

## What Would We Do Without Her?

### Cyndie Ferrera Named OU Employee of the Month for February!



*Administrative Secretary Cyndie Ferrera*

*(Adapted from News at OU):* Members of the English department were gratified to learn that our indispensable Administrative Secretary Cyndie Ferrera was named OU's Employee of the Month for February 2010.

The Department of English simply couldn't function without Cyndie, who works tirelessly to keep everything

running smoothly. Her work ethic is second-to-none, and she always approaches her work with a positive attitude and inspires others to be cheerful and efficient.

Cyndie keeps her thumb on the pulse of the department's operations and facilitates everything with thoroughness, alacrity, and good cheer. She oversees all the communications and paperwork in and out of the department, and knows exactly who to turn to throughout the University community in order to get done what needs to be done. She is thoroughly committed to the department, our students, and the university; she takes genuine pleasure in all of our achievements, big and small. She is a true gem.

To read the full story on Cyndie's award, just click [here](#). And please join us in congratulating Cyndie on this well-deserved honor!

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And expands its cast of stars

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The long and the short on the year's events, faculty awards and publications, student successes, and more...

# The English Channel

The Alumni Newsletter of the Department of English

## Department Welcomes New Cinema Scholar



Hye Seung Chung

The English Department is pleased to welcome its newest faculty member in **Cinema Studies**, Hye Seung Chung. Professor Chung is a widely published scholar who specializes in Asian Americans in film and television as well as East Asian cinema and popular culture. She has taught at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, Hamilton College, and the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She'll join OU in Fall 2010.

A Korean native, Professor Chung completed her M.A. in Cinema Studies at the College of Staten Island, CUNY, and her Ph.D. in Film and Television at the University of California, Los Angeles. She published her doctoral dissertation, *Hollywood Asian: Philip Ahn and the Politics of Cross-Ethnic Performance* (Temple University Press, 2006), which chronicles the shifting representations of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans from the 1930s to the 1950s in Hollywood's "Oriental genres" (using the titular Korean American actor as part of her main case studies).

Professor Chung is excited to return to the state of Michigan where she did her postdoctoral fellowship and to share her passion for both American and East Asian cinemas with OU students. As an avid viewer of contemporary television and having recently published essays on *Gilmore Girls* and *Grey's Anatomy*, she welcomes the opportunities to talk with fellow TV fans about some of her favorite shows (including *The Wire*, *Lost*, *Weeds*, *Dexter*, *Big Love*, and *Glee*).

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## Moments of Grace: Fiction Writer Enthralls at OU *by Jeff Chapman*

I've been thinking about grace lately.

Yesterday, in my advanced fiction workshop, we discussed a student's story where something unexpectedly beautiful had happened. We, the readers, had expected a character to let us down, but he didn't. He soared. So often fiction revolves around conflict and tragedy; we sometimes forget the power of the moment when things go right.

Think of the moment at the end of Raymond Carver's "A Small Good Thing" when a baker feeds warm, fresh cinnamon rolls to parents whose son has just died. It's not going to get rid of the pain, but it is a small, good thing. Sometimes that's enough.

Moments of grace in fiction are powerful moments, as are moments of grace in life. And when we meet people who exhibit grace, we stop and take notice.

**Janette Turner Hospital** is one of those people.

I met Hospital six or seven years ago when she was a visiting writer at the University of Utah. She helped me figure out an ending to a story I'd been struggling with. When we were brainstorming writers to bring to Oakland this year I remembered Hospital's genuine kindness and enthusiasm.

What a great choice. Hospital visited Oakland University on March 22 and 23. She read on the night of Monday the 22nd and spent Tuesday visiting two of my classes and one of Professor Annie Gilson's. In between were two dinners and a lunch with faculty and students. It was a busy schedule but we could not have asked for a more graceful visitor.



Janette Turner Hospital

Janette Turner Hospital is, in my eyes, one of the best authors writing in this country. Her writing is dense, rich, poetic, but still remarkably accessible. My English 100 students—many of whom I think still haven't forgiven me for assigning Shakespeare—embraced reading Hospital's *Orpheus Lost*. It is modern: the novel—published in 2007 and clearly a post 9/11 novel—concerns itself with terrorism, extremism, torture, rendition, but also with myth, loss, and love. Everyone  
*(continued on p. 2)*

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in my class agreed that it was complex and beautiful but not difficult or alienating.

In fact, one of my students made me promise that when Hospital came to our class that I would leave time to get books signed. This student also got a friend to snap a picture of her with Hospital. She was very excited.

It was a little like Beyonce was visiting the class.

The reading on Monday was wonderful. Perhaps she has an unfair advantage because anything would sound interesting if read with a great Australian accent (Hospital is originally from Australia, but has lived in the US and Canada for a couple decades now), but the selections from *Orpheus Lost* gave us a taste of the rich characters and left us wanting more.

In the classroom Hospital answered questions and told anecdotes. I kept thinking to myself, what an opportunity! To read a novel in a general education literature class and then turn around and have the author at your disposal, ready to answer your questions. (Couldn't you also have brought in Kafka and Ovid to explain a thing or two? my students demanded of me.)

But the thing that will stick with me is the attention Hospital paid to our students. I had dinner with her on the night of the 22nd. Around the table were seated Hospital and her husband Clifford, two faculty members and two students. The conversation was sparkling and wide-ranging, at times political and at times literary, and Hospital was brilliant. She told stories and jokes but also listened with great interest. Throughout the dinner Hospital would turn her full attention



Hospital (right) with Provost Moudgil (center) and Annie Gilson.

to the students and ask them about their lives and their writing. She may have been the visiting author, but the students were the center of attention.

When I go to a concert it has always made a difference to me whether or not the band seems happy or grateful to be there. A concert where the musicians simply come on stage, play their music, and leave, feels to me like half a concert. I want banter. I want interaction. I want them to say, "How great to be here in Detroit!"

Similarly, at a literary reading, I respond best when a reader seems genuinely excited to have the opportunity to be there. This will be what the Oakland students will remember.

This is one way I would define grace.

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## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR by Susan E. Hawkins



The department has just finished a very exciting and busy year of readings and read-in's, faculty lectures and presentations, student and alum writing contests. **The English Honor Society, Sigma Tau Delta**, has finished a splendid year of events with the induction of thirty-three new members, and department faculty continue their outstanding work. In particular, Professors Rob Anderson and Jeff Insko received University Faculty Recognition Awards this spring for their innovative teaching and scholarship, and Professor Kathleen Pfeiffer received the Judd Family English Department Faculty Award for her outstanding service. Bravo to all!

The new **Cinema Studies** major has proved wildly successful with forty-two majors in its first year. Our newest faculty member, world cinema specialist Hye Seung Chung, will bring exciting, global course offerings. Her impressive scholarship in Korean film, as well as in American TV, will add a compelling dimension to the major.

And speaking of excitement, fall semester is going to be a blockbuster! This year's Maurice Brown Memorial Poetry Reading, September 29th, 4:30–6:30 p.m., will feature **Molly Peacock**, author of six poetry collections, including *The Second Blush*. Our featured fiction writer will be none other than **Junot Diaz**, winner of 2008's Pulitzer Prize for his novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Mark your calendars for November 4th, 5-7 p.m. For details on these and other events, visit our [website](#) and our [Facebook page](#).

Finally, and as always, I want to thank those of you who have given to the department gift fund. This past year's fund drive proved the generosity of our alums and our faculty. Our gift account supports student travel and research, Sigma's activities, special library acquisitions, as well as our many events for students, colleagues, and the community (Junot Diaz!!) Your contributions make all of these possible. The department could not thrive as it does without your continued support.

## “Filling it with Sweetness”

### Kathy Pfeiffer Honored with 2010 Judd Family Faculty Achievement Award

*[On April 18th, English department faculty, students, alumni, and family gathered to honor Kathy Pfeiffer with the Judd Family Faculty Achievement Award, established through the generosity of OU alumni Pat and Randy Judd, with the counsel of their former teacher, Professor Joan Rosen. Department chair Susan Hawkins was kind enough to allow the Channel to print a portion of her eloquent tribute to Professor Pfeiffer, delivered at the ceremony. Prof. Hawkins's remarks are followed by the text of Kathy's gracious acceptance talk.]*

The Judd Family Faculty Achievement Award was created to recognize outstanding achievement in the areas that broadly define our professional mission: teaching, scholarship/creative work, and service. We are honoring Kathy today because of her outstanding service contributions to the life of the department. No department can function efficiently and productively without faculty who are willing to serve. Kathy has taken on numerous service responsibilities willingly and has performed them with dedication, efficiency, and good humor. I would add that the “good humor” part is worth its weight in gold.

Quite specifically Kathy is being honored for her service to the department over the course of the last two years. While she has served the university and community in many ways during her time in the department, she deserves the department's gratitude for taking on the burden of General Education Assessment over the course of the last two years. . . I'm not going to detail the myriad other duties she has performed for us—as a member of Undergraduate programs, four faculty search committees, as chair of two faculty review committees, as both a member and director of Graduate Studies, and on it goes! She is admired and revered by her students and has provided essential mentoring to both undergraduate and graduate students. Despite her many obligations (did I mention spouse and mother???) she has continued to be an active scholar in her field of specialization—the Harlem Renaissance.

Allow me to repeat myself here as I conclude: No department can function efficiently and productively without faculty who are willing to serve. Kathy has taken on her service with dedication, efficiency, and good humor. She has served us all in ways large—Assessment!—and small, but in every way well.

It is my great pleasure to present this year's Judd family English Department Faculty Achievement Award to Kathleen Pfeiffer. The plaque reads: “With gratitude for your dedicated service . . . on behalf of your colleagues.” The dedication is accompanied by this quotation: “She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder.” Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. —Susan Hawkins



While I realize that this award recognizes my service to the department, I hope you will forgive me if my comments do not dwell too very much on committee service items like the process of General Education course assessment. This is somewhat disappointing, because I will not be able to incorporate such novel acronyms as WIM, WIGE and GESLO into my talk. Instead, I'd like to share some comments related to my forthcoming book *Brother Mine*, due out June 1 and available for pre-order on amazon.com, where it is also eligible for super saver shipping.

*Brother Mine* traces the evolution of a friendship in letters, and it illustrates the tremendous satisfaction that can be found in friendship, particularly intellectual companionship. The correspondence between Jean Toomer and Waldo Frank has shown me what the bonds of friendship can mean for a writer and how they shape not only the life of the mind but also the writing that results. As many of you know, research and writing is solitary work, and for me, the loneliness that can result is sometimes frightening. Isolation is not always a condition that inspires my best efforts.

But what I learned in reading through the Toomer and Frank letters is how the loneliness acquires meaning when it is shared, and how our writing preserves its value. In one of the first letters that Frank wrote to Toomer, I saw this expressed with great eloquence. “Glad I was indeed to hear from you, and to read what you had to say,” he wrote. “You are the sort of life one doesn't forget . . . nor do you grow dim.” Friendship is a sustaining force for Jean Toomer and Waldo Frank, as it was for many writers, and as it is for me. This letter carries the same affectionate tone as I read in the many emails you all have sent me since the Judd Award announcement.

The lines of friendship and support that appeared in the letters between Jean Toomer and Waldo Frank echoed the sense of friendship and support that I felt as I worked on the book:

Pfeiffer (continued from p. 3)

"Your letter has helped enormously. I wish I could think I could be of help to you. You are one of those men one must see but once to know the timbre and the truth of. About you at present solitude and silence. Well, mine is broken mostly by the bile-venting of ugly journalists who hate me with a hate I can never understand. And then letters such as yours, not changing my silence, but filling it with sweetness."

Filling it with sweetness. There are few substitutions I could make in this passage and it would fit my own experience exactly—is the "bile venting of ugly journalists who hate me with a hate I can never understand" much different than our own experiences with certain administrators, or certain committees, or ratemyprofessor? I think not. But we find solace and comfort and companionship in each other's friendship.

The friendships I've formed in this department have nurtured and sustained me. The turning points of my life and of my career have been marked by them—as when Natalie leaves handmade cards and gifts of chocolate in my mailbox to celebrate my successes, however large or small; or when Nancy offers thoughtful and helpful suggestions for navigating the first grade teacher conference; or when Ed responds to my desperate plea for writing advice, in less than 12 hours, during winter break; or when Rob agrees, at 7:30 in the morning to proctor my 8 am final exam because I have an infant barfing at home; or when Brian Connery shares links to essays that he thinks I might like, because a line in the essay reminds him of something I once said or wrote; or when Susan Beckwith advises me on weight training strategies; or when Kevin Laam agrees to discuss *Messien* with my husband so that I don't have to; or when Josh gives me the quick and dirty about Erich von Stroheim's *Greed* as I'm heading to class to teach *MacTeague*; or when Jeff Insko shares the bounty of his garden and of his preserve cabinet with all of us every year, and that's not even mentioning the Oakhill culture; or when Pamela always, always, always asks how Brian is doing; or when Jim talks to me about teaching with such dedication and enthusiasm that I feel reinvigorated every time; or when Niels will look across the table at me during a meeting in which I've just ranted about some thing or another, and he will nod and wink and reassure me that I might be making sense after all; or when Rachel convinces me that I, too, could succeed at blogging; or when Andrea agrees to discuss the "Federalist 37" with my husband so that I don't have to; or when Kyle indulges my unhealthy fascination with the Marilyn Monroe version of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and sends me articles and teaching tips for the film; or when

Annie Gilson helps me with a problem so thoughtfully and generously that when I leave off the email exchange at the office, by the time I get home, she's on the telephone there to follow up because she knows that I am still upset; or when Kevin Grimm employs the secret knowledge he has acquired from serving on the AAUP

***The friendships I've formed in this department have nurtured and sustained me.***

executive committee to give me wise advise on matters that shall remain confidential; or when Jeff Chapman tells a story, any story; or when Doris advises me about the safe use of my power tools; or when Linda tells me about her email exchange with Annie Dillard; or when Becky Godlasky leaves a cupcake on my desk to help get me through my 12 hour teaching day; or when Gladys responds to my ongoing anxieties about classroom dynamics with the comforting reassurance of saying that it's always exactly like that for her too; or when Becky and Cyndie save my hide in any number of ways, which occurs about 4 times each week, even during the summer and occasionally when the campus is closed; or when Bailey brightens every moment of my every day just by being here, and just by being Bailey; or when Susan Hawkins writes a letter nominating me for the Judd Award when really, so many others are so very deserving.

Indeed, the very fact that the Judd Award exists is precisely my point. The friendship, and mutual support and the kindness and generosity that have always defined this department's culture have made all of my accomplishments

possible. Last night, at the final meeting of my English 401 seminar, the students arrived to class with a gigantic sheet cake that they had custom ordered so that it had the image of my book on it. I think about that, and I look around this room and feel rather like Fraulein Maria out in the greenhouse singing, "somewhere in my youth or miserable past, I must have done something good."

In the midst of a busy exchange about writing,

and publishing contracts and book sales, Toomer mentions to Frank how grateful he is for Frank's friendship and support. Frank's response is uncharacteristically humble. For that reason, I'll quote it here to close. "You have helped me too, Jean," he writes. "Who can measure the balance one way or the other? My deep concern is, to live up to what you from your own generosity of spirit have put upon me and look to me for. It is hard, but the challenge of your love is good, and I accept it . . . for the whole course of my life."

—Kathleen Pfeiffer



L to R: Joan Rosen, Randy Judd, Brian Connery, Kevin Grimm, Pat Judd

# English Alum Returns and Inspires *by Chelsea Grimmer*

## A Student Response to April's Poetry Reading by Award-Winning Poet Molly Brodak

*OU alum Molly Brodak was awarded the prestigious 2009 Iowa Poetry Prize for her book **A Little Middle of the Night**. To celebrate her achievement, Oakland invited Molly to do a reading from her book followed by a book-signing.*

On Thursday, April 1, students and faculty welcomed Molly back to her undergraduate campus. Professor Hoepfner, whose introductory comments about Molly were full of praise, described the tone of Molly's poetry as "both wry and tender." When Molly began her reading, she joked, "I see so many of my professors here and that is making me so nervous!" – an admission that put students such as myself at ease. Molly was quick to praise the creative writing faculty at OU. She explained that Professor Hoepfner's introduction was especially meaningful because her interest in writing poetry began with her experience in his class during her undergraduate studies.

Molly continued to give her past instructors credit for her success as a poet, dedicating her book to her mother, her grandfather, and her teachers, then launched into her reading. It was thrilling to hear how OU impacted an amazing artist of the written word, and reminded me how fortunate I am to have had the workshop experiences at OU.

Molly soon had the room captivated, reading seamlessly through several of her poems. She explained the background that led to each poem's creation, and students and faculty alike listened intently. I found it particularly useful, as a beginning writer, to hear Molly read a variety of her poems, from those that spoke about her experience with a brain tumor, to her thoughts on "Snow White." When Molly explained her background in visual arts and how she meandered into writing in a round-about manner, it became an instant encouragement to college-aged writers in the audience. Adding to her poetry's depth and scope were her ekphrastic poems. Many students entered the OU Ekphrasis competition this year, and perhaps drew inspiration or felt encouraged to hear a successful poet's own poetry about the visual arts. Molly explained how she tried to mix up her topics: "I don't want to be known as the girl who wrote about her brain tumor." In "Underneath," she writes:

The last dump and trailer on the edge of town –  
which way to the wilderness? What edge.  
Let them think  
We need to witness our own limits transgressed.  
Let them think there are limits.



Lines such as these question the authorities that enforce a crippling belief in boundaries. They remind us what the writer's true purpose is – to question everything and bring forth the truths behind words. During the Q and A after her reading, questions ranged from the serious, such as

advice on getting published, to the light-hearted, such as, "Do you ever write about food?" Many writers and prospective writers in the audience had the chance to learn from Molly's experiences, as she explained that achieving publication requires frequent submissions, and frequent submissions result, inevitably, in frequent rejections.

Encouraged by my writing workshops, I recently began submitting my own writing; and, yes, seeing the rejection in the mail may sometimes be discouraging. To hear a successful writer admit that she receives rejections regularly, but presses on, regardless, encouraged me to resume the submission process. Molly advised individuals to become emotionally unattached to the rejections, saying, "You have to be persistent...it's like paying the bills."

As the event came to a close, Molly spoke about winning the 2009 Iowa Poetry Prize. She said, "It was just short of horrifying...I still think of it as the 'luck' thing." However, anyone

at the event would most likely agree – Molly did not win the award based on luck, but on her skill as a cutting-edge poet who understands the writing process and the human spirit. After the Q and A, Molly offered to sign copies of her book; a long line quickly formed, and the OU book store sold out within ten minutes all of their copies of *A Little Middle of the Night*.



## Gilson Reads from New Novel-in-Progress

At noon on February 18, a crowd of about 40 filed into the Lake Superior Room to hear Professor Annie Gilson read from the manuscript of her novel *A Book of Mirrors*. This was the first installment of the department's Research in Progress series devoted to the creative work of a faculty member. If the crowd—mostly students—came for a show, they were not disappointed. Gilson is as lively a reader as she is a writer. She set up the reading by describing the novel's intricate plot that combines political agitation, visionary manifestations and family relationships that bridge (and fail to bridge) class backgrounds.

The novel is set in New York City and Reno, and focuses on 17-year-old Sophie Abbott and two friends, who get involved with the Earth Liberation Front (they go to Reno to free wild mustangs destined for slaughter). As a counterpoint to this focal narrative, the novel also explores the lives of Sophie's family back in New York City, touching on urban ennui, desire as it is intertwined with the love of art, and the sorrows of forgetting what you once believed in.

Sophie's act of leaving her East Village home forces her family to confront 15 years of old griefs. Her father, a former sailor, and her mother, a professor of art history, have long been estranged. Her fortune-telling grandmother has silently lived with strange manifestations that allow her to sense both the future and people's hidden desires and fears, yet these visions have also prevented her from being anything more than



an observer in her own life. Each of these characters discovers that, though Sophie has left home, her elusive, seemingly fantastical nature (her grandmother calls her "Holy Sophia, Divine Mirror of the World") enacts changes in their lives, both mysterious and earthly. In this way, the gift

of wonder is returned to the estranged members of this New York City clan of artists and activists and mystics. Sophie herself undergoes her own transformation, one that marks her with loss and sorrow, as well as joy.

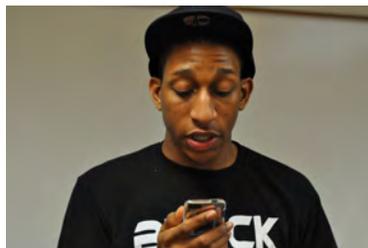
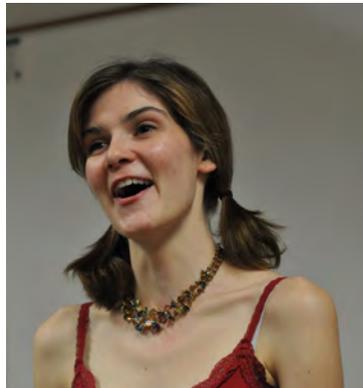
After the reading, the students in the audience were bursting with questions. They asked about the writing process, the novel's genesis and the relationship of the novel's characters to people in her life. Professor Gilson answered the questions adroitly, explaining that novels come when they want to. Characters, she explained, may have a connection to people she knew, but they develop in ways she can't control.

The reading whetted their appetite. After the reading was over, Professor Gilson hurried off to meet her class. Those in the audience who did not have classes to get to lingered in the room, hoping, perhaps, to catch another taste of the novel.

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## Scenes from the 12th Annual Tax Day Poetry Bash

On April 15th, faculty and students once again gathered to celebrate the art of poetry by reading from some of their favorite poems. The lively event not only featured a range of poems read in a range of styles; but also a book raffle, and the presentation of of the 2010 Ekphrasis Poetry Contest Awards, including readings of the winning entries.



CAREER STORY

# A Conversation with Tobye S. Stein *by Annie Gilson*

I met with Tobye Stein in November of 2009 to talk about her experiences as an English major at Oakland University in the early 1970s. Following graduation, with a B.A. and M.A. in hand from OU, she went on to have a rich and exciting career, and she agreed to share the evolution of that career with me. Because of the variety of positions Stein has held, and because of her flexible and adaptive use of her English degree, I knew her story would be of great interest to English majors who are currently working toward graduation and a career beyond school. Ms. Stein wasn't so sure, but agreed to let me proceed.

Stein admits that she didn't start out as an English major. Her high school Honors' American Lit teacher convinced her she had no place in an English class outside of Freshman Lit, but as soon as she took Introduction to Modern Literature, English 111 (still being taught to this day!) she had a conversion experience. Literature was wonderful; it opened her eyes to the world! She had an additional lit classes which she liked, but it wasn't until she took English 242 with Professor Bob Eberwein that she knew she had discovered a focus that was more than just a major—it was a passion. Moreover, Bob Eberwein read aloud from her exam in class along with two others from the class, an exam Stein was sure she had failed, because it exemplified what he wanted students produce with their open-notes, open-book exams. She was embarrassed but managed to survive. The fact that this brilliant professor thought her work worthy of being read aloud to others amazed Stein. She realized that some professors wanted quality of writing and thought, not just the reproduction of their own views. This enabled Stein to start thinking of writing as a creative act, one where she began to evolve her thinking and analytical skills. A class she took later with Professor Nigel Hampton was eye opening when a comment she received on a paper said Stein was “a colossal wit.” Hampton said to her in the Hawthorne/Steinbeck seminar she took with him: “You're not just funny, you can actually write.” Stein began to understand that her sharp sense of humor and terse, tell-it-like-it-is writing style were valued by her professors. Indeed, she would come to find that these abilities were valued by every company and organization for which she later worked.

Stein noted that, because she went to school during an economic recession, she was forced to work while she went to school, to help pay for her education. She observed that none of her work experiences were wasted. She came to OU from Oak Park High School, a very homogeneous institution. She came to OU because it was a departure from Oak Park, and because OU was rated outstanding scholastically.

While pursuing her degrees at OU, Stein worked as a student advisor on campus, helping freshmen and transfer

students in selecting appropriate courses and adapting to college life as she herself had done. She also was assigned to write *A Guide to Freshmen Enrollment* and *A Training Guide for Student Advisors* while working for the Dean of of Freshmen and Transfer Students. Working closely with the Dean allowed Stein to further hone her writing skills.

After earning her BA, she stayed at OU to earn her MA. She continued to work for the Dean, and used her position to get to know more professors and administrators, as well as other students. This was an important move, because talking and working with people in differing positions of authority helped her to hone her oral communication skills, and to become comfortable working side-by-side with people who were influential in the University community. She encourages students to

get to know everyone they can through their experience at OU. Don't be afraid to introduce yourself, talk to professors and administrative staff, ask questions, and ask for help. Watch, look, and listen as you work on your BA, because the more information you gather, the better equipped you will be when you head out into the world to start your own career.

Stein earned a teaching certificate, even though she thought that she really didn't want to teach, because everyone told her that teaching was all that an English degree would enable her to do. In the 1970s, the English degree's flexible utility hadn't yet been generally recognized. While student-teaching at Southfield-Lathrup High School, Stein found she enjoyed teaching students, but that the politics of teaching in the public schools were difficult to swallow.

***Don't be afraid to introduce yourself, talk to professors, and administrative staff, ask questions, and ask for help.***

While some teachers were dedicated to the students, others seemed to be there only for the scheduled time off and regular pay checks. When problems arose, other new teachers told her the goal was to keep your mouth shut until you got tenure. Because teaching jobs were more or less non-existent especially for English majors, the only route available seemed to be substitute teaching. Since she was still quite shy at the time, she decided she needed another career route.

The Dean she had worked with for two years suggested she consider going into Higher Education in Student Affairs since Stein enjoyed her work as a Student Advisor. She enrolled in OU's then newly-created Counseling program and earned her MA. Stein also took a job as a resident assistant to gain some experience working with students in a residential setting. Upon graduation, she accepted a position at North Illinois University in DeKalb, IL and worked as a Residence Hall Advisor,



*Tobye S. Stein (right) and her husband Neal*

One of the many things Stein learned while working with faculty, administrative staff, and fellow students was to be straightforward and to the point. She also learned through numerous interviews at OU that, while it's important to prepare for interviews and be professional in conduct and attire, it's equally important to be yourself. The Director of Housing at NIU found Stein very direct and frank and full of questions that were challenging yet atypical for a candidate. Upon checking her references at OU, he was told, "Stein will always challenge you and be frank with you; you should do the same with her." If they wanted someone who would be passionate, fully-engaged, and who would not pull punches, Stein was their woman. It probably helped that one of Stein's OU administrative contacts had also been a member of the NIU Housing Office several years earlier. She reiterates: there is no harm in getting to know instructors and administrative staff. Most are happy to be helpful and provide references.

Stein went on to direct a large staff, oversee staff development, counsel students on future career paths, handle emergencies and, in spite of these duties, even found time to continue writing assorted training materials and administrative manuals. She willingly accepted other writing assignments, something many of her colleagues avoided. Because she had a wealth of talent and adaptable, useful service as a training specialist, in addition to her writing skills, after two years she received an offer from the University of Maryland to be their Community Director. There, she oversaw a staff of 75 and had under her care 9 dorms full of students. But after 5 years in Maryland, Stein felt the need for another career change. Leaving Maryland provided Stein with a tough decision: pursue a PhD at Northwestern University where she was accepted into the Speech Communication Department, or return to Michigan during one of its worst economies to be closer to family? She did some research and realized that entry-level positions for assistant professors paid significantly less than what she had made in her Student Affairs positions at Northern Illinois and Maryland. So, she put off grad school and instead worked for a time in sales, hoping that this work would lead to a position in Sales Training and Staff Development. In the meantime, an opportunity to teach part-time at OU presented itself. It was at this point that one of her OU professors (now her colleague!) received a grant to retrain GM-UAW laid-off auto workers, and he hired Stein as one of the Counselor/Trainers to help him with the retraining project. After working on other similar grant-funded projects for a few years, Stein then took a position at Providence Hospital, again utilizing her specialization in training, development, and writing. She continued to teach at OU part-time, training Human Resources majors how to conduct employee-training and to write better (to the chagrin of many students), as well as to conduct interviews utilizing a variety of written and verbal assessment skills. Who would have imagined in 1974 that an English major could adapt her skills to so many settings?

After 4 years at Providence, where she headed the Training and Development Department, she decided it was time for another career change that would provide new opportunities.

***While it's important to prepare for interviews and be professional in conduct and attire, it's equally important to be yourself.***

Although Stein was then reporting to the Vice President of Human Resources and had the opportunity to write and direct scripts for audio/visual presentations, which were used throughout The Daughters of Charity Hospital System (in addition to her training and development duties), the opportunities for career growth were shrinking.

Stein began interviewing and decided to accept a position at a growing Credit Union Service Organization (CUSO). Although her job title remained the same, she was now reporting to the Company President, and they saw mutual potential, he in her for a future Human Resources Manager, and she with the company which was rapidly expanding. During Stein's tenure with the organization, she moved up through the ranks to become the first Senior Vice President for Human Resources. As she earned her promotions, she continued her professional education, earning several Human Resources designations, including the Senior Professional in Human Resources Certificate, as well as certifications in Compensation and Benefits.

In 2001, her organization and a California-based credit union organization began merger discussions. Stein decided the best thing to do was to research everything she could find related to mergers and acquisitions as well as talk to colleagues who had been through the process (although not many from the acquired company had survived). The research skills that she had gone on honing after first developing them as an OU English major, continued to be a valuable resource. The merger took over a year to execute. And yes, during this time, Stein was concerned that she might be thanked and dismissed when the dust settled. She took time to research corporate cultures and what needed to be done to bring divergent organizations together, and continued to provide her new CEO and colleagues with frank, honest, assessments on various corporate matters.

When the new company emerged, it was with Stein in the position of Executive Vice President of Human Resources. It is impressive to note that Stein was the only Michigan staff member to be promoted to the new company's executive staff. Rather than spending all of her energy worrying about her job and her fate as an individual, as some in the company chose to do, Stein focused all her energy on anticipating what the company would need in the long term after its merger. As a result, the two CEOs of the companies that were merging selected her for their top management team.

Stein has since retired from her position as Executive Vice President of Human Resources. She spends her time developing her musical and culinary interests, traveling with her husband, and remaining a committed and involved member of the OU community. The English Department is proud to have her as one of our most successful alums, and especially appreciative of her willingness to tell us this story, to help and encourage current English majors to keep working hard and keep honing their English major skills. English majors are trained to consider the world with thoughtful honesty, and Stein is here to tell us that this training pays off in the long run.

## BOOK REVIEW

John Stauffer's *Giants: Douglass and Lincoln* Jeffrey Insko

In a commencement address at Hampton University last May, President Obama reminded the graduates of the historically black college of Frederick Douglass, who insisted that “education means emancipation.” It wasn’t the first time that Obama cited the great nineteenth-century black writer, orator, and leader. Indeed, one of the felicities (for me at least) of the candidacy and election of Barack Obama has been something of a flurry of public interest in Douglass and his legacies in American civic life (go ahead, just try googling “Douglass and Obama”). It might be an overstatement to say that such interest in Douglass eclipsed the 2009 bicentennial of the birth of that better-known and more frequently cited (even by Obama himself) nineteenth-century writer, orator, and leader Abraham Lincoln. Yet it might also turn out to be the case that the so-called “Obama Era” marks a subtle shift in how the U.S. remembers its nineteenth-century: Lincoln now has to share the stage.

None of this is lost on John Stauffer, the author of *Giants: The Parallel Lives of Frederick Douglass & Abraham Lincoln*. The book was released on election day, 2008 and begins with an epigraph from Obama’s *The Audacity of Hope*, praising—who else?—both Lincoln and Douglass. A joint biography of the two great men, *Giants* is a vivid, readable account of the corresponding lives, both public and private, of Lincoln and Douglass, which culminated not only in political alliance, but in an improbable friendship.

Douglass and Lincoln met only three times in 1863-5. And while those meetings are themselves of considerable interest—and Stauffer supplies rich accounts of them, drawn mainly from Douglass’s autobiographical recollections—those brief encounters mainly provide the scaffold for Stauffer’s fascinating examination of how the “strikingly parallel lives” of the two men reflected the political and cultural crises of the first half of the nineteenth-century—not just sectional division, slavery and racism, but also oratory, masculine interracial friendship, and self-making.

In his earlier book, the wonderful *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race*, Stauffer explored the cross-racial friendships of a group of four abolitionists: John Brown, Gerrit Smith, Douglass, and James McCune Smith. The lives of those four, Stauffer showed, challenged the period’s notions of immutable racial identity. *Giants* echoes *Black Hearts* both in its method and in its interest in interracial friendship, but its central theme is

the quintessentially American notion of self-making. In similar ways—Douglass rose from slavery to become the most famous and revered African-American in the country; Lincoln rose from “poor white trash” to President—the two men embodied the myth of the “self-made man.” Stauffer doesn’t challenge this myth nor does he promote it uncritically; instead, he suggests that for Lincoln and Douglass “such transformation was to improve society... In remaking the self, you reformed society.”

Stauffer’s narrative moves back and forth between his two subjects—“reflecting the one off the other,” as he puts it—in order to draw his parallels: they were both physically striking, taller than average; both were largely self-educated and

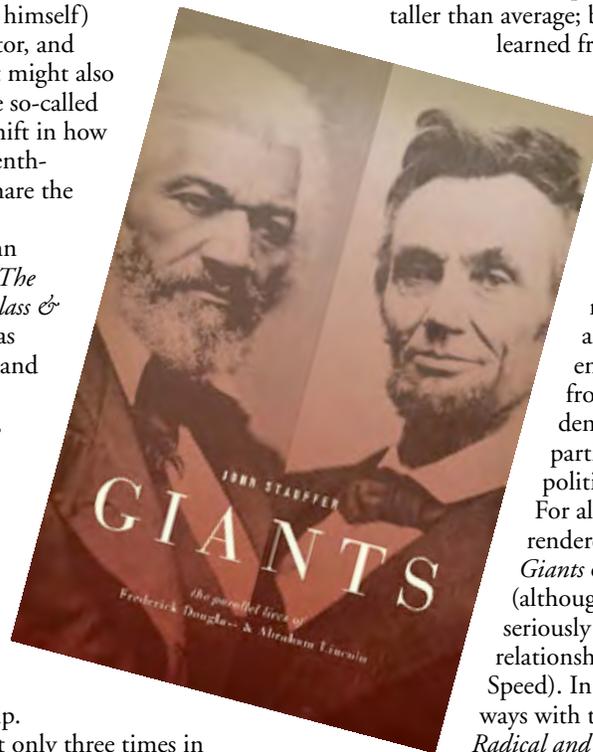
learned from the same books (like *The Columbian*

*Orator*); both emerged from early lives of poverty, filled with violence (Stauffer’s accounts of Lincoln’s early violent “rough and tumbles” are great fun); and both became master orators. Stauffer presents these early experiences as central to the changes each man would undergo later in life: Lincoln’s transformation from average racist and reluctant anti-slavery advocate to a champion of emancipation; Douglass’s transformation from scathing critic of the President to ardent admirer, his gradual acceptance and participation in the pragmatic business of politics.

For all of the book’s considerable interest, deftly rendered in lucid prose, it must also be said that *Giants* doesn’t cover a great deal of new ground (although it does, provocatively, revive and take seriously some speculation about Lincoln’s close relationship with his Springfield friend Joshua Speed). In fact, Stauffer’s account overlaps in many ways with two other recent books, John Oakes’s *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (2008) and Paul and

Stephen Kendrick’s *Douglass and Lincoln: How a Revolutionary Black Leader and a Reluctant Republican Liberator Struggled to End Slavery and Save the Union* (2008). Yet aside from its fine storytelling (no small thing in itself), what sets *Giants* apart—and this won’t be to everyone’s liking—is the assumptions it makes about what it means to cite (like President Obama) and revere figures of the past in the first place. That is, ultimately Stauffer’s book may perhaps be less a work of biography than a work of cultural history, one that seeks to understand the “great” men it takes as its subject not just as themselves powerful forces acting on history, but as individuals (like the rest of us) also acted upon by the powerful forces of history and culture.

*Prof. Insko will be teaching his course in American Literature 1820-65 again this coming fall.*



# A Tribute to Marilyn Williamson, 1927-2010

Marilyn (“Peter”) Williamson, who began a distinguished academic career as a member of Oakland University’s Department of English in the 1960s and early 1970s, died on February 19, 2010, at age 82. A native Chicagoan, she was educated at Vassar College, University of Wisconsin, and Duke University and spent the 1969-70 academic year as a fellow of Harvard University’s Radcliffe Institute. Professor Williamson focused her teaching and research interests on Early Modern British literature with emphasis on Shakespeare and his contemporaries, including women authors. One of her most memorable courses resulted in her Renaissance Drama class staging a richly comical production of Ben Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair* at the old Barn Theatre.

Marilyn’s ironic wit, sharp mind, and warm personality made her a popular teacher and helpful colleague. They served her in good stead also when her interests turned toward academic administrative issues. A leader in the movement for faculty collective bargaining, she chaired the first AAUP bargaining team in 1971. Shortly after that, she left Oakland to become chair of the English Department at Wayne State University – and later Associate Dean for the College of Liberal Arts and Provost of the University. She also committed her remarkable energy to leadership roles in the Modern Language Association.

Ever a scholar, Marilyn Williamson left a substantial body of critical writing with many articles and conference papers as well as books: *The Patriarchy of Shakespeare’s Comedies*; *Raising Their Voices: British Women Writers, 1650-1750*; *Infinite Variety: Antony and Cleopatra in Renaissance Drama and Earlier Tradition*; and *As You Like It, Much Ado about Nothing, and Twelfth Night, or What You*



*Will: An Annotated Bibliography of Shakespeare Studies, 1673-2001*. In “retirement,” she founded the SOAR program (Society of Active Retirees) at Wayne State’s Farmington Hills Campus and chaired its Curriculum and Instruction Committee – teaching in the program herself and often recruiting both retired and active members of Oakland University’s faculty.

She enjoyed travel and the arts, often combining the two as in her frequent trips to the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. Marilyn actively supported the Michigan Opera Theater, the Metropolitan Opera in New York City, and Detroit Institute of Arts, as well as the restoration of Orchestra Hall. Shortly before coming to Oakland, she and her former husband, Oakland physics professor Robert Williamson, spent a year in Italy on a Fulbright, where they lived in Palermo, Sicily. Her most recent travel took her to Machu Picchu in Peru with her son and his husband where she climbed the length and breadth of the citadel with the aid of her walker and the determination that characterized

much of her life.

Among Professor Williamson’s generous bequests to educational programs is the James H. McKay Endowed Fellowship in Applied Mathematics at Oakland University to honor the long-time contributions of her husband. Those wishing to support this fund should contact Pat Zawadzki, Director of Planned Giving, at 248-364-6129. She is survived by her husband, his four children by a previous marriage, and her son, Timothy Williamson, of Boston. A memorial celebration in her honor is scheduled for Sunday, May 16, 2010 at 3 pm in the recital hall of the Old Main building of Wayne State University, at the corner of Warren and Cass.

—Jane Eberwein

## REMEMBERING SHAKESPEARE SCHOLAR PROFESSOR JANET ADELMAN

Niels Herold records with deep sadness the untimely passing of one of our greatest Shakespeareans, Professor Janet Adelman of UC Berkeley, where she taught for most of her stellar career and wrote a progression of monumental essays and books which are already classics of literary and psychoanalytic criticism. Professor Adelman was a total inspiration to all who knew her, an irreplaceable heroine of the Shakespearean academic stage, capable of standing before hundreds and without notes constructing the most potent, subtle, and heart-felt arguments about the nature of family relations in Shakespeare. Herold had just assigned Janet’s great essay on Othello, “Iago’s Alter Ego: Race as Projection,” in his Eng 315, when he learned of her passing on April 6.

FICTION

# The 2010 Flash Fiction Contest Winners

## A Little Dash of Obsession *by Alexandra Giese*

There's an abandoned baseball field in a park near my house. We got a new one a few years ago, and since then, only a few people have occasionally cared to look after the old one. I got one of those push mowers – the kind that doesn't use gasoline – and I attack the field over the summer, slowly conquering it until it's somewhat manageable again. I even bought chalk so that I could mark the dirt.

I like to bring people to the little baseball field, usually dates. It's a good place to see the stars and to think about their stories. I brought a boy named Nalani Watson there when we were in high school. He had light gray eyes, the kind that could look a little blue on one day simply because of what he wore, and when the light hit them, there almost seemed to be no color there; they were the color of dead fire.

I drove him there one night in my truck. I took the blanket out and rolled it out in the bed of the truck, and we climbed in and lay down without a word. I could barely see him in the darkness, but I knew that he was looking up at the stars. Fireflies skittered around us, blinking their way across the field. I like to think they're sending messages to lost souls. When I remember to bring a flash light, I blink back at them.

"You know, you're the saddest boy I ever met," I told Nalani Watson, the boy that I had taken to dinner that night. The wind rustled before he said anything.

"What do you know about it?" he asked, and I felt him sit up more than I saw him do it.

I didn't know how to answer that question. I had seen Nalani in the hallways with the German boy called Bing. Actually, I didn't usually see him with Bing, because Bing left school in the middle of the day, while Nalani went to every class, moving through the hallways as if on a mission and never seeing anyone else. It took me weeks to go near him.

"The first day that I saw you, I knew," I said. He got up, feeling his way around until he could climb out of the truck. I heard his feet hit the ground.

"You don't know what you're talking about," Nalani said. A firefly blinked by him, giving me a glimpse before he was lost to darkness. His eyebrows drew together, taut as a guitar string about to snap.

"Don't be mad, Lani. I wasn't trying to upset you. It just slipped out. You know that happens," I said. "I mean, you should have an idea that it happens. Look what happened at dinner. I'm sorry, Lani."

"Just take me home," He said.

"Okay," I said. I climbed out of the bed of the truck, and he walked to the passenger side as I walked around to the driver's side.

The ride home was quiet, and that the fresh summer night smell blew through the windows. I already missed the field. When we got to his house, a small yellow house with a dying garden in the front, there was a light on in the living room. We could see the silhouette of a man sitting.

"I'll see you at school, Lani," I said after parking in front of the house. He sat there, staring at the living room for a few moments.

He nodded. "Sure," he said before opening the door and clambering out of my truck.

I watched him as he crossed the yard and walked up the porch steps – making sure to put his foot on each one. He opened the door, which looked pale orange, and the man's silhouette moved from the living room. Nalani looked at me before he shut the door, and I watched the light disappear behind him.

I went back to the field to watch the fireflies and the stars, thinking of Nalani.

### Flash Fiction Winners

Congratulations to this year's Flash Fiction Contest winners!

#### Undergraduate Category

1st Place: Alexandra Giese, "A Little Dash of Obsession"

2nd Place: Marsha Graham, "You Can't Go Home Again"

3rd Place: Sean Callan, "Seventeen"

4th Place: Chelsea Grimmer, "A Space."

Honorable Mentions: Kathy Angel, "The Dagger"; Seth D Clarke, "The Exodus Hymn"; Evan Pham, "Eden at Night"; Jennifer Savasky, "The Erikson Question"

#### Graduate/Alumni Category

1st Place: Jim Kelly, "When the Tabloids Turned Our Way"

2nd Place: Patrick Samuel, "Sunday Groceries"

3rd Place: Shayla Hawkins, "The Queen's Kiss"

Honorable Mention: Brian Weibel, "Pardon Me Boy, Is That the Chattanooga Choo-Choo?"

Semifinalists: Kathleen Belanger, "Pirate's Corner"; Randy Judd, "Epiphany"; Annette Krizanich, "Group"; Gary Miron, "Open Door"; Shaun Moore, "Cigars & Cellphones"

## When the Tabloids Turned Our Way *by Jim Kelly*

Love crazed teen butchers girlfriend. Sleepy suburb in shock. Death wears a letter sweater. Horror pays a visit to the girl next door. Or was she? Shocking new revelations. Quiet religious honor student or fatal flirt? You decide. Townspeople stunned, numb. Spurned slasher spills guts, tells all. Still, questions remain. Why her? Why him? Why here?

Hard, sharp and fast, the red lights from the cop cars spun and spun, hurting my eyes. Adults standing in the dark, standing on a front lawn. Two cops, a woman with curlers in her hair wearing a robe and slippers, a man in pajamas wearing tie shoes with the laces all undone. Then me.

I was just walking by, walking to school. Usually a buddy walked with me but he was sick that day. I had my lunch in a brown paper bag. A peanut butter and jelly sandwich, chips in a crimp top wax paper bag and Oreo cookies wrapped up in a white paper napkin.

It must have just happened, the murder. She wasn't even covered up yet. Lit by flashlights, by the red lights that kept spinning, she looked tiny and still. There was blood everywhere.

Already, she was a corpse, a body, a victim. Words we would read again and again over the next few weeks. Later, I would read how many times she'd been stabbed.

She was wearing flats. They were all the rage back then. Slip on shoes with thin flat soles and no support. One was on just fine. The other one was dangling, hanging from what, her big toe?

Who was she? A thirteen year old girl. A girl who walked off to school one warm spring morning and got killed along the way. But who was she?

We read all about it in the tabloids. They always had a brand new batch of bad black and white pictures every week. We stared and stared, looking for somebody we might know, something we might recognize. Was that her Mom or his? Was that the school, the police station or the court house?

Jailhouse revelations weekly. Price of admission? Twenty five cents, only a quarter. What did the coroner's report show? What did his shrink say? Was she a virgin? Was he crazy? Was she pregnant? Would he, could he stand trial? Details inside. Only a quarter.

The killer was caught and confessed everything on the same day as the murder. He was seventeen and a starter on the high school baseball team. He was quiet. He was polite. He got good grades. He was an only child and he lived four houses down from her on the same block.

"Quick hands, good arm, good instincts" his coach said. "A born shortstop. But, to be honest, he couldn't hit for beans."

"He come running in the john" said a big dumb guy from the high school, a guy who liked to pick fights, make people squirm. "I was smoking a cigarette in the boy's bathroom and this skinny guy runs in. He's all bloody and he's got a knife. He must have recognized me right off. People

know not to mess with me. He asks can I help him out, get rid of the knife for him. He said he killed his girlfriend. He said that right to my face."

"I told him sure, but I didn't throw that knife away like I said. I give it to the Principal and he called the cops. That's why he got caught so fast, because of me."

"My little girl is an angel" her father told one reporter, "an angel up in Heaven."

"I can't look at her things" her mother told another reporter. "I can't look at her things, go into her room or stop crying. I keep thinking she's just going to walk through the front door, same as always."

"One minute" her Uncle Leo said, "give me one minute alone with him. That's all I'd need. I'd give that sick bastard a taste of his own medicine. I'd gut him like a deer. Only I'd do it nice and slow. Make sure he knew what was happening to him, and who was doing it, and why."

A neighbor girl told this story in court, under oath. "They used to go into our garage after school, when he wasn't playing baseball. We have an old sofa in there against the back wall. They'd go in there and kiss. I saw them once. I don't know what else they did. I only saw them kiss. She wore his ring on a chain around her neck. It was too big for any of her fingers. She told me they were going steady. That she was his girlfriend."

The Mayor, a fat man with a big mouth who liked to hear himself talk, guaranteed that nothing like this would ever happen around here again, at least so long as he was mayor. "I put the cops on notice" he said, "and the cops all know me, they know I mean business."

Stories, stories and more stories. Everyone told their little piece of it. What they knew and why it was important. Her family and his family, their relatives and friends, their neighbors, school teachers, a coroner a shrink and a judge, jurors after it was all over, after he was convicted and sentenced, the girl's second cousin from out of state who said she'd had a premonition, even the night janitor at the junior high.

Not a one though, not a single one told what her laugh was like, or her smile. Or how, all alone in her room, she used to dance and dream, play acting her future. Who she wanted to be. Or what things she kept in that decorated little box hidden away at the back of her closet, all the special little things she'd been collecting, saving as treasures her whole life long. Those things, those things the tabloids never told.

### Want More Flash Fiction?

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

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

STUDENT POETRY

Green Succor

We've come off one another like pear skins  
loosened by a building heat and left shriveled  
in the cooling; the slack of dramatic weight loss

that sends disassociated flesh  
wagging after the memory of key lime pie.  
I was bare bones in those final moments,

didn't even know it,  
and our meeting was the shucking  
down to kernels, chained peridots,

little conciliatory jewels like all that talking you did.  
The sun coming in burned the shadow of us

into your lime leather chairs;  
I talked too, too much,  
head whitened like a monk parakeet

and with the same vocal calamity;  
the language was heartier when we were strangers.  
Each brightly paneled word,

like those birds, stood out  
against withering foliage despite their lost origins  
and the quieter chattering coming on.

—*Elizabeth Milam*

Anatomy of Instinct

The bestial song  
that beats out

from fingertips run  
over spinal cord

echoes ages of  
suspended notes poised

for the chorus  
to hollow out

the lungs and  
compose an anthem

of species undone.

—*Elizabeth Milam*

Acts of the Unconscious

With all these mirrors,  
cells  
fire into the  
beast,

and (this  
too)  
leaps down to  
choke.

The ape howls,  
mirrors  
the screeching barn  
owl,

and I stand to  
face  
the trunk;  
gnarled.

Feathers will  
fall;  
they must  
always

melt, quick to the  
wick,  
And I will always  
twitch

my left heart when you  
point  
your left finger:  
cells.

At the dusk behind my wings.  
spires  
rise behind my flight –  
or

is it a  
single,  
shingled red  
roof?

—*Chelsea Grimmer*

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*Elizabeth Milam and Chelsea Grimmer are OU English majors.*

## News Shorts

### New Major in Cinema Studies Approved

The English department is excited to announce the approval, last fall, of a new Bachelor of Arts in Cinema Studies. The new program has already attracted over 40 majors, more than tripling the program's year one projection of 12.

Program Director Kyle Edwards says, "We have been delighted both by the response to the new program and by the quality of students who have selected Cinema Studies as their major or minor in its inaugural year."

Edwards also notes that more than 10 new courses have been approved for the program, with still more pending. In addition, a new Cinema Studies faculty member will join the English department next fall (see story, p. 1). "The Cinema Studies program would not have enjoyed such success," Edwards notes, "without the support of the English department faculty and staff." The program is also excited to announce the development of a new internship program for its majors: you can read about it [here](#). For more information on the new Cinema Studies major, visit their [website](#).

### Novelist Junot Diaz Set to Visit OU in November

Mark your calendars! The English department is pleased to announce that Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Junot Diaz will be coming to OU next winter for a public talk and reading. Diaz's visit promises to be one of the most exciting public events sponsored by the English dept. in recent memory.

Diaz's fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker* and *Best American Short Stories*, among other prestigious venues. In 1996 he published a collection of short stories titled *Drown*. He won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2008 for his magnificent novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

The event is scheduled for November 4th, from 5-7 pm in the Banquet Rooms of the OC. All are welcome to attend. Please join us.



### Anderson and Insko Honored for Collaborative Work

This year, Professors Rob Anderson and Jeffrey Insko became the first-ever recipients at OU of a Faculty Recognition Award for collaborative work.

At this year's Faculty Recognition Luncheon, the two were honored for their innovative, collaborative pedagogy. Anderson, a British Romantic specialist, and Insko, a specialist in antebellum American literature, have team-taught three courses, two of which have focused upon the poets William Blake and Walt Whitman.

Their collaborative teaching has also resulted in a scholarly project. They have presented papers on Blake and Whitman at several conferences and are working on a book project titled *Poets' Work: Time, Labor, Blake, and Whitman*.



*Jeff Chapman*

### Chapman Awarded University Research Fellowship

Jeff Chapman has been awarded a University Research Fellowship for summer 2010. Prof. Chapman plans to use the fellowship to travel in Europe to perform research for his graphic novel on the Latin poet Ovid. He is mainly focusing his visit on Constanta, Romania, where Ovid was exiled, but he will also be spending some time in other places. His time will be split between sketching the landscape and writing. All told the trip will last seven weeks.

### Pamela Mitzelfeld Named CAS Ambassador



*Pamela Mitzelfeld*

English's own Pamela Mitzelfeld has been appointed an Ambassador for the College of Arts and Sciences. CAS Ambassadors work to advance the College's vision and mission - to provide a quality liberal studies education that will enrich students' lives and give them the tools they need to lead productive personal and professional lives. The Ambassadors create a bridge between the College of Arts and Sciences and the community by generating increased awareness of the college's academic programs and community initiatives. "I'm deeply honored to be an ambassador for the College of Arts and Sciences and the English Department," Mitzelfeld said. "It's always a pleasure to share the news about all the great work we do."

### Stay Informed

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

**[Just click here.](#)**

# Student News

## English Major Earns Keeper of the Dream Award

(Adapted from News at OU):

English major Chelsea Grimmer was one of three students to receive this year's prestigious Keeper of the Dream Scholarship Awards for contributions to and promotion of interracial understanding and tolerance.

A member of the OU Honors College, Alpha Lambda Delta and two college ministries – QuarterLife and Inter-Varsity— Grimmer has served as a cultural ambassador in mission trips to Venezuela, Germany and Amsterdam, and regularly volunteers at home through a variety of organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, the Greening of Detroit, Helping Hands Food Pantry and a project that hosts barbecues for the homeless in Detroit's Cass Corridor.

## 2010 Scholarship Winners Announced

Once again, the English department is pleased to announce another fine crop of scholarship winners. The Holzbock Humanities Scholarship has been awarded to Bethany Boutin. Gabriella Passarelli and Chelsea Grimmer have won the Mr. and Mrs. Roger Kyes Scholarship. The Doris J. Dressler Scholarship will go to Bethany Boutin and Jacqueline Manning. Another English major, Ashley McIntosh will receive the Handleman Scholarship through the Honors College.

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

## Sigma's Memorable Year

Sifting through the souvenir allocation and reservation forms from the past year conjures up some exciting memories for Sigmites. This year was jam-packed with speakers, read-ins, get-togethers, and other events Here's a quick wrap up of it all:



*Sigma Tau Delta officers, old and new, with Prof. McDaniel*

Professor Pfeiffer's lecture, "The Joys of Reading Other Peoples' Mail," took us through the mysterious relationship of Jean Toomer and Waldo Frank, while explaining the ups and downs of primary research. Professor Chapman's lecture, "Beware: Graphic Content. Comics: They're not just for kids anymore," brought in a full house on March 10th. Professor Chapman engaged his listeners with series comics and graphic novels including *Ninja Turtles*, *X-men*, and, of course, zombie quail (see p. 16).

Over the year, we held two read-ins. The Halloween Read-in drew some costumed figures for six hours of gothic literature. For Black History Month, the student organization E.L.I.T.E. and Sigma Tau Delta cosponsored a read-in that celebrated African American authors.

Professor Cole's generous hospitality at game night and movie night allowed Sigmites to gather for great food and a few laughs.

We are proud to report that over the months of February and March, we collected 616 books for the Beyond Basics Book Drive. These books will aid Beyond Basics in encouraging student reading, specifically the students of Barbara Jordan Elementary, and will hopefully contribute to the overall literacy of Detroit schools.

Lastly, we would like to thank everyone for making this a memorable year with their continuous support and enthusiasm. Specifically, we thank Professor Bailey McDaniel for her

constant encouragement and creative ideas.

## English Majors Get Published, Win Writing Awards

Chelsea Rebekah Grimmer's poem, "How I Do Know," was accepted for publication in the Spring 2010 issue of *Diverse Voices Quarterly*. Kaitlin Huff, has had her essay accepted for *Sticks and Stones and Other Student Essays*, published by St. Martin's Press. Her essay is entitled, "Unhealthy Lunchrooms: Toxic for Schoolchildren and the Environment." Sarah Vore, has won Honorable Mention in Category 5 (Advanced Writing) for her paper: "Bullying in the Classroom: Educational Awareness."

Congratulations on these exciting student achievements in writing!

## Graduate School Acceptances

We are also proud to report on some of our students' recent success applying to graduate school. Nina Lavelenat has accepted a spot at UCLA's doctoral program in Cinema and Savannah Gignac is currently deciding between offered graduate spots in Library Sciences from McGill, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Michigan. English minor Pam Hester (a Political Science major) received the graduate assistantship position in OU's Public Administration department, where she will pursue an MPA with a concentration in non-profit management.

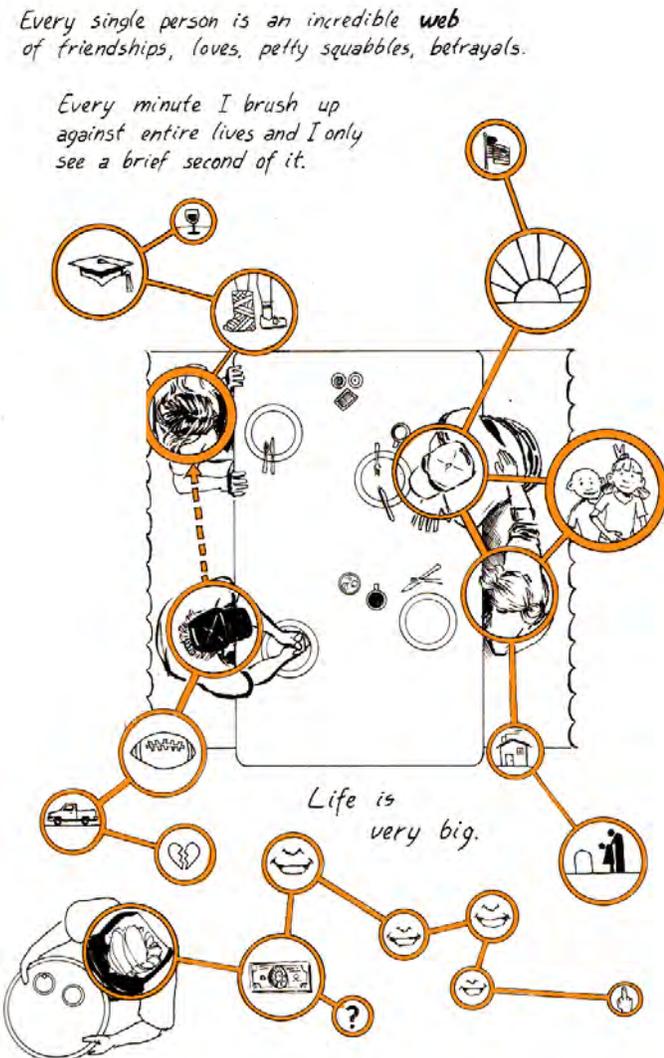
CHAPMAN, PFEIFFER DELIVER SIGMA TAU DELTA LECTURES

Graphic Content

Professor Chapman's lecture, "Beware: Graphic Content! The New Age of Comics (They're Not Just For Kids Anymore)," began with an overview of recent developments in the theory and practice of the Graphic novel and concluded with a lively discussion of his own intriguing work in the field.

The lecture explored the interaction between text and image in graphic novels. He bolstered the lecture with a slide presentation and had copies of books to pass around the crowd. Working with the examples, he demonstrated the visual techniques graphic artists use to advance the narrative. Occasionally, graphic novels even introduce parallel visual and verbal narratives.

The highlight of the lecture, however, was clearly his discussion of his own work. Professor Chapman brought examples of his work, including his innovative book small enough to fit in a box of matches. Chapman's graphic works are simultaneously whimsical and probing; light-hearted and dark. One of the stories proceeded by giving instructions on composing stories.



Other People's Mail by Kathy Pfeiffer

Now that my book is about to be published, I shall confess to you the tawdry and selfish origins by which I came to write it. Yes, it contains all the sheen and distinction that an academic publication provides, with its long, colon-enhanced title (*Brother Mine: The Correspondence of Jean Toomer and Waldo Frank*) and yes, it was published by a distinguished academic press (University of Illinois), and yes, my name appears beneath the byline "Edited by," emphasizing that this was an illustrious undertaking indeed. But listen, gentle reader, here's the sordid truth: this book was initially motivated by two urges and neither of them are particularly noble—I undertook the initial research because I don't like to sweat, and I wrote the book in large part because I am, at heart, a very, very nosy person.

During the summer of 1993, I was living in New Haven, Connecticut, writing my dissertation, and living in an apartment with unreliable air conditioning. Because of the heat—far more than any naturally inquisitive scholarly instinct—I decided to spend my summer in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. This place is excellent: bright, quiet, clean, and best of all, hermetically sealed to keep the air brisk and dry, lest the precious archives housed therein should mold or sweat. In truth, I probably didn't need to read archival material in order to write my dissertation, but as an adjunct lecturer at Yale, I owned the requisite identification to gain access to that hushed and carpeted sanctuary. The Jean Toomer Papers seemed as good a place to start as any—my dissertation was on race passing, and Jean Toomer was known to pass for white during his lifetime. Moreover, Jean Toomer wrote numerous versions of his autobiography, enough pages to keep me coolly occupied for the whole of July. I filled out the call slips, settled down to read them all and discovered....that they were actually kinda boring.

So I turned instead to the Correspondence file. Scholarly interest? Somewhat. But mostly I just love to read other people's mail. I read the Jean Toomer and Waldo Frank exchange with increasing fascination, trying to piece together letters that were out of order, unraveling the story to put the tale of love, support, envy and betrayal into its proper order, trying to understand the final letter between them ("I wish that you would write to me, and tell me why you left New York the way you did, and why you did not answer the letter I wrote to you on my departure...."). The exchange was riveting. It is nearly two decades later; in the end, I spent many sweaty summers rifling through those letters and I came to know the painful facts of their complicated, fascinating relationship. But at the start, it was nothing more glamorous than my own self-interest, my personal idiosyncrasy that set the whole thing in motion.

# Their First Professional Conference

## STEP Students Attend Michigan Council of Teachers of English Conference

Sixteen students from the Secondary Teacher Education Program attended "Writing Across the Divides," a professional conference of English educators at Michigan State University on Saturday, April 10, 2010. Under the direction of program coordinator Nancy Joseph, the students participated in a variety of interactive workshops on topics ranging from graphic novels and multi-genre fiction to reflective writing.

*I attended the presentation called "Writing Well with a Common Interest: Using Harry Potter and Twilight in the Secondary English Classroom." The most interesting part was when a science teacher explained how she integrates literature into her classroom. Many high school students have such a narrow spectrum of what they "think they are good at." It was great to see a science teacher who encourages her students to read and write and incorporates literature into her science lessons.*

—Gabrielle Cook

*The most interesting session that I attended was "Literature and Terrorism." One way or another I, as a teacher, will have to deal with this topic in the classroom because terrorism is so heavily incorporated into our everyday lives as Americans. The speaker, Dr. Allen Webb, talked about how the words "terrorism" and "terrorist" have become some of the most powerful words in our language. He invited us, as teachers, to encourage our students to think critically about the words that they're using and provided an array of book titles, documentaries and websites that would help do this. After mulling through some of the materials, I have no doubt that they'll be incredibly useful! I walked out of the session with a new perspective, feeling both inspired and empowered to someday make a difference in a classroom.*

—Tara Fugate

*I attended a session about integrating Harry Potter and Twilight into our lessons to explain difficult concepts. The presenters really encouraged us to get the math and science teachers to read current literature because they can also integrate these works into their lessons. Staying current helps all teachers relate to students.*

—Mary Shereda

*I found the MCTE conference experience to be very enriching—an electric environment in which many bright minds collaborated. It was much different than I had anticipated because I thought there would be more practicing educators than pre-student teachers. However, the seminars were informative and useful, and I was able to take much from the conference as a whole. It was a fresh perspective on the field, and I am glad to have experienced it!*

—Joshua Orban

*I thought the conference was interesting and informative. The breakout sessions were useful in understanding new ideas for the classroom. My favorite session was the "Writing Diner." This session explored ways to strengthen young writers' abilities to write effectively and creatively. I am happy I made the decision to attend this conference. I will continue to do so in the future.*

—Jennifer Doptis

*In one session at the MCTE conference titled "Choice Topics," I learned the important role choice has in the classroom, and I plan to use some of the strategies discussed with my own students. It's very helpful and encouraging to us as new and pre-service teachers to get ideas from our experienced peers as we begin our own journeys on the path of educating youth. I enjoyed myself, and I'm glad to see such opportunities available to the educators of our state!*

—Timothy Castle

*Attending the MCTE's Bright Ideas Conference has been very beneficial for me. As a pre-service teacher, the opportunity to listen to experienced educators tell their experiences has been very valuable. It has been a great learning experience, and I would recommend any future student who has the opportunity to attend forthcoming conferences to go.*

—Emilia Udicki



Back row (left to right): Tim Castle, Annelise Truitt, Mike Burny, Matt Szalkowski, Landon Polley, Josh Bear Orban. Front - Nancy Joseph, Jennifer Doptis, Mary Shereda, Gabrielle Cook, Marie Kennedy, Katherine Ribusovski

# Faculty Notes

## PODIUMS AND PRINT

**Chris Apap's** article, "The Genius of Latitude: Daniel Webster and the Geographical Imagination in Early America" appears in the Summer 2010 issue of the *Journal of the Early Republic*.

**Susan Lynn Beckwith** presented "From Anguish to Freedom; From Ailing to Agency: Being, Death, & Hope in Narratives of Illness" at the meeting of The International Society for the Study of Narrative Conference at Case Western University. She's now preparing an interdisciplinary course that she'll be teaching this summer in the Honors College: "Art & Literature: Dialogues In, Dialogues On, And Dialogues Between Art, Artist, & Audience"

**Natalie Cole's** book, *Dickens and Gender: Recent Studies, 1992-2008* was published by AMS Press in late 2009.

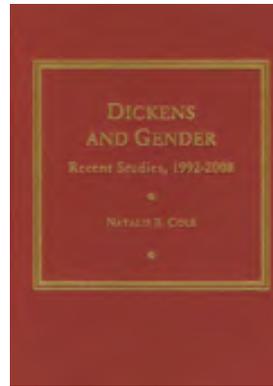
**Brian Connery** contributed a new introduction to Matthew Hodgart's *Satire: Origin and Principles*, published in Dec. 2009 by Transaction Publishers.

**Bob Eberwein** attended the annual conference of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies in Los Angeles, where he met up with Joshua Yumibe and Hye Seung Chung, the newest member of the department. He has also been doing research in film archives in Los Angeles. His second "retirement" book, *Acting for America*, is now in press with Rutgers UP; it contains new critical essays on film stars of the 1980s.

**Jane Eberwein's** book, *Reading Emily Dickinson's Letters: Critical Essays*, co-edited with Cindy MacKenzie, has been published by U of Massachusetts Press. She and Bob are looking forward to the Emily Dickinson International Society conference at Oxford U in August, to be followed by a few days in Paris.

**Annie Gilson** has been awarded a fiction-writer scholarship to attend the Summer Literary Seminar in Montreal from June 13-27th.

At the recent annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, **Niels Herold** contributed a Whitepaper on a hypothetical play-text of *Macbeth* for student use, which would allow re-mixing and mashing of scenes, media, and the interpolation of music, dance, and theater:



these activities jive with early performance history of the play, which Gary Taylor's monumental edition of the works of Thomas Middleton (a contemporary of Shakespeare who had a hand in the writing and production of *Macbeth*) has rightly labeled "musical theatre"!

**Jeffrey Insko's** essay "The Prehistory of Posthistoricism" will be published in a volume of essays titled *The Limits of History*, edited by Thomas Haddox and

Allen Dunn. The collection has just been accepted by the University of Tennessee Press. In May, he will deliver his paper "Israel Potter: Melville's Philosophy of the Present" at the inaugural conference of C19: The Society of Nineteenth-Century Americanists in State College, PA.

**Nancy Joseph** chaired a session titled "Developing 21st Century Literacy Through Metacognitive Awareness" at the annual conference of the North Carolina Reading Association on March 23, 2010.

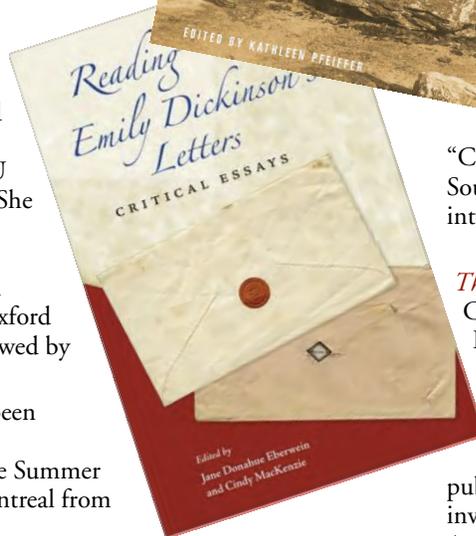
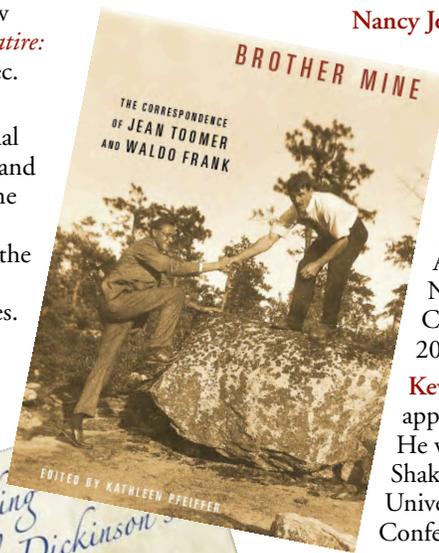
**Andrea Knutson** chaired the panel "Perception and Nation in Early America" and delivered a paper, "Emerson's 'New Yet Unapproachable America': In the Vicinity of Perception," at the Northeast Modern Language Association Conference in Montreal, Quebec, April 7-11, 2010.

**Kevin Laam's** essay on "Shakespeare and Happiness" appears in a forthcoming issue of *Literature Compass*. He will present his paper, "The Ethics of Laughter in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*" in July at the University of Reading Early Modern Studies Conference in Reading, England.

On May 4, **Bailey McDaniel** presented her paper "Caretakers, Carnage, and Complicity: EvilDomesticity in South Africa's Ubu and the Truth Commission" at the interdisciplinary "Evil Women" conference in Prague.

**Kathleen Pfeiffer's** is presenting a paper on *Brother Mine: The Correspondence of Jean Toomer and Waldo Frank* at the Conference of the American Literature Association in San Francisco on May 28. The book was released on June 1. This summer, she will write a chapter-length biographical essay on the Harlem Renaissance poet, librarian and children's author Arna Bontemps for the Scribners American Writer's Series, edited by Jay Parini and published by Gale. Prof. Pfeiffer has also accepted an invitation to participate in the Liberty Fund Colloquium, "Art, Morality and Freedom in Kames and Burke" which will take place in August in Seattle.

In March, **Joshua Yumibe** presented a paper, "Color Space in Early Cinema," Society for Cinema and Media Studies Annual Conference in Los Angeles.



## Faculty Notes (continued)

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**Doris Runey** is collaborating with Dr. Lidia Vianu, professor of Contemporary British Lit at the University of Bucharest, in a double capacity. She has been editing translations into English by her students in the CTITC (Centre for the Translation and Interpretation of the Contemporary Text) and is also mentoring them in translation

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studies. In addition, she consults for Vianu's online publishing house, Editura Pentru Literatura Contemporana. Doris's screenplay, *Lorelei*, is currently being considered by industry people in California (again). A storyboard with original score is available on [youtube](#). The second edition of her translation of *Zalmoxis*, by Lucian Blag, including her translations of critical essays and a revised introduction, has been delayed until fall. This summer, Doris will be developing an online version of our Bible as Literature course.

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## Update: Prison Shakespeare and the *Cambridge World Shakespeare Encyclopedia*

At the end of January Niels Herold was invited by Cambridge University Press to join in discussions with its Advisory Board for the forthcoming on-line version of the new *Cambridge World Shakespeare Encyclopedia*. Herold is under contract to write and maintain the encyclopedia entry about "Prison Shakespeare," and he has volunteered OU as a test-site for trial use of the CWSE.

This new scholarly apparatus for institutional and private use, issued first in two volumes (*The World of Shakespeare* and *Shakespeare's World*), will contain essay entries on almost every conceivable aspect, historical and contemporary, of the vast subject of Shakespeare. The internet version of the CWSE will be designed to grow in perpetuity, with all essay entries refreshed every five years, and a growing bank of images and video. Users subscribing to the on-line version will be able to access all of Cambridge's holdings on Shakespeare, including two different series of play-texts, one devoted exclusively to Shakespeare in performance. Subscribers will have personalized desk-tops where they can gather and customize their own "arrangements of knowledge," and keep personal annotations about individual plays and the scholarship they're using.

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At the annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, Herold also attended a screening of a remarkable film adaptation of *Macbeth* called *Mickey B*, directed behind prison walls by Tom Magill of the Educating Shakespeare Company (ESC); check out his [website](#). If you're hooked on the Macker phenomenon, Herold says you won't want to miss "one of the baddest Micks you'll ever see and his Ladyboy cat burglar, who suffuse their adapted roles with a level of punch and realism that's riveting." Magill shot his film over three weeks inside the Irish maximum-security prison of Maghaberry. The DVD is available through Tom Magill for private sale, and Herold will try to arrange for a showing at OU sometime next year.

In the meantime, Herold will once again be taking a group of OU students down to Luther Luckett Correctional Complex in early May to behold behind prison walls this year's *Shakespeare Behind Bars* production of *The Winter's Tale*, a play about crimes of passion and redemptive suffering, one of Shakespeare's final crowning achievements.

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## Above and Beyond: On Becoming Employee of the Month by Cynthia Ferrera

If you are reading this article you probably either had first-hand experience of taking English courses with our professors, or you are one of our colleagues. Our professors are typically described as knowledgeable, passionate, and compassionate. Knowledgeable of their subject matter; passionate for teaching; and compassionate by making a difference in someone's life.

You may have been a student who received your paper back with numerous comments (maybe criticisms) and suggestions for improvement. Perhaps a Professor coached you to present a paper at a conference. When you required extra tutoring outside of the classroom, you may have visited them outside of office hours, or exchanged multiple e-mails at various times throughout the day. A professor may have agreed to conduct an independent study so that you can get the last two credits required to graduate.

Faculty members serve on various committees for the department, college and university—a requirement of full-time faculty. English faculty members are known for doing more service than required. A new major, Cinema Studies has just been created by our faculty and approved; currently, a Creative Writing major is in the works. Consistently professors are nominated for various awards, such as Teaching Excellence and Judd Award.

From my view point, an attitude prevalent of our faculty is one of continuously going above and beyond of what is expected. As Leo Buscaglia said, "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." In addition to their many other duties, English faculty members took the time to nominate me for the Employee of the Month. One of the requirements is to shine by their attitude. Someone described me as someone with a "positive attitude who inspires others to be cheerful and efficient." You see, I/we have learned from the best. Now I simply have to continue to strive to live up to the employee of the month designation.

In addition to receiving praise and recognition from fellow colleagues, as Employee of the Month, I also received a very nice leather attaché case, plaque, and a coveted parking spot by every one in the building. I get to keep the case and plaque, but had to give up the parking spot.

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## Alumni Corner

**Annette Formella** writes with the following update: "I have been working at Baker College of Clinton Township for just over two years. During that time, I have really moved up the ranks. I started out as an adjunct, and was hired as the campus' Director of College Writing in March 2009. In March 2010, I was promoted to Department Chair, English/Communication.

"In both positions, I was given an opportunity to use my degree in ways I never imagined — and I don't think I have ever had more fun! In between revising curriculum for various courses, working closely with faculty, writing professional development sessions, sharing best practices for the teaching of writing and literature, attending conferences, coming up with creative ways to keep my students from texting in class and leading the English/Communication department, I get to teach composition, literary theory and literature!

"I love the challenges and rewards I get from teaching and chairing the department. Every day brings something new and unexpected, but even after spending an entire weekend grading freshman comp essays, it never feels like work."

**Alison Olmack** writes, "When I graduated from OU, I just started applying for jobs. If something sounded interesting, I sent my resume. So, I currently work for Hyundai Rotem Company, which is a division of Hyundai Motors Group that produces military tanks, trains and stamping presses. I work for the defense division. We buy parts and send them to South Korea for the production of their Main Battle Tank for the Korean Army.

"One of the main reasons they hired me for this job is because they needed my English skills. Ha! Who would've thought this is what I'd be doing? At the time, I never thought I would find a job. However, I did find a job very quickly once I started applying. I only interviewed with three companies, this being one of them, before I was hired. There are so many opportunities out there. Don't limit yourself to one area. Explore and enjoy!"

**Marie Lascu** has been accepted into the New York University's Tisch School of Arts. She will begin their Master's program in Moving Image Archiving and Preservation this fall.

**Rachel Banner** is now officially "All But Dissertation" in the doctoral program in English at the University of Pennsylvania

**Lisa Czapski** also recently completed her final class in the PhD program in English at Boston University

**Gina Moretto Frutig** is a 4th grade teacher in Durham and a contributing columnist to DPB. Gina's Journal gives voice to educators who struggle with overcrowded classes, budget cuts, layoffs, paying bills, and juggling life as a single mom. Gina invites **email**.

### Hey, Alumni: We Want to Know!

It's slim pickins in the Alumni Corner this time—alas! But we want to hear from you, what you're up to, where you've been, how you're doing, and what you're thinking. Let us know. You can submit your update or news by **clicking here**.

Go ahead; try it right now!

Or, if you prefer, drop an **email to Susan Hawkins**.

## Ch-Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes

### Our Pointless Space-Filling Feature is Back!

You never know what will happen in Prof. Knutson's classroom. Can you spot all the changes?



**APPEAL**

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

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