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ALUMNI!

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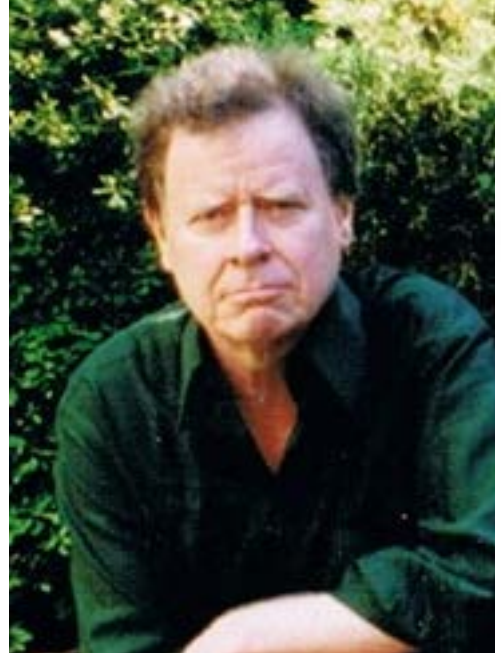
RIOTS AND ROMANTICS: LARRY LOCKRIDGE ON THE EVE OF RETIREMENT

PETER TASCA

For those students who have had the pleasure of taking the Critical Theory and Romanticism courses taught by Professor Laurence Lockridge—or “Larry,” as he convivially styles himself—the 2015-2016 academic year will be tinged with melancholy. After nearly thirty-seven years of teaching, Professor Lockridge is on sabbatical leave this year before enjoying a long and, he hopes, productive retirement. We at the Blotter sat down with Professor Lockridge to discuss his long career at NYU and how the department has changed over the course of his time here.

Although at various points he considered becoming a concert pianist and a mathematician—he reneged on the former because a piano instructor admonished him for having “a weak left hand”—Professor Lockridge feels that his decision to enter the field of literary studies was more or less made for him because of the indirect influence of his father Ross Lockridge, Jr., author of the monumental novel *Raintree County* (1948). His father died of suicide at age thirty-three just as his novel became the nation’s number one best-seller; Larry was only five at the time. He necessarily felt some ambivalence about entering literature as a field, but it seemed to beckon. He had grown up with a novel instead of a father.

As a PhD student, having initially intended to write a dissertation on Shakespeare, Lockridge humorously said that he discovered that “the only seminar paper I had written that had anything original in it” was on Coleridge and ethics. He put in an additional year of research and then shut the door for seven weeks, emerging with a completed doctoral dissertation that was subsequently published. Lockridge has recommended this strategy to all his doctoral students but has never found a taker. In this work and subsequent publications he has taken some pride in being among the first modern critics to bring philosophical ethics to bear on the study of literature.



Professor Lockridge jumped at the opportunity to teach the Romantics at NYU.

After graduating from Indiana and Harvard and teaching at Northwestern and Rutgers Universities, Professor Lockridge in 1978 jumped at the opportunity to teach the Romantics at NYU. “In those days,” he says slyly, “all the hiring was done through a decidedly undemocratic process: by the chair of the department!” As to why he wanted to teach at NYU, Lockridge explained that among other strengths he was drawn to the distinguished company of literary biographers who taught here in the 70’s. The publications of the Department of English at the time included the esteemed biography of Henry James by Leon Edel, one of Keats by Aileen Ward, and one on the young Browning by his present-day colleague John Maynard.

Other eminent biographers included Kenneth Silverman, Edwin Miller, and Frederick Karl. Ralph Ellison of *Invisible Man* fame was also on the scene, serving here as Schweitzer Professor of the Humanities until 1980. The emergent Creative Writing Program was still housed with the regular Department of English at 19 University Place. There, according to Lockridge, Allen Ginsberg was also a presence, frequently overheard grumbling about the department secretaries who had failed to mimeograph his poems in time for class. “Quite a come-down,” Lockridge admits, “from the man who had prophetic visions and conversed with William Blake.”

Soon after he arrived, Lockridge began offering a graduate course in the history of critical theory which in 1986 was then extended to undergraduate students. But one of the main differences between the department then and now, Lockridge said, was that in 1978 there was an enormous number of graduate students in the Department of English by today’s standards and fewer than 30 full-time faculty members. Because as many as ninety percent of applicants were admitted—in other words, anyone willing to pay—teaching over fifty students in a graduate course on theory or the Romantics was not unusual for the time.

One the most memorable incidents of his time at NYU, Lockridge recalled, occurred when he and Denis Donoghue were co-directing the Poetics Institute. Unexpectedly, over five hundred people tried to attend a panel of critics assembled to speak on the provocative topic, "How to Read a Poem." With so many people attempting to crowd into a small lecture hall, the fire marshal approached Lockridge, whispering in his ear that he was needed outside immediately to "quell a riot." (Nobody was hurt.) In the fall of 1999, when he co-taught a three-hour seminar with Jacques Derrida, Lockridge remembers being similarly overwhelmed by the legendary philosopher's "groupies, quite dismayed because denied entry by the fire marshal."

The fire marshal approached Lockridge, whispering in his ear that he was needed outside immediately to "quell a riot."

As for "How to Read a Poem," Lockridge remembers asking Harold Bloom what he thought of a Rutgers student who had interpreted the first line of Wordsworth's "A slumber did my spirit seal" to mean that Wordsworth's pet seal kept falling asleep on him. Bloom replied, in deadpan, that he thought this a "strong misreading." In reply to being asked what he thought were the most significant changes in the intellectual atmosphere during his time at NYU, Lockridge replied that the first thing that came to mind was the tilt away from literary history and biography toward cultural studies with gender theory by far the most popular subject among students.



In spite of his own commitment to critical theory, Lockridge said he feels a certain nostalgia for the days of yore, having himself written a biography of his father entitled *Shade of the Raintree: The Life and Death of Ross Lockridge, Jr.* (Viking 1994; Indiana University Press, 2014), undertaken because an earlier biography "was so terrible." Lockridge added that, in assembling over 78,000 documents for a major exhibition of his father's papers at the Lilly Library, Indiana University, in 2014, he learned that "it is much more fun to visit an archive than it is to create one."

As for the thinkers who have most significantly influenced his writing and thinking, Lockridge numbers M. H. Abrams, author of the classic *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), for his "unrepentant humanism" in addition to "his lucidity of mind and directness of discourse." And, of course, Lockridge counts Coleridge, whose "mind was to be sure a museum piece in many respects," at the top of the thinkers he most admires. Other thinkers who have exerted influence include Bakhtin, de Beauvoir, Levinas, Ricoeur, and Said.

Now, with retirement before him, Professor Lockridge is busy at work on two projects. The first comprises a book on European Romanticism and its ties to the rise of modern critical theory. The purpose of the work, Lockridge elaborated, is to show that many critical schools have their anchorage in European Romanticism, and are much more continuous with the Romantic Tradition than is usually recognized. The second project, which Lockridge calls "unchartered territory for me," consists of a series of comic novellas which will include "only the smallest bit of academic satire." Although he will assuredly miss teaching in the classroom and interacting with students, he feels that grading papers is something he can do without. Nevertheless, his wit and passion for the Romantics—and their critical descendants—will be sorely missed by everyone in the Department of English.

SOVEREIGNTY AND METAPHOR

A GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE EXPLORES POWER AND REPRESENTATION

CYNTHIA DE LUNA

About a year ago, two of our English graduate students, Gina Dominick and Ruby Lowe, were sitting in a course taught by Jacques Lezra when they began to wonder: how do metaphors shape our political and social realities? How does sovereignty factor into that? And what kind of discussion could take place on the subject if graduate students, post-doctorates, professors, and anyone else interested in the topic joined in? These questions were what set the Sovereignty and Metaphor conference in motion. It took a year of work, countless emails, and over thirty submissions of papers, but when September 24th and 25th arrived, professors and students from within NYU and beyond gathered in the English Department Event Space to explore the numerous relationships between sovereignty and metaphor. Together, they asked how one influences the other, how one supports or impedes the other... even how one might be the other.



Photo Credit: Kimberly Adams

The conference explored these questions through four frameworks: opacity, centers, bodies, and violence. The first panel, on opacity, focused especially on the role of metaphor in *Piers Plowman*, Milton's *Areopagitica*, and Barclay's *Argenis*. Jacques Lezra, a professor of Spanish, English, and Comparative Literature here at NYU, brought our attention to manners of speech in Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and how those manners of speech form identities and ultimately political units. The factor of speech also plays a role in *Areopagitica*, as Ruby Lowe, one of the organizers of the event, discussed. She argued that for Milton, speech is a metaphor for an individual's ability to take part in conversations about political matters.

The second panel, focusing on "centers," moved more directly into the realm of sovereignty by looking into representations of power in Milton's *Eikonoklastes*, Spencer's *The Faerie Queen*, and Marvell's *Upon Appleton House*. Orlando S. Reade, from Princeton University, opened with Milton's representation of sovereignty in *Eikonoklastes* as a geocentric universe in which the king stood at the center. Reade pointed out the comedy in this representation, for Charles I viewed himself as the earth in a geocentric universe when the world had moved on to the heliocentric model of the solar system. Like the earth, so too did Charles I, along with his sovereign power, become decentralized.

So sovereignty can be a solar system, or perhaps it can simply be a knight, an "organ of divine might" as described in *The Faerie Queen*. Ross Lerner, an assistant professor at Occidental College, focused on this metaphorical organ that the Redcrosse knight uses to describe himself. More specifically, Lerner focused on the challenges that this metaphor presents, as it treads the line between political sovereignty and religious fanaticism, raising the question of theology's role in sovereignty.



John Rogers
Photo Credit: Cynthia De Luna

John Rogers, a professor of English at Yale University, addressed this question to open the conference's third panel, concerning bodies. Rogers explored the metaphysics of Mormonism and its relationship with Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The panel's focus on physicality extended into talks of the *Alliterative Morte*, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*, Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, and Dryden's *The Hind and the Panther*. Beatrice Bradley, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, most directly addressed this physicality by speaking of the body as a metaphor for sovereignty. She argued that in Shakespeare's play, Cleopatra physically presents herself in a way that depicts her reign as beyond mortal. However, Stephanie Ranks, a graduate student at Yale University, saw physicality as something potentially threatening to sovereignty over a whole. In *The Blazing World*, Ranks spoke of how vision can create numerous perspectives and interpretations and divide a people, leaving them in need of a sovereign who would have to unite them under one point of view.

The question of unity also ran through the conference's final panel, concerning violence. With all the different interpretations that metaphors can imply, how are sovereigns to maintain unity over their people? How do bodies within a political context remain as one cohesive being? This was explored in Donne's *Satyres*, *Havelok the Dane*, *Athelston*, and *Le Morte D'Arthur*. This final work especially addresses the question of unity and wholeness, or "holeness," as co-organizer Gina Dominick presented it to us. The text concerns a desire for wholeness in Arthur's fellowship, but this can only come about at the expense of Arthur's knights. The wholeness of his realm depends on disharmony.

The multiplicitous nature of this disharmony speaks to all the substitutions that occur within a metaphor, as Paul Strohm suggested in his paper on Chaucer. These metaphors are open to interpretation, and while that may lead to differing views, much like in *The Blazing World*, this leaves room for, as Strohm said, "commentary and critique."

And of course, that's exactly the kind of polyvocal experience the conference as a whole provided. Like all the most interesting discussions, "Sovereignty and Metaphor" found ways to complicate the matter at hand, helping us towards a richer understanding of its terms.



King Arthur and the Knights of his Round Table illustrating wholeness and "holeness"

"I FEEL WEIRD WHEN I DON'T WRITE"

CREATIVE WRITERS IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

REBECCA SOUZA

Haley Neil

Senior
Fantasy

For Haley Neil, writing fantasy is an exercise in imagination and creativity. "One of the most exciting (and challenging) parts of writing is creating a believable world," she says. "With fantasy, world building is pushed to the extremes." Like many authors, she started with a passion for reading her genre. Haley has loved reading fantasy and making up stories since she was a kid. But as she's grown older, writing has brought "a way to express, to imagine, to create something distinctly my own," she says.

Her current project is a long worked on novel with the potential title *Gray*. The story begins with a seemingly 'normal' heroine, but later exposes her as a key player in the battle between Heaven and Hell. Except in Haley's version, she's the savior for Hell. "A lot of it has to do with questioning destiny," Haley explains. "Does she have to be evil? Is there another way?" The story gets even more complicated when her heroine meets the quirky gods and goddesses on Heaven's side. In addition to the other themes running through her book, from here "a layer of questioning the reality of the whole situation" begins to emerge.

Haley might be looking forward to finishing this project soon. "I'm in the midst of a pretty intensive edit on the beginning. On the other end, I have about three chapters until I'm done with my first draft," she says. She's working on tying it up while studying abroad in London this semester. Haley thinks the experience has had a positive impact on her work. "I think it's given me a greater wealth of inspiration," she says. Other than completing her first draft of her novel, she is also applying for MFA programs and thinking about where her writing career will take her. "My dream is to teach creative writing and (fingers crossed!) get published," she says.

"I FEEL WEIRD WHEN I DON'T WRITE" continued on next pg.

Annesha Sengupta

Sophomore
Short Stories

If you ever catch Annesha Singh with some down time, you might see her writing scraps after class, hurriedly typing away to pin down a new thought, or getting lost in a new story idea while walking down the street.

Annesha says she chose short stories to focus her technique. By using a tighter space for experimentation, she feels can hone her tone and style before moving on to a bigger project. Her current collection of short stories revolves around the mother/daughter relationship and is largely drawn from her time spent with her mother and grandmother in Calcutta, India. She uses writing as a processing tool, intertwining snippets of her mother's stories and daily interactions within a scene. For her, writing is a way to make sense of her thoughts and experiences within a fictional setting. "I feel weird when I don't write," she says. The ideas flow easily to her, and often she feels compelled to preserve them on paper.

But for Annesha, getting her first words down can also be one of the hardest parts about writing. It's easy to wait until you feel "good," or in the right mood to write. "As a student, it's either you're sick or you're tired or hungry," she says, which makes it difficult to find the time to think creatively. And after finally writing that first sentence and feeling pretty good about it, she thinks a writer might look back and "feel like it's the worst sentence you've ever written!" Annesha speaks to the challenge of being overly critical of your own work. Because of her own standards, it's becomes easy to work on something for a while, get sick of it, and put it in the bottom of a drawer forever. One particular thing she's working on is putting "more time and investment in my first drafts," and staying committed to one piece of work.

Finding the time to put in that investment is another challenge. Between two minors, an editor-in-chief position at the Minetta Review, and publishing internships, it can be hard for her to find that sweet spot for writing. "I can't sit down and write for two hours," she says. Instead she finds herself writing bits and pieces whenever she finds the time. One thing she especially appreciates about being a creative writing minor is how the classes push you to keep writing. Even within the constraints of assignments, in Annesha's experience the professors usually give enough freedom for you to explore your skills, especially in higher-level classes.

Although not ready for the press quite yet,

Annesha says she intends to send out her pieces to literary magazines and test the market. Like many English majors, she craves the "safety net" that is often absent from literary careers. She dreams of finding the stability to be a full time writer and has her hopes set on working at a publishing house or literary agency and perhaps pursuing an MFA. Meanwhile she'll polish her current collection, perfect her skills, and continue capturing her ideas.

Elizabeth Horner

Senior
Fantasy

Elizabeth Horner is a junior-high book-worm turned writer. Now a senior with an interest in the publishing industry, her avid reading and recent experience working at a publishing platform have her attuned to what's already on the market. "There are way too many fantasy novel covers with a silhouetted woman in a white, flowy dress," Elizabeth says. Instead, she's turning her eye to what she hasn't seen—a novel that spins the idea of fantasy on its head. With the working title *Kicked Pebbles*, her newly minted book is a reversal of the usual superhero plot line. The world Elizabeth has created is indeed full of magical power—but the heroine doesn't have any. Disadvantaged, middle class, but with a lot of courage, much of the story centers on the dangerous rescue of her parents, who have been taken as prisoners-of-war. Top it off with an alliance between the main character and a young aristocrat, and Elizabeth's novel is full of both political and interpersonal intrigue.

When she first started brainstorming almost a decade ago, the idea for her novel originally included a love triangle and an extensive list of characters. Yet as Elizabeth grew older, her work grew and adapted with her. By the time she came to university, she wanted to focus on a story that doesn't rely on overblown conflict. "So many TV shows have a couple that breaks up over and over in just one season," she explains, "I wanted to do a story where there aren't un-overcome-able challenges." She's not interested in a story dependent on one big event (like the slaying of a dragon or the death of the hero's family) but one that zeroes in on the real stuff, the "in between moments" with conflicts that are not insurmountable. After graduation, Elizabeth hopes to seek an agent to get her book published, continue her work in the industry, and keep staying up way too late writing.

Stephen Smith

Senior
Plays

With his plays, Stephen Smith is tackling the big questions. His last play, an alternative Jamestown narrative, was Stephen's ways of addressing "what it means to feel authentic in one's own skin" and how people are "claiming a space in life and history." He says he likes to explore the big questions without the answers in mind. To him, it's important to begin "creating from a place of not knowing."

Originally a fiction writer, he switched over to the stage after taking a playwriting class at NYU. "Like most 17-18 year olds, it was about vanity," he says of his first experiences with creative writing. As a teenager craving independence, writing for him was about "creating your own space." Although it's been a few years since then, finding space is still an issue Stephen tackles in his playwriting. He says a big part of the college experience is feeling "awkward in your own skin," and that creating a story on conquering space was a way of exploring that. However, expressing those big ideas in writing brings its own challenges.

Stephen confesses the heartbreak that comes with writing. Often, hours of investment in a piece can end in rejection. Without a drive and a thick skin, it can be tough to withstand the criticism. "If you can live without writing, do it," he suggests, but for Stephen leaving writing behind is not an option. In order to be a writer, "you have to be a little crazy," he says. "You have to need it."

Stephen puts in that investment daily. He dedicates two hours every day to put in the work, and finds that inspiration usually comes with it. One of his favorite places to write is in a museum, or even between classes at the art gallery in Bobst. Being in a space filled with beauty and history often helps spark his imagination. NYU and the city also offer a community of playwrights, which can be a huge source of support for Stephen. Playwriting gives an opportunity to share that forged space with others, both intellectually and on the stage. When he is looking to do a reading or for feedback on his work, he can call on one of the others to help him out. Because of this, staying in New York to focus on his writing is a big priority for Stephen after graduation. The vibrancy of life in the city and the opportunity to "to be around people thinking about these things," will keep him in New York. As he says, "there's no other place to do it."

AnthropoScenes: CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE DRAMA OF BAD IDEAS

2015 DEPARTMENT FACULTY LECTURE BY PROFESSOR UNA CHAUDHURI

ANDREW SCHLAGER

When the English Department gathered this month for the fourth annual Department Faculty Lecture, one can only guess nobody expected to hear about sexual relations between a man and a cat. But the introduction Professor Una Chaudhuri gave us to her recent work did not fail to shock, delight, provoke, and invite us to further exploration. Drawing from the disciplines of eco-criticism, animal studies, drama and performance studies, Professor Chaudhuri's lecture, "AnthropoScenes: Climate Change and the Drama of Bad Ideas," signified on theater scholar and theorist Martin Puchner's notion of modern drama as the "drama of ideas," where a play's intellectual ambition and rigor seizes on theater as a kind of philosophical testing ground. In the wake of the many assaults from global capitalism and the totalized and newly devastating processes of climate change, Professor Chaudhuri proposed, we've been seeing a new form of theater: the drama of the bad idea. These dramas "destabilize meaning," "disrupt all registers of performance," and "unseat their spectators." The ideas they embody and dramatize are the problematic commitments and attachments that have led to our contemporary ecological and political nightmares and destructions.



Professor Chaudhuri offered detailed and ambitious readings of two plays, Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* (2000) and Wallace Shawn's *Grasses of a Thousand Colors* (2009), as examples of the drama of the bad idea. She showed a photograph from a production of *Far Away* capturing a crowd of downcast and anonymous prisoners awaiting execution, each grey body adorned in a fabulously vibrant and utterly original hat. She then provided the stage direction for this scene which suggests how many prisoners should appear—"five is too few and twenty better than ten. A hundred?"—and argued for the incommensurable scale expressed in the non-suggestion. Chaudhuri contended that this flexibility deferred the responsibility of the scale of the scene onto the play's production, and in turn allowed each director to decide just how far the play's "dystopian vision stretches." Sitting in the audience, this reporter (himself a playwriting student) was led to consider how such unfixed scales might allow a play's production to respond, in real time, to the kinds of damages climate change and global capitalism inflict unto the theatrical imagination. Should the future bring a scale of damage currently unimaginable or too far away to imagine, perhaps a play with unfixed proportions can accommodate these kinds of crises. In this way there's a kind of radical responsiveness or sensitivity written into the work. This train of thought was undoubtedly just one of the many intellectual sparks set off in the lecture hall as Chaudhuri tunneled towards the play's upsetting and epic interior, cased within an intimate and domestic form, and its final terrifying description of a world quite seriously, quite literally at war, where weather and flora and fauna and nationalities and household objects have been weaponized and recruited.

Chaudhuri also turned to Wallace Shawn's lewd and saturnalian play *Grasses of a Thousand Colors*, examining how geological and geopolitical disruptions and destructions register as a kind of dramaturgical unhinging of scale. She presented the play as something of a climax in Shawn's body of work, a culmination of his lifelong experimental critique of classic liberal ideology. Shawn's play, in which he also stars as the central character, a wealthy cat-lover (literally) and renowned scientist, is told in a series of first-person memoir-like reflections. The protagonist believes he has cured a scarily developed crisis of world hunger, but the grain he's pioneered and administered induces cannibalism and chronic vomiting in the species digestive systems, causing mass death. Chaudhuri described the play as comprised of disconnections and glaring transgression of species separation both sexual and gastronomic, effects so upsetting or disorienting that several audiences members departed during each of the play's intermissions. Quoting liberally from the play's more anatomical and steamy sections, she momentarily caused the very kind of anxious hilarity she discerned as the play's most precious resource.

Chaudhuri posed urgent questions about how exactly each play dramatizes how easily "forgetting is accomplished" in our contemporary politics, and suggested that these plays force if not guide their audiences towards questioning what exactly a human being is, and how we live through and within futures we'll never experience. Her love of the playwrights she discussed, her commitment to their work and to the interpretation of their work was obvious. Chaudhuri's rigorous and dynamic lecture played with wit and insight, prophecy and forecast; like the plays themselves, it was as inspiring as it was unsettling.

THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Gabrielle Starr Receives Guggenheim Fellowship for her work on Neuroaesthetics

CYNTHIA DE LUNA

What exactly does it mean when we say that something suits our “aesthetic?” That we find it visually or audibly appealing? That we like the way a painting looks or the way a book puts a world in our head? That something resonates with us? It might sound simple enough to say that it means we enjoy the look or feel of a particular thing, but a lot happens when we react to something we find moving or enrapturing, and we’re not necessarily aware of the complexity of the effects that these aesthetic experiences have on us. Neuroaesthetics, the study of aesthetic experiences in relation to the brain, is a recent field of study, one that our very own CAS Dean and English Professor G. Gabrielle Starr has consistently approached. This year, her work in this field garnered her a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship, an annual award given by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation to 175 scholars, artists, and scientists (out of over three thousand applicants!) in honor of their “prior achievement and exceptional promise.”



In 2013, Dean Starr published a book titled *Feeling Beauty: The Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience* that delved into the neural effects of the arts. The title of Starr’s book sums up its main argument nicely: it seeks to demonstrate the complex connections between what we see and what we experience, and Starr accomplishes this by observing networked neural activity in response to the “sister arts” of music, literature, and visual arts. Neural reactions to these sister arts involve multiple areas of the brain, like those associated with memory, language, and emotion. Starr wanted to find a way to distinguish a normal neural response to these arts from the intense one we might experience with a particular piece of art but not others. *Feeling Beauty* doesn’t end on a definitive conclusion, but instead explicitly opens the way to more research in neuroaesthetics.

Starr’s work in this field continues today, currently in the form of directing a three-year project on neuroaesthetics that continues the work she did for *Feeling Beauty*. She will soon be working on a project titled *Imagined: Aesthetic Life and the Double Face of Experience*, for which she won a Guggenheim Fellowship earlier this year. Like her past and current work, this project will also focus on the relationship between neural activity and aesthetic experience. This project, however, will devote special attention to the experience of being lost in an immersive and imaginative state. Such states—which we experience, for instance, when we are lost in a book and can vividly see what is happening on the page—are the intense aesthetic experiences that Starr will focus on when she takes up her fellowship work in the 2016-2017 academic year.

THE FLIGHTS (AND FIGHTS) OF VIRTUAL MOTION

PROFESSOR JOHN GUILLORY GIVES A TALK ON THOMAS HOBBS

PETER TASCA



Thomas Hobbes

On the crisp fall evening of October 13th, students and faculty crowded into the department of English's Event Space to hear Professor John Guillory's lecture entitled "Hobbesian Rhetoric and the Poetics of Virtual Motion." Guillory—the author of *Poetic Authority* (1983), *Cultural Capital* (1993), and *What's Left of Theory?* (2000)—was warmly introduced by his colleague and friend Professor Susanne Wofford, the Dean of the Gallatin School. Professor Wofford emphasized in her introduction the distinctiveness of Guillory's work by highlighting what she identified as its three modes: figural, historicist, and literary historical readings. In a typical essay by Guillory, we find ourselves deeply immersed in a historicist account of, say, how the institutional development of Standard English affected the reception and canonization of Thomas Gray's *Elegy in A Country Churchyard* when, all of a sudden, the text switches gears, treating us to a close examination of the poem's tropes and figures. As we are whisked amongst these three different frameworks, Wofford says, we start to re-think the last one we were in and to observe the conversation that occurs between them.

After Wofford concluded, Guillory took the lectern to argue for the place of poetry in the philosophical system Thomas Hobbes outlined in his 1651 political classic the *Leviathan*. While scholars of Hobbes have had much to say about his ambivalent views on rhetoric, they have too often neglected

the role that poetry plays in his work, specifically in his *Answer to Sir William Davenant's Preface before Gondibert*. But it's precisely his complex relationship to rhetoric, Guillory argued, that gives poetry a vital function within the philosopher's project.

Hobbes, Guillory explained, is the philosopher of motion and his dour universe consists of bodies, or matter in motion, pushing toward or away from each other in endless strife. For Hobbes, the laws of motion extend to the way the mind interacts with the world, where the objects of the senses are not seen in themselves, but are interpreted through impressions or phantasms which press in upon the organs of taste, touch, sight, and sound. The emotions, as their name suggests, are moving bodies *embodied*, colliding with one another and derailing the orderly progress of right reason. It is rhetoric that produces this "commotion of the passions," these "perturbations of the mind" and it is against rhetoric that Hobbes directs his ire in the *Leviathan*, claiming that its direct political consequence is rebellion against the sovereign and, consequently, the unraveling of the social fabric.

In this way, the natural science and political philosophy of Hobbes inhabit a single continuum, for the friction between bodies of matter is used as a proto-scientific explanation for the origins of social conflict. Hobbes bridges the gap between the body politic and bodies of matter through the body of man, particularly the embodied mental processes of psychology in the passions and the emotions. Yet, according to Guillory, this complex system of internal and external bodies operating upon one another is troubled by the notion of rhetoric. It is rhetoric that raises the problem of agency at a distance, whether words, images, and metaphors can be just as powerful in their internal effects as the actual objects of sense. If the more controversial claims of Hobbesian politics find their justification in this psychology of corporeal bodies, then it is rhetoric that exposes the weakness of this hinge by producing instances where social antagonism fails to be explained by their interaction.

Just one such instance is the power of words in metaphor in which like to unlike sense impressions are joined together, producing phantasms that trigger the emotions and exceed the bounds of the semantic content of signs. Hobbes trains his sights on metaphor, in particular, saying that they are "like *ignes fatui*, and reasoning upon them, is wandering amongst innumerable absurdities." And yet, as Guillory pointed out, Hobbes cannot base his attack against metaphor without marshaling all the other devices of rhetoric, with the simile on the will o' the wisps in the previous sentence doing just fine to underwrite that very real absurdity. In metaphor, words rebel against their intended meanings just as the dissenters of the state rebel against the sovereign. And, again and again, in his battle with metaphor, Hobbes makes performative contradictions that threaten the autonomy of his system and its orderly procession of logic.

But just as in the political realm where the terms of transcending the violent antagonisms of men are provided by the fiction of the social contract, so the disruptions and scattered motions of rhetoric are resolved by Hobbes into the virtual motion and unity of poetry. And it is in this way that the *Answer to Sir William Davenant* is like a dreamy footnote to the *Leviathan*. Whereas, in the latter work, "the workmanship of fancy" must "be guided by the Precepts of true Philosophy," the former's excursus into poetry shows that when "these precepts fail...there the Architect [of Fancy] must take the philosopher's part upon herself." For it is in the metaphor of the sovereign that Hobbes finds the ultimate embodiment of his own imagination. His excursus into poetry, Guillory concluded, offers a brief respite from the ravages of civil war, a starry-eyed kingdom where all antagonisms and conflict are converted into the fights and flights of virtual motion.

After Guillory finished, he took several questions from the audience members, including Professors Richard Halpern and Wendy Lee, on topics related to the status of Wisdom in the philosophy as well as the lack of mimesis or imitation in the conception of rhetoric Hobbes offers. As these questions proved, Guillory's project will doubtlessly jump-start its own train of commotion amongst the critical spheres of Hobbesian scholarship.

BOOKS THAT WILL JUST HAVE TO TEACH THEMSELVES

THE MAKING OF THE READING LIST

ANDREW SCHLAGER

Every class has on its syllabus a list of the books required for the semester, but by the last day of most classes, students will also have heard a number of other titles: books that, for whatever reason—maybe there wasn't enough time, maybe the novel didn't quite meet the course's objective—could only appear in the class through reference and allusion. Or maybe the author or text hasn't, say, made it into the *Norton Anthology*: after all, professors in survey courses can require only so many "supplementary" works. Maybe the length of some books exceeds the four-month allotment. Or maybe there are those "fundamental" books that professors secretly (or publicly) despise, and so can't bring themselves to put on their syllabi. Maybe a professor loves a book too much to teach it. Or maybe there's some traumatic memory from three or four years ago, when an assigned text was met with such hatred, boredom and evident non-reading that a professor vowed never to teach the book again.



Patricia Crain



Wendy Lee

Professor Patricia Crain, who works on 19th-century American literature, offered us some thoughtful answers and further meditations on some of these questions and possibilities, noting that there are those novels which "by contrast seem to just get up and teach themselves, mysteriously. Which they do, in a way: *Moby Dick*, *To the Lighthouse*." She said she had never questioned teaching a novel because of length, so she teaches *Moby Dick* and Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*. "Long novels teach well, really," she noted, "because if you can make the time, you can capture something about the kind of reading they demand." She also commented on how "field specialization and the demands of the curriculum" have, in the past, prevented her from teaching other authors she loves, such as Jane Austen. Though always professorial in her reasons for teaching demanding work, Professor Crain did admit to a couple of flops: "In the category of novels I regret having taught—if *Emile* [by Jean-Jacques Rousseau] counts: I don't regret having tried to teach it, but I'm sure the students do. Ditto Susan Warner's *The Wide Wide World*, the big weeper of 1850, so important—it was the 19th century's first bestseller—"but really really really hard to take." And regarding novels that she loves too much to teach, Professor Crain confessed, "I'm glad I don't have to teach *Trollope*, because I would have to find a way to protect what has always seemed weirdly like a secret pleasure (a colleague and I once cooked up a fantasy MLA panel to be called "Can You Forgive Us: Reading Trollope for Pleasure")."

The day Professor Wendy Lee, who works primarily with 18th-century British literature, responded about how she does and does not choose novels for her courses proved to be rather serendipitous! "I usually can't teach the most important novel of the 18th century because it is also the longest English novel," she hedged, initially, "but I did it anyway and we just finished it today! *Clarissa* by Samuel Richardson (1747-48). Some of my students set up a blog for encouragement and group therapy." The tumblr, [18th Century British Novel](#), bears the heading, "All things needed to help you sail through the pages of this British literature class," and the most recent post included a gif of Bradley Cooper (in *Silver Linings Playbook*) finishing a novel and then throwing it violently out of a window. Below the gif, one student offered this reflection: "Excuse the profanity [Cooper drops the F-Bomb as he turns the final page], but I ran across this gif and started cracking up like a crazy person because I think everyone has felt this to some degree at some point or another whilst reading this beast of a book. I know I did! I have just read the final words of *Clarissa*. I feel so [euphemism deleted] accomplished right now. Hope everyone's readings are going well!!!" Clearly Prof. Lee's risky change of tactic had a massive payoff for her students, and the internet at large. So maybe those books that seem like they'll never fit on the syllabus can make it to the classroom "in the flesh"—and not just by name—after all.

WRITE LIKE YOU MEAN IT

NYU BOOKSTORE HOSTS AN INSIDE LOOK AT GETTING PUBLISHED

BECCA SOUZA

For those English majors out there who, like me, expected the publishing industry to be made up of polite, slightly nerdy professionals who spend their time chatting with authors and perusing manuscripts, the NYU Bookstore's "Secrets of Publishing" panel offered a realistic cross-section of the industry and an inside look at what it actually takes to get a piece to the press. Every month this semester, the NYU Bookstore hosted a "Secrets of..." event in which a panel of writers, literary agents, editors, and professors met to discuss tips and tricks for making it as a writer. There I found tough, business-minded New Yorkers who sounded like they'd seen their fair share of outlandish manifestos and were glad to give insight on what they think makes a piece fit for publication. Though a few other backpack- and notepad-equipped undergrads popped up throughout the crowd, authors of all ages and walks of life surrounded us. New York Times bestselling author Sue Shapiro moderated the September event, giving generous and brutally honest advice on how to get a work published. "While breaking in, it's formulaic," says Shapiro. According to the seasoned members of the panel, here's what to write and how to write it:

Do your research

Editors look for targeted pieces that match their particular publication's criteria. The New York Times, for example, always looks for timely leads—openings that relate the article to current events. Try submitting a piece aimed at a specific category instead of just a general pitch. If you're submitting directly to a publication, NYU Journalism professor and former editor Frank Flaherty suggested that the author imagine "sitting in my seat" and empathizing with the editor. Read what's already been published, note the tone, and send what fits. For authors trying to submit through a literary agent, another panelist similarly stressed tailoring your proposal to the particular agent you're writing your query to. Tiny things, like addressing your letter to the agent's name or adding a line about the agent's past work can mean a world of difference. A lot of submissions get filtered out right away simply because they don't include the basics.

Invest in your work

Take the time and investment to make sure it's well written. A piece is never finished right after you're done writing it. Use your resources to make the piece the best it can be—being a student here at NYU holds infinite opportunities to improve your creative writing. But if you find you're out on your own, panelists suggest you find readers, attend a workshop, join an MFA program, or even just sit on a piece for a while. If you're interested in YA books, Grace Kendall suggested looking into the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. Shapiro's hardball approach was to "spend money to make money." As professed by the academics on the panel, an MFA in Creative Writing gives you two years' worth of mentors, writer's community, workshops, and a weekly motivation to keep writing, which might be something to consider for undergrads deciding their next step after graduation. Ghost editors are another powerful way to strengthen a piece—if a writer can afford them.

Get an agent

For major publishing houses, all of the panelists agreed that getting a literary agent isn't optional. Houses like Penguin, HarperCollins, and Random House rarely consider submissions without an agent to credit the author's platform. On the other hand, major publishing houses aren't for every kind of work. Be discerning with what your piece calls for, as not everything is fit for the mass market. Look for small literary magazines (*Gulf Coast*, *Pool Poetry*) and niche publishing houses, or consider self-publishing.



A collection of writing "tips"

Know your craft

Publication of fiction requires submitting a finished piece and a one-page query letter with your name, research, and pitch. Literary agent Ryan Haberge called this the "newspaper approach"—it has to include a who, what, where, when and why.

Non-fiction books and memoirs, on the other hand, should submit a comprehensive proposal instead of a completed work. For non-fiction, many editors appreciate a "back and forth" with the author—getting their input in the development of the book helps prevent problems after all the research has been tied up. Haberge recommends a proposal that is anywhere from 55–85 double-spaced pages long, and ideally includes an overview, writing sample, table of contents, and author biography.

Meanwhile, if you're interested in writing YA or children's books, make sure your work is fully written and to sell the editor on your writing, rather than your platform. As Kendall cautioned at the panel, note that authors rarely get to choose their illustrators, and submitting a pair's work together is no guarantee that it will stay together.

Start small

If you're a brand new writer, Sue Shapiro suggests you start with a column. When Kenan Trebincevic, author of *The Bosnia List*, first met Shapiro and told her the story of his war-torn childhood, she told him he needed to write it down. The length of a book originally intimidated Trebincevic. "Start with 3 pages," she advised him, and that was how he began his 336-page memoir. Another of Shapiro's peers created a book proposal from two previous *Modern Love* and *Psychology Today* columns, and now, at 25, ended up a Canadian bestselling author.

But above all else, any emerging writer should have a healthy drive for success. Shapiro admitted her own destructive writing process as a young adult (drink, write, pass out, wake up and panic about getting published) and shared a piece of advice she had gotten from her therapist back then. To succeed at anything, she revealed, you have to try your best to "hang out with the people you want to be" and then "ask good questions when you get there."

THE MYSTERIOUS ART OF THE TA

ANDREW SCHLAGER

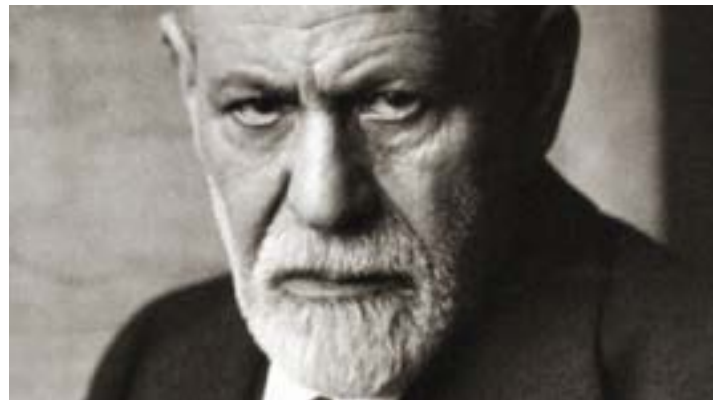
Our old friend Freud, in his essay “Some Reflections on School-boy Psychology,” observes that in the course of “a youth’s development... he comes into contact with his teachers” as “substitute fathers.” Regrettable as Freud’s placing of only men behind the desk and in front of the chalkboard is, I was reminded of Freud’s essay when, during the first meeting of my recitation section for British Literature II last year, our TA, a PhD candidate in the department, pointed out during the last five minutes of our class that she was not our mother.

At first I felt surprised that such a fact needed to be pointed out at all; then, I must admit, a slight sting of disappointment. If I came to you in tears, I wondered, would you turn me away and push me back into the cruel cold world? My TA didn’t seem hard-hearted or insensitive, so I began to consider why she had flagged this fact. Eventually I came to see the statement as a quite progressive and professional assertion of her role in the class, as explicator, interpreter and grader, not as consoler and nurturer.

A few weeks ago I emailed that TA, and asked her if she remembered telling us that she wasn’t our mother, and further inquired about just what she thought the role of a TA was. Is the professor the parental figure, and the TA your older sibling or that one cool aunt or uncle who introduces you to the s-word or Pearl Jam? In her response, she confirmed that TAs are “negotiating a position somewhere between peer and authority figure”; she added that a TA is usually “assisting in classes out of her area of specialization.”

As a medievalist teaching sections of an early American Literature course, she recalled, “I was as much a student as my students were in terms of the material, but I also wanted them to feel that they could learn something from me.” That “something,” she explained, isn’t field-specific: “I consider my main job to be creating an atmosphere where students feel comfortable talking to one another and learning how to form coherent insights about works of literature. Because the focus is not necessarily on my expertise, the class can be free to pursue alternative (even wacky!) questions, references, and strategies for understanding course material.” So the TA isn’t just a kind of model student: instead, she can create a particular kind of emotional and intellectual space where something like expertise is held in suspension; in this zone, a more playful kind of learning can take place.

“I find that students see the TA as somewhat of a mediator and will talk about the course much more candidly with a TA than they would with a professor,” my former TA observed, noting that the TA can, by the very fact of her not being the professor, serve a subversive or challenging role in relation to the professor’s lectures. Some of my favorite TAs have both explicated, elaborated on and pressured professors’ arguments, though not every TA sees it as their place to offer this kind of opinion. There are those TA’s who create a recitation environment that preserves and requires the formality of lectures, and who view their task as further clarifying and recapitulating to students what exactly the professor has been claiming in lecture.



Sigmund Freud

My Brit Lit II TA established a more playful and relaxed dynamic, but she also made sure to define her role. “I also tend to set very clear boundaries with my students from the beginning.... While I never mind a student speaking openly with me about the course or material, and I do strive for my recitations to feel more laid-back than the lectures, I remind them of the many services on campus that can help with more personal issues. I can find my way through seventeenth-century American literature, but I am in no way a qualified counselor or therapist.” That she never lets her position as a TA transform into a therapeutic service or parental attachment (the return of repressed Freud) allows her freer access to all the different identities she slides through in the classroom, creating a richer, more capacious learning environment.

With thanks to Gina Dominick

FALL 2015 IN THE CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE SERIES

PETER TASCA



Artist and author Jill Magid visited Prof. Poovey's class this semester

In recent years, the department's Contemporary Literature Series at NYU has been inviting contemporary authors onto campus and into the undergraduate classroom. Past authors have included novelists Mark Danielewski, Jonathan Franzen, and Zoe Heller, in addition to Pulitzer prize-winning poet Tracy K. Smith. The CLS provides NYU students with the unique opportunity of not only seeing some of the most creative minds on the contemporary literature scene firsthand, but also learning about the distinctive ways in which these writers uniquely and individually engage with the artistic process.

This past semester, several English classes have been graced with a diverse company of artists, playwrights, writers, and filmmakers. Jill Magid sat in on Professor Mary Poovey's Narrative Strategies Seminar; Sibyl Kempson led an exercise in Professor Julia Jarcho's Advanced Playwriting Workshop; and Stanley Schtinter answered questions from students in Professor Sukhdev Sandhu's Contemporary British Literature class. While the program originally placed each author in conversation with an English faculty member, the CLS has also recently begun to highlight the creative achievements of our faculty, with a poetry reading last fall by Professor Maureen McLane, and another in the spring by Prof. Thomas Urayoán Noel, inaugurating what will, with any luck, become a long-standing tradition here at NYU.


This year, on November 2, the faculty spotlight was on Prof. Julia Jarcho who, accompanied by actors Jenny Seastone and Ben Williams, read from several of her plays. Both a playwright and director with the company Minor Theatre, Jarcho's produced works include *American Treasure* (2009), *Dreamless Land* (2011), *Nomads* (2014), and *Grimly Handsome* (2013 & 2015), the winner of an Obie award for Best New American Play. Before the reading began, Jarcho was introduced by her friend and colleague Professor Wendy Lee, who started off her discussion by stating that Jarcho's works "redeem literary criticism." Although Professor Lee noted that Jarcho often receives positive reviews from theatre critics, many of them fail to testify to the complexity of her work. One need only glance at a selection of these reviews—"I can't say I completely got Julia Jarcho's one act 'American Treasure,' but I still liked it," wrote one critic—to register the gap that Professor Lee addresses.

Offering a reading of her own, Professor Lee argued that the wicked and wacky subversiveness of Jarcho's work comes from her deep concern with the notion of intimacy in all of its manifest forms. These include the intimacy of violence, the foreclosure of intimacy in unintelligibility, and the intimacy of the theater as a performative space. In an online interview with CLS fellow Gina Elbert the week before the reading, Jarcho encapsulated the paradoxical form of intimacy in her work by saying "if you asked me what theater does that no other art does, I might say it has something to do with letting a kind of violence emerge between language and reality."

A dramatic reading turned out to suit this type of disruptive energy unexpectedly well. When we go see a play, we anticipate certain dramatic conventions. Even when these conventions are broken, we know they are being broken in the service of a performance. A reading, on the other hand, normally consists of a brief prologue or lecture in which the writer introduces and gives context for the following slice of the work. This lecture portion of a reading is not the performance of the material itself. In purporting to speak to us truthfully about how we are to receive the



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material, it observes the decorum of reality. But not in this case. Getting up in front of the podium, Prof. Jarcho promptly shouted “Romanticism!” It seems to be a lecture: “Let’s all get used to the word,” she continued, “Romanticism...” whereupon she slapped herself in the face, complaining about insects. “Romanticism, in the larval state, attaches to the skin. Chews on you a little and falls away. Normally. Once grown up, well: No longer a threat. No longer an...irritation.” Soon thereafter she made the blithe announcement: “You all look confused,” before lapsing into silence, as audience members’ heads turned and bodies began to shift uncomfortably in their seats.

Bodies began to shift uncomfortably in their seats.

But as the speeches developed, one realized that these performative gaps and hesitations formally double the philosophical issues Jarcho’s characters grapple with. Moreover, it became clear that the question of how one “correctly” stages a play is central to them. “If one wanted to make a piece of, let’s say, let’s say, anything,” Jarcho stuttered, “god demands that you do it as well as god would want you to do it. And since god himself is perfection itself, it follows, it follows—” Yet the divine syllogism for the “correct” way never arrives. The words hang suspended in stammering human mouths. “Because you see the assurance,” she continued in character, “that things are *not* that way, that there is *no* correct procedure, that in fact we—” before finally breaking off, allowing us to observe the ways in which performative incompleteness can act as a salve for its existential counterpart.

This is not to say, however, that Jarcho’s work is gloomy tilt Her bending of theatrical rules demonstrates the idiosyncrasy of her zany wit as much as it provokes serious intellectual reflection. For instance, *American Treasure*, which deals with the irresponsible mythologization of Native Americans, was conceived, she told the audience with a straight face, because the Nicholas Cage movie *National Treasure 2: Book of Secrets* upset her. The plot revolves around the search for a mysterious ancient being named the Hauntus, a macguffin which at once evokes the the traumatic history of Native American resettlement and sets up a punchline for the contemporary character “Poca,” a tough talking antiques dealer who has sold her sister’s scalp. After performing a scene from this piece, Seastone and Williams shifted into a scene from Jarcho’s *Grimly Handsome*, in which—at least for the first act—two Slavic serial killers pose as Christmas tree salesmen. At another point in the reading, a poster behind Jarcho, advertising the CLS event, fell off the wall. Jarcho picked it up off the ground and, without missing a beat, declared, “That’s what you call iconoclasm.”

Observing the scenes from Jarcho’s work as well as the “character” that she played in introducing them, with her nervous tics and self-conscious gestures strategically and theatrically on display, I was reminded of Susan Sontag’s essay “Notes on Camp.” “Camp,” Sontag wrote, “sees everything in quotation marks. It’s not a lamp, but a ‘lamp’; not a woman, but a ‘woman.’” Similarly, the dramatic reading the audience was treated to was not really a dramatic reading at all, but a dramatic “reading.” By treating the “lecture” and the “reading” as genres to be played and tampered with, Jarcho’s work and sensibility profoundly exhibits the notion of camp Sontag described as “Being as playing a Role,” as “the farthest extension...of the metaphor of life as theater.”

NEW FACES IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT: FALL 2015

CYNTHIA DE LUNA

This year, we're joined by two new Visiting Assistant Professor Faculty Fellows, Moacir P. de Sá Pereira and Guadalupe Escobar...



Professor Moacir P. de Sá Pereira came to NYU from the Vilnius Gediminas Technical University in Lithuania and will be at NYU's English department until Spring 2017. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago just last year. In the Fall semester, he started teaching an undergraduate course and co-taught another undergraduate course titled Writing New York. The former course, on digital literary studies, incorporates digital mapping, focusing on American cities and novels. The latter focuses on the cultural development of New York City as seen in literature, poetry, theater, and film. While at NYU, Dr. de Sá Pereira has been working on a book, currently titled "Making Maps," which aims to use geographical information to better understand novels. He hopes to take advantage of all the resources available to him here at the university—through lectures, the NewYorkScapes working group, and other opportunities—and in the city to help him with this project.

Favorite book or author: "Since moving back to the US after six years in Europe, I've been catching up on contemporary novels I couldn't get out there, and my favorite of those, so far, is Nell Zink's *The Wallcreeper*, which is short, funny, and a little weird—all good features for a novel to have. And luckily for me, I think I'll be incorporating that novel into my work soon."

His advice to students in his area of study: "For undergraduates, I'd encourage them to take the time to sketch out the structure of a final paper before writing it. That made a big difference in my understanding the material and made for immeasurably

stronger essays. For graduate students, I imagine I'd encourage them to be certain that their project is something that they really care about, because for the entire lifetime of the project, no one will care more about it than they. That's more important than to pick a trendy topic or something like that."



Professor Guadalupe Escobar arrived from Southern California, where she received her Ph.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research focuses on Latina/o and Latin American studies, and the two book chapters she hopes to finish by the end of the year here at NYU's English department reflect this. The first will revisit Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* (political auto/biography) in its various forms within the context of recent political events in Guatemala, like the resignation of corrupt government officials, including the former President Pérez-Molina. The other chapter will trace queer *testimonio* in the context of Cuban diaspora in the film *Before Night Falls* and in Juana María Rodríguez's "Confessions of a Latina Cyber-Slut."

Dr. Escobar teaches two courses. On Liberating, a Texts and Ideas course co-taught with Professor Jini Watson, focuses on contemporary human rights issues, and her course Testimonial Narratives in the Americas allows her students to creatively engage in a social justice topic of their choosing.

Favorite book or author: "God."

Her advice to students in her area of study: "Master writing—even if it's a life-long process. You'll reap many rewards from the art of persuasion. Also, dream big. Then determine deadlines for the dream(s) with *realistic* goals."

The following distinguished visitors have also joined us...



Professor Maebh Long was here for the fall semester from the main campus of the University of the South Pacific, located in Suva, Fiji. She studied at the National University of Ireland, Cork and received her Ph.D. from Durham University, UK. While here at NYU's English department, Dr. Long researched Flann O'Brien and conversations on immunity and autoimmune diseases, as well as hosting an international conference on Oceanic Modernism in February 2016. She taught two courses in the department: a section of Major Texts in Critical Theory, and Deconstruction and the Contemporary, which focused on Derrida's early texts and engaged them with contemporary issues.

Favorite book or author: "If I have to choose one, I'll name Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*, a darkly comic novel of murder, philosophy and bicycles, written in Ireland in 1940 but not published until 1967, as the publishers O'Brien approached found the text rather too strange. It deserves an even greater audience than it now has."

Her advice to students in her area of study: "I would advise students to try to develop the skill of slow reading. English majors tend to be passionate readers, which often means absorbing books quickly and enthusiastically. But reading slowly and carefully, with thought and attention to detail, is an important skill, particularly for those interested in theory. I would like us to remember that while a love for our material can often lead to a certain frenetic energy, that energy should be channeled into precision and focus, rather than overviews which push us quickly on to the next question, text, or project."



Global Distinguished Professor Isabel Hofmeyr was at NYU's English department during the fall semester, and will be returning to teach every other year until 2021. She visited from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. Last semester she taught an undergraduate senior seminar on post-apartheid literature and culture and a graduate course that focused on narratives of the Indian Ocean World. Dr. Hofmeyr was on her second visit to NYU's English department. Her stated goal was to use her knowledge of the postcolonial Indian Ocean and post-colonial Africa to help further the department's offerings in such courses. She also hoped to further her own research in those areas by using the resources we have available here at NYU and in the city.

Favorite book or author: "Currently it's the British-Zanzibari writer Abdulrazak Gurnah whose novels capture the deep, layered complexities of the Indian Ocean arena."

Her advice for students in her area of study: "With the rise of India and China, the Indian Ocean arena is the coming strategic arena of the twenty-first century. Yet, especially in the realm of literature, we know relatively little about this zone. The field is wide open for bold and imaginative thinkers who are prepared to take risks."



Professor Jenny C. Mann joins us this year from Cornell University. She received her Ph.D. from Northwestern University. She is currently teaching two courses here:

Utopia: Thomas More to Science Fiction, and Shakespeare & Science. In the spring, she will teach Shakespeare and Film and a graduate course titled Renaissance Non-Humanism. Each of these courses raises questions about the relationship between literature and science and between early modern texts and later genres and forms of media. While here at NYU, Dr. Mann hopes to complete some of her research projects—one of which involves Renaissance theories of eloquence and magnetism—to catch as many plays as possible in the city, and to teach enjoyable classes. The latter shouldn't be an issue, since she finds the students here to be bright, creative, and engaged.

Favorite book or author: "If I had to commit to a favorite right this moment, I'd say Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*. If you're asking me what book I'd take to a desert island, the answer is Michel de Montaigne's *Essais*."

Her advice for students in her area of study: "Don't be put off by texts that don't initially make sense or seem in any way 'relatable.' Read slowly, ask lots of questions, and stay open to the possibility that you might be transformed by the strangeness of the past."



Professor Helge Jordheim is visiting us until June 2016 from the University of Oslo, Norway, the same university where he received his Ph.D. While here at NYU's English department, Dr. Jordheim has been working on a Re-enlightenment Project with our Professor Clifford Siskin and others. This project aims to reinterpret Enlightenment ideals and understand how society has inherited and changed those ideals. Professor Jordheim is also working on a book currently titled "Synchronizing the World: The Making of Modern Progress." Last semester, Dr. Jordheim co-taught a graduate course with

Professor Siskin called *Conceptualizing the World*, which focused on the globe and its many representations from the eighteenth century onward. Now, in the spring semester, he teaches an undergraduate course called *The Cultural History of Time*.

Favorite book or author: "At the moment: *His for Hawk* by Helen Macdonald."

His advice for students in her area of study: "Dare to be original and cross disciplinary borders."



Professor Murray Pittock visited us last semester from the University of Glasgow. He is particularly interested in a number of transdisciplinary studies such as 18th- and 19th-Century Studies, Irish Studies, Scottish Studies, Cultural History, and Material Culture. These fields of interest have overlapped with the talks that he has hosted for the English department in the past few months. He held an 18th-Century British Literature Workshop in September and a talk on Edinburgh's Enlightenment in October. He also had the chance to speak to members of the department's community about the way that urban space and the modern university affect each other. While at NYU, he worked on the Re: Enlightenment Project alongside Professor Jordheim and other professors both within and beyond NYU's English department.



DEPARTMENT NEWS IN BRIEF

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

Prof. Tomás Urayoán Noel's book *In Visible Movement: Nuyorican Poetry from the Sixties to Slam* received honorable mention in the competition for the MLA Prize in United States Latina and Latino and Chicana and Chicano Literary and Cultural Studies Winners.

Prof. Nicholas Boggs received a Camargo Foundation Residency Grant for his book-in-progress about James Baldwin's collaboration with French painter Yorán Cazac. The grant comes on the heels of the publication of his article "Little Man Little Man: A Story of Childhood," on Baldwin and Cazac's "children's book for adults," in *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin* (ed. Michele Elam, 2015).

Taesha Muhammad has been selected to participate in an Artist Residence in Morocco for the month of February. Green Olive Arts' CONVERGENCE Residency is a very competitive intensive that invites artists from a broad spectrum of creative practices to a season of shared research and production. On this fellowship, she will be studying in Tetouan and Marrakech. Her work will be featured in the Art's Biennial in Marrakech in March, April and May.

Prof. Crystal Parikh co-edited (with Daniel Y. Kim) the *Cambridge Companion to Asian American Literature*, which was published in August 2015. She also co-authored (with Helena Grice) a chapter, "Feminisms and Queer Interventions into Asian America" in the *Companion*. In addition, she has recently published essays and chapters in *Keywords for Asian American Studies*, *International Journal of Human Rights*, *Routledge Companion on Human Rights*, and the MLA's *Teaching Human Rights in Literary and Cultural Studies*.

Prof. Sonya Posmentier's essay "A Language for Grieving" appeared on December 21 in the *New York Times Book Review*. The piece argued that recent race-related controversies in the poetry world should be seen in the context of larger and longer "traditions of mourning and reconstruction in black poetry."

Prof. Maureen McLane's review essay on Anne Boyer's *Garments Against Women* appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* on December 24, 2015. Prof. McLane's next book, *Mz N: the serial: A Poem-in-Episodes*, will be out from FSG this May.

Critical Terms For the Study of Gender, edited by **Prof. Catharine Stimpson** and Gilbert Herdt (University of Chicago Press, 2014) was named one of the most significant academic titles of 2015 by *Choice*, a journal of the American Research Library Association.

Prof. Carolyn Dinshaw has been named a Silver Professor at NYU.

Prof. Catherine Robson's essay "How We Search Now" was published in *Virtual Victorians: Networks, Connections, Technologies* (ed. Andrew Stauffer and Veronica Alfano; Palgrave, 2015). She also wrote the introduction to *The Liddell Book of Letters* (USC Press). This April, she'll deliver the Cloud Lecture at the College of William & Mary. Prof. Robson will also be the inaugural director of a new British Studies MA program, to begin at NYU London in the fall of 2017, and will be hosting, with Purdue University's Dino Felluga, a supernumerary conference of the North American Victorian Studies Association at NYU Florence in May 2017.

Prof. Martha Rust was invited to give a paper in one of a series of workshops put on by L'Agence nationale de la recherche ("the French version of the NEH") under the umbrella "Le Pouvoir des Listes au Moyen Age"; the title of her paper, delivered in October, was "Tens, Sevens, Fives: The Power of a List's Cardinality." For another invited workshop, at the University of Michigan, Prof. Rust was tasked with finding a co-author in another field; she found medieval historian and expert on taxation Lawrence Poos, and they wrote "Of Piers, Polltaxes and Parliament: Articulating Status and Occupation in Late Medieval England." She also published a paper with a colleague in the Silver School of Social Work and a blog post on the Huntington Library blog, *Verso*.

The MA Committee congratulates **Joshua Krutchen** and **Cherrie Kwok**, who have been selected as participants in this year's Polonsky Foundation-NYU Digital Humanities Internship Program. (Interns, who are expected to dedicate approximately 300 hours during the summer months of 2016, receive a taxable honorarium of \$5,000 and dedicated support in using digital humanities methods and tools, as well as on-going project management support by NYU faculty and the Digital Scholarship Services at NYU Libraries.) **Mary Alcaro**, **Ryan Campagna**, and **Jessica Zisa** have all been awarded funded places in the late-spring week-long intensive skills course "A Folger Orientation to Research Methods and Agendas."

PhD students **Christina Squitieri** and **Jordan Hall** have been offered funded places at Folger seminars: Christina will be attending "Shakespeare's Theatrical Documents," a symposium with Tiffany Stern; Jordan will be participating in the semester-long seminar "Reformation of the Generations" with Alexandra Walsham.

Professor Wendy Lee's article "The Scandal of Insensibility; or, The Bartleby Problem" appeared in the October issue of *PMLA*, a special issue on emotions.

Professor Simón Trujillo's article "'USA Is Trespassing in New Mexico': La Alianza Federal de Mercedes and the Subaltern Historiography of Indo-Hispano Mestizaje" was published in the Fall 2015 issue of the Chicano studies journal *Aztlán*. It was also one of six essays published over the past five years to be selected by the editors of *The Chicano Studies Reader: An anthology of Aztlán* for the volume's third edition.

WRITERS:
CYNTHIA DE LUNA
ANDREW SCHLAGER
BECCA SOUZA
PETER TASCA

DESIGNER:
ELIZABETH HORNER
FACULTY SPONSOR:
JULIA JARCHO

THEORYGOERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!

PETER TASCA



As often as not, an English major's first encounter with critical theory is acutely confounding. Words like *Nachträglichkeit* and *bricoleur* bounce across the room, ricocheting off the conference table into the far, untrodden corners of the mind. For the newcomer on the scene, being thrown into a discussion about *différance* or gender performativity can seem more like being forced to participate in a game of intellectual jai alai than a meaningful exercise in dialogue.

But we here at the Blotter want to ease your worried mind. Because, as the immortal Sam Cooke once said, there's only one thing we can do. Baby, if you let us take you by the hand we're going to teach Adorno to you. We've asked several graduate students and faculty members from the NYU English department to contribute one word from critical theory that has been particularly important to their work. And what we found was that the terms that came up in our discussions were precisely related to this issue of pedagogy, of making both literature and theory relevant and accessible to students.

Second year PhD student John Linstrom, for instance, has found the term "mediation" useful for his work on the relationship between literature and agriculture. This past summer, John worked on a farming collective, an experience which gave him the practical and firsthand knowledge of the material he had only previously known through the "mediation" of the authors he had been studying. Thus, for him, the word "mediation" opens up the possibility for investigating things not traditionally thought of as texts. In this way, working at the farming collective prompted John to meditate on how the transformation of agricultural technologies mediating the relationship between humans and land may effect a corresponding change in the textual mediations of the poem, novel, or movie.

Similarly, fifth year PhD student Cameron Williams's work on poetry and sound has often incorporated the concept "standpoint epistemology." According to Williams, "standpoint epistemology" accounts for the possibilities and limitations for producing knowledge that are the conditions of a structural position in society. While studying botany as an undergraduate, Williams first encountered the idea through reading Donna Haraway's *Primate Visions*. In her book, Haraway expresses a

desire for a feminist science, using the term "standpoint epistemology" to acknowledge the social construction of knowledge and at the same time maintain the possibility of its objectivity. After reading Marx and Lukacs, Williams learned that "standpoint epistemology" originated as a materialist theory of consciousness, particularly as an account of the formation of proletarian consciousness. For Williams, the idea that our material life affects our imaginative life—and may even limit it—is one that can be uncomfortable but is ultimately necessary to confront.

On this note, relating the complexities of the theory to students from different backgrounds has prompted various faculty members to emphasize certain terms as instruments of pedagogy, as ways of bridging potential gaps of mediation or alternate societal positions. So, for John Guillory, the word "media" has become useful for situating the verbal artifact as one medium among many in the age of the computer screen. The fact that many students enter more easily into screen media than page and print is a challenge to any teacher of literature. Yet Guillory takes it as an opportunity for making historical change interesting and meaningful, for showing how the word as a mode of transmission comes with its own unique pleasures.

On a similar note, Maureen McLane values the word "poesis" not just for its complex etymology and resonance, but for its affiliation to what Percy Shelley described as "poetry in the general sense." "Poesis" has its root in the Greek verb "poieo," which means "to make." For McLane, "poesis" signifies any type of imaginative or creative act, thus enabling one to speak of poetry not just in the restricted sense of verse but as skeleton key that cuts across historical, linguistic, and generic boundaries.

And, as a scholar of Jacques Derrida and the school of deconstruction, Juliet Fleming says her entire academic career has been devoted to thinking about the word "writing" or *l'écriture*. In her Derrida class, Fleming urges her students to take nothing for granted, to be aware of the way in which even the most self-evident things, such as the immediate presence of a voice, may paradoxically turn out to be the effect of an absence, an unconsciously swift pen stroke producing the dreamy apparition of subjectivity.

Although her class attracts many ambitious and intelligent students, what Fleming likes about it is that it is a great leveler, one that is in many ways empowering. After her students initially stumble over the dizzying complexity of Derrida's thought, they are asked to take forty lines of a passage from one of his works and merely describe the steps to the argument. In doing this exercise, Fleming says, her students are hereafter able to think and write more precisely.

In this way, students and faculty in the NYU Department of English have been putting paid to the myth of critical theory's inaccessibility, showing how even a vocabulary regarded with suspicion or trepidation can give rise to a diverse and imaginative poetry of its own.

Words like *Nachträglichkeit* and *bricoleur* bounce across the room, ricocheting off the conference table into the far, untrodden corners of the mind.