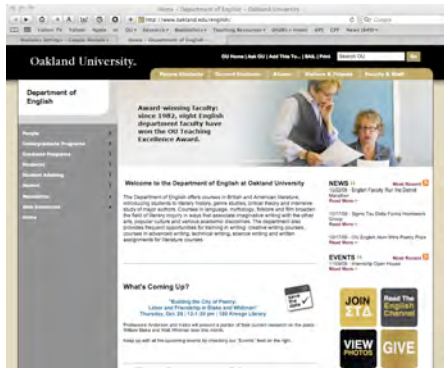


Extreme Makeover: Website Edition



oakland.edu/english

In addition to the ongoing experiment of making *The English Channel* the most cutting-edgiest English department newsletter around, we've recently revamped our department website (more details are on pages 23 and 24). Along with a streamlined design, snazzier images and more up-to-date announcements of news

and events, the new site also features smooth integration with *The Channel* and greater interactivity, inviting submissions of various kinds from you, our dear alumni.

At the new site, you can subscribe to our news and events feeds, submit to *The Channel*, give to the department Gift Fund, and tell us your career story. This last feature (more details are on p. 23) aims to help inform current and prospective English majors about the variety of career options available to students of film and literature by gathering information from the folks living those careers— you!

Like the newsletter, the new website is a work in progress. New information, new features, and more bells and whistles are in the works. We've got ideas, if nothing else. So please pay us a cyber-visit, catch us up, share your story.

Also in this issue

Gertrude White

A Special Collection of tributes

Students Behind Bars

But in a good way...

American Idol... again?!

We can't believe it either

A rock called Bob Dole

Fiction by Jeff Chapman

Teacher Man

McCloskey remembers McCourt

Student Poems

And they're really good!

... and remember

lift with your legs, not your back—
this issue is stuffed full like a
Thanksgiving turducken!

The English Channel

The Alumni Newsletter of the Department of English

OU English Alum Wins Iowa Poetry Prize



Molly Brodak

Oakland University English alum Molly Brodak (BA, '04) has won the 2009 Iowa Poetry Prize. The Prize is awarded annually for a book-length collection of poems written originally in English. Iowa University Press will publish Molly's collection of poems, entitled *A Little Middle of the Night*, in 2010. It will be her first full-length book of poems. Molly's chapbook, *Instructions for a Painting*, won the Green Tower Press Chapbook Series Award in 2007.

On hearing of the award, one of Molly's former OU professors, poet Ed Hoepfner, said, "We're extremely pleased that Molly has won the Iowa Prize, which is, simply put, one of the most prestigious awards for poetry in the country. Molly's work is beautifully executed, turning microcosm toward the larger issue of the presence of the self in a world fraught with the surprising and the ominous, revealing the hidden blades in the music box. We're additionally pleased that Molly did her graduate work in creative writing at West Virginia, where she studied with Mary

Ann Samyn, who is on the faculty at WVU and is herself a very accomplished poet who also received her B.A. in English from OU." Molly currently teaches English at Augusta State University in Georgia.

For more information on Molly's prize and her forthcoming collection, you can [read the full press release from Iowa University Press](#). Regular readers of *The Channel* may also recall reading Molly's wonderful poem, "Make Belief," which appeared in our previous issue and is [available for online reading](#) at the department website. Molly will come to OU for a reading on April 1, 2010. Please [check the department website](#) in the months to come for event details.

Come to Ireland in February!

In conjunction with his course in Irish literature during the winter semester, Professor Connery is organizing a trip to Ireland, February 19-28, and all OU students, alums, faculty, and staff are invited. Participants will spend four days in Dublin, seeing the city, including the National Library, the National Museum, Trinity College (and the Book of Kells), Kilmainham Jail, a backstage tour and performance at the Abbey Theatre, a literary pub crawl, as well as excursions out of the city to Newgrange, the Boyne Valley, and the Wicklow Mountains. Then the group will head west to Galway and a day trip to Inis Mor, the largest of the Aran Islands; and then, after exploring the Burren, it's off to the north to Yeats country in Sligo. Then back for a day of leisure in Dublin, and home. The current cost per person is estimated at \$1560 - \$1950, plus airfare, depending on the number of participants. For \$230 more, you can sleep in two-star hotels instead of youth hostels. Interested parties who want more information, should [contact Professor Connery](#).



Cassiebawn Castle, on Mulloughmore Head Co. Sligo.

Brown Poetry Reading Excites Students

This year's Maurice Brown Memorial Poetry Reading, the 22nd in the series, featured two Michigan poets, Dennis Hinrichsen and David James. As always, the occasion drew together old friends, alumni, retired faculty, and students. Student Christina Shalauylo agreed to share her impressions of the event:

When I heard the first poet, Dennis Hinrichsen, begin reading, I was blown away. He read seven poems, with subjects ranging from a lizard he spent time with in Florida to visiting his father's body at the morgue to make sure he was no longer alive. His work was powerful and moving; time seemed to pass too quickly.

Before each poem, Hinrichsen told stories to give background information about himself and his work. He told of a car accident that he'd been in while still in high school where he was the only survivor. That led to the poem, "On Purgatorio I." The way he described the scene and aftermath of the filled me with a sense of how precious life is.

Hinrichsen also seems to write about his father often, especially his father's addiction to the bottle, as if he's harbored these intense feelings for decades; as if he's trying to find some resolution to these horrible experiences through his writing, which seems dear and utterly close to his heart. My favorite was called "Kurosawa's Dog," which also happens to be the title of his latest collection. When he says in the poem that his sins are partially his dead father's, I was overcome with emotion.

The second reader was the talented and witty David James. Though all of his poems led to a good laugh or two, James doesn't consider himself a humorist. He read aloud a series of ten poems, beginning with "Burning Bush of Sorts." This one was rather amusing, telling a short story about a man who has an encounter with God. He hadn't even read a minute when I knew I was going to thoroughly enjoy every second he read.

The poems that followed all gave us a good laugh, no matter what the topic of choice was. When James wrote about death, as in "Dear Death" and "On Your Terms," there was humor involved and a sense of lightness, unlike Hinrichsen's heavier, thought-provoking pieces. One of his many poems touched was about country music. Not being a fan of such music, when he read "How to Fall in Love with Country Music," I felt like I could relate in a strange way. The most hilarious poem, which also happened to be my favorite, was "Dead Horses," about a dead horse, as the title clearly describes, and how low maintenance it would be to keep, and the many potential uses for one in your household. When he began reading, it almost took me by surprise at how ridiculous it was!

So I arrived at the reading ready to earn extra credit, and I walked out with two new poetry books, Dennis Hinrichsen's *Kurosawa's Dog* and David James' *She Dances Like Mussolini*. My night was well spent as I learned more about poetry and the people who create it. I'm so glad I went!

David Hinrichsen's recent books include Kurosawa's Dog, Cage of Water and a chapbook, Message To Be Spoken into the Left Ear of God. David James's first book, A Heart Out of This World, was published in 1984. He has since published four chapbooks, including: Do Not Give Dogs What Is Holy; I Will Peel This Mask Off; and 2008's Trembling in Someone's Palm.



*Top: David Hinrichsen; Middle: David James;
Bottom: a rapt audience*

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR by Susan E. Hawkins



Despite the late start of the semester, the department has embarked on another incredibly busy year. In October the Maurice Brown Memorial Poetry Reading drew a large and committed crowd of poetry-lovers (See page 2). On November 23rd we will present our Fifth Annual Read-In in the Fireside Lounge, beginning at 8 a.m. Please join us for the kind of marathon everyone can win, a reading of Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth*. This fall also marks the inauguration of the long-awaited Cinema Studies B.A., which has far exceeded enrollment expectations and now boasts 32 majors!

In this season of change we welcome our newest faculty member, Jeff Chapman, a specialist in fiction writing with expertise in poetry and literary nonfiction as well. Jeff's background and interests are providing students with new course opportunities; for example, this semester he's teaching a capstone seminar in the graphic novel. And perhaps the most exciting news for many students will be the return of English 312: Mythology, which Jeff will teach in 2010-11.

And speaking of excitement, mark your calendars now for a truly special event—Janette Turner Hospital's reading on March 22nd at 5 p.m. in the Banquet Rooms of the OC. (See page 16) A native Australian, she now holds an endowed chair as Carolina Distinguished Professor of English and Distinguished Writer-in-Residence at the University of South Carolina. Included among her many awards is Australia's prestigious Patrick White Award for lifetime literary achievement.

Finally I want to thank those of you who have given to the department gift fund in the past and to ask those of you who haven't, please think about doing so. The best way to maximize the benefits of your gift is to **donate to the All University Fund Drive**, underway now. For every dollar contributed, the president matches half, and that means our gift account can continue growing and supporting our many activities.

Shakespeare Connects with OU English Department

The Department of English was well represented at "Shakespeare Connects," a conference for teachers, scholars, and performers of Shakespeare held at Grand Valley State University in October. The keynote speaker for the conference was Curt Tofteland, founder and artistic director of the acclaimed Shakespeare Behind Bars prison acting company. Tofteland described his experiences working with the inmates of Kentucky's Luther Luckett prison where he facilitates their discovery of themselves through Shakespeare's work.

Professor Niels Herold presented a paper titled "Gen Ed Shakespeare and the Limits of On-Line Education," a discussion of his work developing an on-line Shakespeare course. He displayed students' submissions to the on-line discussion format, noting that the course has enjoyed positive results over the past three years, and described the educational benefit of the course: "On-line course delivery has the promise of truly democratizing education, so that no particular cohort is being taught at the expense of any other. Every student in the class is called upon by the course design to post and respond, and the context that facilitates this good participatory citizenship is one in which the concrete classroom no longer exerts its institutional power on the inherently social interactions that make any learning environment rich with possible outcomes."

Professor Amy Spearman presented "Female' Stage Properties: The Object of Marriage," a discussion of the relationship between stage properties and female characters on the early modern stage. She argued that the real world commodification of early modern women—particularly upper middle class women—in the marriage arena, as reflected through dowry exchanges and unequal property rights, is mirrored on stage by means of gendered props in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and *The Merchant of Venice*.

Angela Walentovic, an English STEP major and Honors College student, discussed her work on applying prison

Shakespeare to high school English instruction, presenting a version of her Honors College senior project, which grew out of an HC 202 class in which Herold introduced her to Tofteland, who engaged Angie in the question and answer period. She compared the two instructional situations, emphasizing the need to look at the lessons students learn from performing Shakespeare's plays either in the classroom or in the prison setting. Angie is currently student teaching at Utica High School.

"Shakespeare Connects" proved to be a valuable professional opportunity for students in the Secondary Education Teacher Education Program. Kayla McCabe, currently student teaching in Walled Lake, says the conference gave her ideas for updating the study of Shakespeare: "As a student teacher, I took away some very useful ideas on how to use modern technology such as the Internet, movie adaptations, and video cameras to make Shakespeare more interesting and accessible to students." Other conference attendees were STEP English majors Amy Crecelius, Lauren Moore, and Ashley Curran and advisor Nancy Joseph.



Kayla McCabe, Niels Herold, and Angela Walentovic

In Memoriam: Gertrude White, 1915-2008



"Old Oak" Gertrude White

[The Department of English and the OU Community mourned the passing of Gertrude White in 2009. We offer the following lively and heartfelt remembrances in her honor, with special thanks to Jane Eberwein for assembling them. -Ed.]

Beloved Professor

Gertrude M. White, one of the most beloved and admired members of Oakland University's charter faculty and a founding member of our Department of English, died August 13, 2009 at the age of 94. Although she had retired in 1981, she remained a dedicated friend of the university and continued to enjoy visits from alumni friends and colleagues whom she dazzled with her unfailing aptness in quoting poetry as well as her thoughtful interest in their well-being.

A native Rhode Islander, Gertrude Mason earned her bachelor's degree at Mount Holyoke College, her master's degree at Columbia University, and her doctorate at the University of Chicago, where she wrote her doctoral dissertation under the direction of Ronald Crane (founder of the "Chicago School" of literary critics). After her marriage to William White in 1952, they lived in England while Bill completed doctoral study at the University of London and then settled in the Detroit area when he took a position teaching Journalism and American Studies at Wayne State University. Two sons, Geoffrey (named for Chaucer) and Roger (named for her ancestor, Roger Williams) soon arrived, growing up in the Whites' book-filled, pet-enlivened, and hospitable home in Franklin.

Despite her exceptional academic accomplishments and teaching experience at the University of Chicago, McGill University, the University of Maryland, and Wayne State, however, Gertrude found few career opportunities in higher education. The chair of a notable English department in this area acknowledged her qualifications but refused to consider any woman for a tenure-track appointment. For a while, she

did radio book reviews for Hudson's department store. Later, she taught literature and biblical history at Cranbrook's Kingswood School. Then, when Oakland University was founded, Chancellor Durwood Varner hired Dr. White as one of the charter faculty upon recommendation of two mothers of her Kingswood pupils who recognized her suitability for this new academic venture. One of these mothers was Mrs. Roger Kyes, and it was because of her great respect for Professor White that she and her husband endowed Oakland's first scholarship, designating it specifically for English majors.

Although hired initially on a nine-month contract, Gertrude White greeted this new opportunity with eagerness and turned out to be an ideal choice for teaching at this experimental and academically ambitious university where she was the oldest member of the faculty. Always an enthusiastic learner, she loved developing new courses and displayed an exceptional range of capability, happily teaching in the Western Institutions program as well as English and offering classes in Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Faulkner as well as poetry and Victorian literature. Another of her delights was team-teaching, whether with Marilyn Williamson in her own department or Melvin Cherno from History, Dolores Burdick from Modern Languages, or Clark Heston from Philosophy. Despite her elite educational advantages, Gertrude brought varied, practical teaching experience and took a more realistic attitude than many of her colleagues to the challenges of teaching students of sharply varying capabilities and levels of preparation. In **Paul Tombouljian's interview with her for the Oakland University Chronicles**, she commented wittily on the problems faculty faced in those early years with establishing and maintaining academic standards. "In this business about lowering standards," she remarked, "I would hate to stand before a tribunal of people from the University of Chicago, where I took my doctorate, and talk about lowering standards, but you really have to deal with what you have got. If you are a cook and

you have got chili, you can't make a soufflé. And you cannot give people what they are not equipped to take. So that I think that it is necessary and sensible to temper the wind to the shorn lamb, and give them as much as you can and as high a standard as you can, but remember that things aren't the way they were with Socrates and Plato." Of course, she also found exceptionally able and responsive students for whom education at early Oakland opened long-term opportunities. She thrived in the hopeful environment of the young university, recalling later that "I was having the time of my life, because...those early years were just sort of out of this world, they really were."

When I was hired in 1969, Gertrude was introduced to me by then-chairman Robert Hoopes as the best teacher in the department. She was a generous teacher of teachers, serving as mentor and friend to junior faculty – including myself. Never one to pursue popularity, Gertrude could

Gertrude thrived in the hopeful environment of the young university.

intimidate students with her formidable intellect and patrician manner until they discovered her merciful temperament and nurturing support for their talents. Her teaching emanated from a passionate, lifelong love for literature coupled with authentic concern for individual students. The advice she gave in the Tomboulion interview came from experience: "It is my impression and opinion, firmer than ever in my old age, that you cannot teach anyone how to teach... What you have to do is grab somebody who really loves something and force them into a classroom and say, 'Make these people love it.'"

She was also a model of scholarly energy, writing *Wilfred Owen* for Twayne's English Authors Series (1969) and co-authoring a book on the sonnet with Joan Rosen. Her articles on topics ranging from Chaucer's "Franklin's Tale" to E. M. Forster's *Passage to India* appeared in *PMLA*, *Sewanee Review*, *Philological Quarterly*, *Victorian Studies*, and *Criticism* among other journals. Early publications had to be written in the few weeks each year between the end of Oakland's winter semester and her sons' liberation from schools, but she continued writing well into retirement, often contributing to the *Chesterton Review* and to the *Oakland Journal*.

In a new university, there were frequent calls on faculty for service commitments, and Gertrude toiled on her full share of departmental and university committees – serving as coordinator of English in the days before departments and spending twelve years as an elected member of the University Senate. During my first semester at Oakland, she served on the Senate Steering Committee that faced the awkward task of meeting with staff of State Senator Robert Huber, who – in the light of an indiscreet, if comical, episode of male nudity during student presentations on Yeats in Professor Thomas Fitzsimmons's class – was intent on demonstrating that Oakland faculty were corrupting students by encouraging political activism and moral turpitude. As Gertrude recounted that meeting, she reported that faculty simply held to their normal teaching roles. When challenged to declare what percentage of their faculty colleagues were "activists" or "radicals," she responded by calmly directing her questioners to define their terms – something they had apparently never considered. It turned out, she reported, that "activists" were faculty members who taught without wearing neckties. Another unwelcome assignment that she handled with reluctant grace was the role of AAUP press spokesperson during the faculty strike in fall 1971, a task to which she found herself assigned just as she returned from a year's leave. More enjoyably, she played Old Judas, the melodramatic villainess, in the 1969 faculty production of "Under the Gas Lights."

A venturesome couple, Gertrude and Bill White occasionally absented themselves for teaching opportunities elsewhere – notably in South Korea in 1963-64 and Boston in 1970-71. Bill eventually joined the Oakland faculty to launch the Journalism program, and both Whites retired in 1981. Honors continued to follow Gertrude: a special

Her teaching emanated from a passionate, lifelong love for literature coupled with authentic concern for individual students.

College of Arts and Sciences Teaching Excellence Award and appointment as Distinguished Professor of English Emerita. In retirement, she and Bill taught in Israel and in Florida, lived briefly in California, visited their older son and his family in Australia, and settled for a while near the University of Virginia. When Bill's health declined, they returned to Michigan. Bill died in 1995 after a long and happy marriage. Gertrude mourned deeply for him and for many friends over the years but continued writing, attending university events such as the annual Maurice Brown poetry readings, and getting together with former students and colleagues. She liked keeping up with university news and was always especially curious about how many women were on the faculty.

Despite her performance skills as a professor and her many warm social interactions, Gertrude pursued a lifelong spiritual journey that was largely private, even lonely. Raised as a New England Congregationalist, she immersed herself in the academic world of the mid-twentieth century and found herself first attracted to its ethos of disbelief and then quietly resisting it. Although her husband and many friends remained skeptical of religious claims, Gertrude joined the Episcopal church and then, on her return from Virginia some years after her retirement, surprised me by announcing her plans to be received into the Catholic church and asked me to be her sponsor. Although never reconciled to a lectionary based on scriptural translations not found in the King James Bible, she determined that the most "complete" commitment to Christianity led to Rome, "pope and all." My sense is that G. K. Chesterton and Gerard Manley Hopkins had more influence on her conversion than any doctrinal study. Yet she remained open to all forms of worship, even joining Jewish friends at shabbat services in one of the senior residences where she lived in recent years – but only so long as she felt confident the Hebrew would be read well.

Right to the end, Gertrude remained passionate about literature. Last winter, she was reading a biography of Samuel Johnson that was a Christmas gift from her son Roger. She had stacks of books around her and often recited apt passages from Shakespeare, Yeats, and other favorite poets. At the end of one of my visits this spring, she asked me to locate her Robert Frost volume in one of her bookshelves and leave it with her to re-read favorites from *A Boy's Will*. The last stanza of the final poem in that book, "Reluctance," comes to my mind often these days as I remember Gertrude White:

Ah, when to the heart of man
Was it ever less than a treason
To go with the drift of things,
To yield with a grace to reason,
And bow and accept the end
Of a love or a season?

—Jane Eberwein, *Distinguished Professor of English, OU*

Students and Colleagues Recall “The Grande Dame”

Entering my combination English and Western Civilizations course on the first day of class of my freshman year at Oakland, I noted that the tables were arranged in a rectangle accommodating 20 or so students. There were two professors, one at each end of the room. They called it the Chernow-White College. The year was 1961.

The two-semester course had no textbook. We read in paperback the works of Thucydides, Descartes, Pascal, the Venerable Bede and on and on. Our first assignment was to read and outline the first 100 pages of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*. I was 17 years old.

The class was based on dialog and inquiry, between the teachers and students, and sometimes between the teachers themselves. We experienced the works directly, mainlining ideas. I remember, while leaving class one day, mentioning to Gertrude that Nietzsche seemed to be a harbinger of Freud. She, Mel and I, mostly they, discussed it for several minutes in the hallway. It was for me a sublime moment.

I was in awe of Gertrude. She had committed to memory more poetry than I had read. She would recite beautifully, her head tilted back, her eyes closed. The class was transfixed. On ending, she'd pause a moment, room completely still, look up, and smile. It was intoxicating; I always wanted more.

She also introduced me to *The Stuffed Owl: An Anthology of Bad Verse*. This was poetry by fine, sometimes great, poets, such as Wordsworth, who happened to hit a clinker, perhaps several. As an example (probably not from the book, as I think about it, but never mind) she quoted, “Dante stands with one foot in the middle ages and, with the other, salutes the rising Renaissance.”

When I said something about putting Descartes before the hearse, she reminded me, in a deep, mock-serious voice, that, while a pun is the lowest form of humor, I didn't have to drag it through the mud. I can still see her eyes twinkling.

Gertrude instilled and furthered my love of literature, and of poetry in particular. She said things I'll never forget. During a class discussion on knowledge, she said that among the most important benefits of a liberal arts education was learning how to use one's free time. In this and in so many things, for more than a few decades, you were my mentor, madam. Thank you.

—Robert McGowan, written for Gertrude's 90th birthday, edited on the occasion of her passing

FOREVER AGELESS

Gertrude White was a wonderful teacher who made literature come to life. She was a charmer, energetic, never at a loss for words, and passionate about her work. I looked forward to her class lectures. It's hard to imagine that she is gone. I thought she would always be there at Oakland. After I left OU, another former student of hers and I spent an afternoon with her. She was fun to be with, and I thought she would stay the same, forever ageless. I will always remember her with fondness.

—Marjorie Sandy

Arriving at OU when it was still being hailed as “the Harvard of the Midwest,” I knew Gertrude almost from the very beginning. Even in those early days, we all saw her as our “grande dame,” the very doyenne and champion of all things literary. In retrospect, it's hard to remember how very young she was, and already being held in such high esteem among colleagues and students.

I think of those years as OU's “classical” age (we still had a Classics Department!). It was during that era that OU was running an experimental program called the Freshman Exploratory. Incoming students were asked to read a particular book in advance, and then convene in seminars to discuss it with a faculty member prior to the opening of regular classes. One year the required reading was *Antigone* by Sophocles. Gertrude and I were each assigned a seminar, which happened to be meeting in adjoining classrooms.

I shall never forget running into her in the hallway just beforehand. Humbled by the prospect of dealing with a giant like Sophocles, I had been fretting about the assignment the entire previous day, but Gertrude looked fresh as a daisy. “Oh Gertrude,” I murmured, “What are you going to say?”

“I have no idea,” she replied with a wink and smile. “I never really know until I hear it coming out of my mouth.”

Galvanized by such a display of confidence, I walked into my classroom quite transformed. I cannot recall what I ended up saying about *Antigone*, I only know I was able to smile at the students as I waited to hear what was going to come out of my mouth. I do recall that the seminar was something of a success, and that I owe that success to my encounter with Gertrude. This is my chance to pay her my debt of teacherly gratitude.

She always had something fresh to offer in the way of an idea. Whether it was during a trip we shared to Stratford, or a course we team-taught, or parties we hosted together, Gertrude was always a source of inspiration. Above all, she possessed the talent of devotion. No one valued friendship more than she did, nor served it better. I shall miss her always.

—Dolores Burdick, Professor of French, Emerita, OU

ONE OF THE GOOD MOUNTAIN CLIMBERS

When Gertrude and I taught English together we were both devout Episcopalians. She managed to be a believer. I still manage to be an atheist. She loved to recite to me that “Easter Hymn” by the best of atheists, A. E. Housman, where he admits the possibility of – believe it or not – Christianity.

I don't know where Gertrude is, and, to invoke Lord Byron, neither do you. If she is in heaven, she is bored stiff. If she is in purgatory, she is one of the good mountain climbers. If she is in hell – and she is the first to say there's a chance – she looks the devil into his squinty evil eye, and the devil, I think, blinks.

—James Hoyle, Professor of English Emeritus, OU

A MENTOR AND A FRIEND

Just a few days more than a half century ago, I arrived on the campus of MSUO, a 17 year old freshman in what would come to be known as the Charter Class. The first class I attended was the beginning English course. I was fresh off the farm, away from home for the first time. I wanted to become a high school English teacher, but I was absolutely terrified. There were only freshmen and thus no one could point to anyone having succeeded in a previous year or even quarter. My fears were justified. There were more failing grades that first quarter than there were students enrolled.

But that English class I entered was taught by Dr. Gertrude Mason White. I was in awe of her knowledge and expertise. She was, sadly and frighteningly, not impressed by what I wrote in the first essay I submitted. She asked me to come to see her, and of course I did, trembling as I entered her office. She suggested that I was not ready for college English. I was devastated and asked if I could rewrite the paper. I explained that my high school English teacher had been the football coach. She agreed to let me revise the paper. I rewrote it five times before resubmitting it. The paper was given a B, and my quest to become an English teacher began in earnest.

Dr. White was my English professor all three quarters of my first year. (MSUO was on the quarter system then.) I then

No one, save for my parents, had more influence on my life than Gertrude White.

take several more courses from her. Eventually, I returned to be her graduate associate as I earned a Master's degree. Once again, I took multiple courses from her.

No one, save for my parents, had more influence on my life than Gertrude White. She was much more than a good teacher and scholar. She was a great teacher who loved what she taught and whom she taught. She was brilliant, and I loved her. She was not only my mentor but became my dear friend as well. During the fifty years we knew each other, we were never out of touch. I became a close friend of Bill, her husband, and even attended a World Series game in 1968 with him. I remember vividly how Bill had told her he had tickets to the fifth game of the series. He was very excited, and she replied,

"Bill, it's only a baseball game to me. Why don't you take Jim?" It turned out to be the pivotal game of the series, and Bill and I talked about the game for years.

I had watched their sons grow up, and then the Whites were a part of my children's lives as they grew up. I named my first son, Thomas Mason Drummond, after her. I remember the pain and loss I felt when Gertrude called me to tell me that Bill had died after his long illness. Now, of course, Gertrude is gone, too, leaving a chasm in my life. Many East African cultures believe that when someone dies, that event leaves a hole in the universe. The loss of Gertrude White certainly left a hole in my universe.

While attending a seminar on teaching, I was asked to describe the best teacher I had ever had in one word. Fifty or a hundred words would be much easier than limiting myself to

one. I really struggled to limit myself to a single word. Eventually, I wrote down "gracious." There were, of course, many other words I could think of, but when I told Gertrude, many years later, what I had written, she seemed genuinely pleased with my choice.

I learned a great deal about writing and about literature from her. Even more importantly, I learned how to teach from her and how to win over students' trust and confidence. Let me conclude by slightly misquoting a couplet from her favorite poet:

Sownynge in moral vertu was her speche,
And gladly wolde she lerne and gladly teche.

—James H. Drummond, BA '63, MA, Professor of English Emeritus and Executive Dean Emeritus, C.S. Mott Community College

THE LOOK

It was what I came to call The Look. With the slightest tilt of her head, she would stare at me, a side-long penetrating glance really, not saying a word, but letting me know in no uncertain terms whether she was pleased...or not.

Occasionally, she would give herself away too soon, as when the corners of her mouth would curl up ever so slightly, or, every now and then, downward. This woman, who possessed the most remarkable internal lexicon, could send a message loud and clear without uttering a word.

The first time I saw The Look was in the midst of my first time lecturing as a graduate assistant. The course was Eng 105 – Shakespeare. The play: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The classroom in O'Dowd Hall was enormous, so I had to use a microphone, which only served to draw even more attention to my trembling voice and uncontrollable I-am-new-at-this nervousness. I wanted to run, or at least faint, so that the students would be sent away, allowing me to recover, never to step foot in a classroom again.

As I attempted to relay the importance of Shakespeare's use of comedy in the play, I stopped mid-sentence and turned to look at Gertrude, who was sitting about five feet to my left, arms folded across her chest, not staring at me, but at the students. She did not look pleased.

Then I saw her gaze shift ever so slowly from the rows of uninterested students to me. Her eyes were the only part of her body that moved, and The Look may as well have been a six-foot neon sign that all but shouted: "Do NOT give up! Do NOT give in to them! Keep going, Miss Linda!"

I turned back to face the students and finished that lecture, voice still quivering and knees still knocking right up to the end. I did not ask Gertrude what she thought about the job I did. I already knew, because I had not quit.

There would be many more encounters with The Look over the next twenty-four years, but not nearly enough. I was enormously lucky to experience the ones I did, and fortunate indeed to know this beautiful woman, who was remarkable in so many ways.

—Linda McCloskey, Special Instructor, OU

“WHAT IS THIS WORLD?”

On 25 September 1975, as a junior-year English major, I was summoned to Professor White's fifth-floor Wilson Hall office to discuss serving as student representative on the Undergraduate Programs Committee. In those days, you ran background checks on faculty by visiting the basement bookstore in the old Oakland Center and consulting a stenciled compendium of Instructor Evaluations. Gertrude M. White's write-ups either called her great and inspiring or swore that as a grader she was hard and even mean.

Long afterward she recalled my looking in at her door and tentatively asking, “Professor White?” Nothing survives of that interview, except that I did attend the weekly Committee meetings (and observed the politics operative in even the most amiable of departments); and that, thanks to some remark of mine, she wound up wondering, “Just how old do you think I am?”

Being only 20 (and a very young 20 at that), unaware that she was an “Old Oak,” a veteran of OU's founding years, I hazarded, “50?” That I missed the mark by a decade tickled her no end.

January found me in a course devoted to one of Professor White's specialties, Chaucer. She patiently schooled us in the intricacies of Middle English, and by exploring various *Canterbury Tales*, then *Troilus and Criseyde*, imbued us with her deep affection and affinity for Chaucer's humanity. What delicate, decisive import she gave those haunted lines from “The Knight's Tale”:

“What *is this world?* What asketh men to have
Now with his love, now in his colde grave,
Allone, withouten any compaignye.”

As a grad student I took her Victorian poetry seminar, and in Kresge Library, under her tutelage, we learned every fundamental of literary scholarship while appraising Tennyson's melancholy (“The woods decay, the woods decay and fall”), Arnold's modernity (“Where ignorant armies clash by night”), and Browning's crackling technique (a vision of a fourteenth-century auto-da-fé, “The Heretic's Tragedy”). Her passion for poetry fed the poet-in-training in me, and with her encouragement I wrote a senior essay on the life-work of that

Her passion for poetry fed the poet-in-training in me.

penetrating lyricist and critic, Louise Bogan. By that time, as a regular visitor to the Whites' home on West 14 Mile in Franklin, Gertrude had fed me much else too: asparagus, quiche, chocolate mousse, Dry Sack – she was a splendid cook and hostess. I can still see the front yard's large white metal sculpture, designed by their elder son Geoffrey (whom I met only once); her study, with its heterodox array of books (how on earth had she met up with Félicien Rops?); her husband Bill's study, shelves crammed with international Hemingway editions, desk stacked with typescripts, proofs, and offprints, as befitted a journalism professor and master bibliographer; the kitchen which boasted, still in service, one of the first dishwashers ever produced; two huge housecats, which younger son Roger sometimes had to quarantine – Duffy, the cross-eyed cashmere-eating Siamese, and Monsignor

Joseph T. Cambodia the Third (aka Joe); the modern art prints and tabletop sculptures in the living room, with windows north and south, and a Regency fireplace. . . . I loved going there, though each visit challenged me to act more confident than my gawky social self actually felt.

Such maturation came about, in part, during many long talks with Gertrude. She recounted her experiences as a young woman at the University of Chicago, home of the venerable Manly-Rickert edition of Chaucer, where she took her doctorate and encountered the Scots literary scholar David Daiches, whom I met at their house in April 1980. I surprised her by tracking down *You Will*

Die Today! – “A Red Badge Detective Mystery,” 1953, dedicated “To My Mother” (who died on

Christmas Day, 1952). Had I picked it up in a used book shop I'd have fingered “R. I. Wakefield” as Gertrude: the title, and the titles of each chapter, are phrases from Housman, another enthusiasm she and Bill shared. “Terence, this is stupid stuff!” she wrote on my copy's front flyleaf. “A voice from the past . . . to the present . . . and you I don't really mind reading it.” My doing so prompted a discussion of murder, its motives and possible justifications, such as preserving that one thing which a person values above all else. With relish she drolly quoted, “There are few situations in life that cannot be honourably settled, and without loss of time, either by suicide, a bag of gold, or by thrusting a despised antagonist over the edge of a precipice upon a dark night.” That came from another of the Whites' penchants, Ernest Bramah's tales concerning the storyteller Kai Lung, recounted in elegant faux-“Mandarin” English. Other pithy aphorisms were Gertrude's own: “No outsider ever knows what goes on inside a marriage.” But to hear the two of them remember attending the Indy 500 when the boys were young, so Bill could file immediate eyewitness accounts with the *Rochester Clarion*, or her complaints about traveling with “the monster” (“This man never has to go to the bathroom!”) left no doubt that their union was both deep and cheerful.

For those visits were hardly all academic high-mindedness. One night before supper the TV was tuned to a show about exotic fauna. Upon seeing one presenter, Gertrude imitated a favorite cartoon critter, Sylvester the Cat: “Sufferin' succotash, that's Burgess Meredith! He was an old man when I was a little girl!” She was indignant that an ungainly jungle bird turned out to be her namesake. “Whenever they give an ugly animal a name, they always choose ‘Gertrude!’” Turning to me she asked, “Did you know that the Pocket Books kangaroo mascot is called ‘Gertrude’ too?” I didn't mention Hamlet's mother.

The flow of fresh ideas did continue through the books she lent me – F. L. Lucas's *Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal* (1936, still a startlingly modern book); Elinor Wylie's *Collected Poems* (“As I went down by Havre de Grace. . . .”); *Journey from Obscurity*, a family memoir by Harold Owen, brother of Wilfred (Twayne published Gertrude's book on his work and life); David Daiches's memoir *Was: A Pastime from Time Past*; Belloc's and Chesterton's poems, and *The Man Who Was Thursday*. . . .

(continued on p. 9)

She was indignant that an ungainly jungle bird turned out to be her namesake.

She wrote often for Father Ian Boyd at *The Chesterton Review*, including critiques of Muriel Spark's later novels. "This one I'm not ashamed of," she claimed of the anthology she collaborated on with Joan Rosen, *A Moment's Monument: The Development of the Sonnet* (1972). Two PMLA classics, "A Passage to India: Analysis and Reevaluation" (1953), and "The Franklin's Tale: Chaucer and the Critics" (1974), were much admired and reprinted; but another journal's repeated postponement of an article's appearance made her marvel, "I don't know how anyone lives long enough to get published in an annual."

Despite this record, Gertrude lamented her lack of ambition, whether about writing or one of her perennial diets (though she possessed a nostalgic hourglass figure). She credited it to "a New England conscience – strong enough to make you miserable, but not strong enough to make you change." Nonetheless, she made starts on several murder mysteries (a genre she read incessantly) and a memoir, *The Houses of Memory* (titled after Blake), structured round the far-flung places they had lived. Special-occasion verses she could turn out on demand, chagrined that she had no hand for "serious" poetry.

But she did write innumerable, memorable letters, on pastel half-sheets and blue-bordered personal postcards precisely filled with print, tapped out on a portable whose distinctive typeface seemed the visual equivalent of her voice. She wrote from Greece, amid the windmills of Mykonos; from Haifa, Israel, where she and Bill had accepted teaching appointments during a very dangerous period; from Australia, while visiting their granddaughters, in whom she took great delight.

Gertrude never lost her gift for surprise, as when she gave me, for my birthday once, the Book of Common Prayer; and later – strange bedfellows! – Camille Paglia's *Break, Blow, Burn* (titled after Donne), with 43 poems granted exemplary close readings. I was the one to hunt out, for her and Bill, Walter de la Mare's 1946 lyric anthology *Love* (which includes Vita Sackville-West's magnificent "The greater cats with golden eyes"); but Gertrude was a living anthology. I might mention a line from "The Cloud," by Shelley ("I silently laugh at my own cenotaph"), but she knew them all: "And out of the caverns of rain, / Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb, / I arise and unbuild it again." When I won the Department's Ekphrasis Poetry Contest in 2005 (and then, almost inadvertently, in 2007), the best part was sharing the news with her. She was the sort of person you were proud to make feel proud of you.

In her memoir, years earlier, she had written, "A loving heart will suffer at any age, nor is it a consolation to know that deeper griefs await it." Bill's death was a loss she endured but

never overcame; such is the tax exacted by love. "The flower is gone; now I must sell the bran," she would echo the Wife of Bath, alongside Frost's "Provide, provide!" Phone conversations in later years, when we were far apart, invariably adverted to our mutual hero, Dr. Johnson, eloquently celebrated in Walter Jackson Bate's *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson* – though sometimes it proved difficult to follow his lead and "find new topicks of merriment, or new incitements to curiosity." But I'd also heard both Bill and Gertrude cite, laughingly, the Doctor's dictum that second marriages were "the triumph of hope over experience"; and laughter was the

keynote of many White family anecdotes, her mirth coming in little contralto gasps, as her eyes squinted and twinkled. One such story, which Gertrude never tired of telling, dealt with an older student she once had, a free-spoken loose-cannon "faculty spouse," as they were then called. She came to the office to protest a hard grade, given to an essay which contended that Edmund Wilson was full of a noun not uncommon in

Middle English. When Gertrude mildly suggested that this word did not quite suit scholarly discourse, the woman stood up and, in one mighty sweep, shoved everything on the desk onto the floor, then reared back and, shaking her finger, thundered, "You – have a long way – to GO – and GROW – and BE!" — A few minutes after she took leave, another undergrad, looking in at the door, asked Gertrude, sitting stunned amid the debris, "Professor White – are you all right?"

Now, working as proofreader for The Library of America on texts that range from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Philip K. Dick, I find that everything taught me by Gertrude, and the English Department, and the OU community comes to my aid, for you cannot properly proofread a classic unless you understand where it comes from. My first LOA assignment was two volumes of Edmund Wilson's essays, including his evocation of Edna St. Vincent Millay, whose sonnets Gertrude taught me to love: "See where Capella with her golden kids / Grazes the slope between the east and north. . . ." And wherever I come upon a passage from Chaucer, and find myself still able to read it, I recall her reciting these lines from his "Balade de bon Conseyl." ("Ghost" signifies one's inner spirit, and the last phrase means "never fear."):

Her is non hoom, her nis but wilderness;
Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!
Know thy countree, look up, thank God of al;
Hold the heye wey, and lat thy ghost thee lede;
And trouthe thee shal delivere, it is no drede.

—Warren Keith Wright

Using Oakland's original grading system, Gertrude was easily a 4.3, whether she was being evaluated as teacher, scholar, colleague or friend. Like many others, I benefited from Gertrude's wisdom and generosity. She was without guile or ambiguity; her knowing smile said it all: at once gentle and equally penetrating, alerting me on more than one occasion at departmental meetings to consider most seriously the validity of my comments. Gertrude's smile is what I remember most – no moments of anger or vitriol – and it is what I think of now at her passing. She was a wonderful person and I shall miss her greatly.

—Nigel Hampton, Retired OU Associate Professor of English

ELEGANT, YET EARTHY

In my very first semester at Oakland University, I was lucky enough to end up in a pair of classes team-taught by Professors Gertrude White and Mel Chernow, which – due to a printing error in the course schedule – comprised a total of six students. The course focused on World War I; Mel taught the history and Gertrude taught the literature: Aldous Huxley, Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, T. S. Eliot, etc.. The extraordinary student/teacher ratio (as well as the extraordinary teachers) made the class a real joy, although I suspect the Powers That Be were not exactly delighted; it must have “cost” the university a small fortune.

Our first contact was not exactly auspicious; Gertrude mortified me by calling me “Shelly” throughout that first day of class. Unfortunately, Shelly was not my name, but my father’s. He was a colleague of Gertrude’s at the university and, naturally, I was desperate that this fact should not become known by any of my fellow students. At one point during the class, she passed very near where I was sitting, and I took the opportunity to say – as unobtrusively as I could manage – “My name’s not Shelly!” She took it in her stride and apologized to me after class. She also never called me Shelly again.

Something Gertrude said during the early days of that class has remained with me for the rest of my life, although I doubt she ever realized how great an impact it had on me. We were discussing what a writer is, and she quoted some fellow who had said something like, “A great writer is not someone who has a message to impart, but simply someone who enjoys playing with words.” This made me think about writers and writing – and myself – in an entirely different way. While I had always enjoyed and been “good at” English in school, I had never thought of myself as someone who might possibly become a writer, because I felt I did not have anything much to say; I figured that in order to be a ‘proper’ writer, one did have to have some great message to impart – or at least an important story to tell. The idea that good writing meant playing with words was a revelation to me – and an encouraging one. “Playing with words,” I thought. “I can do that...I really like playing with words.” Suddenly, Writing was not something done only by Great Writers, but (potentially) by mere mortals like me, as well.

I would love to be able to relate that this was the turning point in my Great Literary Career, and to reveal that my writing is revered in critical circles, worldwide, but this is – sadly – not the case. However, what this change of outlook did do for me was allow me to feel that “playing with words” was not just fun but worthwhile in and of itself and it encouraged me to continue playing with and enjoying words for the rest of my life, whether or not I ever end up writing anything that might generate even the faintest of ripples in the Literary Establishment.



In a similar vein, Gertrude radically changed my view of poetry. BG (Before Gertrude), poetry pretty much left me cold – even though I liked words, and reading, and “that kind of thing.” I didn’t dislike poetry; it just didn’t do much for me, even when I read Great Poems by Great Poets, which I did only if it was for school). But when Gertrude recited (declaimed? imparted? no...perhaps shared is the best word to use) a poem, suddenly I could see what all the fuss was about. I’m sure many other people will say this, but Gertrude had a real gift for bringing a poem to life. In her loving ‘hands,’ the sense of the words became clearer, and their power absolutely compelling. BG, whenever I read a poem, the voice I heard in my head adhered strictly to the poem’s meter (if it had one), generally reducing even the most moving of verses to doggerel. Listening to Gertrude, I appreciated – for the first time – the delicious tension between the meter of the poem and the rhythm of individual lines.

I live in England now, where one is (a little) more likely to encounter poetry in day-to-day life, especially on the radio. It is not unusual to hear world-class actors and actresses read and

recite poetry – passionately, brilliantly, and movingly, but I have yet to hear even one of them who has – in my opinion – exceeded Gertrude in full flow.

At the conclusion of the course, Mel and Gertrude invited the class over for dinner. I don’t remember in whose home we actually dined, but it was a lovely meal, and afterwards we were introduced to yet another horizon-expanding, life-changing aspect of Culture: Anna Russell singing/ explaining Wagner’s Ring Cycle. (If you have never heard of Ms. Russell, you have an incredible treat in store; it is still possible to buy her recordings online and/or to [view her on YouTube](#), and trust me, you will never regret doing so.) I knew almost nothing about Wagner’s music, but I laughed so hard my stomach hurt. I believe

it was also the first time I heard Tom Lehrer.

By the end of the semester, I had become an English major. Not, mind you, because I had any intention whatsoever of obtaining an English degree, but because it meant I could have Gertrude as my advisor – which gave me the opportunity to continue seeing her now and then even though I was no longer in one of her classes. As it turned out, I had the treat of another class with Gertrude yet to come.

In January of 1978, the Honors College was in the second semester of its first year. Its directors were keen to ensure that HC students were taught by OU’s very best: master educators who had the ability to motivate and inspire – as well as teach. I can attest to this because my father (yes, the aforementioned “Shelly”) was one of the HC’s directors, so I was well aware of the serious concern and consideration that went into selecting the faculty and staff during the crucial first years of the College. Thus it happened that Gertrude was entrusted with the care and continued nurturing of the (entire) foundation HC class in its second term, Judy Brown having had the distinction of teaching the very first term. (*cont’d on p. 11*)

The course focused on Hemingway. (husband Bill was a leading authority on Hemingway, whose Hemingway collection was one of the best in the world.) On the first day of class, Gertrude asked us, “Why do we read?” and the first or second answer she received (from Diane Geffert, now Diane Smith, if I remember rightly) was “For fun.” Gertrude surprised us by admitting that this was indeed the answer she had been “looking for,” but apparently the surprise was mutual; Gertrude conceded that she hadn’t expected us to come up with the “right” answer quite so soon. It seems that when she asked this question in other classes, the idea of reading for fun (sadly) rarely came up without prompting (if at all).

Years passed; I left OU (and Michigan) and pursued a career in graphic design, but Gertrude and I stayed in touch. Gertrude was good about sending succinct – but evocative – missives on plain white postcards. When she and I managed to get together, I loved hearing about her travels with Bill, their experiences teaching in exotic places, as well as their time as impoverished graduate students in (equally impoverished) post-WWII England. We also enjoyed talking about words and writing; for me, Gertrude was someone special with whom I could let down my guard and share thoughts about such things. It was a profound pleasure to have a good friend who so relished words and language. I will treasure those memories.

Judging by what I have written so far (if you didn’t know Gertrude), you might by now have an impression of someone so very Cultured as to be a tad stuffy, but please banish such thoughts immediately, Gentle Readers, for such a cruel misapprehension would be folly indeed. For example....

I don’t remember how the subject of pornography came up in class one day (it may have had something to do with censorship and/or writing about sex explicitly, or perhaps the idea that “Less is More”), but it did. Gertrude confided in the class that when her husband Bill found out she had never seen a porn flick, he was astonished and resolved to remedy that sad state of affairs – straight away. He hustled her off to one, where, she confessed, she had “thoroughly disgraced” herself ...by falling asleep.

Clearly, the problem with porn was not sex: it was simply its lack of subtlety. Likewise, the problem with abolishing the visiting hours curfew in the dorms was not what young men and women might get up to. Gertrude cheerfully allowed as how there was nothing going on these days that didn’t happen in the good old/bad days as well; it was just that, back then, it required a great deal more in the way of determination, creativity, and ingenuity to accomplish such things – as well it should.

Elegant yet earthy, Gertrude was dignity itself – but without being stuffy, a tad on the formal side, perhaps, but never pompous; not unkind, but very direct and not afraid to speak her mind. (One of my brothers also attended OU and took a couple of courses from Gertrude. I recall him telling me about Gertrude’s response to his parody of a Wordsworth poem (apparently he did not hold the original poem in quite the same high esteem as she did): “Kevin, God may forgive you for that, but I never will.”)

One regret I have is that I never managed to learn Gertrude’s pen name. She told me once that she had written a murder mystery-type novel – under a pen name. Intrigued, I asked her to reveal it so that I might obtain and read the book, but she declined this request, indicating that she didn’t think it was good enough to warrant the attention. Of course, this piqued my curiosity and, feeling sure that even an effort she did not herself rate highly would be well worth reading, I repeated my request, but without success. I persisted over the years, asking almost every time we met, but she never relented.

This may well explain her fondness for “Murder, She Wrote,” with Angela Lansbury. Accompanied by Niko (her elegant Siamese companion of many years), she would settle down in front of the telly to watch Jessica Fletcher solve a mystery in 52 minutes (or thereabouts). Come to think of it, she had a fair bit in common with Misses Lansbury and Fletcher...being a lively, literate, intelligent, handsome, articulate, and accomplished woman of a certain age. Moreover, she knew – intimately – literature, her own mind, and how to enjoy life.

Dignity, playfulness, and passion are not words that one generally thinks of as belonging together, but in Gertrude they met – and merged. Gertrude was an object lesson in how to play with passion (in every sense of those words). Come to think of it, if I was forced to come up with one word to describe Gertrude, I believe it would be passionate. Passionate about Bill – the love of her life (she missed him so very keenly after he died) – and her children; passionate about words, poetry, language and literature; and passionate about sharing her passions – which is what made her such a wonderful teacher and educator – and such a wonderful friend, as well. Her passion was truly inspiring, and if I have absorbed even a small portion of her capacity to live passionately, then I count myself as lucky indeed.

When I knew I would be visiting the Detroit area this past August, one of the things I was most looking forward to was seeing – and talking with – Gertrude again. (I also thought I’d have another crack at worming her pen name out of her.) Sadly, when I did see her, she was in the hospital and by then unable to communicate. Unsure whether she would know who I was or even what I was saying, it occurred to me that surely her passion for poetry would be one of the last things to slip away, so I resolved to visit her again and (as I lacked her magnificent capacity to recite at will) read her some poetry. My first thought was to find some online, print it out, and bring it with me to the hospital. Then, thinking I might not be the only one who had not come prepared with poetry, I hit upon the happy idea of stopping at a bookstore and buying a book of poems to leave behind in her hospital room, which would have the advantage of allowing others to share poetry with her.

I spent my last visit with Gertrude reading poems to her. I wished I could have rendered them even a fraction as well as I remembered her doing, but I did the best I could. Then I said goodbye.

Gertrude, you have no idea how much I miss you. To be honest, I had no idea just how much I would miss you...but I will miss you. Passionately. Your friend,

—Vikki Appleton Fielden

A MOMENT'S MONUMENT

I first met Gertrude White when I came to Michigan as a new bride and a recent Vassar College graduate with a BA in English. Gertrude was already teaching English at Kingswood School, Cranbrook. I was terrified because this was my first “real” job. Gertrude immediately recognized my terror, calmed me down, inspired me with her confidence, and told me, as no one else could, “to stop being foolish and get right in there.” From the moment she first spoke to me, I knew I had found a friend and a mentor. We established a relationship in that year at Kingswood which would last for the rest of her life. She encouraged me, she prodded me, she allowed me to observe her teaching; she taught me more about loving literature than I had learned in four years of college, and she is the reason that I aspired to university teaching. She put me on what we now call “a career path” which I have followed and which I have loved all of my life.

Gertrude and her husband, Bill, together with my husband, Bob, became the closest of friends. Even when the Whites were off on their travels to places such as South Korea and Israel, we communicated often by mail and by phone. Together we spent week-ends, especially at Stratford, where we enjoyed plays, criticized performance, often arguing and then laughing at our “reviews.” We shared some points of view and disagreed heartily about others, but always with a great deal of affection.

Some of the most delightful evenings Bob and I spent in the first few years of our marriage were the “soirees” at the White’s home in Franklin. Gertrude was a marvelous cook who delighted in French cooking adapted to her New England style. Few could put Rhode Island and Paris together in the kitchen as Gertrude did. Her cooking was as good as her teaching – varied, surprising, delicious, and not to be forgotten, especially the soufflé.

Perhaps more important than the food she provided for us at those lovely parties was the nourishment she gave me as she recited the poetry she loved, and led me into a cornucopia of tantalizing literary banquets.

Just before Gertrude left Kingswood to begin her career at Oakland University, she convinced me to go to graduate school at Wayne State University where I applied for and received a graduate assistantship. She believed in me and, as so many of you know, it was that certainty she had about what each of us could accomplish that pushed me into a place I never thought I would be. We spent that first year of my graduate studies talking about my work and her first exciting year at Oakland, sharing both our joys and our occasional lack of patience with both teachers and colleagues. We talked often about poetry: I was interested in Yeats as poet and playwright; Gertrude gently pushed me into writing an essay on Yeats, which I could never have done at that stage of my life without her encouragement.

At the conclusion of Gertrude’s second year at Oakland, she asked me to apply for a part-time teaching position there. I could not believe it. Even though I had not completed the PhD, she told me that the Department of English needed someone to work with the freshman writing program and to teach one literature course; there was no doubt in her mind

that I was that person. I remember exactly what she said. “Don’t argue with me or tell me that you can’t do this job; of course you can and you will.” All I had to do was meet with Robert Hoopes, Department Chair. Well, I did – there begins the tale of my association with Oakland. For the next thirty-five years I remained a member of the English Department faculty. I credit everything that I accomplished in academia to the friendship, mentorship, and encouragement of Gertrude Mason White.

Gertrude and I, at her suggestion, wrote *A Moment’s Monument*, an anthology of sonnets. She came to me, asked that I be co-author; again, she would not allow me to say no. It was on that project that I really learned how to do research, how to read

galley, how to trust my own judgment about the poems. We would talk for hours about inclusions and exclusions – what made each sonnet special, why one made the cut and another did not. Working out our definition of the sonnet form together clarified much for both of us. She taught me that to define one looks within the work, as it contains its own identification. I am forever grateful for the lessons I learned while writing with Gertrude. Her presence, her sense of the appropriate, her knowledge of the poems and their history amazed me. I always felt I would never be as brilliant as she, but it never mattered to her or to me – we were friends, we were colleagues, and we shared our love of literature and its history.

I know that literature, especially poetry, sustained Gertrude to very end of her life. Equally important, however, was friendship and love. She and Bill remained friends and lovers until he passed away fifteen years ago. She nurtured her sons, Geoffrey and Roger, providing them with the best – opportunities to travel and opportunities to learn. Nothing gave her more pleasure than spending time with Bill and the boys. I remember, a summer day in 1958 when the four Whites and the two Rosens were enjoying an outing at the Jonah Pool on the grounds of Cranbrook. Gertrude was the swimming instructor; Bill was the designated lifeguard. All four splashed, laughed, and thrashed, delighting in each other’s antics. They seemed to me the perfect family. Gertrude cared not only for her family, but also for her friends; she kept in touch with people all over the world, telling me often how much she loved her Israeli friends, wishing always that she could go back and see them. She mourned the loss of many of those to whom she was devoted – her brother, Tilden, her Franklin neighbors, college friends, graduate school professors, and colleagues. Every loss was a blow to her; with each one some of the love and the light disappeared from her life.

When I think of my friend, I reflect on our definition of the sonnet, which Gertrude personified: her beauty came from deep within her soul. For me, she was and always will be poetry, which Rossetti described as “a moment’s monument.”

—Joan Rosen, Retired OU Associate Professor of English

RESEARCH REPORT

Summer in the Archives *by Andrea Knutson*

This past summer I had the privilege of spending ten weeks in Cambridge, Massachusetts in order to do archival research at Harvard University's Houghton Library. In preparation for a new project examining the concept of conversion (salvation through belief in Christ) in the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I wanted to read the correspondence between him and his Calvinist aunt, Mary Moody Emerson (1774-1863). I was also eager to read the journals she kept, which she called her *Almanacks*, as well as the four notebooks Ralph Waldo used to record and carefully index her ideas. Gaining access to Mary Moody's writing, especially her *Almanacks*, was essential for understanding what it was about her Calvinism, her individuality, or her intellect that so inspired and impressed her nephew. He called his aunt his "muse" and claimed that in her prime she was the best writer in New England. He also considered her his lifelong intellectual companion. Yet aside from a small collection of her letters, the majority of her work remains unpublished even though, as Emerson's biographer Robert D. Richardson has argued, her writing reveals "more about the formation and workings of Emerson's mind than the twice-edited letters to and from Carlyle."

Archival research requires stamina: This trip was my introduction to such an extensive archival project. Ten weeks seemed like an expanse of time, but of course it went quickly. The most difficult part at first was learning how to read Mary Moody's handwriting. It took much more time than I thought it should to figure out, for example, whether a particular scribble was a D or a B, so unfamiliar were the loops and lines, and as soon as I thought I had a particular letter figured out, the next time it appeared in a different word it became unrecognizable. There was also her creativity in spelling, her abbreviations, and her beautiful abstractions—clusters of images she used to encompass an idea—to contend with, yet these were introductions to a woman who became more interesting and powerful with each sentence. The time and effort were worth it. Having mastered her handwriting and private language, a new world was revealed. Her body of writing spans seventy years, so I was hopeful that I would find what I was looking for in terms of gaining a better understanding of the specific contours of her Calvinism, but I was not prepared for what it meant to enter her intellectual and spiritual universe.

You meet new people: Because they are a sustained meditation on her faith, her *Almanacks*, specifically, offer a spectacular personal vision of God's relations with humanity, a cosmos whose energy and structure depends on individual efforts at knowing truth. They also reveal a larger-than-life figure, a brilliant and stubborn woman with a great sense of

humor. She playfully referred to her nephew Ralph Waldo as Radulphus Waldo, and he, in turn, called her his "dear" but "difficult and despotical" aunt. Above all, they called each other "friend," even though she often had to beg him to return her journals, explaining that they were her "home" and she

couldn't get along without them. Her *Almanacks* also astound, demonstrating her powerful synthesis of literature, theology, and philosophy. She wielded logic and what she called her "imajination" in defense of revelation, arguing that the mysteries behind how the mind works—the unknowability of causes—prove the mysteries of revelation. According to her, the more one understood the poetry of Dante or Milton, or the philosophy of Locke, Kant, Spinoza, or Hume, the more clear the workings of grace or the truths of the

gospel would become. She read Condillac, Paley, Coleridge, and Plato, as well as the Scottish Common Sense philosophers Dugald Stewart and Thomas Reid, because to dwell on ideas was to become closer to God, to explore a variety of states of mind was to open oneself up to glimpses of the idea of God. She called that imaginative place of abstraction the "province of the soul," and her *Almanacks* provided the space to watch and record the relations of ideas to her own thinking.

Sometimes you get lucky in the archives: My trip to the Houghton couldn't have been better timed. It coincided with a new deposit to the collection of Emerson family papers. When I arrived, the letters and photographs in the deposit hadn't even been catalogued, but I had heard through the grapevine that it included the only known image of Mary Moody. One of the most exciting moments of this trip was being handed that box containing about fifty folders. The photo I was looking for was at the very back of the box, so the anticipation had plenty of time to build, and when I finally did find it I had to laugh. It was a small tintype of her in her casket. Her arms are folded neatly across her chest, she's wearing a white bonnet and a black dress, and she looks happy to be dead. Indeed, for a woman who, while alive, had her bed carved in the shape of a coffin and who wore a burial shroud whenever she traveled, death was a welcome state. It looks, in fact, as though there's a smile on her face.

Sometimes you have to pinch yourself: The new deposit is also remarkable for its other contents. It includes many letters written by Ellen Tucker Emerson, Ralph Waldo's daughter, chronicling the family's social activities, travels, and health. One letter, in particular, stands out because it describes the festivities celebrating the centennial of the opening battle of the Revolutionary War at the North Bridge (which spans the Concord River behind the Emerson family's ancestral home, the Old Manse). She writes about how amazed she is at the number of people gathered on the common for the commemoration, and states that the large crowd must mean



Andrea Knutson.

that it was truly a national occasion. She also writes about the dinner tent and the countless white tablecloths and earthenware, that the infinitude of the whiteness was beautiful and enchanting. She describes what their visitors wore and the decorations being set up along the streets, and explains how she and her brother Edward made a flag depicting the Emerson lion to hang over the front porch. Apparently, it was a very cold day, but she remarks that nobody minded and, thankfully, no one got sick. After reading this letter, I drove to Concord the following Saturday to visit the Old Manse and walk across the North Bridge. With Ellen Tucker's reflections in mind, the pilgrimage took on new meaning. I carried with me a kind of secret, and it brought me closer to the Emerson

family, the Old Manse, and the history of Concord and America.

The ten weeks in Boston and Cambridge flew by. As I sat in the Houghton's reading room day after day, I watched other scholars poring over the collections of some of my favorites, such as William James or C.S. Peirce, and wished there was enough time to read everything. These collections sit quietly waiting for someone to make a discovery or to draw them into public view with a new research project. They beg to be drawn into the light so that we can understand our literature, our history, and ourselves better.

Prof. Knutson is currently teaching courses in Early American Literature and the literature of the Early Republic

CONTROVERSY

What's in a Name? *by Kathy Pfeiffer*

I am reminded of a scene from my life as a stepmother several years ago. I had been teaching slave narratives that week; I led—or tried to lead—thoughtful, detailed discussions about the power of naming, about how the master-slave dynamic manifested itself in language. And then, at the end of a long day, my then-seven year old stepdaughter Elizabeth and I cuddled on the couch with my then-infant son Brian and she said, “My mom says Brian’s not my real brother. She says he’s only my half brother.”

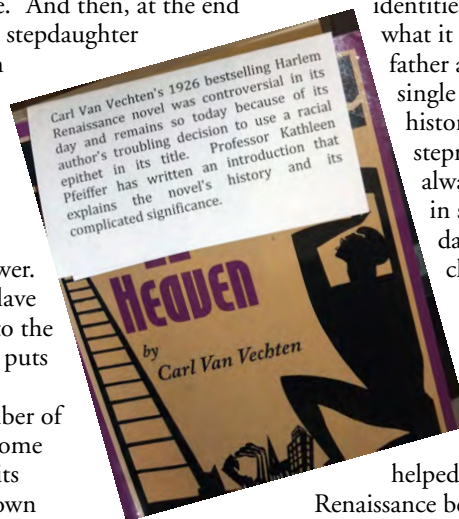
In my classes, I encourage my students to pay attention to the relationship between naming and power. When we read Frederick Douglass’s slave narrative, for instance, I point them to the word “nigger,” to note how Douglass puts it in quotation marks the first time it appears in the text; to count the number of times it accompanies a whipping or some other act of violence; to think about its continued significance today. In my own thinking about that word, I’ve come to believe it wholly significant that we have no racial epithet for white people that conveys the racial hatred—and physical threat—that “nigger” does. Even the word “cracker,” which students sometimes raise as an example, has etymological origins in slavery, referring to the “crack” of the master’s whip, naming the one who held the whip. It’s a name that derives from racial superiority, not from degradation. The power to name is an awesome power, and the relationships between the words we use and the realities they describe is vexed and, to my mind, frightening.

This works with gender as well. It has been several decades since the work of Casey Miller and Kate Swift called our attention to sexism in language and to the oppression that certain words both evoke and, more to the point, continue. The “n- words” parallel is the “f-word” and those of us who are feminists understand the relationship between the

frequency with which that word is bandied about in our culture and the epidemic of rape and other forms of sexual violence. Eff you, indeed. And of course, certain parallel terms reflect the glaring lack of balance between concepts or identities that ought to be parallel, but aren’t. Think of what it means to mother a child versus what it means to father a child. Language works in such a way that a single word carries enormous, painful, complicated histories within it. What does it mean for me to be a stepmother? We are an evil, wicked lot of women, always trying to poison good and innocent children in storybooks, foisting our own mean and ugly daughters on the hapless prince, while we send the charming innocent to clean out the cinderbox.

Language and the power of naming have been on my mind lately. A few weeks ago, the English Dept. installed a book display case to showcase faculty publications outside the new office on the fifth floor of O’Dowd Hall. Included in the display was a book that I helped usher back into print in 2000, the Harlem Renaissance bestseller by Carl Van Vechten titled *Nigger Heaven*. I believe that this novel is a significant part of American literary history and a central text in the Harlem Renaissance; some of you may have read it in one of my Harlem Renaissance classes. I agree, however, that the title offends. When you walk by the book display, you’ll note that the title page has been partly covered over with an explanatory note that both reveals and conceals the word that lies beneath. This note is not meant to be clever, or gimmicky, or cavalier. I do not wish to suppress Carl Van Vechten’s right to free speech, or my own for that matter. But I believe that we must remain mindful of the power of the words we use, even if we have used them reflexively. I hope that this makes our book display the occasion for what we in the department often seek, that elusive thing we like to call “a teachable moment.”

Prof. Pfeiffer is currently teaching African-American literature



CULTURAL STUDY

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back?

Some Thoughts on Paula Abdul and the Wage Gap by L. Bailey McDaniel

It's tempting to employ aphorisms that simultaneously nod to Paula Abdul's career drama as well as her popular song lyrics. From this point on I'll refrain from that temptation because the topic itself (Abdul's salary crisis with producers of Fox's *American Idol*) smacks of a triviality at best, and a dangerous media distraction from important world events, at worst. Abdul's personal career woes aside, the atmosphere surrounding her recent departure from the most watched television program on the air sheds a revealing light on the persistently gloomy shadows of gender pay inequity.

As an admitted consumer of popular culture and television, I've watched a few seasons of Fox's lucrative franchise since it first hit the airwaves. If memory serves, at the time of *AI*'s premiere in 2002, Abdul was easily the most famous of the judges. While Marquis de Sade aspirant Simon Cowell has probably replaced Abdul as "most recognizable" by today's standards, her particular celebrity still easily places her in the top two of the show's other celebrity talking heads—judges Randy Jackson and the newly added Kara DioGuardi, and host Ryan Seacrest. Given Abdul's "unique" charms and recognizability, even if rooted in un poco loco, one could make a strong case that her presence was an instrumental factor in helping the Fox reality show break ad revenue records. Yet for some reason, Abdul, the only woman among the show's original four talking heads, was scheduled to continue as the lowest paid of Cowell, Jackson, and Seacrest.

This is a topic that hits closer to home than one might expect, and not just because your faithful writer was born with two X chromosomes. A few months ago I found myself in the oddest of all positions: standing on a picket line off of Walton Boulevard imploring passersby to support me and my colleagues in our plea not to have faculty pay cut during a year in which my university claimed un-Michigan-like profits in the range of \$14 million dollars. Of course the other, more frightening motivation behind my presence during the job action was a feared loss of faculty governance; but the lingering odor of "Who does she think she is griping about pay issues when she should be happy to be employed/middle-class?" could be smelled, at times, along with the car exhaust. Is this at all analogous to what one might legitimately feel toward Abdul, whose request of \$10 million per year was rejected and countered with a proposed bump from \$4 million to \$5 million per season? Maybe, maybe not... But before one gives into temptation and, understandably, wags a finger of judgment toward an individual who, after all, earned a salary and perks any of us would be exceedingly delighted to accept—we might consider the salary range *AI* producers 19 Entertainment and FremantleMedia disburse to the other three original, exclusively male personnel.

According to *Variety* and *Forbes*, after eight seasons Cowell feels the current economic downturn the least with his former annual salary of \$36 million now raised to \$45 per annum; admittedly performing a different function on the show, *AI*'s

diminutive emcee became the highest paid host of any reality show ever with his most recent three-year deal totaling \$45 million; and while Jackson's salary has never been publicly announced, *NPR* places it significantly higher than Abdul's, if still lower than Cowell's. Does Ryan Seacrest really perform a function three times more valuable than Paula Abdul? And does Cowell's "value added" really exceed Abdul's nine-fold? If neither of these (rhetorical) questions can be answered in the affirmative, what could explain this remunerative imbalance?

As a feminist and a person who likes to stay informed of world events, devoting any page space or mental energy to something as inane as Paula Abdul's career feels, well, creepy. But when we contextualize Abdul's wage woes (Ruth Bader Ginsberg, she's not) with the reality that American women still earn \$.78 for every dollar that their male counterparts earn, a more legitimate, if scarier picture surfaces. When Barack Obama signed The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 into law, a few teeth were knocked out from the jaws of the 2007 5-4 Supreme Court ruling (from which the act takes its name) that severely restricted women's ability to take action in wage discrimination claims. But as *Tell Me More*'s Michel Martin recently pointed out, it's still such a "big deal" when a powerful or wealthy woman gets paid the same as her male equal—think Julia Roberts or Barbara Walters—that it makes news. Although it's been decades since the Equal Pay Act was passed in 1963, a recent report from The Center for American Progress notes that lifetime wage losses for women average \$434,000 over a 40-year career. Noteworthy for OU professors and female students alike, the same report calculates that women with a four-year degree or higher can expect to lose the most, an average of \$713,000 compared to male counterparts over the same four decades.

I began this informal piece with a promise to resist indulging in Abdul-inspired aphorisms as I pondered reality television's salaries and the American wage gap. Despite the numerous Paula-performed hits that make this promise difficult to keep (with titles such as "Cry for Me," "Cold Hearted," and my personal favorite, "Forever Your [underpaid] Girl"), I'm going to stay strong. I think I'll conclude with a request that I often make to my bright, hardworking, curious, and sincere students—both female and male: what (if anything) in the body of this cultural product that we find ourselves discussing jumps off the page and speaks to you regarding any issues, questions, or even identity-based power relationships that influence the quality of your own life? Do the words on the page, or the numbers of the reported paycheck, connect with you directly or even indirectly in a more personal way? If so, let's explore where those resonances come from and what they might mean to us as critics, students, scholars, and earners.

Prof. McDaniel is currently teaching a graduate course in Postcolonial Drama and Performance

SNEAK PREVIEW

Books I Carry With Me

On Reading the fiction of Jannette Turner Hospital *by Jeff Chapman*

There are many things I love about reading Janette Turner Hospital. Her command of the craft is so finely-tuned, her writing is so exquisite, her material is so intelligent, and her sensibility is so quirky and unique, that I feel like I'm sitting down to a rich feast when I open her books.

But here's the thing that really fascinates me about Hospital: I feel, when reading her narrative, like I'm reading someone at the front edge of the craft. I don't know how she does what she does. Another way of putting it: I don't think I could write like her, and I'm jealous.

This isn't hyperbole.

Let me delve into this a bit:

There are texts that are easy for me as an author to figure out. It's easy for me to see what the writer is doing or how she is doing it. I could do that, I think.

An easy example. The other day I watched the movie *Gran Torino* starring and directed by Clint Eastwood, in large part because it was Made in Michigan and I have a natural curiosity for famous things that brush up against my life.

The movie opens in a church; Clint Eastwood's wife has died and he is dealing with his grief by sneering at his grandchildren who, inexplicably, are dressed for a funeral in Lions jerseys and belly-revealing half shirts. Okay, I say. Now I know something about this character: he's the kind of guy who sneers at his grandkids.

His two sons are sitting in the pews. The one son says to the other: "There's nothing anyone can do that won't disappoint the old man. It's inevitable. You know, that's why we stopped doing Thanksgivings."

"What are we going to do with him?" the other son says. "Don't you think he's going to get in trouble over there, all by himself in the old neighborhood?"

Aha! I say. I see what you're doing. This isn't dialogue between the two brothers; this is dialogue between you, the writer and us, the audience. I mean, really ... the first time an explanation is given for missing Thanksgiving is in the pews at their mother's funeral? No. The writers are using the sons as a quick vehicle for exposition and character-development. All by himself in the old neighborhood is information that the writers want us to have: Clint is alone and refuses to move. And he's hard to get along with. And he sneers.

Two minutes in, and we already know so much (irony intended).

I see the moves the writers are making and feel that I would be capable of doing the same. There are lots of books I've read — both bad and great — that I feel I could have written. Conversely, when I read James Joyce's *Ulysses* or Nabokov's *Lolita* or Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, I recognize that the authors are making choices so virtuosic that I can't even imagine how they made them.

Likewise, Hospital writes in a way that I wish I could.

Her writing is dense and palpable but still manages to be lively and playful. She writes prose like a poet, charging the

language with meaning. Towards the beginning of *Orpheus Lost* she writes about a subway musician: "The violin itself was weeping music. Sometimes it wept alone; sometimes the tenor voice sorrowed along with it in a tongue not quite known but intuitively understood. The singer was singing of loss, that much was certain, and the sorrow was passing from body to body like a low electrical charge."

Her stories weave together diverse narrative strands into complex, beautiful meditations on human interaction and the modern landscape. Somehow, she transforms the Orpheus myth into a post-9/11 cautionary tale about terrorism, religious extremism, and authoritarianism. Yet true to the original myth it is still a story about love and returning home.

She manages to probe carefully into human motivation, and is especially interested in how we behave when we are part of, or come in contact with, groups at the extreme fringes of society — outcasts and artists — or at the fringes of belief — cultists and fanatics. Hospital's characters are fiercely independent, but the irony is that these individuals are inevitably drawn together. Everyone has responsibilities; everyone can save others or can be saved. For this is one of the questions that Hospital returns to again and again: what does it mean to be saved.

And throughout it all, we feel like Hospital knows so much. In *Oyster* we're placed in a town so far off the beaten path in the Australian outback that it's not on any maps. The town is inhabited by ranchers and opal miners, and Hospital writes as if she's spent years doing both. She writes with similar mastery of music theory in *Orpheus Lost*, and physics in *Charades*.

I've been telling people about Hospital left and right. When I finish one of her novels I can't stop thinking about it. These are books I will carry with me.

Prof. Chapman is currently teaching a seminar on the graphic novel

SAVE THE DATE

Janette Turner Hospital will read from her fiction at OU in the spring. All are welcome to attend the event:

March 22nd

5 p.m.

Banquet Rooms of the OC.

BOOK REVIEW

Per Petterson's *Out Stealing Horses* by Rob Anderson

Add Per Petterson to the list of Norwegian writers you should know and love. If you are like me, that will double your list. And if you are like me, you are probably wondering if Henrik Ibsen is the other name on your list. (It is.)

Petterson's *Out Stealing Horses* was published in 2003 in Norway. Since Anne Born's English translation appeared in 2005, *Out Stealing Horses* has been steadily gaining admirers.

It's a quiet book. It begins slowly and only gradually reveals its concerns and direction. In fact, that careful play of revelation, concealment and deferral is one of the primary pleasures the novel provides. We first meet Trond, the narrator, in early November, 1999. His discussion of his self-imposed isolation in rural Norway and the cultural anxiety about the impending millennium might make a reader wonder if this is going to be a novel about a Unabomber figure; fortunately, the book is much more ambitious—and less predictable—than that.

The novel is never clear about just why Trond has moved to the harsh remote area where he now lives, nor why he failed to tell his adult daughter that he was moving, but this is ample fodder for speculation. In any case, as the harsh winter approaches, and Trond reveals his uncertainties about his ability to manage the work necessary to make the appropriate preparations, the tension in the novel increases. Why, we might wonder, would an urban 67 year old man move to the isolated mountainous countryside of Norway as winter approaches?

The novel's discussions of Trond's physical labor as he prepares for winter are not only beautifully written; they lie at the heart of the novel. Early on, as he discusses his attempt to repair a sink, he notes, almost in passing, that his father was expert in all these areas of manual labor, and laments that he did not learn this from his father. The complex nature of physical work and his unresolved longing for his father turn out to be chief among the novel's preoccupations. This is brought home during a scene in which a snow storm brings a tree down hard in Trond's yard and he has to rely on Lars, a neighbor, to help him cut up the tree. Trond tells Lars that the tree is blocking his tool shed:

"We'll see to that, [Lars] says, pulling out the choke on his saw, which is a Husqvarna and not a Jonsered, and that too is a relief in a comic sort of way, as if we were doing something which we are not in fact allowed to do, but which is certainly really fun, and he pulls the cord once or twice and slams the choke back in and then gripping the cord firmly he lets the saw sink as he pulls and it starts up with a fine growl, and in a trice the branch is off and cut into four parts. The door is unblocked" (140).

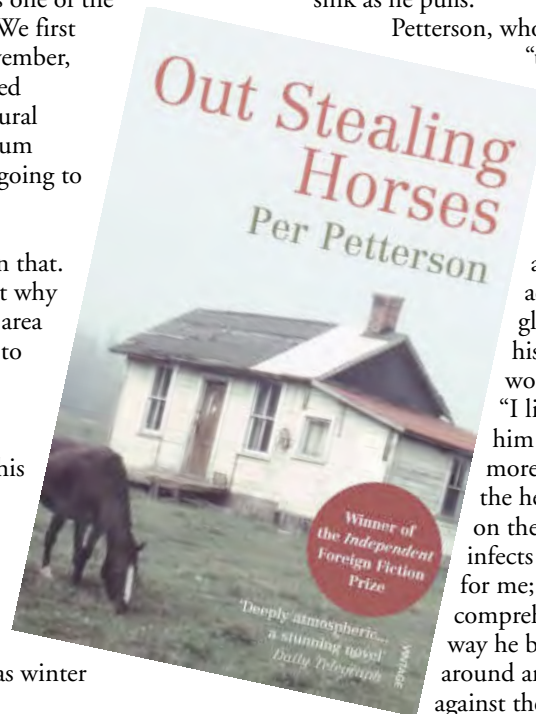
Notice the balance of the long, winding sentence juxtaposed with the direct and brief one. The long sentence is perfect for suggesting the complexity of the action: we get both the social-psychological and physical dimensions of work—the tension of working with power tools with a neighbor and the joy involved in physical, dangerous labor. Yet these psychological and social elements are no more important than the tactile and physical parts of labor: "he pulls the cord and slams the choke back in"; "he lets the saw sink as he pulls."

Petterson, who himself spent time working as an "unskilled laborer," is clearly interested in work. It is hard not to feel the slight release of pressure in my hands and arm as Lars "lets the saw sink . . . and it starts up with a fine growl." A few paragraphs later, he takes up the action of sawing the tree again; the action—and Trond's watching of the action—ends up opening a momentary glimpse into Trond's character and his history, and indeed, into the nature of work:

"I like watching Lars work. I would not call him brisk, but he is systematic and moves more elegantly up to the birch trunk with the heavy saw in his grasp than he does out on the road with Poker [his dog]. His style infects my style, and that is how it usually is for me; the movement first and then the comprehension, for gradually I realise that the way he bends and moves and sometimes twists around and leans is a logical way of balancing against the supple line between the body's weight and the tug of the chain as it takes hold of the trunk, and all this to give the saw the easiest access to its goal with the least possible danger to the human body, exposed as it is; one moment strong and unassailable, and then a crash, and suddenly ripped to shreds like a doll can be, and then everything is gone forever, and I do not know whether he thinks like this, Lars, as he wields the chainsaw with such aplomb" (141).

Trond's admiration for Lars's work habits is clearly informed by his longing for his father. Both on the general level of Trond's missing his father and regretting the fact that he did not get a chance to learn how to work from him, and on more specific levels when we see Lars remembering working with his father felling trees, this passage is enriched by the reverberations of Trond's relationship to his father. He feels his "style" is infected by Lars's style because, never having fully learned to, he has no style of his own. Petterson's investment in the physical, social and psychological dimensions of work produce these long sentences. Complex activities like work require complex sentences.

(continued on p. 18)



OUT STEALING HORSES *(continued)*

There is plenty more to the novel than work and the father-son relationship. It is a novel about history and memory and, in a way, “stealing horses.” I will leave those pleasures for your discovery.

It occurs to me that some might say that *Out Stealing Horses* sounds like a man’s book: the absent father and its preoccupation with work and isolation might seem to suggest this. I am no Tiresias, but the book’s loving description of loss

and disappointment that linger for decades) is powerful and moving. I think it is no more a man’s book than it is a Norwegian novel.

Prof. Anderson somehow continues to find time to teach British Romanticism while reading all the latest contemporary fiction.

APPRECIATION**Here’s to You, Teacher Man** *by Linda McCloskey*

It’s a long road to pedagogy.
—Frank McCourt (1930-2009)

I don’t usually buy hard cover editions of books due to economic constraints, but I can recall three that I deemed to be so necessary to own and read as soon as possible that I decided to forego some necessities in order to have them well before the printing of the cheaper paperback versions. They are *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* by Annie Dillard, *Small Wonder* by Barbara Kingsolver, and Frank McCourt’s *Angela’s Ashes: A Memoir*.

Scene: The Book Place located on M24 on the outskirts of Lake Orion, Michigan, early fall, 1996.

Even though new, larger bookstores are beginning to appear in the vicinity of this suburban village, I still prefer to shop at this small independent bookstore, and I’m not sure why. There aren’t as many titles to choose from, and the owner is not friendly, nor are the sales personnel, but I chalk that up to the stress they must be under, for the rumor regarding the coming of a Border’s and a Barnes and Noble in nearby Rochester started long before their fruition. The employees might find employment at a new chain store, but it will not be anything like what they are used to. And, for the owner, it’s most likely that she sees what’s coming: the soon-to-be demise of a life-long dream, as well as her livelihood.

So I do know why I prefer The Book Place to a chain bookstore like Border’s or Barnes and Noble: I want to support The Book Place, and the crabby owner, as well as other local businesses as long as I can, and because I don’t get lost in this store. And they have a nonfiction section (actually spelled nonfiction on the sign placed on the table, without that annoying hyphen), and on that table on this day I spot *Angela’s Ashes: A Memoir* by a writer whom I have not heard of: Frank McCourt.

I pick up a copy because it’s nonfiction, my favorite genre, and I find myself intrigued by the title, so I turn to the acknowledgments page. McCourt writes:

“This is a small hymn to an exaltation of women.”

I like this guy already, so I begin the first page and find McCourt is doing something different here, although I’m not sure exactly what.

As I continue reading, I find myself completely hooked by the fourth paragraph, where McCourt describes and sums up in a mere five words his childhood:

“Above all – we were wet.”

I take this book about a miserable Irish Catholic childhood to the young woman guarding the cash register. I don’t flip the book over beforehand to look at the price, because I don’t care how much it costs. I need to read this book now.

Scene: Clutch Cargo’s, Pontiac, Michigan, Saturday, October 30, 2004.

My friend Chrys and I are waiting to enter, and we are at the front of the line. Chrys, 15 years my junior, looks much younger than most of the other concert-goers. Most look like me.

We have tickets for the Rock Bottom Reminders concert. We’re excited to see Amy Tan, Dave Barry, Scott Turow, Ridley Pearson, Mitch Albom, Kathi Kamen Goldmark, and Roy Blount, Jr., all writers except for Kathi, who is a literary agent. (Stephen King, a founding member of the band, is not able to attend. Barbara Kingsolver, another of the original members and one of my favorite writers, quit the band a while ago due to time constraints.)

I also love Amy Tan’s writing and can’t wait to see her and hear her sing, but I’m here mainly because of the two guests who will perform with the band: guitarist and song writer Roger McGuinn, a member of one of the greatest bands of all time, The Byrds, and Frank McCourt, that writer whom I encountered in The Book Place eight years before. Frank is slated to play tambourine and harmonica and, in his own words, attempt to “warble a tune or two.”

When the doors open, Chrys and I rush in to find the best seats, only to find that Clutch Cargo’s doesn’t have seats, and the crowd soon begins to voice its displeasure. (Remember, most of us are nearing the geriatric stage of our lives and are expecting comfortable chairs placed at tables on which we will place our glasses of uninteresting white wine.) A few Clutch Cargo employees place some chairs around the perimeter of the balcony, but there is such a mad rush for those few chairs, Chrys and I decide to stay where we are. It appears to be a great deal safer, if much less comfortable.

While walking around before the concert, I spot a former student, Michael, a biology major who took my Creative Nonfiction Workshop “for fun.” We exchange pleasantries and he tells me that his mother is one of the organizers of the concert, a charity event for a local organization. And then I hear something I wasn’t expecting.

“I know you love Frank McCourt. Would you like to meet him?”

* * *

He wasn’t as tall as I thought he would be, but much more handsome than I had imagined. I had seen several photographs of him, as well as a BBC America broadcast of an interview and had thought him a pleasant-looking man. But there he was standing before me, slight of build, “white-haired and sad-eyed” as a writer for *The New York Times* described him, and blessed with the most beautiful and mischievous grin I had ever encountered.

And he was oh so charming, just as I expected him to be.

I’m not entirely sure what I said to him, but it had something to do with how much I love *Angela’s Ashes* and how I include it in my Creative Nonfiction Workshop syllabus every semester and how much the students love it and...

Clearly, I did not respond like a sophisticated card-carrying member of academia. I gushed and I stammered, and I’m quite sure that I was blushing. I admit it. But I did stop short of asking him for an autograph, although now I wish I had.

(Sometime after the concert, Mitch Albom recounted how Frank told the band that the only song he could play on the harmonica was “Love Me Do,” so the band spent months learning and perfecting their playing of the song. When it came time to play it, the band began “Love Me Do,” while Frank began playing “I Should Have Known Better.” The kicker, claims Albom, was that nobody noticed that McCourt and the rest of the band were playing two different songs.)

* * *

Frank McCourt wrote two more memoirs, *‘Tis* (1999), which begins where *Angela’s Ashes* leaves off, and *Teacher Man* (2005), a recounting of his 30 years as a teacher in the New York City school system, primarily in the English Department of the prestigious Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan. I didn’t much care for *‘Tis*, as I feel it lacks the humor and superb use of voice that *Angela’s Ashes* contains; however, I adore *Teacher Man*.

For many years, I did include *Angela’s Ashes* on the reading list for both my Personal Essay and Memoir special topics course, and then the Creative Nonfiction Workshop. I

included it because it is an excellent example of how the best personal essayists and memoirists incorporate stylistic techniques familiar to readers of fiction and poetry to bring their narratives to life, such as vivid description, dialogue, internal monologue, the present tense, and, certainly in Frank’s case, tone and voice. I also included *Angela’s Ashes* as a companion work to Annie Dillard’s *An American Childhood*, as the two works are so readily contrasted in regard to style and certainly content. A reader will not find two stories of childhood experiences more different than Annie’s and Frank’s.

I replaced *Angela’s Ashes* with another memoir last year because I felt that I had been including it for so long that I was becoming stale at discussing it, not the work itself. The funny thing is that as I write this, I cannot remember the name of the work I replaced it with, so that should tell me something.

Angela’s Ashes came close to reappearing on this semester’s syllabus as a tribute to Frank, who died on July 19th of this year, but then I decided not to include it only for that reason, but I’ll return to it for the right reason, when I can do it justice once again.

* * *

Frank McCourt was a storyteller extraordinaire and a remarkable teacher. The keen sense of humor that carried him through horrific childhood experiences stayed with him throughout his adult life, and his love and respect for the profession of teaching allowed him to shine in the classroom. *Angela’s Ashes*, his self-described “epic of woe,” taught me a great deal about what the best writers of creative nonfiction can accomplish, while *Teacher Man*, a heartfelt tribute to the profession, reminds me about what it really means to be an educator.

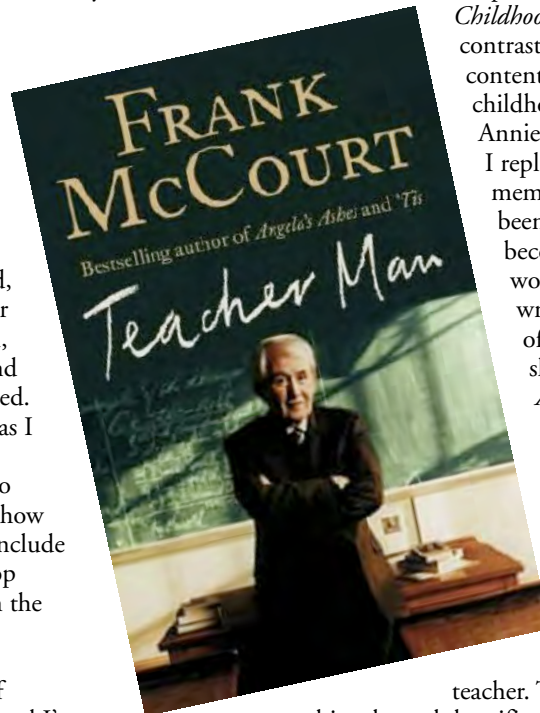
“All those years I was a teacher, why didn’t you look at me like that then?”

He questioned why it took writing a critically and commercially successful book for people to notice him, especially the people who had known him for years. He seemed to embrace and enjoy celebrity, yet at the same time he recognized that it wasn’t the part of his life that he liked best. The part he liked best was teaching.

Many readers of this newsletter, I know, aspire to the noble profession of teaching, and I offer all of you this advice:

1. Make sure that you feel an authentic passion for teaching, and
2. Read *Teacher Man* at least twice.

Linda McCloskey is currently teaching a workshop in creative nonfiction



FICTION

Bob Dole's Transcontinental Tour and American Voyage *by Jeff Chapman* A True-to-Life Travel Narrative Told in Reverse-Chronological Order

- Bob Dole (the Rock) arrived in Newark on August 19, 2001. Little fanfare awaited him because, perhaps, the transcontinental tour had gone mostly unpublicized. Completely unpublicized, truth told.
- Ohio is the only State with eight cities of 80,000 people, or more. I learned this, with Bob Dole (the Rock), at a rest stop in Ohio.
- Halfway through Kansas is a zoo of sorts, built on top of a prairie dog town. So prairie dogs appear everywhere always. It's a dusty, cheerless place, with cages for foxes, badgers, rabbits, birds. The big attractions are a five-legged cow and a six-legged cow. The extra legs aren't fully-grown legs. They are afterthoughts. We took pictures of Bob Dole (the Rock) with the cows.
- After the burial we drive on. To everyone's surprise, our chosen route took us through Russell, Kansas, the birthplace of Bob Dole (the ex-Senator and Presidential Candidate). We drove around the town and took pictures of Bob Dole (the Rock) in front of every building or sign that said Bob Dole. Russell, KA is also the birthplace of Arlen Specter, Senator (R-PA).¹
- He might have died before midnight. But we fell asleep after midnight and we neither heard him die nor sensed that he had passed away. Probably we were watching motel television and making jokes about ordering pay-per-view motel porn. Or, I might have been lying in holy quiet with one arm resting on Erin sleeping, sad she was moving but not willing or able to say anything. We found Bob Dole (the Fish) where we'd put him on the motel-room table the night before. We buried him at a rest stop in Arriba, CO with some ceremony. Deciding that the American Tour must continue, we found a rock with the approximate size and color of Bob Dole (the Fish) and named it Bob Dole. We put it in the small mayonnaise jar.
- We'd been told that fish don't take car-travel well. But Bob Dole (the Fish) had developed a reputation for hardiness and toughness.
- Bob Dole (the Fish) died in Colorado on August 16, 2001.
- Erin chose to drive across the country, rather than fly.² I was along as volunteer alternate driver. Bob Dole (the Fish) was co-pilot. Or, alternately, first mate. He had zero (0) responsibilities, truth told. He traveled in a small mayonnaise jar (8 semi-fluid ounces).
- Bob Dole's move across the country coincided with Erin's move across the country, two years (almost to a day) after she moved to Salt Lake City. Erin tried to press Bob Dole (the Fish) on me as she was moving to Newark, no place for a fish.³ I had a small basement, too small even for a small fish, and I wouldn't take any pressing so, No, I said. No fish. And so it was decided.
- Often, during Bob Dole (the Fish)'s second year, we thought Bob Dole was dying but he wasn't. He just liked floating upside down. We learned to ignore him and eventually he'd turn over again. As time went on we became more and more impressed with his ability not to die. Like Bob Dole (the ex-Senator and presidential candidate). Bob Dole (the Fish) was approximately the length of one phalange of the thumb and so transparent you see his brain or internal organs.
- My friend Erin's goldfish was named Bob Dole after the former senator and presidential candidate — a resilient and persistent man. Bob Dole (the Fish) was also resilient and persistent. Erin respected Bob Dole (the Fish). She had Bob Dole (the Fish) for two years; four (4) other fish bought at the exact same time died within two weeks. She had love for that fish.

¹ No. I've got it wrong. Russell is not the birthplace, but rather the "boyhood hometown" of both senators.

² Erin also had a dog — a young brown-and-white of hound-dog inclinations named Annie — that I haven't mentioned because she plays non-essential role in this narrative. She did almost get head-butted by a ram in Kansas, which was funny but non-essential. I only mention her now because she helped determine the mode of travel. You can't take a dog on a plane in the summer because the baggage compartment gets too hot.

³ One is tempted to say that Newark is no place for any animal as a pet. But a year later Erin and her roommate had a pet duck (of all things, a duck) named Pat foisted on them after being bought at a Portugese street-fair by a boy who, predictably, tired of the duck within the hour.

Jeff Chapman's most recent fiction has been published in Best of the West 2009

POETRY

Glaciers Melting *by Savannah Gignac*

Above the ramshackled laws of time,
we twittered away by sunsets,
ignoring the possibility of teetering off an edge of a frozen sea called fidelity.
Now the tings and tangs in your voice,
the tinks and squeals and squints are all made of razors,
that cut my lips when they proclaim new allies.

Me in this empty s p a c e
of guilty thoughts I had one night nursing my beer at the bar top.
I am stuck to the tundra,
I rest against its numbness,
I refuse to get up,
Ignoring the frostbite.
Ice melting,
Seeping in,
quelling my blood
from all the memories that burn in my stomach.
All the dreams I keep in the cardboard box under my bed
are coming out of my fingertips, disintegrating the frigid landscape beneath me.
Falling past it, springing forth from the flowing ground,
I
Stand tall and proud and look above to the
plane in the sky and wonder
Wonder where the edge is
Where the end is -
Is it in me, is it in me,
or outside the red matador's cape I charge at
every day.

Tulips for Gertrude Innis *by Savannah Gignac*

Two lips
on my belly.
impromptu belly dance.
Dancer in the dark -
Arch and Open
and Jingle Jangle -
with ornaments of love,
that make an ardent soul
and leave me
in an august sweat.

Before you'd gone,
I stuffed my heart in an amber vase
and let it alone.
I played sweet nothings on the piano's teeth.
When I was done I locked it up,
threw away the key.
I needed some silence.

The Postman came today,
carrying tulips,
those memories of your mouth,
the pillows of my past dreams
that held all the truthful words
and purged me of my ponderings.

This package signaled your leaving
to a pretty elephant town on a coast of curry.
Hot nights without me?
How dare you.
But I could never call you a bastard to your face.
Instead I'll curse you for your selfish dreams.
You knew I was never that brave.
I am the one who wanted to travel under orange groves,
over pearl ridden paths!
Worship stone gods,
burn under palm trees.

I am once again left –
to sweat it out,
without any dancing.
Sickened by high society,
Its top hat men,
the flowers they pour into
every girl's heart.

But tulips never meant so much to me before.

Savannah Gignac and Ben Malburg are OU English majors

Earthbound *by Ben Malburg*

The earth is congested with Gravity.
On every surface we touch, and we lean, and we sit.
It is smothered all over bent heads and weary features.
Clumping down onto hunched shoulders and bowing spines.
It is caked on these earthed hands deep into the calloused cracks.
Every bit of the body catches and collects these particles of Gravity.
Much like the screen of a clothes dryer filling up with the matted material.
Meanwhile, the imagination pounds against the cavern walls of thickening chests.
Attempts to crack the hardened prison as airy ways become plugged. Then solid. Then bound.

If we could, would we brush it off our shoulders? Would we fall—in the sky—in all directions?

News Shorts

Call for Web Submissions

Submissions from Alumni are sought for a new feature on the department website. "Career Stories" will feature narratives from alumni based on the age-old question, "What Good is an English Major." We'd like to post stories of alumni career paths and the ways the degree in English has shaped that path (see sidebar at right). This feature is designed both to help the department track its graduates and, more importantly, to assist current and prospective majors learn the career possibilities open to English majors. If you are a graduate of OU with a degree in English, please consider submitting your story by visiting the link above.

The new department website also allows you to contribute to *The Channel*. Just click [here](#). Or, as always, you can also submit your Alumni news via email.

Oh, and don't forget to friend us on Facebook, where, among other things, Ed Hoepfner, our Poetry Thief, will transform your food into scrumptious poetry.



Faculty Marathoners Run to Team Best

For the fifth year in a row, English faculty members competed in the *Detroit Free Press* Marathon relay. Known as "Eard Stapan," this year's team was comprised of Profs. Kevin Grimm, Kevin Laam, Susan Beckwith, Andrea Knutson, and captain Brian Connery. The team shattered the four hour barrier, clocking in at 3:39:40. Overall, the team placed 7th of 24 teams competing in the University division, 80th overall in the relays out of 631 teams.

This year's team also accepted pledges of \$1 for every mile under 4 hours the team finished. In all, the team raised over \$500 for the department gift fund, not enough to make us rich, but as Team Captain



Eard Stapan: Kevin Laam, Team Captain Brian Connery, Andrea Knutson, Kevin Grimm.

Connery put it, "Enough to put up 6.5 poets for a night at the Holiday Inn or to provide 2.1 research travel grants for undergraduates."

Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars for some of our upcoming public events:

Our Fifth Annual Read-In will feature a continuous reading of Edith Wharton's great novel *The House of Mirth*. The event will be held November 23 starting at 8 am in the Fireside Lounge and continue until we are done—probably 8 or 9 pm.

On Monday, March 22, 2010, novelist and short-story writer Janette Turner Hospital will read from her works 5:00 - 6:30 pm, OC, Banquet Rooms A and B. For more on Hospital, see Jeff Chapman's endorsement on p. 16.

Also, the 12th Annual OU Poetry Bash may happen before the next newsletter comes out, so mark it on your calendar now: April 15, from 5:30 until 7 pm in the Oakland Center.

Tell Us Your Career Story

As part of our ongoing efforts to keep in touch with graduates of our programs in English, we want to know — and, just as importantly, current and prospective English majors want to know— where your degree in English has taken you.

- Why did you choose English as your major?
- How did you arrive at your current position and how has your degree in English helped you?
- In what ways does your background in literary studies benefit you in your current career?
- What advice would you offer to current or prospective English majors?

To submit, just click here!

English Office Unveils Spiffy New Displays

It may not be the biggest news on campus, but we think it looks pretty sharp: settling in to our new home on the fifth floor of O'Dowd Hall, we've added some spiffy new display cases to "our" wall outside the main English department suite of offices (see below). Displays feature faculty publications, flyers and announcements for students, and all of our handy handouts (for students). Special thanks go to our extraordinary administrative secretary Cyndie Ferrera and her stylish eye for choosing such smart looking cases. Pay us a visit and take a look!



Student News

New Website Features More Student Resources

In addition to program information, course descriptions, course schedules, and information on internships and scholarships, our **newly designed website** now features a “Student Advising” section to help students manage their progress through the major and beyond.

Students can contact the department Advisor, download the change of major form (see below), and learn about the diverse career options available to English majors through our new **“Career Stories” project**.

And of course, the new site presents all the latest news and information on events and makes it easy to find our **Facebook** page, or to **join Sigma Tau Delta**. Please stop by for a visit—and come back often as we plan to add new features in the future.

Make Your Major Official

If you’re a student and you’re reading this, chances are you are an English major. But does the department and the university know that? Have you declared your major (officially)? If the answer is no or if you are unsure, please visit the department website to **download a “Change of Major” form**. These forms allow us to better track our majors, and help ensure that we’re offering the courses you need to graduate in a timely manner.

Meet Our Graduate Assistants

Heather Bonner, the teaching assistant for Annie Gilson’s Modern Literature course, completed a BA in English from OU. With a career goal of being a writer, Heather yearns to write a bestseller and retire at a ripe, young age. Until that time, she plans to do some editing work in publishing or in journalism. She selected the English major because she has always had an affinity for writing and a passion for theatre, claiming that she can’t imagine a better combination for her career goals. Heather is from Rochester.

“My favorite hobby,” Heather tells us, “other than creative writing, is sitting around in coffee shops with my best friends, gabbing and theorizing about life, men, and the idiosyncrasies of the people and situations confusing us in our lives. We’ve become regular psychologists for one another! I have a terrible habit of writing ‘epic emails’ to my friends to tell them, in long-winded and perhaps overly explicit

to avoid formal running events, and follow the Spartans during March. I have a female West Highland Terrier named Peanut who has lived with me since I was in middle school, but despite her age, still finds the energy to follow me on walks. For next semester I look forward to trying something new when I help with the Cinema classes.”



TAs Andrew Reimann and Heather Bonner

detail, what’s going on in my life.”

Andrew Reimann, currently the Teaching Assistant for Nancy Joseph’s Masterpieces of World Literature course, completed a BA in English/ Secondary Education from MSU and taught high school English in an urban district in the San Francisco bay area for two years. As a second year student in our MA program, he enjoys the literary giants and pop-culture writers of Ireland who wrote during the late 19th Century. His career goal is to become a professor of English, noting that this is a great time to be in English because the malleable field provides opportunities for scholars to make an impact on how the subject matter is viewed.

Beyond school, Andrew tells us that he keeps busy: “I write novels in my spare time, find myself going to an increasing number of weddings, hike and participate in Adventure Races, try

Sigma Forms Study Group

The English Honor Society has formed an informal Homework Group for students taking courses in English. The group meets Wednesdays from 5-8pm in the CSA office in the basement of the OC. Anyone in an English course is welcome to come. So if you are in an English class, the society invites you to attend.

STEP Announces 2010 Admits

The Secondary Teaching Education Program is pleased to announce its 2010 class. The following students were admitted to the program: Jennifer Doptis, Tara Fugate, Haylie Kujawa, Annelise Truitt, Landon Polley, Gabrielle Cook, Mary Shereda Joshua Orban, Jennifer Sacker, Katherine Ribusovski, Josh Kozlowski, Brooke Turk, Marie Kennedy, and Shelly Ryan. Congratulations to this year’s fine group!

Students Experience Shakespeare Behind Bars *by Nancy Joseph*

Last May, Professor Niels Herold encouraged his Shakespeare students to make a trip to the Luther Luckett Correctional Complex in La Grange, Kentucky, the home of acclaimed Shakespearean director Curt Tofteland's Shakespeare Behind Bars project. Three students — Audrey Quinn, Madison Pelletier, and Rachel Harbin — share their impressions and experiences below:

AQ: To many people Shakespeare seems elusive, despite the fact that the themes and emotions prevalent in his works are ones everybody deals with daily. But when they are bound in a book written in a language that can seem daunting, it may be hard to connect to what his characters are experiencing. Shakespeare Behind Bars (SBB), a program at the Luther Luckett Correctional Complex does what seems impossible, putting on one Shakespeare play per year, starring the inmates. That men in prison for sometimes heinous crimes could understand and perform Shakespeare seems incredible, but the truth is that they may just comprehend it better than most.

MP: When my Shakespeare Professor, Niels Herold, first suggested a trip to Kentucky to see a group of prisoners perform a play, my interest was piqued, but so were my nerves. The concept of Shakespeare Behind Bars (SBB), a company of inmates who solely perform plays written by William Shakespeare, sounded intriguing and the more Professor Herold talked about it, the more I wanted to go. So when the time came, two of my classmates and I piled into my car and set out on an adventure.

In order to be allowed into Luther Luckett Correctional Complex to see a play, first, you have to send an e-mail to the director containing your driver's license number and a few other items of personal information and agree to a background check. If you are cleared, the e-mail you get in reply is a very long list of what to do and what not to do once you get to the complex. There is even a dress code, which includes the very adamant prohibition of khaki clothing. It seems like an odd request; khaki is a staple in the wardrobe of semi-formal dress, but it's the color of the inmates' jumpsuits, so if you don't want to be mistaken for a prisoner, you don't wear khaki.

The thrill I feel when driving up to the very large, imposing complex is an interesting mix of anticipation and apprehension, but it is nothing compared to when I finally walk through the door. There is a series of four doors to pass through to get to where the play is held. The officers allow a group to pass through one door, then wait as it is locked and guarded before the next door opens. By the time I reach the final room, I have a sense being vacuum sealed. There is no easy exit. At the same time, this is the first time I get a glimpse of the prisoners turned players as I shake their hands and they hand me a program. A mere few feet from a convicted killer, I am at ease.

RH: I know intellectually that inmates are, more or less "just like us", but the disconnect between the folks you run into at the supermarket, the inmates you see portrayed in movies and television shows, and the reality of the situation at

Luther Luckett is impressive. The cast of Macbeth was, to my visitors eye, a motley composition of age and race, although all male. Nothing about them screamed "prisoners!" Before we arrived, Professor Herold elucidated on the history of some of the inmates, and spotting them as they played various characters added layers onto the experience that is impossible to replicate. Watching Lady Macbeth played by an actor who did kill his wife and unborn child brought to the forefront aspects of the character which altered my entire viewing experience.

AQ: Not all of the men are great actors but that isn't the point of the program. The play was done in a small room with a simple set and costumes, but none of that was important. Their thick southern accents fell into the background and soon nothing was there but the story.

MP: Settling down to watch the play, this time Macbeth, I was totally amazed at just how excellent the unlikely players were. The man who played Lady Macbeth was perfectly convincing. The fact that I was within the walls of a prison was lost as I allowed myself to get sucked into the story. Knowing that some these men were convicted for kidnapping, assault, and murder makes some of them eerily convincing as violent and dangerous characters like Macbeth.

RH: At the end of the performance there was a meet-and-greet setup where the audience could ask questions of the performers. Obviously we avoided questions pertaining to their history; the program and the penitentiary felt geared toward rehabilitation, not reliving the past. The inmates explained different requirements for participating in the program, like excellent behavior and working towards a degree. We also learned about the impact the program had on them. Many of the inmates mentioned a greater ability to look inside themselves and examine motives they had in the past, using the new perspective of a given character they were playing.

AQ: It's more than just putting on a play; their lives and their experience in prison change because of what they're doing. I'm not saying that they should be absolved of all of their sins because they are being educated and behaving well and staying committed to something, but seeing the play makes one realize that these men are people, not just some statistic. Sitting in the talk-back after the play hearing them answer questions and talk about their experiences in the program, I learned just how valuable and life-changing it can be for them to feel like someone believes in them enough to give them this opportunity.

After seeing it once, the question isn't whether it's worth going back, but how many times one can make the trip.

RH: The entire experience was unforgettable. I not only learned about the program, but also saw Macbeth in an entirely different light. For all of the times I've watched or read that play, it has never had as profound an impact.

Faculty Notes

PODIUMS AND PRINT

Rob Anderson presented a lecture at the New Baltimore Public Library, "Not Your Mother's Jane Austen" as part of the Jane Austen Celebration on September 15, part of the Tri-County "One-Book, One Community" series of events. His review of John Strachan's *Advertising and Satirical Culture in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge UP, 2007) is in the September 2009 issue of *Nineteenth-Century Literature*.

Susan Lynne Beckwith has published "Vor[te]xtual Time: The Agency of Being-in-Time and Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*" as a chapter in a collection called *Literature in Exile of East and Central Europe*, edited by Agnieszka Gutthy for Peter Lang Publishing. Professor Beckwith also co-presented with Niels Herold at the Conference on Teaching and Learning Conference in Ontario last May. Her presentation was titled, "Into the Great Beyond: Using Technology to Create Courses that Extend Learning and Increase Engagement Beyond the Boundaries of the Classroom & the Close of the Semester." Professor Beckwith was nominated for the Oakland University Excellence in Teaching Award last winter.

Jeff Chapman participated in a panel for contributors to the anthology *Best of the West 2009* (just recently published) at the Western Literature Association conference in Spearfish, S.D. on October 2. He read and answered questions about "Great Salt Lake," his short story included in the collection. Professor Chapman reports that everyone at the conference was talking up Cormac McCarthy, and since his return he's read *The Road* and talked about it with just about everyone. Also, his (Chapman's, not McCarthy's) story "Rock Pusher Boss" has been accepted for publication in *The South Carolina Review*.

Natalie Cole's essay, "'Private Snuggeries': The Spaces of Masculinity in *Armada*" has been published in *Armada: Wilkie Collins and the Dark Threads of Life*, a collection of essays edited by Mariaconcetta Costantini for the Arachne Press in Rome. Professor Cole presented "'Little else than monstrous': the Bothers of Brotherhood in Dickens" at the Dickens Symposium at Providence College in August. She has just been named as the new editor of *The Oakland Journal*.

Brian Connery's essay, "Wild Work in the World: The Church, the Public Sphere, and Swift's Abstract of Collins's Discourse," appears as a chapter in *Swift as Priest*

and *Satirist*, edited by Todd C. Parker, University of Delaware Press, 2009. Professor Connery has also provided an introduction for the re-issue of Matthew Hodgart's *Satire* by Transactions Press to be released in November.

Kitty Dubin's play, *The Blank Page*, made its world premiere, directed by Gillian Easton, at the JET Theatre on October 17 and will run through November 8. The plot focuses on a creative writing professor mired in self-doubt while work, family, and a gifted new student threaten to drag her under. The theatre's press release summarizes: "Dubin explores the choices we make in creating our own stories, with her trademark wit, compassion, and razor-sharp dialogue." You can read a review [here](#).

Distinguished Professor Jane Eberwein attended the Emily Dickinson International Society annual meeting July 31 – August 2 in Regina, Saskatchewan. This winter, the University of Massachusetts Press will be publishing *Reading Emily Dickinson's Letters: Critical Essays* which Professor Eberwein co-edited with Cindy MacKenzie. Her essay, "Messages of Condolence: 'more Peace than Pang'," will appear in that volume. Professor Eberwein

also notes her delight in meeting up with alumni and colleagues at her presentations on poetry (chiefly Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost) for Wayne State's SOAR (Society of Active Retirees) program at the Farmington Hills campus and for the Adult Learning Institute, which meets at the Orchard Ridge campus of OCC.

Distinguished Professor Bob Eberwein's latest book, *The Hollywood War Film*, has been published by Wiley-Blackwell. His review of the HBO film *Taking Chance*, appears in the June issue of *Journal of American History*.

Susan E. Hawkins presented a paper—"Everything uncoupled from its shoring": Navigating the Late World in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*,—at the Fourth Annual International Cormac McCarthy Conference at the University of Warwick in July.

Niels Herold has been invited to explore the realm of digitalized Shakespeare scholarship in a special seminar called Shakespeare 2.0, at this year's annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America in April, 2010.

Professor Herold has also been invited to become a contributing member of the new

Cambridge World Shakespeare Encyclopedia, which Cambridge University Press is bringing out in 2010. The *Encyclopedia* will appear simultaneously in print and in an on-line version, with capacity for limitless growth in the years ahead. Herold's essay in this scholarly venture will be on prison Shakespeare. (*continued on next page*)



Faculty Notes (continued)

Kyle Edwards presented at the American Independent Cinema international conference in Liverpool, UK. His paper was entitled "A Permanent Place in the Motion Picture Industry': Poverty Row and the Hollywood Studio System."

Annie Gilson has signed with literary agent Kelly Sonnack of the Andrea Brown Literary Agency.

Kevin Grimm presented a paper, "Why Read Le Morte Darthur?, 1485-1634" at the 44th Annual International Congress for Medieval Studies, 7 May 2009, Kalamazoo, MI. Over the summer months, his project, "Reading the 1634 Morte Darthur," was supported by a University research grant.

Ed Haworth Hoepfner has completed work on a new volume of poetry, *Saint Ophelia*. His "Poetry Thief" series has resumed on the Oakland English Department Facebook page. Feed the thief and read him there.

Conference on College and University Teaching in Traverse City in September. Most recently she co-organized and facilitated the Michigan Writing Center Association Conference held at OU on October 17, to rave reviews; this was the best attended meeting in the Association's history. With Rachel Smydra, Pam has been awarded a Teaching Fellowship grant to work on incorporating service learning into the classroom.

Kathleen Pfeiffer has just completed reviewing the copyedited manuscript of her volume, *Brother Mine: The Correspondence of Jean Toomer and Waldo Frank*, due out from Illinois UP next summer. She has also completed a forty page biographical essay on Waldo Frank to be included in the Scribners American Writers series edited by Jay Parini and published by Gale. Next up: Professor Pfeiffer is exploring the possibility of a paperback release of her book, *Race Passing and American Individualism*, as part of a new paperback publishing program with the U of Massachusetts Press.

Doris Runey spent the summer translating several articles from Romanian scholars who have contributed critical essays to the bilingual second edition of *Zalmoxis*, and two essays by American scholars also included in the book. She is also a consulting translator on several projects headed by Dr. Lidia Vianu, Professor of Modern British Literature at the University of Bucharest, working with Master's students on various projects, two of which are the latest edition of EGOPHOBIA (Bucharest, Romania), and the Romanian version of the PEN Anthology. Inspired by teaching ENG 305: The Bible as Literature, she is writing a paper on a comparative translation of the Romanian Orthodox Bible, Jubilee Edition, by Metropolitan Valeriu Anania, from the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Her first novella, *Sihistrul (The Hermit)*, is scheduled for publication in Romania, and she is working on a second, part of a series.

Rachel Smydra and Pam Mitzelfeld are participating in the 2009 Academic Service Learning Faculty Fellows program, which offers the opportunity to workshop with other OU faculty to find ways to incorporate opportunities for students to partner with their communities in courses like Smydra and Mitzelfeld's innovative Blogging and Literary Self Narrative course.

Joshua Yumibe was in England in July where he presented at two conferences: the first was in Sheffield at "Visual Delights IV: Visual Empires" where he presented "Abyssinian Expedition and the Field of Visual Display"; the second was in Bristol at "Colour and the Moving Image: History, Theory, Aesthetics, Archive" where he presented "An Introduction to Experimental Color Aesthetics," participated in a roundtable discussion of film preservation, and chaired several panels. He also published two research articles: "On the Education of the Senses: Synaesthetic Perception from the 'Democratic Art' of Chromolithography to Modernism," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* Special Issue: Synaesthesia (September 2009); and "Harmonious Sensations of Sound by Means of Colors: Vernacular Color Abstractions in Silent Cinema," *Film History* Special Issue on Color (2009).

Research in Progress

Professors Anderson and Insko will present from their collaborative work in progress:



"Building the City of Poetry: Labor and Friendship in Blake and Whitman"
Robert Anderson & Jeffrey Insko
Thursday, Oct. 29 | 12-1:30 pm | 100 Kresge Library

Jeff Insko has been promoted and tenured – to great rejoicing among his colleagues. Recently, he presented on "Irving among the abolitionists" in a roundtable discussion on Washington Irving at the American Literature Conference in Boston. He and Rob Anderson premiered their collaborative paper, "Building the City of Poetry: Labor and Friendship in Blake and Whitman" at the Department's "Research in Progress" event on October 29, before Professor Anderson's presentation of the paper at the International Conference on Romanticism in New York City in November. Professor Insko is currently working on an essay called "John Neal's American Revolution" for a book by diverse hands on the neglected antebellum author John Neal.

Nancy Joseph attended "Shakespeare Connects," a conference for teachers and scholars of Shakespeare, at Grand Valley State University.

Andrea Knutson presented a paper, "Reviving New England as a Means to Faith: Thomas Shepard's Confessions as a Communal Response to Crisis," at the New England Historical Association Conference, Portland, Maine, in April. Her book review of Robert Richardson's, *First We Read, Then We Write: Emerson on the Creative Process* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009) is forthcoming in the *Emerson Society Papers*.

Pam Mitzelfeld attended the International Writing Center Conference in Philadelphia in July and the Lilly

Alumni Corner

IN MEMORIAM: BETHANY BROADWELL, 1973-2009



The English Department notes with tremendous sadness the death of Bethany Broadwell, '97 in September. An English major and journalism minor, Bethany was passionate about fiction, drama, and writing. Her smile and her quick wit enlivened our classrooms, and her example enriched our lives. She was the founding student editor of this newsletter. Like other news media, our masthead and our means of distribution have changed since Bethany's first issue, but the name that she gave it, "The English Channel," remains.

Disabled by her lifelong battle with muscular dystrophy, Bethany was among the pioneering cohort of young writers who discovered in the internet a way to work from home. She worked as a consultant and writer to raise funds for a variety of causes, and she served as a feature writer for the *Oakland Press*. Perhaps most importantly, she was among the small cadre of people recruited by Heidi VanArnem (OU '87) for ICan Inc. a national agency for the disabled community. From its launch in March 1999 until a month before her death, Bethany was a major content provider and editor for the icanonline.net website, while also writing a regular column – "Upbeat." Over the past several years, she also blogged regularly for the *Detroit News*.

Her writing served the disabled community and also served as a bridge between the disabled and the "temporarily able." She told the stories of disabled children, women, and

men with compassion and insight; she reviewed books, television shows, plays, and movies in which the disabled were represented – most recently a short review of last summer's film, *Adam*, about a young man with an autism spectrum disorder.

While writing for publication, Bethany pursued her education further, earning an MFA from NTL University. Subsequent publications were featured in the *Traverse City Record Eagle*, *Logan Magazine*, *MDA Magazine*, and *The Edible Grand Traverse Magazine*. Bethany inspired many of us with her courage and intrepid spirit; she kept us laughing with her wicked sense of humor. Her major legacy, however, is her writing, which remains to show the many humane purposes to which writing as a craft can be turned.

Memorial contributions may be made in Bethany's name to the Muscular Dystrophy Association, 36520 Grand River, Suite 102, Farmington Hills, MI 48335.

Bethany was a talented writer and we were proud to count her among our English graduates. With that in mind, we recommend a perusal of some of her work. [Her blogging work for the Detroit News is available here.](#) Much more of her writing is [available at her own website.](#)

NEWS AND NOTES

Chris Thomas, '09, writes to us with this update:

"This summer, with the help of Professor Cole, I had the opportunity to speak at the "Dickens and the Voices of Victorian Culture" conference in Verona, Italy. At the conference, I presented a paper entitled "A Career in Freedom: The Englishman Abroad in Collins's *Basil*, Browning's 'The Englishman in Italy,' and Dickens's *Little Dorrit*." While presenting before an audience of Dickens scholars was exciting, what was even better



was being able to talk with and receive feedback from so many bright minds. And of course being able to do this while in a beautiful and historic city like Verona only made for a more memorable experience.

Currently, I am in my first year of a doctoral program at Indiana University studying in Victorian literature. Graduate

school has been demanding but also very rewarding. Thus far, my studies have allowed me to pursue such things as performance and performativity in the dramatic monologue, literary reflections of dissection in the Victorian period, and the role of the audience, in rhetoric, in creating ethos. Downtown Bloomington is great and the Indiana University campus is beautiful (and expansive).

As much as I love Indiana, I still do miss my time at Oakland. In particular, I miss the wonderful people in the English department, who have done so much (and continue to do so much) to guide and support me."

Jennifer Parker reports, "As one of the lucky few who was hired before graduation, I have been working for HAVEN which is a domestic violence and sexual assault center in Oakland County. I teach kids K-12 about the dynamics of abuse and how to have healthy relationships. I am planning on returning to OU to pursue an additional bachelors degree in Counseling after my wedding which is planned for September 17, 2010.

(continued on next page)

Alumni Corner

NEWS AND NOTES (cont'd)

Jeffrey Hill, now an Associate Professor of Mass Communications at Morehead State University, was honored at his university's recent convocation for distinguished achievement. According to the Morehead State press release Prof. Hill has gained international acclaim in film, winning awards in the U.S. and overseas. He has created music videos, narrative films and three-camera studio productions but his specialty is documentaries." His film *Chisel* highlighted an African American wood sculptor. It was screened at the refereed Broadcast Education Association's district conference and played at three juried festivals: The Bluegrass Independent Film Festival, Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival and the George Lindsey UNA Film Festival where it earned an honorable mention for Documentary-Faculty. The documentary was selected for KET's Arts Toolkit, a curriculum and instruction series which KET makes available to K-12 schools, as well as colleges and universities." Congratulations to Prof. Hill on this prestigious award! More details on Jeffrey's work are available in the [full press release here](#).

Jianna Hair Taylor, '07 was a guest speaker for Nancy Joseph's course SED428 with the STEP interns. Jianna presented "Find the Literary in Graphic Novels," a project she has been working on as part of the Oakland Writing Project. Jianna also presented her work at the MCTE conference this fall. Jianna is a graduate of the Secondary Teacher Education Program and former president of Sigma Tau Delta. She currently teaches for the West Bloomfield schools and is working toward an M.A. at U of M.

Lisa Czapski is currently in her second year in the doctoral program in English at Boston University, experiencing the traditional grad school anxiety and teaching freshman writing.

Rachel Banner, '06 is currently in her third year in the doctoral program in English at the University of



Rachel Banner, '06

Pennsylvania. Her essay "Labors of Freedom: James McCune Smith's 'The Washerwoman'" recently won Penn's Nancy Rafetto Leach P. Sweeten prize for best graduate essay in American Literature or Studies. The award was affectionately presented to her by the grad director. She is currently reading (frantically) for her upcoming field exams in April, teaching freshman writing, and "eagerly awaiting ABD status." (It is unclear whether the photo is from Halloween or simply a result of the rigors of graduate school.)

Jen McQuillan presented her paper, "Hop-Frog' and the Magazine Prison-House" at the Third International Edgar Allan Poe Conference in Philadelphia in October and reports that the conference was excellent. Jen is the chair of the English department at West Bloomfield High School.

Alicia Sossi works for Teacher's Discovery in Auburn Hills doing catalog work, product development, and other marketing. She says that "It's a fun job because there are so many different responsibilities. It's impossible to be bored!" Even better, she works with fellow OU English grads **Sandy Mierzejewski** and **Christina Fontana**.

Marie Lascu, '07 lives in North Carolina where she volunteers for the Lower Cape Fear Historical Society's Latimer House. Having gotten a taste of the pleasures of archival research, she is applying to NYU's Tisch School of Arts which offers a Masters in "Moving Image Archiving and Preservation." Good luck, Marie!

(Yet Another) Call for Contributions

Remember: we're exceedingly proud of our graduates, which is why we implore you to keep those updates coming—no matter what it is that you do for a living (or in your free time). We'd like to hear from the doctors and lawyers out there, the mechanics and carpenters, the child-rearers, the waiters and waitresses, the (struggling) musicians, the shop clerks and pizza deliverers, the office workers, the vagabonds, the dreamers, those of you still finding your niche just as much as the teachers, professors, and poor graduate students! Oh, and don't forget to include your degree and year of graduation. Thank you.

And now it's easier than ever! Submit to *The Channel* or tell us your Career Story right from [our fancy new website](#).

Of course, you can also send us your latest news the traditional way—with an email. Just click [here](#).

Respect for the Story *by Josh Corbin*



Josh Corbin.

Josh Corbin began his studies at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles this fall. He wrote the following essay based on his experience there so far. —Ed.

I sit on the shallow stage, raised six inches from the auditorium floor of the Mark Goodson Screening Room. To my left is Frank Pierson, screenwriter for such films as *Dog Day Afternoon* and *Cool Hand Luke*. To my right sit the other five members of my cycle-one production team. Before us are 134 AFI

Conservatory fellows, all prepared to pounce with their critique of the film we had just screened, *The Intern*, the first of three cycle films I would make during my first year.

Mr. Pierson addresses the fellows with a simple inquiry, “Okay, what was the story here?” And it begins.

My stomach begins to twist as their comments burn the ego I never believed myself to have. How the hell did I ever make that mistake? How could I have ever thought that shot to be a logical choice? Oh man. I don’t belong here. AFI made a mistake in accepting me. I thought I knew what I was doing and I clearly do not.

Something is changing within me. I begin to doubt my talents as a filmmaker as I never have before. I begin to feel intimidated by the work of other AFI Fellows, inadequate as I struggle to reevaluate my creative potential.

There is a personality trait in aspiring filmmakers that is irrefutably universal: competitiveness, borne of both passion for our ambitions and insecurity about our level of experience. Thus, the very existence of another creative presence can sometimes feel like a threat.

Paradoxically, this is the nature of film school—it is both a haven for such insecurities to incubate and a daunting, rewarding journey for those who complete it. Reflecting back as I begin my second and final year at the AFI, I see that as my fellow film students and I created three films, we begin to form a different relationship with one another as we all set out to begin production on our thesis films. Thus our competition evolved into a solid fellowship, a support system. Having put each other through such harrowing tests, we now strive to encourage each one of us to make a great film. We regenerate that confidence we all once had pre-AFI, but with far more credibility to it after all we have learned.

Not only has the AFI experience taught me to embrace these insecurities—to draw upon them—it has given me an acute appreciation for the art of cinema. As an English student at Oakland University, I honed my respect for story, stringing and stitching my ability to develop unique characters and with them, to tell a cohesive and engaging tale.

It is a truism in the film business that if one’s odds of breaking into the industry are to be any higher than anyone else’s, then the filmmaker must appeal to mass audiences. Regardless of box office numbers, however, a good story is what we as human beings crave. We yearn to be brought into different worlds, to be immersed temporarily in the lives of others, searching for what could be a profound lesson about ourselves. After all, to tell a story well is to form a connection with our audience, a bond that can be never broken.

And so, the anxieties I have and continue to experience at AFI have only expanded and sharpened my creative goals rather than suppressing them. I remain focused as a storyteller, staying true to the arts of a well-told story and well-crafted film, knowing I still have much to learn as a filmmaker, but propelled by my optimism and ambition, and the launching pads of Oakland University and the American Film Institute.



Josh in full director mode at AFI

English Channel Archives available!

Missed an issue of the *Channel*? No problem. Just visit the English department [website](#), where you can download and read recent issues of the [department newsletter](#). And while you’re there, you can also get information about upcoming events, contests and awards, make a donation to our gift fund, send an email to a favorite former prof, and more.

APPEAL

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

Thank you for your generosity!

Contributions may be made by mail using the form below or online by clicking [here](#). Be sure to designate your gift to the English department.

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