ship built in Britain, was an Australian trader that foundered in a storm off the coast of northern Wales in October of 1859, a hurricane driving the ship onto the steep rocks near the shoreline. Dickens, who had four relatives who perished in this shipwreck, visited the site two months afterward, and wrote “The Shipwreck” (1860), vividly describing the disaster spectacle after the wreck, the local church which became a makeshift morgue for some of the 450 people who lost their lives, and the retrieval of some of the estimated 320 thousand pounds of gold from Australia mines. Only forty people survived the wreck.

The Frozen Deep

The year after “The Abandoned” was exhibited, Dickens and Wilkie Collins wrote a play, *The Frozen Deep*, performed as a benefit for the financially-struggling family of an actor, starring Dickens and set in the Arctic. Stanfield was recruited to paint an elaborate set for the play. All three men drew inspiration from 1845 expedition led by Rear-Admiral Sir John Franklin which had disappeared while attempting to discover the Northwest passage, a sea lane between the Atlantic and Pacific far up in Northern Canada. A later expedition led by John Rae in 1854 found traces of the Franklin expedition and evidence of cannibalism; these findings were hotly disputed in a series of essays written by Dickens and published in his magazine, *Household Words*. In 2010, a ship from the Franklin expedition was located underwater.

For more about these topics, see

Dickens, Charles. “The Shipwreck.” *The Uncommercial Traveller and Other Papers 1859-70*. Ed. Michael Slater and John Drew. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2000. 26-40.

Landow, George P. *Images of Crisis: Literary Iconography*. London: Routledge, 1982.

McKee, Alexander. *The Golden Wreck: the Tragedy of the Royal Charter*. London: Souvenir Press Ltd., 1966.

Meisel, Martin. “Perils of the Deep.” *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth Century England*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983. 189-200.

Ormond, Leonee. “Dickens and Painting: Contemporary Art.” *Dickensian* 80 (spring 1984): 2-25.

Palmer, William J. “Dickens and Shipwreck.” *Dickens Studies Annual* 18 (1989): 39-92.

Prof. Cole is currently teaching a graduate course on Work & Leisure in Victorian Fiction

News Shorts

Chapman Appears in HuffPo

On September 29, poet Molly Peacock gave a public reading to a rapt crowd at the 23rd Annual Maurice Brown Poetry Reading. Peacock's engaging presence and her poetry's wit and power clearly enthralled the large crowd of students, faculty, and friends of OU. Speaking for many, one student leaving the event was overheard saying, "I didn't know poetry readings were so cool!" If you missed Peacock's reading, don't worry-- **you can watch it here!**

McDaniel Awarded University Research Fellowship



Bailey McDaniel

Bailey McDaniel has received the University Research Committee Faculty Research Fellowship for the Summer and will be traveling to New York City in July. There she will visit the archives of American playwright Rachel Crothers at the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Crothers is one of the playwrights featured in McDaniel's upcoming book, *Nurturing Fallacies*, which looks at representations of mothering in twentieth-century American drama.

Cole Joins Advisory Board

Natalie Cole has been chosen as a member of the Editorial Advisory Board for a new book series on "Victorian and Edwardian Studies" to be published by Peter Lang, Inc. Congratulations Prof. Cole!



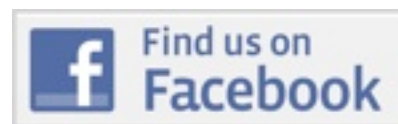
Natalie Cole

Chapman Appears in HuffPo

Jeff Chapman recently appeared in the online Huffington Post. His short piece "Yes, yes we don't know what it is and it terrifies us, all this not knowing" is part of "7 Rings: An Artist's Game of Telephone." The project is "a living, responsive work of art" created by a painter and a poet. Each week, the two "alternate kicking off the current week's collaborative artist project. Painters and poets, photographers and essayists, musicians and story writers will collaborate to create ongoing, live-made art." The project is **available online here.**

Gilson Enters Blogosphere

Speaking of online presences, English's own irrepressible Annie Gilson has started a blog called "Books, Whistling Puppies, and Salamanders." According to Prof. Gilson, the blog is "about reading and writing, humans and other animals, and the various roles all of these have in our lives. When I'm lucky, I stumble across some of the mysteries that inspire and sustain the imaginative life." **Check it out here.**



English Department Website Adds Video Gallery

And in one final bit of online news, the English department website has launched a new video gallery featuring faculty promoting upcoming courses and other projects (like Brian Connery on studying abroad). Also available for viewing is OU English's first contribution to the Close Reading Cooperative (featuring Prof. Insko), Junot Diaz's reading, and last year's Maurice Brown Poetry Reading (featuring Molly Peacock), as well as the famous "Last Lecture of Bob and Jane Eberwein." And there's more to come, so be sure to check back occasionally! You can visit the video gallery by clicking the button above.

Apap, Chung Present Research

In November, new Cinema Studies faculty member Hye Seung Chung gave a campus presentation to a standing-room-only crowd on "Old Boy's and Sassy Girls: Bringing East Asian Cinema to OU's Campus." The lively even was hosted by the English Honor Society, Sigma Tau Delta.

Also in November, Special Lecturer Professor Chris Apap presented a portion of his current research on the topic of "Literary Monsters: The Shape of the Novel and Nation in the Wake of the War of 1812." Prof. Apap's fascinating talk was part of the department's "Research in Progress" series.

Connery Takes Leadership Role in International Education

After many years of directing Winter Break in Ireland and the British Studies at Oxford Program, Brian Connery has this fall been serving as the interim Director of International Education at OU. Connery says that he is "delighted to be working with so many former English majors who are working in a variety of capacities in offices around the university."

Remembering Joseph Dement (1925-2010)

Professor Emeritus Joseph DeMent died this past July after a long and courageous battle with cancer.

Professor DeMent came to Oakland in 1966 as an Associate Professor, having previously taught at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania and Hiram College in Ohio. A WWII veteran who had enlisted in the Army in 1944, after six years of military service he earned a B.A. at the University of Redlands in California and a Ph.D. at Indiana University where he wrote his dissertation on Restoration drama. His principal teaching loves, however, were Shakespeare and literary criticism. Former students recall with particular admiration a graduate course in Practical Criticism, a course which he designed himself as part of the revamped MA program he was instrumental in creating. Perhaps the best measure of his success as a teacher is the fact that he was always most admired by the best and brightest of our students. He was a rigorous and exacting teacher; and because he was a

man of strong opinions, some thought him dogmatic; but he loved intellectual give and take and was always willing to accept a well-reasoned argument.

Professor DeMent's impact on the English department goes far beyond his quarter century in the classroom. He was chair of the department from 1973 to 1982 and successfully guided it through difficult times as Oakland was in the process of transforming itself from a liberal arts college to a multiversity. As resources were being diverted to emerging Schools and programs, English, along with other liberal arts programs, ran the risk of being marginalized. He oversaw the department's entry into the field of Business and Technical Writing which was both an important service to the university and a means of protecting our staffing levels. He was nothing if not a fighter at a time when our department seriously needed one, and was especially forceful in representing the department's interests to the university community.

Student News

Recent OU English Grad Places Essay in Prestigious Journal

Former OU undergraduate and M.A. student Christina Fontana has had her essay, "Traditional Rebirth: The Significance of the Epistolary Genre in *When Washington Was in Vogue*," accepted for publication in *The African American Review*—one of the premier academic journals in African American studies. The essay originated in a graduate course with Professor Pfeiffer. The department is proud to congratulate Christina on her achievement. In addition to teaching courses in Writing here at OU, Christina is currently applying to graduate schools.

Students Present Papers at Meeting of Minds Conference

Kathy Angel and Ben Malburg, both OU English '10, presented papers last May at the Meeting of Minds, the cooperative undergraduate research conference for students from OU, the U of M-Flint, and the U of M-Dearborn. Kathy's paper, "Good-heartedness and Virtue in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*," grew out of her senior seminar on Fielding and Richardson with Prof. Connery. Ben's paper, which inspired vigorous discussion among the session participants, was entitled "Breath



From left: Kathy Angel, Prof. Gladys Cardiff, Ben Malburg

Molecules': Order and Chaos in Jorie Graham's *Overlord*," a product of his study of contemporary poetry with Prof. Cardiff. Both papers were among those subsequently selected for publication in volume 12 of *The Meeting of Minds Journal*, [available here](#).

2011 Meeting of Minds to be Held at Oakland

The **19th Annual Meeting of Minds Conference** will take place on the campus of OU on May 13, 2011. The one day event provides a forum for the presentation and publication of

undergraduate student research and creative endeavor. We encourage our English majors to participate. Talk with your favorite professor!

English Majors Encouraged to Subscribe to Literary Studies Podcast

Looking for ways to contribute to class discussion? Still need help perfecting your skill at literary analysis? Baffled when asked to do a "close reading"? You can learn a lot from the Close Reading Cooperative podcast in literary studies. Start by **subscribing through iTunes U!**

Faculty Notes

PODIUMS AND PRINT

Rob Anderson presented a paper entitled, "Frankenstein, Collectivity, and the Future of the Corporation" at the International Conference on Romanticism at Texas Tech University in Lubbock. The paper grew out of a graduate course he taught on the social history of *Frankenstein* and tries to make sense of the continuing appeal of the novel as a fountain of political metaphors.

Chris Apap presented "Literary Monsters: The Shape of the Novel and the Nation after the War of 1812" at the Department's fall semester Research in Progress talk. The paper is part of a project on the geographical imagination in the early American republic.

Jeff Chapman's "The Restaurant" has just been published in the Fall 2010 issue of the *Oakland Journal*.

Hye Chung introduced members of Sigma Tau Delta to her work at a lunch-time talk, "Old Boys and Sassy Girls: Bringing East Asian Cinema to Oakland University's Campus."

Bob Eberwein's latest book, *Acting for America: Movie Stars of the 1980s*, a collection of essays which he has collected and edited, has been published by Rutgers University Press. Bob's essay on Michael J. Fox and the Brat Pack, along with a short look ahead at the stars of the 90s, is accompanied by lively essays by diverse hands. The volume is sweetly and simply dedicated, "For my students." Homie says, "Check it out." Since then, Bob has published a brief commentary on the silent war film *Wings* in the *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* and is working on an essay about John Ford's *They Were Expendable* to be published in an upcoming collection by another editor. He is also compiling a bibliography on war films for an Oxford University Press online bibliography.

Jane Eberwein gave a paper, "'Dangerous fruit of the tree of knowledge': Dickinson, Marian Evans, and Strauss's *Das Leben Jesus*," for the Emily Dickinson International Society Conference at Oxford University in August. Upon returning home, she was drafted to write a comprehensive account of the conference that will appear as "Beneath a British Sky: EDIS at Oxford" in the fall Emily Dickinson International Society Bulletin. Jane will be delivering the commencement address at the December ceremony for OU graduate degree recipients – and says that the text on which she will speak is *not* an Emily

Dickinson poem! She will be returning to form when giving the keynote address, "Wider than the Sky," for Detroit's Big Read project which focuses on Dickinson, on Wednesday, March 23, at 4 p.m. at the Detroit Public Library. All friends of the Department are cordially invited.

Annie Gilson participated in the Summer Literary Seminars in Montreal.

Kevin Grimm presented "Writing the Adventure, Or a Reconsideration of Chivalric Choice" at the 45th International Congress of Medieval Studies held at Western Michigan University last May.

Andrea Knutson's book *American Spaces of Conversion: The Conductive Imaginaries of Edwards, Emerson, and James*, a study of the Puritan legacy in the works of Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William James has been published by the Oxford University Press and is now available at fine bookstores and libraries throughout the world. Ronald Bosco, coeditor of *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, calls the book "powerful intellectual history that foregrounds the Puritan process of conversion in the New World." Robert D. Richardson, the author of *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* says, "Knutson has given us a powerful rethinking and cogent reformulation of one of the main currents in American thought. This is a fresh new take on the conversion experience with the emphasis on experience."

Kathleen Pfeiffer reports that her recent activities "have all been coddled by the sweet warmth of sabbatical" during which she completed a chapter-length biographical essay on Arna Bontemps, the poet, librarian, and children's author who first began writing during the Harlem Renaissance. This will be included in a forthcoming volume of the "American Writers" Supplement edited by Jay Parini and published jointly by Scribners and Gale. In mid-November she traveled to Victoria, British Columbia to present a paper, "Cane and Holiday: A Peek Behind the Scenes," at the conference of the Modernist Studies Association.

Kevin Laam will be presenting "Thomas More and the Death of the Consolatio," at the annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in Montreal in March 2011.

Dawn Newton's Modern Literature students visited, via Skype, with Bonnie Jo Campbell, author of *American Salvage*, a novel shortlisted for the National Book Award last year which the students are currently studying.

Pamela Mitzelfeld was profiled by the *The Oakland Post* in September; [read it here](#).

Rachel Smydra's essay on her recent innovative courses, "Academic Service Learning: Moving Your Students Outside the Classroom – Literally," has just been published in the Fall 2010 *Oakland Journal*.



Alumni Corner

OU ALUM WINS TEACHER OF THE YEAR HONOR

Last year, Lake Orion High School selected Brian Bishop to be their Outstanding Teacher of the Year for 2010. Brian completed Oakland University's Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP) in 2003 with an English major and was hired that same year by the Lake Orion Community School District. Brian has been involved in a number of special projects including developing courses such as Technical Reading and Writing and Honors English 10 – American Literature. In addition, he has been actively engaged with the Oakland Writing Project and has participated in the Michigan Council of Teachers of English conference.

In 2006, Brian completed the MA in English. His views on his graduate school experience reveal a passion for learning. He notes, "The MA program in English was the best investment I've ever made. My professors challenged me to excel while also allowing me to customize some assignments so that I could blend my own literary interests with their expectations. Furthermore, professors assisted me with making connections between my university-level coursework and the goals that I was setting for myself as a teacher; I was constantly striving to translate learning experiences in my master's courses to my students' experiences in the high-school setting."

The Department of English congratulates Brian on his success. And for the future? Brian says that earning a PhD remains a possibility. We wish him the best!

OTHER ALUMNI NEWS

Writer and web designer **Bethany Broadwell**, '97, was honored posthumously with the Oakland University Alumni Association Odyssey Award. The honor recognizes alumni whose lives exemplify Oakland's motto to "seek virtue and knowledge."

Alisa Nixon '09 was accepted into Wayne State's Ph.D. Program in English (started this semester) with a prestigious Rumble Fellowship (tuition waiver, living allowance, medical, etc, insurance, and three years guaranteed T.A. funding).

Shayla Hawkins ('98) writes with the following lengthy update: "Dear OU faculty and staff: I read the Spring 2010 edition of "The English Channel," and your statement "It's slim pickins in the Alumni Corner this time — alas!" struck me as awfully funny for some reason. So here are some of my recent literary "pickins," and I wish you a fuller bushel for the next issue. 2010 was, and continues to be, a fruitful year for my creative writing, and I'm incredibly thankful for it. Since January 1st, I've had poems published in *Chopin with Cherries*, a poetry anthology about the life and music of master pianist-composer, Frederic Chopin, and *VWA*:

Poems for Haiti, an anthology created in response to Haiti's cataclysmic January earthquake that killed over 230,000 people (and I'm proud to say that every penny of the profits made from *VWA* goes directly to organizations helping with Haiti's rebuilding efforts and relief assistance for the survivors). Additionally, two of my poems ("Nest of Honey: A Blues for Samson" and "Sunset in Tunisia") were published this year in the online literary journal *TORCH: Poetry, Prose, and Short Stories by African American Women*. My poem, "When Aretha Sang, 'Mary, Don't You Weep'" was published in the Spring 2010 issue of *Aunt Chloe: A Journal of Artful Candor*, which is the oldest literary publication of the historic Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. Also, two more of my poems ("Cyan Blue" and "Cuba Night Woman") were published in *St. Somewhere*, an online literary journal devoted to literature of the Caribbean and the coastal United States. Two more of my poems (I told you this was a fruitful year for me!), "Carambola" and "My Beloved's Voice", are slated for publication in the October 2010 edition of *Pyrta*, an international online journal based in Shillong, India. And, probably the biggest literary cahuna for me this year, critically acclaimed and PEN/Faulkner Award-winning author John Edgar Wideman chose my story, "A Test", as the winner of the John Edgar Wideman Microstory Contest! "Microstory" is another word for "flash fiction," and "A Test" will be published in all future editions of Mr. Wideman's latest book, a collection of microstories called *Briefs: Stories for the Palm of the Mind*. (For more information about ordering *Briefs*, [click here](#).) So there you have it, good people of the Oakland University English Department. And for everything you did to prepare me and help me earn my current (and future) successes as a writer, I thank you!!"

Annette Krizanich (MA '98; BA '95) reports, "I will be attending Binghamton University's Ph.D. program in English, with a creative dissertation in poetry. Many, many thanks to Professor Hoepfner, and also to Professors Hawkins and Grimm, for helping to make this possible."

Joy Gaines-Friedler ('05) has won an Honorable Mention in the 2010 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards sponsored by The Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College, Paterson NJ. The contest judge was the director Maria Mazziotti Gillan winner of the 2008 American Book Award. Joy will be traveling to New Jersey in November to read her poem at the Awards Ceremony

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.

APPEAL

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