

| **DISCOVERIES** |



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INSIDE



Dear Friends of English,

The theme of our newsletter this year is “Discoveries,” and you’ll find in the following pages a delightful selection of pithily rendered epiphanies and revelations from members of the English faculty. Apart from the humbling realization that chairing a large department requires a distinct set of skills that the professional training and experience of an English professor do not necessarily confer, the most notable of my own discoveries over the past year, which have come into focus through working closely with my colleagues, writing nomination letters, reviewing salary materials, and attending award ceremonies, have been of the kind that have consistently inspired me with the intellectual sprightliness and generosity of members of this department and left me feeling honored and grateful for the opportunities I’ve had to learn from them and to support, as best I can, their consistently remarkable contributions to our shared mission.

Our faculty continue to garner acclaim both on campus and on the national stage, with major honors and awards so numerous that I can offer only a representative sampling here. From our top-ranked MFA program, novelist Peter Ho Davies was awarded a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, and Linda Gregerson’s latest poetry collection, *Prodigal*, received a glowing review in the *New York Times*. On the Language and Literature side, Susan (Scotti) Parrish was selected to receive the 2016 John Dewey Award for her ongoing commitment to the education of undergraduate students, while Ruby Tapia received the 2016 Harold R. Johnson Diversity Service Award from the Office of the Provost, and Sidonie Smith was given the Distinguished Faculty Achievement Award honoring senior faculty who have consistently demonstrated outstanding achievements in research, teaching and service. Our own Anne Gere has been elected incoming president of the Modern Language Association, whose 25,000 members make it one of the world’s largest scholarly associations. Yopie Prins has been appointed the Irene H. Butter Collegiate Professor of English and Comparative Literature, and Valerie Traub has been named Adrienne Rich Distinguished University Professor, making her one of few recipients of the very highest honor that the University bestows on its faculty. To top off a banner year, Valerie also brought home prestigious national research fellowships from both the Guggenheim Foundation and the American Council for Learned Societies to support work on her project, *Mapping Embodiment in the Early Modern West: Anatomy, Cartography, and the Prehistory of Normality*.

It is with great excitement that we welcome two new senior faculty to our department this fall, both of whom come to us from Tulane University. Gaurav Desai is a scholar of African literature and culture with broad interests in postcolonial literary and cultural studies. He is the author of *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-Fashioning and the Colonial Library* (Duke, 2001) and *Commerce with the Universe: Africa, India and the Afrasian Imagination* (Columbia, 2013).

Supriya M. Nair, a specialist in Anglophone Caribbean literature, is the author of *Caliban’s Curse: George Lamming and the Revisioning of History* (Michigan, 1996) and *Pathologies of Paradise: Caribbean Detours* (Virginia, 2013), which won the Nicolás Guillén award for Outstanding Book in Philosophical Literature from the Caribbean Philosophical Association. You’ll find more about these two new colleagues in the individual profiles that follow.

We will continue to build on existing strengths in our faculty over the next several months, with national searches in the fields of Contemporary English and Anglophone Literature and Environmental Humanities, both of which are of growing interest to our undergraduate and graduate students. A wide-ranging series of strategic planning discussions in the department last year yielded a host of fresh initiatives relating to student internships, curricular innovation, diversity, and graduate student placement, all of which we hope will help us successfully adapt to the changing climate for higher education and for the humanities in particular.

Our new internship program is one that will benefit especially from the support of our alumni and friends. Designed to help both English majors and graduate students translate the capacities for deep reading, critical analysis, and effective writing that they develop in our classrooms into skill sets that a broad range of employers will recognize and value, the program will help students identify suitable opportunities and provide scholarships to subsidize their pursuit, hopefully encouraging both students and faculty, in the longer term, to think creatively about the broader benefits of a literary education at this historical moment. We have already established a new position within the department to manage the internship program, and have assembled a database of over 100 local organizations, both for-profit and non-profit, actively interested in working with student interns from our department. In the program’s first phase, we arranged attractive summer internship opportunities for three PhD students with local non-profit organizations and, thanks to a generous alumni donation, established a new funded internship in the public arts in honor of Professor Emeritus Peter Bauland. We welcome your help with this and other new projects you’ll hear about and invite you, as always, to be in touch with your ideas.

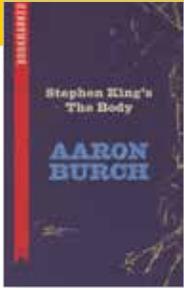
I hope that you enjoy the discovery pieces in this newsletter as much as I did and that you find some inspiration in these pages for the next stage of your own educational journey.

Best regards,

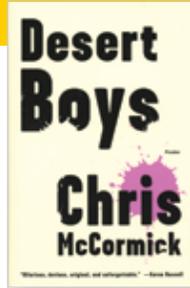
David

Books

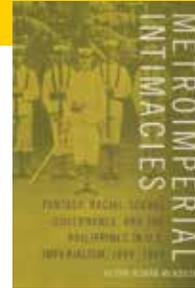
| Recent Faculty Publications |



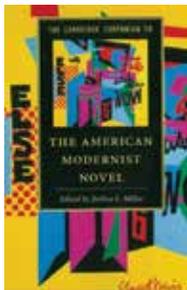
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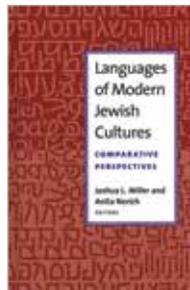
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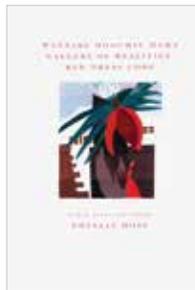
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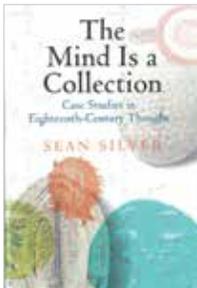
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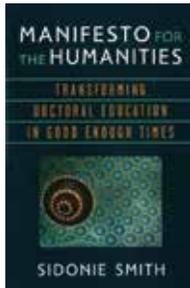
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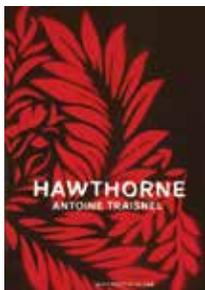
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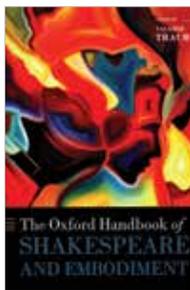
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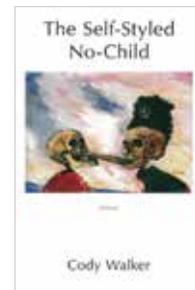
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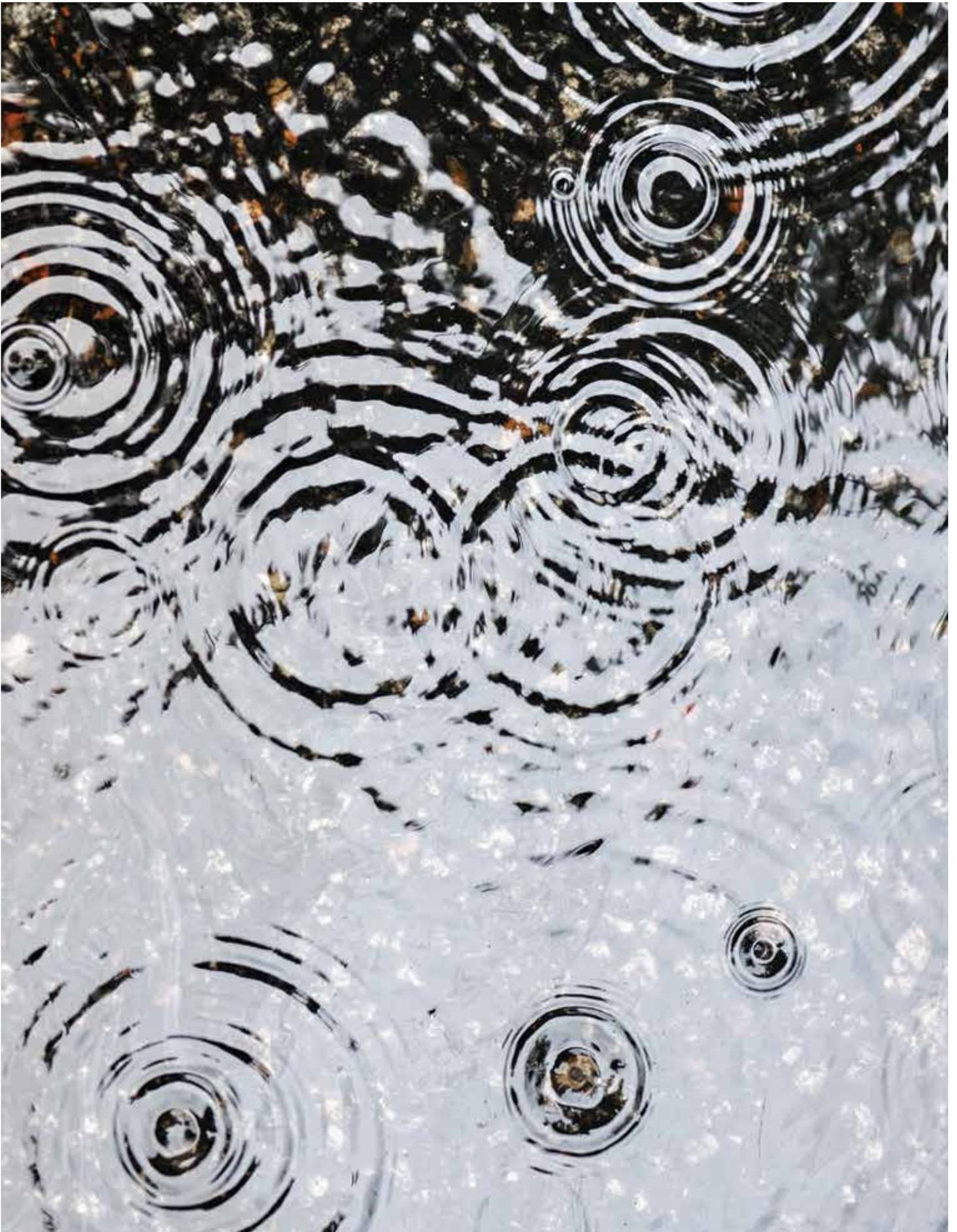


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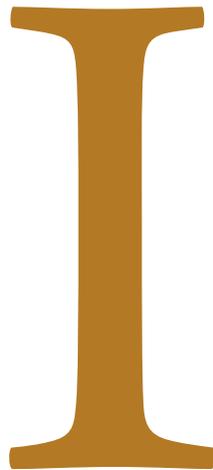
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DISCOVERIES

| by Michael Byers |



IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT — AS IN ANY HIGHLY specialized, research-heavy environment, I suppose — it's easy to lose sight of what your friends and colleagues are doing. Your own work is so alluring and fascinating, and leads you into so many unexpected avenues, that lifting your head for a moment can be difficult. In my role as MFA director from 2011 to 2015 I certainly had enough on my plate to keep me occupied — and my own writing, of course, kept me (often literally) in a room of my own. Which was why, when I was privileged to assume the editorship of this annual newsletter from Larry Goldstein, my friend and mentor, I hoped to use it to correct my own myopia. I hope you'll find the news here as enlightening and exciting as I do. You'll find everything from Clem Hawes engaging in what seems to me like a fantasy version of the English professor's life (digging deep into documents in the British Library!) to Laura Kasischke's brilliantly intuitive evocation of emotion and memory through a single writer's exercise — and lots in between, too, all of it full of vigor, curiosity, and — best of all — that everlasting sense of newness that this profession can provide. And when we get to display that joy to a room of students, and work to help them find their own joys — well, it just doesn't get much better anywhere. We're happy to put all this news in your hands this year, and we hope, as always, that you'll take the time to let us know about your discoveries. We'd love to hear from you.

| by Gina Brandolino |

D

URING THE WINTER SEMESTER I TAUGHT A COURSE NEW TO ME:

ENG418 Graphic Narrative. As that title suggests, the stories my students and I studied were composed of both words and pictures -- comics and graphic novels. Going into this class, I had some experience teaching such texts (I teach a few of them in other courses) but it was pretty intimidating for this teacher, trained in literature, to teach so many texts with major visual components.

Once classes began, I realized I wasn't alone. Several students were comics superfans, but most were nervous about a whole semester of reading a combination of words and images. We helped each other, poring over pages together, figuring out how words and pictures collaborated. This work had results that surprised me. I felt a change in my reading practice, which seemed, against all odds (I'm no spring chicken) to evolve. I asked my students whether they sensed this in themselves too. They had. As a class, we were able to identify changes we had noticed. Reading graphic narratives had trained us to linger longer over details and seek out deeper connections. It made us see things — not just in other visual genres but in poetry and prose, too — that we would have missed before. We were working not just the usual literary interpretative muscles but also muscles you don't get to use in most English courses. Doing that, we discovered together, made us better readers overall.

O

NE OF THE BEST PARTS OF THE SUNDAY MORNING program that I do for Michigan Radio — called “That’s What They Say” — is the questions I get from listeners. These questions have led to some wonderful discoveries about words this year.

For example, the word *gangbusters* goes back to cops who fought organized crime in the 1930s (who, in other words, busted gangs). And here’s the interesting part: the expression “come on like gangbusters” seems to stem from the WWII-era American radio drama “Gang Busters,” which began every week with sirens and gunshots and other loud noises. Now *gangbusters* can refer to things that start with an immediate success or excitement as well as to things that are just very successful (e.g., “a gangbuster year”).

I also learned that we don’t all agree about what a button-down shirt is. Does the description refer to just the collar or the entire shirt? I had never given this question any thought before an astute language observer emailed me about it. For me, a button-down shirt is the same as an “Oxford shirt” — that is, the buttons go all the way down the front and it doesn’t matter whether there is a button on the collar. I polled lots of friends and colleagues, and I was far from alone. Originally, though, it was all about the collar, and for some folks (and some dictionaries) it still is. What is especially interesting to me is that this change is happening below the radar, as opposed to some changes people are more concerned about (e.g., *literally* being used to mean ‘figuratively’ and *on accident* sneaking into use beside *by accident*). All of this is the stuff of language change. And for me, as a historian of the English language, it is a delight to be forever surprised by the creativity of speakers, now and in the past.

| by Anne Curzan |



Joan Banks was a regular cast member of the radio series *Gang Busters*.

| by Tarfia Faizullah |

T

HIS PAST YEAR, WHEN I WASN'T TEACHING, I WAS OFTEN ON the road to present my poems elsewhere, usually at other colleges and universities. I drove all over the Midwest and flew all over the country, giving me ample opportunity to experience a broad cross-section of conversations with both travelers and students and faculty here and elsewhere. It was fascinating to note the differences between conversations: in some, we were truly present for and attentive to one another. In others, not so much. When we were present for one another, our conversations felt natural and instinctive, led to discussions that felt deep and true, and sometimes continued after the prescribed time allotted. Whereas in the latter, the surface was scratched, a few perfunctory thoughts were exchanged, and everyone seemed to go their own way unchanged.

I discovered — or remembered again, which seems to be an aspect of discovery — that in the best conversations, it didn't matter how alike we were as much as how candid and open and curious we were. The less concerned we were with how we appeared or who we were supposed to be to each other, the more lively and rich the discussion. The more anyone emphasized hierarchy over connection, or social status over enjoyment, or categories over idiosyncrasy, the less interesting the discussion. Which is to say, I rediscovered both that our differences enliven and fortify us, and that peanut butter crackers and a cold soda make for excellent traveling companions no matter the season.

O

NE OF THE CHIEF REWARDS OF TEACHING IS WATCHING students experience the pleasures of discovery as they engage the language and forms of literature. Last year on the first day of my Introduction to Poetry course I passed around a few pages of very short poems, mostly two to four lines. I asked that each student write in their journal an analysis of one of the poems. To my surprise the favorite was a tiny epigram by Thom Gunn:

Their relationship consisted
In discussing if it existed.

The students discovered that their most persistent, most complex and obsessive, personal frustration could be captured in eight words. The poem confirmed that, indeed, brevity is the soul of wit and wisdom.

Furthermore, the poem's title, "Jamesian," opened a whole new way of thinking about Henry James, he of capacious novels with long swaths of wary conversation among complex characters maneuvering toward discoveries about each other. Several students informed me by semester's end that they had felt impelled to read one of James's novels to savor the revelation embodied in this rhymed couplet impossible not to memorize forever.

Now when I read, say, "The Victim," Thom Gunn's chilling poem about Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen, composed in triplet rhyme, or Henry James's hyper-discursive late fictions, I comprehend them in some part through my students' commentaries. Our relationship exists, expands, and never ends. Even writing this brief essay has prompted me to seek out more nuances and insights in texts that I have shared or will share in the near future.

| by Laurence Goldstein |

| by Danny Hack |

I

SPENT MUCH OF THE PAST YEAR FINISHING MY FORTHCOMING BOOK, *Reaping Something New: African American Transformations of Victorian Literature* (due out this fall). Recovering the many ways in which African American writers and editors in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries made use of nineteenth-century British literature, the book asks what these often enigmatic acts of transatlantic, cross-racial repurposing and rewriting can teach us about both British literature and the making of the African American literary tradition. For example, in chapters on Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* and Alfred Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade," I discuss the reasons why Frederick Douglass chose to publish both of these works — which have nothing to say about slavery or American race relations — in his abolitionist newspaper; I trace how one writer reworked Dickens's novel about England's failed judicial system and neglect of its poor into a novel condemning American slavery; I consider another writer's claim that Tennyson's poem plagiarized an African war chant; and I show how these surprising acts of appropriation and reframing make us see those canonical British works differently.

Much of the pleasure of this project for me has come from the discovery of previously unknown, unsuspected textual connections. One of the last such connections I unearthed was one of the most surprising, and remains for me one of the most mysterious. In Pauline Hopkins's early-twentieth-century novel *Of One Blood*, an expedition to Africa comes upon a hidden, ancient African civilization. When this civilization's minstrels begin to sing of their people's history, they do so — I discovered — in verse Hopkins borrowed from the popular Victorian novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*, by Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Thus, what the novel presents as the words with which an orally based culture has sustained itself over centuries are in fact lifted, seemingly at random, from contemporary print culture. This strange move is made even stranger by the fact that Hopkins does not try to cover her tracks and even mentions Pompeii in passing.

I was able to come up with some ideas to help make sense of what Hopkins might have been up to. I argue, for example, that she is responding to the use of Bulwer-Lytton by another African American novelist, Charles Chesnutt. Nonetheless, there is a weirdness and an audacity to this intertextual encounter that, finally, exceeds or defeats analysis. I wouldn't want it any other way.

| by David Halperin |

D

URING THE PAST SEMESTER, A GRADUATE STUDENT PERSUADED ME to offer a new course in the fall, entitled "Queer Theory without Psychoanalysis." I have been active in the field of queer theory since its inception in 1990, but I have never taught a course called "Queer Theory" at the University of Michigan, because the last time I taught such a class at another university one of my brightest students complained that it had consisted mostly of psychoanalysis, which did not seem very queer. The student was not wrong: many leading figures in queer theory nowadays adopt an explicitly psychoanalytic method for understanding sexuality and politics — which is why most classes that offer an introduction to queer theory are taken up with psychoanalysis.

Yet queer theory is less monolithic in this respect than it might appear. Much of my own career has been devoted to elaborating non-psychological and non-psychoanalytic approaches to gay male subjectivity, drawing on the fields of philosophy, social history, sociology, social theory, anthropology, feminist theory, aesthetics, and critical theory. The point has not been to argue that psychoanalysis is wrong, or bad, but that it should not be the only show in town, and that other methods are possible. The course I will teach in the fall is designed to outline an alternative model of queer theory and to highlight neglected aspects of recent theorizing about sex, community, politics, and society.



M

| by Clem Hawes |

Y DISCOVERY IN THE BRITISH LIBRARY LAST SUMMER has to do with the famous war of words that Jonathan Swift conducted against the towering Duke of Marlborough. This avenue of research will become the backbone of a chapter in my book-in-progress on Jonathan Swift, sovereignty, and scale.

In 1710, John Churchill, the First Duke of Marlborough, was a highly successful and vastly rewarded general, in part because he held personal rights to critical military contracts. As a member of the Queen's cabinet, he was prolonging the war with France that was so greatly enriching him. He had many sycophants generating good publicity for him. Even to attack such a figure publicly was an act of considerable daring. I was attempting, by examining all sorts of print ephemera, to figure out precisely how in 1711 Swift had managed to topple such a powerful figure.

Swift focused on the issue of peculation: Marlborough's corrupt engrossment of public funds. I was especially struck, however, that Swift avoided a possible line of attack coming from a very different political angle. Marlborough's political favor at court had depended in part on his wife's position as Queen Anne's favorite — and possibly, as plausible rumors had it, her lover. Yet Swift avoided this line of attack on Sarah Churchill, most obviously, perhaps, because it would rebound on the queen; he also may have simply disliked the tactic. Swift felled Marlborough on the grounds of the latter's egregious personal and political self-aggrandizement. His later satires of court favorites, such as the dwarf in Brobdingnag, owe much to this earlier moment.

My research into ballads and pamphlets and satirical fables has thus provided me with a much more textured insight in Swift's early and decisive satirical campaign against the Duke of Marlborough. Interestingly, as I am learning, the intertwined legacies of Swift and Marlborough — the latter whom the royal family still counts as a heroic ancestor — continue to do battle well into our own times.

Self-Portrait as Slinky

by Tarfia Faizullah

It's true I wanted
to be beautiful before
authentic. Say the word
exotic. Say minority—

a coiled, dark curl
a finger might wrap
itself in — the long
staircase, and I was

the momentum
of metal springs
descending down
and down — say tension.

The long staircase,
and I was a stacked series
of spheres fingertipped
again into motion — say

taut, like a child
who must please
her parents and doesn't
know how — a curl pulled

thin — I wanted to be
a reckoning, to gather
into each day's pale
hands — that helpless

lurching forward
in the dark — another
soaked black ringlet,
that sudden halting —

Tarfia Faizulla is the Nicholas Delbanco Visiting Professor of Creative Writing. She is the author of *Seam* (SIU, 2014) and the forthcoming *Register of Illuminated Villages* (Graywolf, 2017). "Self-Portrait as Slinky" originally appeared in *Ninth Letter* and reprinted in *Best New Poets 2013: 50 Poems from Emerging Writers*, edited by Jazzy Danziger and Brenda Shaughnessy.

E

| by Laura Kasischke |

EVERY SEMESTER, AT SOME POINT IN AN UNDERGRADUATE creative writing class, I deliver the Secret to my students. I tell them that the only thing any instructor of creative writing can actually teach them is the only thing they need to know in order to write well, and that this secret would fit on a bumper sticker: Show, Don't Tell. Those three words are the keys to the kingdom, I tell them, and what we're doing together all semester is practicing this, critiquing this, reading this, and struggling this into our habits and sensibilities and intuitions.

Every semester there's usually one exercise that will surprise us all with how well it teaches us to show instead of tell. It doesn't need to be a brilliant exercise, and the same exercise doesn't work for every class. But there will be one that, perhaps due to its timing or subject or other synchronicities, will knock us all over. Last fall in my introduction to poetry writing course, I cobbled together an idea for a timed exercise from a few other exercises that had failed, or been so-so, earlier in the semester or in previous semesters. I asked the poets to think of an object they owned that was bigger than a bread box (at which point I had to tell them how large a bread box is since most of them had never seen a bread box—because who has bread boxes anymore?).

They were then to describe this belonging in as much sensory and physical detail as possible.

But, also, the thing had to be out in the rain, getting wet.

I asked them to describe this object, out in the rain, for about five minutes — which they dutifully did. Then I stopped them, and told them that they had to go back to those descriptions and use every detail of that belonging in the rain in a new piece of writing—and that this second piece was to be a portrait of one of their parents.

And they would have six minutes to do this.

There were, at that point, some noises made that might have been expressions of exasperation. I chose to ignore those snorts and to pretend that I knew what I was doing and what the point of this exercise was.

(Full disclosure: I didn't.)

For whatever reason, it was the right exercise at the right time. There wasn't a single poet who didn't want to read his or her exercise aloud to us immediately after the six minutes were up. Some of these portraits were frightening, some were touching, some were Freudian, some were hilarious, almost all were loving and sad and empathetic and full of longing and seeming to speak to the universal experience of being a child and having a parent, as if written by poets far older than the average age of nineteen in that room — and, most importantly, every one of these descriptions seemed to the poet who wrote it to touch on some truth about the parent that could never have been put into words if one had set out to tell a reader about that parent. The words they'd have needed to use for such a purpose could not be found in a thesaurus while trying to evoke a father's gentleness or a mother's grief or a father's temper or a mother's warmth. Instead, we had damp bicycles and rusty stereos and ruined lampshades and soggy encyclopedia sets, and it worked.

Our parents were there with us that afternoon in that classroom — fully, vividly, magically, and improbably — and we all realized for the first time, or remembered again for the millionth time: Show, Don't Tell.



| by Aliyah Khan |

T

HIS PAST SUMMER, UNUSUALLY FOR A PROFESSOR OF ETHNIC AND WORLD literatures, I gave a talk at an international finance conference in London, learning in the process how to translate qualitative humanities research to business, marketing, and legal professionals. The theme of the conference was the thriving European and American markets for Islamic *sharia* religious law-compliant banking, venture capital investments, and other business interests, and it was hosted by the University of East London's Royal Docks School of Business and Law. The talk was from my in-progress journal article on the popularity of halal Arab and Muslim street food in New York City and the role that the foodie adoption of these meaty wraps and rice dishes — and the New York media fetishization of the “secret white sauce” accompanying condiment — play in transforming Muslims into “good” citizens within traditional U.S. immigrant cultural assimilation narratives.

One of my case studies was a *halal* food cart that does thriving lunchtime business with World Trade Center workers at the site of Ground Zero itself.

My London audience of finance professionals was most interested to hear that the intertwining of business and culture could cause a shift in local social and political attitudes, particularly in the most contentious realm of Islam and migration to Europe and the United States. I learned something surprising: that the largest corporate business entrepreneurs were most receptive to my arguments. Though we disagreed on political and economic methods and means, in some cases we shared a similar sense of social responsibility. I am quite accustomed to reading the tenor of a room of university students in English, and that pedagogical skill served me well in gauging how to pitch my research to businesspeople and lawyers. Classroom tricks like pictures and audiovisual media make any presentation convincing, but happily for the field of English literature, everyone just wants to be told a good story.

| by Sean Silver |

I

WAS PLEASED RECENTLY TO DISCOVER THAT THE WORD “complex” is only about 350 years old. Over the past two years, I have been reading widely in a set of seventeenth-century paper debates on the origin of ideas. This includes not only John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* but also treatises by allies and adversaries in London, Cambridge, and elsewhere. The stakes, if I may put it this way, are many of the philosophical claims we associate with modernity, including the philosophy justifying the empirical sciences. I had begun noticing the word “complex” turning up in these treatises, but was unable to discover its prehistory. These thinkers didn’t seem to be quoting anyone, except for each other, when it came to this singular word.

Where, then, did the concept of complexity come from?

My interest in complexity is driven by the importance of the concept to modern-day culture. Complexity is the belief that things are best understood as though they are composed of swarms of simpler things. We say (for example) that economic trends emerge from the decisions of individuals, or, we say that thoughts are formed in the associations of discrete experiences (Locke’s claim). This is an extraordinarily powerful technique for understanding phenomena: simply break them into smaller, analyzable components. And so it is no coincidence that the modern sciences— economics, associationist psychology, and many, many more — developed coeval with the first stirrings of complexity. Complexity has even risen to the status of one of the cornerstone concepts in the humanities. Here, we might very well take it as our task to unpack the complexity of modern discourse.

It is just in the last year that electronic tools and digital databases have made it possible to confirm what could only be suspected before: “complex,” as a word in English, simply didn’t exist before Locke and others began putting it in print. Discovering such a clean site of origins for a word and concept is rare in my line of work — but in this case, the evidence seems pretty clear. “Complex,” a word so ubiquitous today, was coined to fit a new concept — and coined by the very people developing the sciences to unpack what we are now pleased, routinely, to call a complex world.

| by Sid Smith |

S

INCE SERVING AS PRESIDENT OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE Association in 2010, I have been writing on and conversing with faculty and graduate students across North America about the future of doctoral education in the humanities. After spending several years thinking through various effects of digital affordances and cyberinfrastructure on the new everyday life of humanities scholars in the 21st century, I discovered the exhilaration of becoming a 21st century academic humanist by maintaining copyright to my work and making that work accessible to a wider audience. My book *Manifesto for the Humanities: Transforming Doctoral Education in Good Enough Times*, published by the University of Michigan Press, came out in its open access online version in November 2016 and in its paperback version in January 2016. Anyone can find and read my book for free online at www.press.umich.edu/8845365/manifesto_for_the_humanities.

I also discovered the importance of reclaiming copyright to books I wrote in the 1990s and of unlocking access to those digitized books in the Google Books archive. Two of those books are now available open access to scholars around the globe. More and more humanities scholars are pursuing opportunities available to them through new initiatives in scholarly communication that are beginning to realize the goal of “unlatching knowledge.”



Julia Margaret Cameron's
"The Dirty Monk"

| Andrea Zemgulys |

I'VE SPENT THE LAST YEAR OR SO RESEARCHING THE WORK OF Julia Margaret Cameron, a pioneering photographer of the Victorian era. I was particularly interested in Cameron's portraiture of the poet Alfred Tennyson because Virginia Woolf used the portrait in order to launch an important friendship with Vita Sackville-West (she who inspired Orlando).

What I found out was that Tennyson's second favorite portrait of all time was one taken by Cameron, one he titled "The Dirty Monk." The title is a joke on the rough cloak he wore, his unkempt, frizzy hair, his dislike of regular hygiene, and his dark skin. Tennyson was over and over described by biographers and friends as gypsy, Indian, and "dark blooded" because of his skin color, and Cameron's signature style for her "heads," unusual for the time, brought into resolution the texture of hair and skin, with blemishes, freckles, and natural shadowing included. Clearly, Tennyson's joke title announces his privilege — his dark skin and apparently unclean body did not threaten his status.

What I discovered was that Woolf took this particular image and inverted it perfectly in a comic play she wrote in 1923, imagining for us Tennyson naked in his bathtub, with marble smooth, rose-blossom skin, pulling a young woman onto his knee, again making his "dirtiness" into a joke. The more interesting discovery to me, however, was that the "dirtiness" of Tennyson's portraits was not funny to everybody, but rather a reason for serious argument. One late-nineteenth-century reader of Tennyson (Theodore Watts, writing in *The Magazine of Art*) made his review of the portraits an occasion to declare the Poet Laureate certainly not gypsy (and merely suntanned), referring to "our American cousins who know by a moment's glance at the white of the eye, whether in any man the pure flow of the Caucasian blood has been disturbed in the ancestral stream."

Such unease about miscegenation was rather ordinary in America and the British empire at the time. It perhaps shouldn't have surprised me to encounter the uneasiness in this text, but it did.

The Selvage

by Linda Gregerson

So door to door among the shotgun
shacks in Cullowhee and Waynesville in
our cleanest shirts and *ma'am*
and *excuse me* were all but second

nature now and this one woman comes
to the door she must have weighed
three hundred pounds Would you be
willing to tell us who you plan to vote

for we say and she turns around with
Everett who're we voting for? The
black guy says Everett. The black guy
she says except that wasn't the language

they used they used the word
we've all agreed to banish from even our
innermost thoughts, which is when
I knew he was going to win.

2

At which point the speaker discovers,
as if the lesson were new,
she has told the story at her own expense.
Amazing, said my sister's chairman's

second wife, to think what you've
amounted to considering where you're from,
which she imagined was a compliment.
One country, friends. Where when

we have to go there, as, depend
upon it, fat or thin, regenerate
or blinkered-to-the-end, we shall,
they have to take us in. I saw

3

a riverful of geese as I drove home across
our one-lane bridge. Four hundred of them
easily, close-massed against the current and
the bitter wind (some settled on the ice) and just

the few at a time who'd loosen rank to
gather again downstream. As if
to paraphrase. The fabric
every minute bound

by just that pulling-out that holds
the raveling together. You were driving
all this time? said Steven. Counting
geese? (The snow falling into the river.)

No. (The river about
to give itself over to ice.) I'd stopped.
Their wingspans, had they not
been taking shelter here, as wide as we are tall.

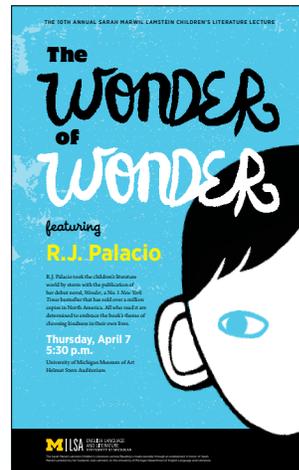
A Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, Linda Gregerson is the Caroline Walker Bynum Distinguished University Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan, where she teaches creative writing and Renaissance literature. "The Selvage" first appeared in *Poetry*, and is the title poem of *The Selvage*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

Noteworthy

| News around the department |

Events

In its 10th year, the **SARAH MARWIL LAMSTEIN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE LECTURE** featured **R.J. Palacio**, the author of debut novel *Wonder*. The novel, which describes the experiences of a boy born with a rare facial deformity, was a breakout bestseller; a movie adaptation starring Julia Roberts and Owen Wilson will appear in 2017. "This really isn't just a book about a kid with a facial anomaly," Palacio writes, "it's a celebration of kindness. The impact of kindness. I think that's why people are so moved by parts of the book. We like to see people doing good, rising beyond our expectations to do something noble. It's not the big heroic gestures but the small moments of kindness that shape the world." Palacio, a former art director and book jacket designer, lives in New York with her family.



Our **ZELL VISITING WRITERS SERIES** will once again bring some of the finest writers in contemporary literature, including **Bob Hicok, John Freeman, Valeria Luiselli, C. Dale Young, Celeste Ng, and Colm Toibin**, among many others. In addition to the readings, each semester the series also features a multi-day residency for renowned authors. This Fall the **ZELL DISTINGUISHED WRITER IN RESIDENCE** was **China Mieville**, noted science-fiction and fantasy writer, winner of the Hugo Award and three-time winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award.



Awards

The 10th annual **BEN PRIZE** was awarded to (below, left to right) **Jaimien Delp** and **Ali Shapiro**. The Ben Prize was established in 2007 in honor of Laurence Kirshbaum and was made possible through the generosity of Bradley Meltzer and a group of donors to promote the teaching of good writing. The award was named after Mr. Kirshbaum's grandson. Two exceptional lecturers are chosen each year for their work with students to improve writing skills. Nominations for this award come from students.



The three recipients of this year's **DAVID AND LINDA MOSCOW PRIZE FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING COMPOSITION** were (below, left to right) **Mindy Misener, Mickenzie Fasteland, and Logan Scherer**. The selection committee had to make difficult decisions in choosing from such an impressive pool of applicants. The committee found it inspiring and humbling to read the nominees' files, including the many glowing letters of support they received from students and colleagues. The three instructors who were selected this year are remarkable for the highly effective, thoughtful, and innovative activities and assignments they employ in their classes. David and Linda Moscow make this prize possible, and we are grateful for their ongoing generosity to the Writing Program.



ALSO AWARDED this past year was the **FEINBERG FAMILY PRIZE FOR EXCELLENCE IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING**. Winners were **Peter Goggin** (Instructor: Kyle Frisina), **Sajani Desai** (Instructor: Ryan McCarty), **Rachel Woods** (Instructor: Sarah Linwick). All three essays, from English 124 and 125, were well-written works that demonstrated the range of genres in which our students learn to compose.

New Faculty Member

Gaurav Desai



I AM DELIGHTED TO JOIN THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AT the University of Michigan and look forward to the many friendships with new colleagues that await me. I have long been an admirer of the department, the excellence of its faculty and its well-deserved national and international reputation for research and teaching. While saying goodbye to beloved colleagues at Tulane University where I have taught for almost twenty years has been difficult, I am energized by the opportunity to teach at a large and vibrant public university.

I come to Ann Arbor via New Orleans and before that Durham, where I pursued my Ph.D. at Duke University. Prior to Duke I did my Bachelor's degree at Northwestern University in Evanston where I was mentored by two members of the faculty (David William Cohen and Simon Gikandi) who subsequently moved on to join the faculty at the University of Michigan. So my connection to Michigan over the years has been both professional and personal. Some of my prior visits to the Ann Arbor campus have included a lecture hosted by David William Cohen several years ago for the joint program in Anthropology and History; a forum organized by Jennifer Wenzel and Patsy Yaeger which was subsequently published in the PMLA; and a very memorable tribute and conference held in honor of Professor Cohen's retirement a few years ago. Simon Gikandi, who has since moved on to Princeton, was the one who first introduced me to the formal study of African Literature in a Freshman Seminar many years ago at Northwestern. To come into a position in the department following his footsteps is to me a singular honor.

My scholarly research is in the area of Anglophone African Literature with a broader interest in postcolonial literary and cultural theory. My most recent book looks out from Africa across the Indian Ocean and is interested in imaging an "Afrasian" space that goes beyond the more traditional divisions cast by both African Studies and South Asian Studies. I am currently engaged

in two editorial projects, one on approaches to teaching the works of Amitav Ghosh and the other a volume of critical terms for the study of Africa. I look forward to making new discoveries as I teach my classes at Michigan

and engage with the scholarly work of a larger cohort of students and colleagues.

In the long run I hope to work with colleagues in African Studies and M-Compass to design short term study abroad activities, perhaps in East Africa where I did my high-schooling. But in the most immediate future, I look forward to settling in, discovering the many pleasures Ann Arbor and the university have to offer, and of course, learning how to dress warm and to drive in the snow!

New Faculty Member

Supriya Nair



I WAS BORN IN A SMALL PORT CITY IN THE SOUTH OF INDIA. Like many in my generation, I went to an English-medium convent, which was then considered the most elite system of education. The nuns who ran the school were strict but fair, and their insistence on discipline and rigor indelibly marked my early route to learning. My path to an English major was influenced by India's British colonial legacy, a mixed blessing that introduced me to the wondrous world of English literature but interrupted my knowledge of local languages and customs. Further studies impelled my move to the United States, and I graduated with an MA in English from Baylor University and a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin, where I specialized in Ethnic and Third World Literature. My book publications include *Caliban's Curse: George Lamming and the Revisioning of History* (Michigan, 1996) and *Pathologies of Paradise: Caribbean Detours* (Virginia, 2013). I also co-edited, with Gaurav Desai, *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism* (Rutgers, 2005) and edited *Teaching Anglophone Caribbean Literature* (MLA, 2012).

Teaching and research are inextricably and pleurably linked for me. I hope

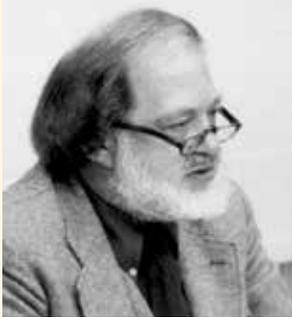
to continue that synergy in my move to Michigan where large interdisciplinary communities promise exciting new potential and collaboration. My administrative experience has been comparatively brief but also memorable, since I was Director of Women's Studies at Tulane University the year Katrina hit New Orleans. It was impossible to study gender without considering several other aspects and identities, a multi-perspectival approach that I tend to follow in all my work. My fields of research and teaching include postcolonial theory and literature, Anglophone Caribbean studies, race, class and feminist theory, and cultural studies, an interlocking series that keeps me busy with multiple reading lists! Although I continue to love and teach the traditional subfields of English that first shaped my training, I have come full circle to

a deeper engagement with non-Western cultures. My current areas of interest are animal studies and magical realism, and my future projects in research and teaching will revolve around these topics. The connection between animal lives and

divinity in postcolonial contexts are of particular interest to my ongoing work.

Since I come from a foodie family of restaurant owners and great cooks and have lived in New Orleans for over two decades, I am also a disciple of food culture. I have taught food culture classes with a service-learning component, and my students at Tulane were delighted by the local cuisine and disturbed by the food deserts in the city after Katrina. We were motivated by Michael Pollan's aphorism: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." I am an enthusiastic advocate of literature and the humanities, since I am convinced that they are a fountainhead of vital knowledge and enduring wisdom. At the same time, other disciplines have been an invaluable source of information and insight. Paul Kalanithi's turn to both literature and medicine as he confronts his mortality in *When Breath Becomes Air* has been profoundly illuminating and inspiring. My goal as a teacher and researcher is to share and learn from this wealth of disciplines in my new university community at Michigan. Leaving New Orleans and Tulane has been a wrench, but I look forward to stimulating experiences in Ann Arbor. I'm delighted to be here.

Remembering



BERNARD VAN'T HUL

BY MICHAEL BYERS

OUR FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE BERNARD VAN'T HUL, PROFESSOR EMERITUS IN THE ENGLISH department at the University of Michigan, died in Needham, Massachusetts, on Aug. 21, after what his family described as a long decline. His passing struck particularly close to home for this editor — literally, as Bernie was my neighbor across the street here in Ann Arbor.

Bernie's career was long and illustrative, full of variety, touched everywhere by his trademark serious wit. Born in Rock Valley, Iowa, in 1931, Professor Van't Hul was an Army veteran, serving in West Germany during the Korean War. He returned to study at Calvin College, where he was an actor and a baseball catcher, and where he met his wife Nelvia Geels, who survives him. He earned his English Ph.D. from Northwestern University and joined the English faculty at U-M Ann Arbor in



DANIEL AARON

B. A. ENGLISH, '33

DANIEL AARON, THE FOUNDING PRESIDENT OF THE LIBRARY OF AMERICA AND A DEFINING figure in the field of American studies, died this past May at 103.

Dr. Aaron received his English degree from the University of Michigan in 1933.

Dr. Aaron, who was Victor S. Thomas professor of English and American literature emeritus at Harvard University, once described himself as “part historian, part literary critic, part political theorist, an irregular in the ranks of the ‘non-Communist Left.’”

“I’ve never been purely concerned with literature,” Dr. Aaron said in a 2001 Boston Globe interview. “My intellectual interests have been adulterated. There’s always been a social dimension to it.”

Trim and angular, Dr. Aaron resembled a professor out of central casting. He smoked a pipe, favored tweed jackets, and was unfailingly avuncular toward students.

“He wore his eminence very lightly,” the biographer Walter Isaacson said of his one-time senior thesis adviser. “His eyes always twinkled. He seemed less like a professor up on stage and more like a person you wanted to sit alongside. And he let you.”

Well into his 90s, Dr. Aaron cycled to his office, with a denim jacket thrown over his sport coat, and he never lost a Prohibition-era fondness for the occasional glass of Irish whiskey.

An undergraduate named John F. Kennedy got a B from Dr. Aaron in Harvard’s introductory American literature course (“a rather respectable grade in those days,” Dr. Aaron recalled). Another undergraduate, Betty Friedan (“very formidable,” he called her), thought enough of his counsel during her days at Smith College to mention him in the acknowledgments to *The Feminine Mystique*. Dr. Aaron taught at Smith from 1939–1971.

1969 with a unique joint appointment, split between the Department of English and the *Middle English Dictionary*, for which he worked as a lexicographer. A dedicated, energetic presence in the classroom, Professor Van't Hul was one of the founding activists who brought about the English Composition Board, leading workshops and in-service programs for secondary school teachers in more than 300 schools around the state of Michigan, improving the lives of countless high-school students in countless classrooms over the decades. At the time of his retirement in 1993, Bernie had become a pioneer in the early use of computer-aided conferencing in high schools, using then-emerging technology to encourage students to collaborate in the close examination of texts. In his retirement, Bernie taught a class on the modern short story for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, a group I'm proud to have inherited from him.

He was also, as I know first-hand, a reliably humane, generous presence in

our neighborhood. By the time I knew him he'd been retired for more than a decade, and, his catching days long behind him, Bernie was doing just what a retired English professor ought to: sitting on his porch and reading, keeping a keen eye on the

Bernie's career was long and illustrative, full of variety, touched everywhere by his trademark serious wit.

business of Olivia Avenue from his wise and comfortable perch. My twins were five years old when we moved in across the street, and Bernie (with his own grandchildren by then) instantly became one of their favorites, a funny, sweet, and gentle man who would show them around his garden, who never condescended to them, who honored their curiosity and their occasional shyness, and who knew what would be of natural interest. One summer after he and Nelvia returned from their cabin up north Bernie came across the street with a delicate branch on which was suspended an impressive

cocoon. A monarch butterfly would emerge from this in a few days, he told us, if we would only wait. It was a typical gesture: thoughtful, surprising, a little touched with glory, and perfectly pitched for its audience. A few days later, as we all watched (we

called Bernie over for this) the little black legs emerged, the glistening head, the damp and glowing wings. My kids were enthralled: life was being born in front of them. We all held our breath, wishing the new creature well. After a few minutes' acclimation, the monarch took to the air, alighted once on our fence, a badge of crimson orange. It paused there another moment until, at last, it danced off into the world.

Authors Dr. Aaron knew included Sinclair Lewis, Ralph Ellison, Saul Bellow, Robert Frost, Lillian Hellman, Charles Olson, Truman Capote, V.S. Pritchett, Czeslaw Milosz, and Edmund Wilson. As an undergraduate, he sat next to the poet W.B. Yeats at an English department banquet.

His friendship with Frost began one summer at the Bread Loaf writers' conference, when they pitched for opposing squads on the baseball diamond.

His acquaintance with Edmund Wilson led to Dr. Aaron's becoming founding president of the Library of America, in 1979. The library was a long-cherished Wilson project. The famous man of letters wanted to see classic American writers made available to the public in accessible, authoritative texts.

Dr. Aaron was born in Chicago on Aug. 4, 1912, the son of Henry J. Aaron and the former Rose Weinstein. The family moved to Los Angeles when Dr. Aaron was 5 because of his parents' ill health. Upon their death, seven years later, Dr. Aaron returned to Chicago to be raised by relatives.

As a young man in Chicago, Dr. Aaron

developed a lifelong love of jazz. During his graduate student days, he traveled to New York to see the legendary 1937 Orson Welles staging of "Julius Caesar," as well as the storied Group Theatre productions of "Waiting for Lefty" and "Awake and Sing!" On later visits, he'd go drinking with the poet Delmore Schwartz at the Cedar Bar.

"It seems to me he was an embodiment of the generous America that was there at the height of the New Deal and through World War II," said the novelist Louis Begley, a friend of Dr. Aaron's. "He was totally and quintessentially American, and also a great American character. Not many men 103 years old have young friends. Dan did."

After graduating from the University of Michigan in 1933, Dr. Aaron spent two years in the graduate English program at Harvard, returning to Ann Arbor for a year's stint as English instructor at Michigan.

He returned to Harvard as one of the first two students admitted to the university's American Civilization program, receiving a doctorate in 1943.

Books by Dr. Aaron include *Men of Good Hope: A Story of American Progressives*

(1951); *The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War* (1973), a finalist for the National Book Award; *American Notes: Selected Essays* (1994); and *Commonplace Book, 1934-2012* (2015).

Dr. Aaron's professorial mien concealed a sly wit. Asked once why he'd chosen Harvard for graduate school, he said: "I don't know. It's supposed to be a good school." That wit was no less apparent in an anticipatory obituary he once wrote for himself:

*When I die will God blink His eye,
The sun snuff itself out?
This I doubt.
But perhaps the earth will tilt
And the moon flush with guilt
And the clouds drip tears,
Then after many years
When nothing remains of me,
Not a particle,
I shall sparkle in the footnote of
an article.*

Adapted from *The Boston Globe*, May 2, 2016.
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Thank You!

Once again, you, our alumni and friends, have been incredibly generous this year.

You gave over \$39,000 to our Strategic and Gift Funds. We use these gifts to enhance undergraduate instruction, to support our graduate students, and to recruit and retain the exceptional faculty that make us one of the top English programs in the country.

You donated \$20,000 to the New England Literature Program (NELP) to provide scholarships for students.

You gave more than \$3,700 to the Michael Schoenfeldt Undergraduate Curriculum Enhancement Fund.

You continued to support the Bear River Writers' Conference with more than \$28,000 in donations.

No gift to the Department is too small, and we value and appreciate each one.

Thank you for being Victors for Michigan!

Announcing a unique giving opportunity **Michael Schoenfeldt Undergraduate Curriculum Enhancement Fund**

This endowed fund is dedicated to making the classroom experience for students in the English Department as engaging and rewarding as possible. Through this fund, faculty can apply for support to help cover costs associated with visiting museums and attending artistic performances, and facilitating in-class experiences that enrich the learning experience.

Funding Goal \$50,000

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