

ENGLISH

Duke University Department of English Newsletter

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Summer 2005

Congratulations Class of 2005

Commencement Address by Vijay Varma



Fellow graduates, parents, faculty and friends, I thank you for joining me on this important day.

Undergraduate education in the United States is a peculiar thing. One has to wonder why the U.S. is one of the few countries where a four year buffer zone displaces high school graduation from real life. In many countries still indoctrinated by a lingering British system of education children are forced to not only perform on tests as soon

as they can hold a pencil but decisively determine their future trajectory at a young age.

Indulge me because I am grimly curious: May I see a show of hands from how many of you know what you want to be when you grow? Hmmmm...I wonder what students at the Pratt School of Engineering would say.

Despite reports that the United States is performing exponentially worse on a world-wide scale in terms of quantitative test scores, this country continues to mold its students around an liminal institutional idea that for many will soon exist as a framed diploma and the faint remnants of stickers once placed crookedly yet ever so affectionately on the back window of their family car.

But for the class of 2005 graduates from the Duke University English Department perhaps it is in the denial of the duplicity of memory that we can still believe in “friends forever” and “the best years of our lives.” We throw our caps into the air with a type of exhilaration that only a profound belief in closure can bring. The false promises thrown to eager ears at the end of high school will soon become the false promises uttered when we are forced to create elaborate transitional remarks for friends and faculty with whom we have intimately shared the past four years and also with whom we may never spend another second.

I am purposefully austere because I don't believe in closure. I don't believe in the best years of our life or best friends never mind best friends forever. However, I believe, profoundly, that not only is undergraduate education possibly one of the greatest American inventions outside of jazz, but an undergraduate education specifically in English is one of the most ambitious projects any young adult can take on.

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Commencement Address by David Gardner

Finding Our Porpoise.

What do you do with a B.A. in English? It's a question that must get tossed around each year 'round about this time when a new batch of us English major types break out of our undergraduate cocoon and descend with untested fury upon the World. (That's World with a capital W) You don't hear scoffers asking in low, muffled tones

what one does with a BA in Political Science, or with a BS in Biology. No, they save their derision for us, for we are a special breed. So special, in fact, that our apparently unique predicament was recently immortalized by the Tony Award winning musical *Avenue Q*. In it, the young protagonist, wide-eyed and twenty-two, wanders onto Avenue Q still wearing his graduation cap and clutching his diploma. And singing, as he comes:

What do you do with a BA in English?

What is my life going to be?

Four years of college and plenty of knowledge
Have earned me this useless degree.

I can't pay the bills yet, 'cause I have no skills yet;
The world is a big, scary place...

But somehow I can't shake the feeling I might make
A difference to the human race!

In Broadway musical fashion, full of flair and gesticulation, Princeton—that's his name—confronts the same question that we, my friends, must face today. What to do with this blasted degree. As far as I can tell, we have several options. If you're the marrying type, you could woo your wealthy would-be lover with impeccable Chaucerian Middle English. You could perhaps raise your social status among friends by pointing out the iambic pentameter in various Madonna lyrics—just like a prayer you know I'll take you



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Varma, from page 1

Terry Eagleton, a figurehead in contemporary literary theory, argues that the locus of intellectual life for the past century and a half has tended to revolve around English. English as the center of intellectual life...hmmm...imagine that. (Again for my grim curiosity, as a show of hands how many of you have had someone ask you, “What are you going to do with an English degree?”) I think the next time someone asks me that I’m going to throw the Terry Eagleton reader at them (I think at Barnes and Noble you can get the hardcover version that has really, really sharp corners).

So here we are with four years of sitting in the Allen building and reading and writing under our belts. The English majors know why they are here and I hope to God the faculty knows why they are here. But the parents...now they can be a tough sell. So I have to direct the rest of my speech mostly to the parents in the audience. Duke University is on an incredibly exciting path. As a senior in high school deciding whether to accept my admittance, an alumni acquaintance mentioned Duke as teetering on a fulcrum in constant negotiation between ideals of elite academic rigor and hip philistine prowess (think James Dean solving differential equations in secret). In 1992 for his Founders Day Address, James B. Duke Professor of English Reynolds Price commented on the pejorative opinion of intellectualism many Duke Undergraduates hold. He remarks:

“Disturbingly often I’m left wondering why a particularly lifeless student—one so apparently vacant of... “real ambition for life”—is present at a University that affirms its luxury of choice and its stringent standards. Whose rightful place is that dullard usurping?”

Professor Price jolted the University into a realization that very recently, with the gradual policy of former president Nan Keohane and the intentioned selection of President Broadhead has become tangibly obvious. As the pedigree of a residential college system begins to be constructed and funding is diverted towards professor-student focused research partnerships, Duke has set its sights on a very different location than I could have ever imagined when I stepped onto this sprawling Gothic campus in early autumn four years ago.

Duke’s ambitious enterprise is to field a University of undergraduates whose social and intellectual lives flow naturally into each other. Academics are forced to be relevant, and socialization is held to academic scrutiny.

Well I think the English department may have been doing it all along.

Freshman year Writing 20, page 32 of Pamela:

He by Force kissed my Neck and Lips and said, Who ever blamed Lucretia, but the Ravisher only? And I am content to take all the blame upon me; as I have already borne too great a Share for what I have deserv’d.

Junior year, Act II scene ii of Richard the II:

The skipping king, he ambled up and down,
With shallow jesters, and rash bavin wits,
Soon kindled and soon burnt carded his state,
Mingled royalty with cap’ring fools
Had his great name profaned with their scorns
And gave his countenance, against his name.

Parents as you look at your children who have labored through four years understand this...they have been pushed to intellectual realms that have forced them to understand themselves and the world around them through a conversion of self-reflection and intense academic scrutiny. They must be commended on this day for successfully completing this most demanding task.

Thank you.

Gardner, from page 1

there. Or, for those of you of dubious integrity, you could get online and try selling that fifteen-page essay on “Woman Warrior” that you managed to use for three different classes.

For Princeton, it turns out not so well. In the end, after a smattering of hardcore life experiences, Princeton meets a recently graduated English major, wide-eyed and twenty-two, and realizes that maybe—just maybe—his purpose in life is to take everything he’s learning and put it into a show! Only, the fresh new English-degree-toting lad rejects Princeton’s help with a flourish of profanity, leaving Princeton forsaken and forlorn.

“Maybe you’ll never find your purpose,” one of his friends suggests.

“Lots of people don’t,” optimistically adds another. “Everyone’s a little bit unsatisfied.”

Today, as we think about our futures, as our families all encourage us to do, I wonder, one year from now, will we be unsatisfied? At the same time I also wonder if that would be such a bad thing. I once heard Professor Wahneema Lubiano mention that the point of any class should never be satisfaction, and I think we can extend that sentiment to include our undergraduate endeavors more generally. Satisfaction marks the arrival at the end of a search. It connotes stagnation and complacency, but if there’s one thing I’ve gained since being an English major at Duke, it’s my newfound desire never to be satisfied, to always keep moving, to keep learning, and, most importantly, to take pleasure in my dissatisfaction.

What if, in the end, it’s okay not to find our purpose? And what if we even go so far as to delight in this purposelessness? Lewis Carroll, in *Alice in Wonderland*, speaks to this possibility during the scene in which the Mock Turtle performs for Alice the Lobster Quadrille, singing:

“Will you walk a little faster?” said a whiting to a snail.

“There’s a porpoise close behind us, and he’s treading on my tail.”

To which Alice later responds, “If I’d been the whiting...I’d have said to the porpoise, ‘Keep back, please: we don’t want YOU with us!’”

“They were obliged to have him with them,” the Mock Turtle says.

“No wise fish would go anywhere without a porpoise....why, if a fish came to ME, and told me he was going a journey, I should say “With what porpoise?””

At first glance it sounds like the Mock Turtle is punningly saying that we’ve got to find our purpose before we pack up our books and free Nalgenes and head out on our own journeys, that it is unwise for us to leave Duke without a purpose. That’s how Alice reads it, too. But if we look again, I think it’s saying just the opposite. When Alice tries to correct the Mock Turtle, by asking “Don’t you mean purpose?” the Mock Turtle simply replies, “I mean what I say.” Which, of course, was porpoise, not purpose, and I can’t help but hear the Mock Turtle’s voice urging discouraged English majors everywhere to calm down. You don’t need a purpose right now. The joy is in the searching.



Parting Words from Department Chair Maureen Quilligan

As I prepare to say my final words as chair of the Duke English Department at my sixth Duke graduation, I think what a wonderful honor and pleasure it has been to work with the people in our department. From the first days of fish tailing through the two foot deep snowdrifts in Durham's unplowed streets during the 100 year snowstorm of February 2000 to pick up job candidates, on to the pollen laden sneeze inducing airs of April 2005, it has been a real adventure. We have learned to work together as a professional and intellectual community of great grace and efficiency. We have added to our intellectual strengths by the hiring of notable new faculty who are impressive not only for their scholarly work but for their great gifts of human kindness.

The large number of books being published--and reissued-- by our members this year attests to the productive health of our shared intellectual community; the five teaching awards and three Bass fellowships we have won in the past 6 years also says a great deal about the fact that the best scholarship sustains the best teaching.

I will never forget the gorgeous silver bowl the department kindly gave me to thank me for my efforts. The bowl mentions my "leadership"; I have always felt that I never led but simply followed the will of the department. I was privileged to help that will articulate itself and to feel the supreme surge of energy coming from our collective members when we finally figured out what we wanted to do in any given instance. I wish, therefore, to thank everyone who helped make this department what it will continue to be, a vibrant, powerful, and energetic place in which to think and learn about our remarkable shared language.

New Books from our Faculty



*Shades of Black:
Assembling Black
Arts in 1980s Britain*

David A. Bailey,
Ian Baucom, and
Sonia Boyce
Duke University
Press, February
2005

In the 1980s—at the height of Thatcherism

and in the wake of civil unrest and rioting in a number of British cities—the Black Arts Movement burst onto the British art scene with breathtaking intensity, changing the nature and perception of British culture irreversibly. This richly illustrated volume presents a history of that movement. It brings together in a lively dialogue leading artists, curators, art historians, and critics—many of whom were actively involved in the Black Arts Movement. Combining cultural theory with anecdote and experience, the contributors debate how the work of the black British artists of the 1980s should be viewed historically. They consider the political, cultural, and artistic developments that sparked the movement even as they explore the extent to which such a diverse body of work can be said to constitute a distinct artistic movement—particularly given that “black” in Britain in the 1980s encompassed those of South Asian, North and sub-Saharan African, and Caribbean descent, referring as much to shared experiences of disenfranchisement as to shades of skin.

In thirteen original essays, the contributors examine the movement in relation to artistic practice, public funding, and the transnational art market and consider its legacy for today’s artists and activists. The volume includes a unique catalog of images, a comprehensive bibliography, and a series of descriptive timelines situating the movement vis-à-vis relevant artworks and films, exhibitions, cultural criticism, and political events from 1960 to 2000. A dynamic living archive of conversations, texts, and images, *Shades of Black* will be an essential resource.

*Incest and Agency in
Elizabeth’s England*
Maureen Quilligan
University of
Pennsylvania Press,
May 2005

Maureen Quilligan explores the remarkable presence in the Renaissance of what she calls “incest schemes” in the books of a small number of influential women who claimed an active female authority



by writing in high canonical genres and who, even more transgressively for the time, sought publication in print. It is no accident for Quilligan that the first printed work of Elizabeth I was a translation done at age eleven of a poem by Marguerite de Navarre, in which the notion of “holy” incest is the prevailing trope. Nor is it coincidental that Mary Wroth, author of the first sonnet cycle and prose romance by a woman printed in English, described in these an endogamous, if not legally incestuous, illegitimate relationship with her first cousin. Sir Philip Sidney and his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, translated the psalms together, and after his death she finished his work by revising it for publication; the two were the subject of rumors of incest. Isabella Whitney cast one of her most important long poems as a fictive legacy to her brother, arguably because such a relationship resonated with the power of endogamous female agency. Elizabeth Carey’s closet drama about Mariam, the wife of Herod, spends important energy on the tie between sister and brother. Quilligan also reads male-authored meditations on the relationship between incest and female agency and sees a far different Cordelia, Britomart, and Eve from what traditional scholarship has heretofore envisioned.

Incest and Agency in Elizabeth’s England makes a signal contribution to the conversation about female agency in the early modern period. While contemporary anthropological theory deeply informs her understanding of why some Renaissance women writers wrote as they did, Quilligan offers an important corrective to modern theorizing that is grounded in the historical texts themselves.

*The War Complex:
World War II in Our
Time*

Marianna Torgovnick
University of Chicago
Press, April 2005

“Marianna Torgovnick is one of our most brilliant and probing cultural critics.” -Joyce Carol Oates

“Torgovnick has begun to do for the Second World War what for some years now thoughtful scholars and critics have done for the Civil War: to explore how our patriotism can survive if we acknowledge terrible truths. Her promising ethical solution transcends identity politics in a way that should open important further discussion.” -Jonathan Arac

Marianna Torgovnick argues that we have lived, since the end of World War II, under the power of a war complex: a set of repressed ideas and impulses that stems from our unresolved attitudes toward the technological acceleration of mass death. This complex has led to gaps and hesitations in public discourse about atrocities committed during the war itself. And it remains an enduring wartime consciousness, one most recently animated on September 11.

Showing how different events from World War II became prominent in American cultural memory while others went forgotten or remain hidden in plain sight, *The War Complex* moves deftly from war films and historical works to television specials and popular magazines to define the image and influence of World War II in our time. Torgovnick also explores the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, the emotional legacy of the Holocaust, and the treatment of World War II’s missing history by writers such as W. G. Sebald to reveal the unease we feel at our dependence on those who hold the power of total war. Thinking anew, then, about how we account for war to each other and ourselves, Torgovnick ultimately, and movingly, shows how these anxieties and fears have prepared us to think about September 11 and our current war in Iraq.

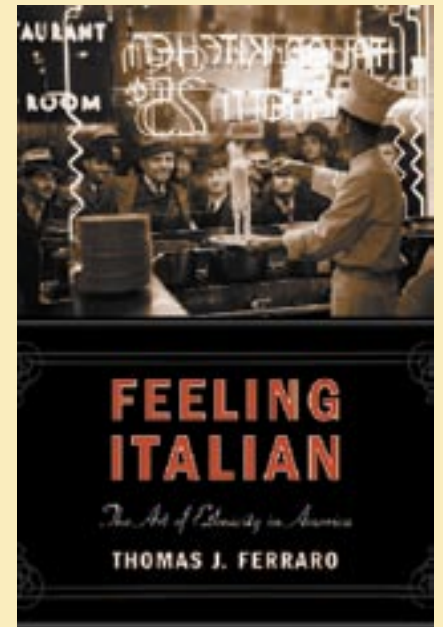


*Feeling Italian:
The Art of Ethnicity in America*

Thomas J. Ferraro
New York University Press, May 2005

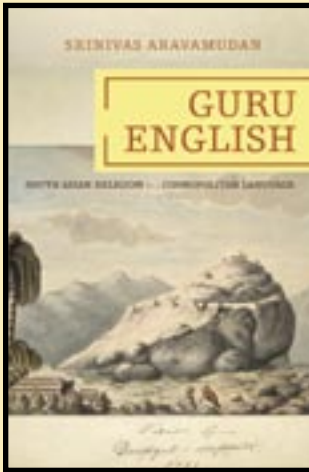
“This inspired, sophisticated, provoking book should command the attention of anybody interested in American Italianness in particular or the cultural consequences of ethnicity in general. Joseph Stella and Frank Sinatra, Maria Barbella and Giancarlo Esposito, Madonna and the good people who brought you the Corleones and Sopranos—they and others appear here, often seen in startlingly fresh ways, as creators and exemplars of the aesthetic Tom Ferraro calls ‘feeling Italian.’ Wise, funny, contagiously enthusiastic, Ferraro takes us far beyond the narrow pieties of the identity police or anti-defamation types as he traces the development of a widely accessible American cultural style that still bears the marks of distinctively Italian ways of making do and making sense.”

—Carlo Rotella, author of *Good With Their Hands: Boxers, Bluesmen, and Other Characters from the Rust Belt*



Italian American identity, now a mix of history and fantasy, flesh-and-bone people and all-too-familiar caricature, still has something to teach us, including why each of us, as citizens of the U.S. twentieth century and its persisting cultures, are to some extent already Italian. Contending that the media has become the primary vehicle of Italian sensibilities, Ferraro explores a series of books, movies, paintings, and records in ten dramatic vignettes. Featured cultural artifacts run the gamut, from the paintings of Joseph Stella and the music of Frank Sinatra to The Godfather’s enduring popularity and Madonna’s Italian background. In a prose style as vivid as his subjects, Ferraro fashions a sardonic love song to the art and iconography of Italian America.

New Books from our Faculty



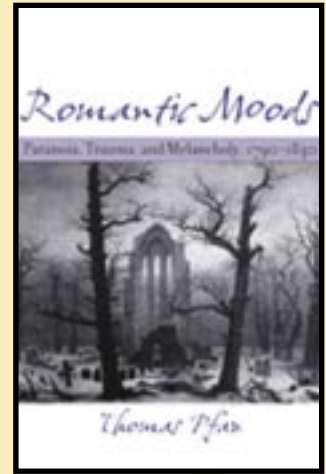
Guru English:
South Asian Religion In a
Cosmopolitan Language
Srinivas Aravamudan
Princeton University Press
September 2005

Guru English: South Asian Religion In A Cosmopolitan Language is a bold reconceptualization of the scope and meaning of cosmopolitanism. It surveys a specific set of religious vocabularies from South Asia that launch a different kind of cosmopolitanism into global use. The book demonstrates that cosmopolitanism is not just a secular Western discourse that results from a disenchantment with religion as has previously been thought, but that it can also be fashioned from South Asian religion when these materials are put into dialogue with diasporic and contemporary social movements as well as literary texts. By tracking the multiple outcomes of the representations of South Asian religion in English, cultural critics can appreciate that cosmopolitanism also travels around the world through religious languages, cultural commodification, and literary production. Therefore, *Guru English* analyzes writers and gurus, literary texts and religious movements, and the political uses of religion alongside the literary expressions of religious teachers.

Some of the topics analyzed include the religious rationalizations of nuclear weaponry, the literary satire of religious movements, and the proliferating neologisms of South Asian theological innovation in New Age contexts. Religious neoclassicism, nationalism, and Romanticism, as well as postmodernism and nuclear millenarianism are targets of sustained analysis as well as hilarious critique. Bringing together a consideration of religious teachers such as Ram-mohun Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Bhagwan Shri Rajneesh, and Deepak Chopra with literary writings by Rudyard Kipling, James Joyce, G. V. Desani, V. S. Naipaul, and Salman Rushdie, *Guru English* will be of interest to students of linguistic anthropology, literary criticism, post-colonial theory, South Asian civilization, globalization and diaspora, and cultural studies.

Romantic Moods: Paranoia,
Trauma, and Melancholy,
1790–1840

Thomas Pfau
Johns Hopkins University
Press, October 2005



Thomas Pfau reinterprets the evolution of British and German Romanticism as a progress through three successive dominant moods each manifested in the “voice” of historical moment. Drawing on a multifaceted philosophical tradition ranging from Kant to Hegel to Heidegger--incorporating as well the psychosocial analyses of Freud, Benjamin, and Adorno--Pfau develops a new understanding of the Romantic poet’s voice as the formal encryption of a complex cultural condition.

Pfau focuses on three specific paradigms of emotive experience: paranoia, trauma, and melancholy. In the trajectory of Romantic thought paranoia characterizes the disintegration of traditional models of causation and representation during the French Revolution; trauma relates to the radical political, cultural, and economic restructuring of Central Europe in the Napoleonic era; and melancholy emerges as the dominant post-traumatic mood of the stalled, post-Napoleonic history both in England and on the continent.

Romantic Moods positions emotion as a “climate of history” to be interpretively recovered from the discursive and imaginative writing in which it is objectively embodied. Pfau’s ambitious study traces the evolution of Romantic interiority by exploring the deep-seated, emotive reverberations of historical change as they become legible in new discursive and conceptual strategies and in the evolving formal-aesthetic construction and reception of Romantic literature. By establishing this relationship between mood and voice, Pfau moves away from the conventional understanding of emotion as something “owned” or exclusively attributable to the individual and toward a theory of “mood” as fundamentally intersubjective and deserving of broader consideration in the study of Romanticism.

“Without a doubt, the most advanced restatement of the nature of feeling that I have encountered. Stunning in its mix of theoretical approaches, integration of historical context, and attention to a range of primary materials, both English and German.”

-Alan Liu, University of California, Santa Barbara

Faculty Announcements

- A short story by Christina Askounis, “The Novice,” will appear in the quarterly *Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion*, in September, 2005.

- Professor Houston Baker participated in several different professional conferences and colloquia as listed below:

Keynote, International Meeting of Poets, Coimbra, Portugal, May 27-29, 2004

Ridge Lecture at the Huntington Library, CA, May 5, 2004

Keynote, “Unsettling Memories” Conference, Jackson, Miss., June 18, 2004

Panelist, Printer’s Row Book Fair, Chicago Tribune Citywide Event, June 5, 2004

Keynote, Furious Flower Poetry Conference, JMU, Sept. 24, 2004

DeLuca Lecture, University of Toronto, March 3, 2005

Organizer & Host, School of Criticism & Theory Conference and Meeting of Senior Fellows, April 16, 2005

Commencement Speaker and Recipient of Honorary Degree, Saint Louis U., May 13, 2005

Additionally, he received the Martin Millennial Writers Award for Contribution to Southern Arts

- Professor Barbara Herrnstein Smith presented a paper, “Pre-Post-Modern Relativism,” at the meeting of the Society for Literature and Science held this fall in Durham, NC, and also at a workshop at the Wesleyan University Humanities Center. A talk, “Figuring and Reconfiguring the Sciences and the Humanities,” that she gave at the Presidential Forum (on “The Future of the Humanities”) at the MLA meeting in Philadelphia will be published later this year in *Profession 2005*.

- Professor Thomas Pfau has been awarded a Bass Professorship (Eads Family Professor of English) that will become effective this July 1. His book, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, Melancholy, 1780-1840* will be published by Johns Hopkins Univ. Press this October (please see page 6). He is editing a special issue of the new, web-based journal *Modernist Cultures* on “Medium and Message in German Modernism” and will be taking on the DUS job starting July 1.

- Joe Ashby Porter received a 2004 Academy Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in May 2004. The award, occasioned by his 2002 *Touch Wood: Short Stories*, is for the body of his fiction, and included the citation, “From his brilliantly comic first novel onward, Joe Ashby Porter has entered the fiction lists with splendid exhibits in virtually every event or genre—more widely diverse novels and haunting short stories and sketches. No writer of his gifted generation has shown greater daring or has earned higher praise.” Joe’s short stories “Pending” and “Reunion

Eve” have appeared in *Harrington Gay Men’s Fiction Quarterly* and *Golden Handcuffs Review*, and his short story “West Baltimore” has been anthologized in *So the Story Goes: Twenty-Five Years of the Johns Hopkins Short Fiction Series* (2005). Joe coordinated the Spring 2005 visit of William Blackburn visiting fiction writer William H. Gass. Joseph A. Porter’s article “Revisiting Shakespeare’s Eliot” has been published in *Renaissance Papers 2004*. At the March 2005 Annual Meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America in Bermuda, Joseph presented his paper “Rare Accidents: Pangs of Scriptive Transparency” to the seminar “The Principle of Pleasure.”

- In Spring semester, 2006, Professor Jane Gaines will be Kerstin Hesselgren Chair at Stockholm University, Sweden, where she will conduct research in early cinema out of the Swedish Film Archive. During this time she will also teach at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, Norway as part of the “Digital Documentary” international project. In 2004 she received a grant from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to support the acquisition of 35mm prints for the Women Film Pioneers project, housed in the Division of Motion Pictures, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound of the U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

- Professor Karla F. C. Hollway received a Master of Legal Studies degree from Duke Law School during Spring 2005 commencement.

- Professor Laurie Shannon’s essay, “Actaeon’s Coat: Renaissance Zoographies of the Body’s Edge,” was the subject of the annual New England Early Modern Seminar at the Leslie Humanities Center at Dartmouth College (April, 2005); she had the benefit of two and a half hours of questions and comments from an interdisciplinary group of early modern faculty gathered at Dartmouth from across New England.

- Professor Victor Strandberg, who founded the Robert Penn Warren Circle fifteen years ago (a few months after the author’s death), participated in its program on the Centennial of Warren’s birth in April. The ceremonies in his home town of Guthrie, Kentucky included the issuance of an RPW postage stamp at the Guthrie Post Office (representing five years of labor by Circle members pushing the Washington bureaucracy), and a variety of panel discussions and poetry recitals in his Birth House—now on the national Historic Register—on and about his natal day, April 24.

- Congratulations to Tom Ferraro and Thomas Pfau who have been approved for promotion to full professor.

Great Books Come to Life in Literature Out Loud

by Meg Bourdillon

Some books just weren't made to be read silently. Epic poems and beautiful prose roll off the tongue, creating an effect that the printed page cannot recreate. Literature Out Loud, Duke's marathon reading society, has been busy this year bringing great literature to life.

We kicked off with "Arabian Nights" on September 25. Everyone has heard of Aladdin, but the meeting's attendees had a chance to read the narrative that frames the famous *One Thousand and One Nights* of tales. Of course, one evening is far from long enough to get through that many stories, but we heard enough about Sinbad to appreciate the misogyny and racism that marks many tales and translations, as well as to see why the stories were enough to keep a king distracted for three whole years.

October's reading of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* kept the theme of romance and magic going. Things got a little more racy, though, with November's selection: Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* [The Art of Love], a Roman handbook for those on the hunt for amorous relationships that is enough to make even modern readers gasp and giggle. These poems are products of a society where public recitations were the norm, and their artistic excellence is even more apparent when they are performed as they were intended to be. At the end of the well-attended reading, there was enough time left over for an encore, so we plowed on through Ovid's *Remedy for Love* and *Art of Beauty*.

Spring semester was action-packed, although regular attendees missed the presence of former president Erika Myers, who graduated a semester early. Reading Edmund Spenser's heavily allegorical *Faerie Queene* is much too great a task for a single night, but at our January meeting, we managed to get a feel for his elegant poetry—and get frustrated with his archaic spelling!

Voltaire put a spark into February with his biting satirical *Candide*. Everyone received a crash course in philosophical optimism and eighteenth-century corruption. One particularly exciting aspect of this novel was the chance to find parallels between the book's most pessi-



mistic figure and a character in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the contemporary classic by Douglas Adams we read to round off the last academic year.

April brought another work truly designed for performance: *Beowulf*. Seamus Heaney's translation of the iconic Anglo-Saxon work is a masterpiece in itself, and his words made the story accessible to everybody. Several of those who came were unfamiliar with the story, making the epic poem seem all the more dramatic. Afterwards, we finished with a discussion and a short reading from the original Anglo-Saxon, which was printed next to the modern English verses.

The year concluded with an April 23 reading of selections from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories about Sherlock Holmes. Although turn-out was somewhat low, "All-Night Sleuthing" was plenty of fun, and we read about some of the detective's most well-known adventures. No one could bear to leave without waiting to hear Sherlock's solution to each fascinating conundrum.

Saturday nights are busy times, with plenty of activities competing for everyone's attention. This year's LOL events have been a fantastic alternative to the ordinary. Readings are a chance to relax, snack, hang out with friends, and enjoy a good story. No one has time to read every great work of literature ever written, but marathon reading sessions provide an opportunity to find out more about books that never made it to the top of your reading list or to experience familiar compositions in a new light. This year's selections have spanned nearly two millennia of great literature, providing something for everyone's literary tastes.

Look out for more chances to join us next year. Please address questions and book suggestions to Peter McCary (ptm10@duke.edu).

Matt Cohen Profiled

by Vanda Chou

In a way, Matt Cohen is graduating, too.

His first book, *Brother Men: The Correspondence of Edgar Rice Burroughs and Herbert T. Weston*, is being published by Duke University Press this year. The process of this book was his transition between graduate student and faculty member. While at the College of William and Mary, writing his doctoral dissertation on the 19th century bachelor, Professor Cohen needed a break – so he visited his grandmother. After giving her his five minute synopsis of what his dissertation was about, she thought he might be interested in a collection of family letters between his great-grandfather and Edgar Rice Burroughs, author of the Tarzan series. Cohen recognized that these letters were a project of their own, and a book was born. This was no easy delivery, however. Legal matters had to be discussed with the estate of Edgar Rice Burroughs – who, as an effect of incorporating himself, held his copyrights infinitely – and Cohen also got the blessing of his family. Writing about family is a tricky business; they tend to hold you accountable for the actions of other family members because you are exposing them. Most difficult for Cohen, however, was personally dealing with his great-grandfather's anti-Semitism. In the early 20th century, after an explosion of immigration, the United States contained the third largest Jewish population in the world. Americans became even more xenophobic.

“It was a bizarre historical moment of ‘what I went through with my parents’ again. When you’re young, there are so many stories you don’t know – and it can be hard to sort out what to think about your family when you finally hear the old stories.”

Having a book published is “awesome,” “eerie,” and “uncanny.” The labor and struggles were well worth it: “I suspect it’s only getting weirder – but it’s the most pleasant uncomfortable feeling I’ve had.”

The transition from student to professor involved other experi-

Foods Professor Cohen does not like: *celery, cranberries, and cannoli (Professor Ferraro, yell at him!) even though he has eaten all three in the past two weeks. “There’s something to be said of attraction to that which we define ourselves against.” Maybe Cohen just has something against the letter C.*

Recommended books: *Enchiridion, Epictetus; Leaves of Grass, Walt Whitman; Dave Barry Slept Here, Dave Barry.*

Professor Cohen plays golf.

He would like to write more poetry and visit southern China.

ences, also – such as recommendation writing, teaching, and mentoring.

“Suddenly, you have to think long term because you have all these resources to work with. You know, when you’re a grad student, you can’t employ other grad students to do your work – but now, it’s okay.”

Along with being a professor and published author, he is an editor for the Walt Whitman Archive, an electronic collection of Whitman’s work, and “Critical Masculinities,” a series of books about masculinity as an analytical category in multiculturalism, media, technology, science, and the arts.

And now, he’s been awarded the Andrew W. Mellon Professorship here at Duke along with grants from the Newberry Library and the American Council of Learned Societies. He will use these grants next year in Chicago, researching and writing his next book on 17th century English and Native American interactions. From undergraduate at Oberlin to graduate student at William and Mary to junior faculty at Duke to junior faculty with accolades, Cohen’s career is promising – even if he is “suspicious of recognition.”

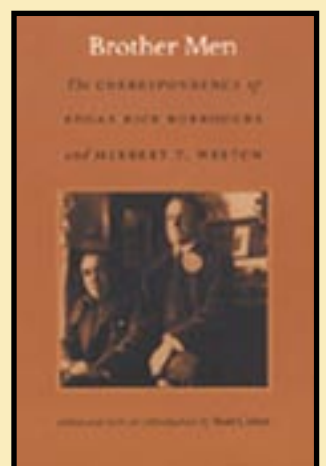
“I’m not a big fan of honor in general. I’m a big fan of work. The process is more interesting. It is in the process we do our most humane work. But recognition is a means to involvement in an intellectual conversation, and it suggests that the field and Duke are committed to that role in the conversation. It means a lot to me. It means I’m not crazy, and I would never underestimate the value of knowing you’re not crazy.”

Professor Cohen’s growing up; he’s graduated into a published author, a sought after editor, and a decorated professor responding to the honor and burden of awards. And no, he’s not crazy.



Brother Men: The Correspondence of Edgar Rice Burroughs and Herbert T. Weston.

**Matt Cohen
Duke University Press,
March 2005**



Graduate Student Announcements

- Andrew Burkett has been awarded two summer fellowships: The first to attend the Vienna Circle Summer Institute's Advanced Studies in the Philosophy of Science. Fully co-funded by the Vienna Circle (Vienna, Austria) and Duke. The second is the Graduate School Pre-dissertation Summer Travel Research Fellowship. He will be using it to do independent research on the Darwin Archive in the Special Collections Library, Cambridge University Library. Andrew will be reporting on, in part, this research at the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism's annual conference in August in Montreal, Canada. Finally, his article "The Image Beyond the Image: G.W. Pabst's Pandora's Box (1929) and the Aesthetics of the Cinematic Image-Object" has been accepted for publication in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* Vol. 24, No. 3. Spring, 2007 (Routledge Press).

- Jeannine Carpenter (Duke English-Linguistics 1st year) and Sarah Hilliard (Duke English-Linguistics 3rd year) were runners-up for the Reza Ordoubadian Award given to the best student paper presented at the SouthEastern Conference on Linguistics for their paper "Vocalic Alignment on Roanoke 'Oi'land". The award was given April 9, 2005 at the LXXII meeting of SECOL held in Raleigh, NC.

- Nathan Hensley presented a paper at the Interdisciplinary Nineteenth Century Studies Conference (INCS), called "Trollope's Realist Economies: Speculation and Form in *The Way We Live Now* and *An Autobiography*." He's also organized and supervised the conference "Forms of Empire," at the University of Notre Dame (May 1, 2, 3). Professors Psomiades and Moses from the English department, among other scholars from the U.S. and England, will be presenting papers. The website is www.formsofempire.com. Additionally, Nathan has received the Dorothy Atkinson Evans Fellowship, administered by Vassar College.

- Jeffrey Reaser, a Duke 3rd year Ph. D. Candidate (anticipated completion May, 2006) have accepted a tenure-track position in the English Department at NC State University, in Raleigh, NC.

- Congratulations to Caleb Smith and Austin Kelly for successful Spring 2005 dissertation defenses.

Vivier's "Peace or War Yet?" Wins Bascom Headen Palmer Prize

Eric Vivier's honors thesis was titled "'Peace or War Yet?': The Politics of the Military in the Plays of John Fletcher." The department nominated Eric for the Bascom Headen Palmer award with the following statement drawn from those who had looked at the thesis:

Very clearly demarcated into three separate sections, first on the arguments against military action, second the arguments for militancy and third, a discussion of the relationship between the military and the monarchy, the thesis shows itself to be lucidly in control of at least nine of Fletcher's plays. The texts are mined for statements pro or con soldiering and peace; the passages are very aptly selected and deployed to demonstrate praise or blame of peace or war. The prose is very nicely polished and the points made persuasive and coherent. Fletcher, according to Vivier, does not come down on one side or the other in the debate about peace or war at the court of James I, but displays the debate itself, offering the two sides. Instead, as Vivier points out, the debate really turns on the issue of the relationship between the king and the military. The king neglects the needs of his soldiers in too many plays not to be something of fundamental concern to Fletcher (and also, therefore, to English society under James).

In evidence throughout the thesis is the careful tracing of the importance of mutual loyalty and duty between monarch and army as outlined in Fletcher's plays. The readers are entirely persuaded that critics overlook a most important concern about military matters shared among a number of Fletcher's plays, that the soldier is an important figure and that the debate between war and peace was profoundly constitutive of political organization.

The prize was awarded to Eric at the Arts Awards Ceremony on May 14. Thanks to Joe Porter for directing this wonderful piece of work, and to Maureen Quilligan for being the second reader, and Ian Baucom for his work preparing the critical distinction students this year.

Max Brzezinski and Melinda DiStefano win Horne Teaching Awards

Congratulations to Max Brzezinski on winning the Stephen Horne award for innovative use of new media in the classroom. His class, entitled “Literature and the Rise of High Tech,” addressed the relationship between artistic modernism and modern technologies. Max used iPods from CIT to study technology’s effect on sound culture in the early 20th century. Class members shared classical and popular music from the 1920s and 1930s, field recordings, experimental and incidental sounds on the iPod and created playlists to accompany the criticism they read; the students also used iLecture to access audio recordings (stored on a server) of their class discussions.

Congratulations to Melinda DiStefano on winning the Stephen Horne teaching award for addressing different learning styles. Her class “Haunted America: Mumbling Voices, Lurking Ghosts and Walking Corpses,” used late nineteenth and twentieth century American novels, newspaper articles, speeches, short stories and some film as source material to explore the existence of the disenfranchised and silenced citizen and the violence within American constructed historical narratives as well as contemporary issues of class, race, gender and how haunting offers a means through which these acts of violence can be acknowledged. Since students brought extremely varied expertise it was imperative to establish the class as an adaptive, changing entity. Individual meetings with students allowed Melinda to pinpoint the ways in which they process information—through auditory learning, written language, visual aids, etc—allowing her to adjust her frame of reference to target their strengths and to provide personalized attention to skills and ways of thinking that they each found more challenging.

Duke University Department of English 2005 Undergraduate Writing Awards

Academy of American Poets University and College Prize: Sabrina West, “Oxidation”

Terry Welby Tyler, Jr. Poetry Award: Michaela Kerrissey, “The Fantastic Episodes”

Anne Flexner Award for Poetry: First Place: Jonathan B. Fisher, “Geisha Song” and Karen Rembold, “Ironwood”

Anne Flexner Award for Fiction: First Place: Edward Helfers, “Tune Out”
Second Place: Chris Good, “King of the Tourists”

William H. Blackburn Scholarship: Macy Parker

Margaret Rose Sanford Scholarship: Talya Lieberman

Francis K. Pemberton Scholarship: Alessandra Colaianni

Barbara Herrnstein Smith Award for Outstanding Work in Literary Criticism or Theory: David Gardner

Stanley E. Fish Award for Outstanding Work in British Literature: Vanessa Hamer

Outstanding Work in American Literature: Allison Serra, Erin Ingraham

Stephen Horne Graduate Teaching Award: Max Brzezinski, Melinda DiStefano

Department of English Award for Non-Fiction Essay:

1st Prize: Karen Rembold “Text and Textile: Questions of Cultural & Biological Reproduction in George Eliot’s *Silas Marner*”

2nd Prize: Matthew Mrkonic “With ‘Legs Bestrid the Ocean’: Strategies for Public Female Speech in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* and Cary’s *Tragedy of Mariam*”

3rd Prize: David Gardner “I know Thee Not, Old Man”

Chan Visits Duke

From April 4-7, Eugenie Chan visited for the second in a series of staged readings of works by Asian American playwrights. Chan spoke with classes in both the Theatre and English departments to discuss her career and writing. She also participated in a rehearsal for and answered questions after workshops of *Novell-Aah!* (about a Chinese mother and her daughter, whose dramatic relationship—perhaps incestuous, perhaps homoerotic—is structured like a telenovella and *Pilgrim* (the tale of a young woman whose temporary office job is interrupted when a giant bird crashes through her window).

Since receiving her MFA in dramatic writing from NYU, Chan has seen several of her plays produced. Venues like the New York Public Theatre and the Northwest Asian American Theatre Company as well as several theatres in the San Francisco Bay Area have taken interest in Chan's staging of the intersections of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, faith and class that often place Chinese women in unexpected landscapes. Indeed, her Chinese characters often seem most influenced by Native American and Latina/o cultural iconography, a characteristic of her writing that gestures toward the complexity of racial formation today and anticipates the continuing importance of her work.

Chan's visit was organized by Hannah Jocius and Sean Metzger (who also directed the readings) with the assistance of Cyndi Bunn (Theatre Studies). Several of the English department's undergraduate students participated in the reading including Carrie Alexander, Grace Ha, Moon Kim and Kelly Rohrs (who did the program). The event was sponsored by the Asian Students Association, the departments of English and Theatre Studies, the program in Women's Studies, the center for Multicultural Affairs and the John Hope Franklin Center for International Studies.

Student Poetry

Hallowed Sand

this shattered shell,
pieces scattered over the shore
sparkles
in the light of the dying moon,
jagged edges
catching beams as a sea gull pecks
at a heart
full of holes from ocean animals.
once a body,
each gash a memory of life once held –
grooves
worn smooth
by the constant
rushing
of the waves
over,
and over,
and once again –
water molds the shell to its will
healing scratches and rounding margins,
altering history, softening memories.
i step on the shell, pick it up,
put it in my pocket.
my scarred hand now holds it.

-Vanda Chou

Exhibition

let me stand in front of You, no borders,
positioning myself at just that angle.
read my body. it speaks to You, fosters
fascination. like gold I will dangle
droplets of me for You to chase and grasp
at, one piece of a puzzle at a time
always just enough. your attempt to clasp
and understand is not your own, but mine.
perceive me, piece me, glue me together,
make me into whatever You desire.
but know that I am only yours whether
I am true or a dream, all I aspire
to give You is some of me, precisely
what I decide You should have and know
me.

-Melanie Garcia

Slamming War

Money Greed Lust Desire Anger Strife
Bam! We Blew up the World Again. So
What?
It's all just a game now; taking a life
Has become so normal; we're in a rut.
Our values, morals, and ethics are here
But have been writhed and contorted like
clay
Into shapes that cause us to scream in fear
And resort to actions of hate that may
Bring us all to our knees in shame and we
Will pray for redemption. Although who
knows?
We could all be poor players, so to be
Or not be might be the it or the close
Of a poem, of a show, of a fight
And we as humans must observe
our right.

-Melanie Garcia

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