

Loose Canons

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This fall the English Department is very fortunate to welcome three new faculty members. To get to know them a little better, I asked Assistant Professor of English Monique Allewaert, Associate Professor of English Benjamin Reiss, and Professor Jonathan Goldberg to write about themselves and their work for this issue of Loose Canons.

—Amy Benson Brown

Exploring Revolutionary Spaces

Monique Allewaert on her work

In U.S. political and academic cultures, revolution has often been imagined as the prelude to modern nationalisms: Revolution breeds nationalism breeds democracy. So goes the story that makes these unrelated words into cognates. To illustrate the tight concatenation of revolution, nationalism, and democracy, you need only recall that last year President Bush flew to Philadelphia to deliver a policy speech in which he proposed that there is “no better place to discuss the rise of a free Iraq than in the heart of Philadelphia, the city where America’s democracy was born.” Clearly the White House believed that invoking the U.S. revolution would unite U.S. citizens behind the war effort. And the reason U.S. citizens should support the Iraq war was because the President promised that they might have a chance to see their own history repeat itself in the Middle East. Sectional violence (given political form by the implication that this violence might be called revolution) must give way to the coming order of national democracy.

My work and teaching on the relation of race, revolution, and nationalism often returns to Philadelphia in 1776. However, my research

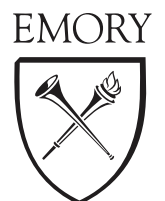


also leads me to plantation spaces—Virginia, Surinam, St. Domingue (now Haiti), Florida. By moving to plantation spaces, I hope to offer new stories about the age of revolution. For one, focusing on revolution in plantation spaces requires that we change the cast of characters and the archives we use to tell stories about revolution. Leonora Sansay—a Philadelphia native who married a French Creole planter, had an affair with Aaron Burr, and wrote an epistolary travelogue about her travels through revolutionary St. Domingue (and was later implicated in a treasonous plot to overthrow the U.S. government)—becomes a central figure in my account of revolution. The texts I study suggest a revolutionary genealogy that does not yield nationalisms but rather transnationalisms and (at the other end of the spectrum) intensely local cultures like

West Indian maroons (communities made up of self-emancipated slaves).

Right now I am thinking about what revolution in plantation spaces implies for

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Sudden Surprises of the Soul

For this issue of *Loose Canons*, I've been asked to write about myself. It's a perplexing assignment for me because most of what I write concerns people who lead lives nothing like my own. My first book is about an elderly African American woman who was exhibited by the impresario P.T. Barnum and claimed to be the oldest living human and the former nurse of George Washington. Along the way, she encountered plate-spinning entertainers, prying children, skeptical reporters, and doctors eager for her to die so that they could perform an autopsy. (They got their wish, and the results set off one of the first media spectacles in American history.) I've written an article about a sleepwalking housemaid who became a local marvel until her employers grew tired of her nocturnal habits and had her committed to an insane asylum. I'm now finishing a book about nineteenth-century asylums that includes mad poets, doctors-turned-patients, patients who formed a blackface minstrelsy troupe, and doctors who claimed to be acting on the authority of William Shakespeare.

Unlike my subjects, I think of myself as a fairly ordinary person: I like to read, listen to music, spend time with my family and friends. I don't have a hankering to run away with the circus and haven't seen the inside of a mental hospital (yet). Though I tend to write about relatively "lowbrow" phenomena (freak shows, minstrel shows, and the like), I like jazz and classical music, once dreamed of being a concert violinist, and can't stand most TV shows. I'm not entirely a snob, though—I even like a good roll in the gutter now and again: Austin Powers movies, down 'n' dirty blues joints, and my son's Captain Underpants books. My favorite books do tend to dive downward, but only to lift us up again:



Moby-Dick, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and recently, Edward P. Jones's *The Known World*.

So, what draws me to those curious old cases: human anomalies; spectacles of marginality, disability, and infirmity; theaters of exploitation? It's hard to explain, but when I'm reading or doing archival research, sometimes a story leaps out at me, grabs hold of my collar, and makes my eyes bug out. When this happens, I set the book or the document down, walk away, and wander in a daze for a few minutes, then come back to make sure I haven't hallucinated. After I confirm my own sanity, I know I've got to get on the case. How did this happen? Who are these people? Why, for instance, did a medical authority think that shaving someone's head and raising blisters on the scalp would be a good way to stop somnambulism? Why, in the midst of a national crisis over slavery, would a sitting president of the United States take the time to read and comment upon a mental patient's poem about Jenny Lind? Or why would 1,500 people pay admission to watch an old woman's corpse be dissected, and tens of thousands more clamor to read about the disputed results? My search for answers—never, to my mind, entirely complete—leads me into forgotten political debates, scientific and medical theories, religious practices, and cultural rites. Sometimes I feel like I'm puzzling out the whole world; at other times I feel I'm drowning in an ocean of anecdote and digression.

My published work is part narrative, part analytical. I try to situate these stories within the broader rhythms of cultural and ideological change, and to recapture the texture of historical experience through intense, sometimes microscopic examination of specific incidents and phenomena that tease me with the promise of meaning, but that finally resist simple

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To Question What Is

On the final page of the introduction that I wrote for *Shakespeare's Hand*, the 2003 publication of my collected essays on Shakespeare, I wondered whether the U.S. ever might have a president who is anything other than a presumptively heterosexual white male. I recognized what an odd question that was to ask, but nonetheless ended the introduction with the claim that there might be a relationship between readings of Shakespeare and the all but unthinkable possibility of a U.S. president who is Black, or female, or not straight—or even all of the above. Perhaps scholarship and teaching that does not assume the function of literature is to support prevailing norms might produce political changes. This hope may be part of the reason I've just joined a department that publishes a newsletter called *Loose Canons*. Loosening the hold of the canon and taking aim at exclusionary readings of the canon are goals with which I am entirely sympathetic.

A political desire has been at work in my writing for more than a decade now—from the publication of *Sodometries* (1992), which sought to understand representations of sexuality in early modern texts from the vantage point of current conceptions. That book opened by considering a tee shirt image of the face of Saddam Hussein fastened to a camel's rump surrounded by the logo "America Will Not Be Saddamized." I don't see that shirt anymore, but it's clear that its political effects haven't disappeared. In the Shakespeare collection's introduction, I gestured to the pathways along which questions of race, gender, class, and sexuality pass, sometimes lining up, but more often crisscrossing complexly, as I went on to explore in *Tempest in the Caribbean* (2004). The mobilization of complex, skeptical analysis seems to me crucial to counter the consolidations of identity and purpose which the tee shirt assumed: the singleness of America, for one thing—the presumption that no one who has that identity could ever want to be "saddamized" or hold different ideas about U.S. foreign policy.

Academic inquiry of the kind I like to encourage would invite analysis of the anything-but-simple strategies of this simple-minded message. In addition, it doesn't hurt to remember what the Tee shirt conveniently forgets, that not so long ago, an entity that assumes identification with America—the U.S. government—had given material support to Saddam Hussein.

Political analysis per se is, of course, not what I do, but the politics of literature always has been at the center of my work. In the 1980s, what I hoped to show in books on the early modern period was the impossibility that literature, even when it operates in and through the prevailing discourses of its time, could simply echo them in some univocal way. The impossibility I have in mind is a double one. First, as the analysis of the tee shirt shows, even texts that think they mean one thing can mean more than that, often in ways that cut across the grain of their most apparent meaning. Second, literary texts are literary precisely to the degree that they depend upon these kinds of linguistic resources. It's because of this double situation that the parameters of literary study can widen to include nonliterary texts. Thus, we can bring various kinds of materials into juxtaposition, with the aim of producing more plausible cultural knowledge even about the place of literature within culture. The aim is not simply to enable richer readings of literary texts, for the reading techniques do not stop there.

Reading is a process that moves along the kinds of complex paths to which I alluded earlier, the crisscrossing of implications that extend in ever-widening textual filaments; careful analysis pursues these in thought processes that extend to classroom discussion, and possibly beyond. Currently, my pursuits in these complex paths have taken me to the atomic science and

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Reflections on a Post-doctoral Fellowship

From July 1845 to September 1847, Henry David Thoreau conducted his famous “experiment” at Walden Pond, and he condensed his experiences into his book *Walden*, published in 1854. After spending the last two years at the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture in Williamsburg, Virginia, on an NEH/Institute postdoctoral fellowship, I have also been asked to reflect on *my mode of life*. While my fellowship was not with nature, I hope Henry will forgive me for using some of his words in describing what I discovered (all citations, in italics, are taken from the 2000 Modern Library paperback edition).

Economy

I arrived in Williamsburg in August 2004. The Institute furnished an office, personal computer, and generous travel support for visiting archives and participating in conferences. I also benefited from stimulating exchanges with other fellows, a round-table of scholars invited to discuss my work, the editors of the Institute’s prize-winning book program, and visiting scholars presenting during weekly research colloquia. I had the rare opportunity to spend two years predominantly following my own interests, unencumbered by the daily obligations of teaching, grading, preparing, and committee meetings required by a tenure-track job. *Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day . . . he has no time to be anything but a machine. How can he remember well his ignorance—which his growth requires—who has so often to use his knowledge?*

I explored entirely new questions as well as things I had left out of my dissertation on intercultural and multilingual literary exchanges between German and English immigrants in colonial Pennsylvania. I am grateful that the Institute not only gave me the time, space, and financial support to let my work mature, but that its book program—in cooperation with the University of

North Carolina Press—will publish the outcome of this process. I relish the thought that the academic marketplace will not be the sole arbiter of my intellectual pursuits. *I too had woven a kind of basket of a delicate texture, but I had not made it worth any one’s while to buy them . . . I studied rather how to avoid the necessity of selling them.*

Reading

I read and thought much about ideas that meant a great deal to writers and readers in early America but have largely dropped out of the consciousness of literary critics and cultural historians. I started reading about early-modern theories of language difference and diversity, ideas of musical harmony and spiritual community, the mystical compositions of the Ephrata Cloister, the extensive translations of Moravian missionaries among the Indians, and a common quest for peace among English Quakers and German sectarians during the French and Indian Wars. A new set of questions emerged: How, for instance, did the seventeenth-century vogue of searching for a perfect language appeal to writers, missionaries, and community-builders who found themselves in a “New World Babel”? Why did a host of Ephrata papermakers, printers, bookbinders, and translators invest the better of three years to publish the Dutch-Mennonite *Martyrs’ Mirror* in German? Who were the “martyrs” of early Pennsylvania? *My residence was more favorable, not only to thought, but to serious reading, than a university . . . I had more than ever come within the influence of those books which circulate round the world . . . Says the poet Mir Camar Uddin Mast, “Being seated, to run through the region of the spiritual world; I have had this advantage in books. To be intoxicated by a single glass of wine; I have experienced this pleasure when I have drunk the liquor of the esoteric doctrines.”* I hope to capture in my book the exciting prospect that early Americans maintained a keen sense of the hid-

den or “esoteric” knowledge sought by writers and thinkers of late Renaissance Europe and that they maintained a fear of persecution and hope for a utopian beginning characteristic of radical Protestants in the early modern period. Similar to mystics and utopian philosophers of the seventeenth century, early Pennsylvanians—English and German, Quaker and Pietist—believed that spiritual connections could bind together seemingly disparate parts of their new community. I enjoyed getting lost in early-modern debates that confound reductive present-day divisions between religious “fundamentalism” and secular “progressivism.” As the eighteenth-century Quaker Edward Pennington said to a Philadelphia Meeting divided over pro- and anti-defense arguments, “I apprehend a good degree of unity may be maintained in a society whose members do not think exactly in every respect.”

The Ponds

Walden is blue at one time and green at another, even from the same point of view. Lying between the earth and the heavens, it partakes of the color of both. The glassy surface of a lake may also be a fit metaphor for the people and the texts I have studied. They always reflect concerns for the earthly and the divine—both being divided by an almost invisible line. The many people of colonial Pennsylvania who lived and wrote in the space between cultures and languages—especially the many translators and linguistic mediators—detected mystical connections as well as subtle differences that escaped those seeking to inscribe ostensibly essential ethnic and cultural divisions. *Like the rest of our waters . . . [Walden Pond] appears at a little distance of a darker blue than the sky itself; and at such a time, being on its surface, and looking with divided vision, so as to see the reflection, I have discerned a matchless and indescribably light blue* Ultimately, the “divided vision”

of translation has become the central trope and argument of my book: translators could find unity among apparent opposites while appreciating beauty in differences.



Conclusion

I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. When I first applied for this fellowship, I was not sure whether the Institute would be interested in the mix of close readings, history-of-the-book research, and translation study present in my dissertation. The support and encouragement has been overwhelming, and I truly profited from working in an interdisciplinary environment (my co-fellows were an art historian and two historians). My contact with some of the most acclaimed historians in the field has sharpened my ability to distinguish between “context” and historical evidence. As a literary scholar, I hope to heighten my readers’ curiosity for the intangible possibilities of spiritual community that the writers and readers of early America located and inscribed in texts, even if “on the ground” records do not always reflect such ideals.

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. The most important lesson I have learned during these two years is the need for real conversations. Conducting my job search and fellowship selection process simultaneously, I had met with committees who could barely stay awake for my three-minute “blurp,” while the people who chose me for the fellowship had read my entire dissertation and engaged me during a 1-hour interview about the critical questions that make my work both difficult and promising. In speaking with my students and colleagues (in person and in print), I hope to emphasize three things: good work takes time; difficult questions require complex answers; and, if we want to talk, we also need to listen. I love the line my three-year-old son recently learned from his Montessori teacher: “I need you to listen to my words!” •

—Patrick Erben, Assistant Professor of English
at the State University of West Georgia,
can be reached at perben@wga.edu

Expanding Horizons for Emory's Humanities Center

In 2005, Emory's Center for Humanistic Inquiry was awarded a prestigious National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant in the amount of \$2.5 million. This year on October 28th, the CHI officially became the Bill and Carol Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry, in recognition of the Foxes' many years of devoted service to Emory University. In only its sixth year of existence, the Center has not only established itself, but it is also changing the culture of the Humanities at Emory. Recently, the Director of the Fox Center Martine Watson Brownley, Goodrich C. White Professor of English, sat down with the editor to talk about the future of the Center.

AB: Congratulations on receiving the grant. How does it affect operations at the Center?

MB: Initially, it will allow us to expand our work in a variety of ways, including a new Post-Doctoral Fellowship in Poetics, a new series of Great Works Seminars for the general public, and a new Public Programming Fund that will introduce the cutting-edge humanities research of Emory scholars to the wider community.

The grant also provides permanent funding for our CHIIRS series [CHI Interdisciplinary Research Seminars] for faculty and graduate students, and covers the salary for a half-time staff position that was previously funded on soft money. Staff support is a major concern for me, because our staff is an absolutely incredible group, and they've been a crucial element in the Center's success.

Basically, with the new growth funded by the NEH grant, we'll begin to refocus our emphases. We will still support humanities programming through CHIPS [the Center for Humanistic Inquiry's Programming Support] and run the Humanities Calendar. But we intend to increasingly focus on humanities research.

AB: And you are currently in your sixth year?

MB: Yes, we had one planning year, and we're now in our fifth year of residential fellowships. We were really pleased to receive this kind of grant with our first application to the NEH,

which is rare for an institution. Not only was it awarded on our first submission and with no revisions, but they approved the full amount we requested. The CHI was the only humanities center in the country that received funding in that round of applications. This show of confidence speaks to a national recognition of the value of our work in strengthening humanities research.

In recent years, there's been decreasing support for humanities research at universities across the United States—not to mention abroad. And one of the great lacks in American education is the failure to provide post-doctoral training in the humanities. We want to supplement this initial NEH grant with further outside funding for several named post-docs, all designed to foster a community of humanities research.

AB: Why is the Center placing such an emphasis on a post-doctoral program?

MB: What passes today for additional training after the doctorate in the humanities is far too often just a way for schools to get teaching labor cheap.

What scholars in the humanities desperately need is time to work—the work that Fellows are able to do during a year at the Center will sustain them far into their research trajectory. And as young faculty have increasing teaching and service demands placed upon them both in teaching and service, their scholarship suffers. With the small, but very successful, post-doctoral program we already run, the Fox Center is well-positioned to put Emory in the lead nationally in developing effective post-doctoral programs and helping to train the next generation of scholars.

AB: Why start with Poetics?

MB: We initially wanted to highlight Emory's strengths, and Poetics, with our rich library collections, was natural. As we look ahead, we plan to develop these fellowships in three ways—we can augment areas where Emory is already strong, we can support research fields that are still growing, and we can have Fellows in areas not currently represented at Emory. see page 16

New Graduate Students

JENNIFER HEIL, originally of Metairie, LA, completed her B.A. degree in English from Louisiana State University in 2002 and her M.A. degree in American Literature from Tulane University this past May. Her scholarly interests are American Literature and African-American Literature. Heil has garnered considerable experience as an English teacher in the past four years. During the Summer and Fall of 2002, she taught all levels of English to adult students in Qingdao, China; in 2003, Heil taught beginner-level English to adult students through the Sam Marsalli Language Institute in Santiago, Chile; the following Summer, she taught English and Spanish with The Accent Group. In September of 2005, she worked for NASA teaching Russian cosmonauts English as part of their training for the space program. Also in the Fall of 2005, she taught writing and reading at Augusta Technical Institute.

SHANNON HIPPI, originally of Detroit, MI, currently of Chamblee, GA, completed a B.A. in English Writing and a minor in Italian Language and Literature from St. Mary's College in 1998. She obtained an M.A. in English from Middlebury College in August of 2006. Her scholarly interests are in British Literature and Irish Literature, specifically T.S. Eliot. While at St. Mary's, Hipp was able to complete a semester of study in Rome, which led her to consider the ways in which medieval Italian literature and spiritual culture penetrate Eliot's writings. She hopes to further explore this path at Emory. For the past five years, Hipp has taught English and Creative Writing at Marist School in Atlanta.

JOSEPH JOHNSON of Philadelphia, PA, received his B.A. in English Literature from St. Michael's College in May 2000 and an M.A. in English Literature from Villanova University in May 2005. His scholarly interests are in Modern Anglo-Irish Literature; his current work addresses the relationship between traditional

folklore narratives and the Irish Revivalist art. For the past three years, Johnson has been teaching history and English at the junior high school level within the Philadelphia School District, and in 2003-04 he served as program coordinator of the Talented and Gifted Program with Philadelphia Academy Charter School.

REBECCA KUMAR, a New Jersey native who spent much of her childhood in Southern Mississippi, received her B.A. in English from New York University in May 2006. During her study at NYU, Kumar was energized by the works of South Asian writers and began to formulate a serious academic interest in Postcolonial literature and Gender Studies. She hopes to focus her doctoral study on the culture and identity conflicts that emerge from the South Asian diaspora. While at NYU, she was an English literature peer tutor at the university's Learning Center. Kumar has also been involved with SAKHI, a safe house for South Asian women who have faced violence and abuse. In addition, she was instrumental, this past year, in raising funds for a Mississippi hospital that addressed the needs of victims of Hurricane Katrina.

GUIRDEX MASSÉ, a native of St. Marc, Haiti, who spent his formative years in both France and the United States, completed his B.A. in English and Africana Studies from Brooklyn College in January 2006. Fluent in Creole and French, Massé completed a language immersion program at the Instituté Catholique in Paris in the Summer of 2004, studying the life and works of Jacques Roumain and the Indigéisme literary movement of which Roumain was a part. At the doctoral level, Massé plans to further his understanding of African American and Caribbean literatures.

LAUREN MATTHEWS, originally of Fayetteville, AR, received her B.A. in English from Hendrix College in 2003 and an M.A. in English from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, see page 9

The Writing Requirement

Watching the drooping eyelids of half the students every Thursday in my 2:30 Poetry class, I wonder why they took the course in the first place. Three distinct groups seem to populate most writing classes: those who prepare daily for classroom discussion; those who are marginally interested in English and writing but not enough to prepare for and participate actively in class; and those who seem to be there because they hoped they could veg out unnoticed. I began to ask a few of my friends and fellow students why they think students take classes that don't interest them.

...the writing requirement forces all students to write and learn valuable skills along the way, and yet the many students who are not humanities majors consistently fail to take the class seriously, thereby diminishing the learning of all.

One answer is the infamous Writing Requirement, a course feature (which is mandatory in one class per semester) emphasizing bounteous reading assignments and equally tedious essay writing. For instance, in a recent midlevel Writing Requirement English class I took, there were four upperclass students who did not participate in class discussion at all. All four explained that they were taking the class to fulfill a writing requirement. When I interviewed a fellow sophomore (a business major) on the subject of the writing requirement and asked whether he would take a writing-based course if it weren't to satisfy a writing requirement, he replied: "I don't know. It never really occurred to me to take a writing-based course until I learned I had to." The idea is a double-edged sword: the writing requirement forces all students to write and learn valuable skills along the way, and yet the many students who are not humanities majors consistently fail to take the class seriously, thereby diminishing the learning of all. In fact, it was a common perception among the students I interviewed that if you are a math, science, or business major, writing is either not important or not necessary to enter the work force after college.

This attitude ultimately does not serve anyone well. It's widely acknowledged that being able to write smoothly and effectively is very valuable to any career from accountant to archeologist. I am reminded of the scientist James Hutton, who is considered the father of modern geology. His writings were reportedly so obscure that they impeded the recognition and acceptance of his ideas until other geologists like John Playfair and Charles Lyell clarified them with lucid transcriptions. Only then did he become widely acclaimed for his revolutionary innovations. Why then, if writing is so widely acknowledged as beneficial, does that perspective not permeate into the minds of many students?

I believe the negative perception of the writing requirement comes about partly because of the classes through which the writing requirement is offered. In other words, there seems to be a lack of writing-based classes offered specifically for the purposes of science or

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business majors. When I searched the course catalog for the biology and chemistry classes for Spring 2007, I found only one writing requirement class: the honors thesis in Chemistry, a class that the strong majority of all chemistry majors will not take. While students are asked to keep clear and concise lab notebooks in some chemistry classes, there remain no classes solely devoted to the development of technical writing.

While I am not calling for the reshaping of the entire chemistry or biology programs, or a changeup in the curriculum of the B-school, I wonder if classes dealing with technical and other types of writing (which could meet the writing requirement and interest students in that specific major) would be helpful. Just as the English department makes English 205, dealing with the Interpretation of Poetry, mandatory for all English majors, could the Chemistry or Biology department make “Technical Writing” necessary to receive a degree? Having writing requirements within the math, science, and business departments would allow majors to regard the requirement as another step forwards in the completion of their degree, rather than a step sideways.

Being in an atmosphere favorable to writing and favorable to their interests would theoretically allow math, science, and business students to improve their writing skills: the very goal of the writing requirement. Whereas the science student in a class on Joyce’s political commentary will write qua reluctant student, the science student in a class on the study, writing, and development of scientific papers will at least be provided with an example of writing in their field, and try to write qua scientist. The sort of students who nod off in my afternoon Poetry class might actually sit up and participate if they had this kind of option. •

—Andrew Pickard is a sophomore and can
be reached at apickar@emory.edu

in 2005. While working on her undergraduate degree, Matthews completed a semester of study at the University of London. Her scholarly interests cross many canonical boundaries, but she hopes to parse Renaissance Literature and British Literature more fully, making connections between works traditionally separated by historical, geographic, or other boundaries.

CHRISTINE MCCULLOUGH, originally of Flagstaff, AZ, joins the department from Portland, OR. She completed her B.A. in Liberal Arts from St. John’s College, Santa Fe, in 2003. In between her sophomore and junior years of college, she worked at a rehabilitation facility for female juvenile offenders in South Carolina. Her experiences in the southern heartland no doubt influenced her decision to pursue Southern Literature further at the doctoral level. McCullough is also interested in Irish Literature, particularly the works of W.B. Yeats.

LASHONDA WILLIAMS is a native of Americus, GA, who received her B.A. degree in English from The University of the South in 2005. While at Sewanee, Williams was the recipient of a TONYA Scholarship, which allowed her to work as an intern with a Washington, DC-based literary agency. She also received the Andrew Lytle Award as an outstanding student of Southern Literature and History. At the doctoral level, Williams hopes to further her understanding of British Literature and African American Literature. •



Lauren Matthews, Shamon Hipp, Rebecca Kumar, Lashonda Edinburg,
Jemifer Heil, Guirdex Masse, Joseph Johnson, and Christine McCulloch

Faculty News

- WILLIAM M. CHACE, Professor and President Emeritus, has published a book, *One Hundred Semesters: My Adventures as Student, Professor, and University President, and What I Learned along the Way*.
- BARBARA LADD, Associate Professor, was respondent for “Beyond the Islands: Haiti, Cuba, and the U.S. Imaginary” at the American Studies meeting in Oakland, CA, on October 14, 2006. In September, she presented a paper entitled, “‘Les Amis Myriades et Anonymes a la France de Tout le Monde’: Créolité and Empire, Difference and Indifference in William Faulkner’s A Fable,” at Transnational Exchanges: The South in Europe, Europe in the American South, a symposium in Vienna.
- JONATHAN GOLDBERG, Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor, has had an essay, “Literary Criticism, Literary History, and the Place of Homoeroticism” included in *Early Modern English Poetry: A Critical Companion*, published by Oxford University Press.
- JIM MOREY, Associate Professor, delivered a paper, “The Fourth Fate of Men: Heremod’s Darkened Mind,” at the Southeastern Medieval Association meeting in October at the University of Mississippi.
- MARK BAUERLEIN, Professor, published articles in *The Weekly Standard* and *Atlanta History*, delivered lectures at Colorado College (“Milton vs. MySpace”), Harvard (“Academic Training and the First Amendment”), and the University of the District of Columbia (“Arts and Culture Research”). He was interviewed by NPR in Washington, NPR in Colorado, WABE and WRFG in Atlanta, and was the subject of a profile in *Atlanta Magazine*.
- WALTER KALAJDZIAN, Professor, was an invited speaker for the Josephine Baker: A

Century in the Spotlight Conference sponsored by the French and Africana Studies Departments at Barnard College and the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University; he also was an invited speaker for the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; finally, he participated on a panel of the Open Forum on International Issues: Transcultural Crossings and the Geomodernist Imaginary at the Modernist Studies Association 8th Annual Convention.

- JOSEPH SKIBELL, Associate Professor, reports that his novel, *A Blessing on the Moon*, will be adapted as a theatrical-dance presentation by Rebecca Salazar, choreographer, and Rebecca Novick, theater director, as part of the Brave New Works Festival at Theater Emory in February 2007.
- BENJAMIN REISS, Associate Professor, gave a lecture in October called “Saneface Minstrelsy: Blacking Up in a Nineteenth-Century Insane Asylum” at Loyola University in Chicago. Another section, on Emerson and the “mad” poet Jones Very, was the subject of a roundtable sponsored by Northwestern University’s American Cultures colloquium. A portion of his first book, *The Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum’s America*, was recently translated and reprinted in a Mexican journal of culture and the arts, *Luna Córnea*.
- MARTINE WATSON BROWNLEY, Goodrich C. White Professor of English, Winship Distinguished Research Professor, and Director of the Center for Humanistic Inquiry, spoke on “Seventeenth-Century English Biography” at the Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry conference on “Icons and Iconoclasts: The Long Seventeenth Century, 1603 to 1714,” at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland on July 20, 2006. This semester, in addition to her teaching at Emory and directing the CHI, she has been named the



Dabney Adams Hart Distinguished Visiting Humanities Professor at Agnes Scott College.

- LAURA OTIS, Professor, has been using her combined focus on literature and science this semester to honor the hundredth anniversary of Santiago Ramón y Cajal’s Nobel Prize for Medicine. Cajal, who won the prize for proving that neurons are independent cells, also wrote some extraordinarily creative science fiction, collected in *Vacation Stories*. In October, Otis delivered a keynote address at “The Legacy of Ramón y Cajal,” an interdisciplinary symposium organized by Chesnut Hill College in Philadelphia to celebrate Cajal’s contributions to literature and science. She also gave a presentation at the Neuroscience 2006 conference in Atlanta to inform scientists of Cajal’s achievements in literature.

IN MEMORIAM

Barbara Anne Mortimer
(PhD '89)

April 16, 1960 —
August 30, 2006

A devoted teacher, a dedicated scholar, and a true friend.

To Question What Is from page 3

epicurean philosophy found in Lucretius’s epic poem *De rerum natura*. This philosophical view, I am finding, has a much wider purchase than simply in the history of philosophy or for early modern studies; it shows itself in many other places, some quite surprising. This semester, for example, I’m teaching a number of novels by Patricia Highsmith. Highsmith is not often an explicitly philosophical writer, but I think her writing is Lucretian in its consequential meeting of strangers, indeed, that the sexuality of these encounters may indicate one of the sites for that philosophical position. Several years ago, when I was writing a book on Willa Cather and various others who might be brought within her orbit, I had hoped but failed to find a way to connect her with Highsmith. Lucretius, read on rainy nights by Cather’s Professor St. Peter and the outlandish Tom that appeared one day in his garden, may point the way.

Political analysis per se is, of course, not what I do, but the politics of literature always has been at the center of my work.

For now, the imperative seems to me to question what is; the drive to do that comes from wanting to understand materiality better. I’m helped in this task by Foucault’s concept of biopower, which has been crucial in my thinking for some time now. Foucault claimed that life itself was not immune from politics, was itself a political category. Nazism was the instance he had most in mind making this claim; but that form of state racism for him was not an aberration but an instance of a logic that we can still see at work in the Saddam tee shirt or subsequent political developments in the U.S. Asking, with Lucretius, the question of how life arises and persists so long as it does; seeing, with him, the accidental quality of these beginnings means recognizing the possibility of new beginnings.

Lucretius imagines atoms through a number of terms: seeds is one; bodies, elements, are others. That term returns us to the reading practices I’ve mentioned, for “elementa,” the word for basic particles, also names the letters of the alphabet. Lucretius conjures up a world as it arises from the alphabetical row: l-m-n spells element. •

–Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor
Jonathan Goldberg can be reached at
jonathan.goldberg@emory.edu

On Dissertations, Literary Language, and Magical Thinking

Jennefer Callaghan

I've been told that a dissertation tends to reflect its author's deepest personal concerns. Supposedly, whether consciously or not, we choose topics and problems that are central to our identities and our world views. If this is true, it's bad news for those who want to write about "Incest and Orgies in the Elizabethan Sonnet" or "Famous Murderers in Modernism" or other subjects that would not go over well at dinner with the grandparents. (You know who you are.)

My own dissertation is on ghost stories written by well-known practitioners of American literary realism, such as W.D. Howells, Henry James, and Sarah Orne Jewett. The upside of this topic is that most regular people (i.e., those outside the academy) are interested in ghost stories. The ones I meet at cocktail parties, at least, are excited about it; but then again, they might be tipsy. They greet the news with a sort of surprise and enthusiasm that suggests they didn't realize Ph.D. students were allowed to write dissertations about anything fun.

The downside is a tendency to assume I believe in ghosts because I study ghost stories. Some give me a look as if I next might ask to massage their chakras. Others feel inspired to share their run-ins with the supernatural. One guy gleefully told me that his aunt had drowned her baby in a well in Singapore and its vengeful ghost has since haunted the whole family. A friend from the Republic of Georgia, a country apparently so psychically resonant that dogs howl in the streets when someone dies, solemnly reported that he saw a ghost in the guest bedroom of the house where I used to live. In the middle of the night, a giant man in dark clothes passed through the room while my friend lay terrified.

The thing is, I never really believed in ghosts, and I believe in them even less now. It's the equivalent of analyzing humor—once you explain why a joke is funny, it's just not funny anymore. Ghosts lose a little of their scariness when you've considered them for a while. And besides, my interest in ghost stories has nothing

to do with ghosts themselves.

Initially, I was drawn to the paradox of "literary realists" who write ghost stories. Nearly every major American writer of the late nineteenth century, including many vocal proponents of literary realism, tried his or her hand at supernatural fiction. Mary Wilkins Freeman, Charles Chesnut, and Edith Wharton all wrote ghost stories. Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Kate Chopin, Hamlin Garland, and Jack London wrote on subjects ranging from séances to telepathy to mesmerism to time travel. Why, I wondered, would American authors invested in a positivist notion of reality choose to write about ghosts?

It turns out that literary realism and the ghost story are not such strange bedfellows after all. Ghost stories dramatize an intrusion of a supernatural element into the natural world. They depend on verisimilitude, among other things, in order to produce a chill in the reader. If a ghost could pop in unannounced in the middle of this perfectly ordinary drawing room that I'm reading about, the reader thinks, then what could prevent one from showing up here, in my own living room?

It's this boundary between fiction and reality that I find so fascinating. The pleasure of reading, in my opinion, is the indulgence of a desire to believe in what might not be real—that slippage one can sometimes achieve between rational thought and irrational belief. The division between fiction and reality is particularly interesting when mimetic representation is involved, since the illusion succeeds to the extent that it purports to be reality. The stories that I'm writing about all demonstrate a common concern with the question of how fiction works, and I realize now, looking back on the development of my project, that it's the very question I've been trying to explore all along. To think about the imaginative, transportive power of fiction is for me to return to why reading was enjoyable in the first place.

What I've come to believe, which may be equally as odd as a belief in ghosts, is that literary language is an extension of "magical thinking."

A professor of psychology at the University of Bristol recently announced research findings

on the susceptibility of human beings to supernatural beliefs. A tendency toward irrational, superstitious, or supernatural beliefs, he claims, is a result of our ability to reason intuitively. Through thousands of years of evolution, we developed the ability to theorize invisible forces or entities in order to account for what we observed, and those of us who believed in the presence of the unseen had an evolutionary advantage. For instance, we were less likely to end up as a snack for the predator in the bushes. This hereditary predisposition, the professor argues, accounts for the present-day phenomenon of otherwise perfectly rational persons who talk to our cars, or refuse to wear a sweater that belonged to a mass murderer, or would be unwilling to trade their wedding rings for exact replicas. What strikes me about these instances of superstition in daily life is the way they corre-

late to familiar forms of figurative language: personification or pathetic fallacy, metonymy or synecdoche, and symbol or metaphor. The same mental operation that makes us think our toaster is out to get us also makes us able to imagine “The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes.”

In the end, I suppose our dissertations do address our own nagging concerns about life and literature. Not through means of the topic—that’s surface and subterfuge—but by virtue of the underlying questions. Though whether addressing those questions means we end up answering them to our satisfaction—I don’t know. I’m certain I’ll be able to figure out how my nineteenth-century authors used the ghost story genre as a means to think about fiction. But will I ever figure out how fiction works? There’s only a ghost of a chance. •

—*Jennefer Callaghan can be reached at jcallag@learnlink.emory.edu*

Sudden Surprises from back page

Lawrence Jackson, and Walter Kalaidjian. Jonathan Goldberg left Johns Hopkins to accept an endowed chair here. Professor Goldberg, a specialist in Renaissance, early modern studies, and the history of sexuality, has been called “one of the foremost literary critics and cultural commentators writing today.”

All three new professors immediately began working on department committees and teaching fully subscribed courses. And if that is not enough to celebrate, I can tell you also that we are in the midst of negotiations with two more world-class faculty members. At this time, I think it better not to name the renowned public intellectual in Irish Studies, but I can tell you that the interest appears to be mutual, and he’s visited twice in recent months. Since the news media has already made much over coming of Salman Rushdie, I might as well confess that in March some very fortunate students will be learning from the master himself and that his papers will soon be available in our special collections. Now, if that is not enough to make you go “hmmmm,” think on this: I have good reason to believe that this time next year, I will write another *Loose Canons* column announcing appointments of the best assistant professor

of 18th-Century British literature that can be found in this hemisphere—or maybe the world—and of at least one other senior professor.

And there is yet another reason why I am smiling. I hope that some of you remember an earlier column in which I tried to explain why an English major is a valuable and worthy specialization. My premise was: while there’s more to wealth than money, an English major can and should expect to be able to translate her knowledge into a financially comfortable profession.

A recent survey circulated by the Modern Language Association has found that Garrison Keillor is not the only English major to hold a very lucrative and influential position. In fact, you may be surprised that teaching is not the profession that claims the largest percent of undergraduate English Majors. A larger percentage enter entertainment, publishing and public relations. If you have read to the end of this very long epistle, I thank you. I assure you there’s even more to share and to celebrate. But, that can wait for another edition or three of *Loose Canons*.•

—*Frances Foster, Chair of the English Department, is Charles Howard Candler Professor of English and Women’s Studies. She can be reached at ffoster@emory.edu*

Literary Pilgrimage and Letting Go

Amy Benson Brown (PhD '95)

A heat wave had just broken. Buoyant crowds strolled along the streets of Boston's Back Bay neighborhood, but our mission took us underground.

My friend Mary and I were on a pilgrimage to find the grave of Sarah Moore Grimké, a nineteenth-century reformer and the subject of a collection of poems I've been working on. This was the final Sarah trip. I had traced her steps from Charleston to Philadelphia and tracked down her papers in various archives. For years, I had tried to fathom how she made the amazing journey that was her life: from privileged daughter of the South to outspoken opponent of slavery and advocate for women's rights; from pious Episcopalian to radically free religious thinker. Visiting Sarah's grave seemed like a way to begin to end this project.

The subway ride was hot and long as a fluorescent-lit hospital corridor. At the end was a working-class suburb. After the tightly-wound exuberance of the city, this place seemed drab.

The wrought-iron fence and stone chapel near the front gate, though, gave us a sense of crossing a bridge into the past. I thought of the horse-drawn wagon in 1872 that bore Sarah's coffin and the carriages in which her mourners rode, shoulder to shoulder, to this very place when it was a new burial ground in the countryside.

When we asked for directions to the grave in the front office, a large, curly-haired woman shuffled over to an old filing cabinet. After a brief search, she held the original, yellowed record of Sarah's burial gingerly in her hand. Nervous, I rattled on about Sarah: how she grew up in South Carolina in a wealthy, slave-owning family and became an abolitionist in the North; how after the Civil War she welcomed her mixed-race nephews, the sons of her brother

and an enslaved woman, into her family in the North. Finally, the clerk circled a section on faded map and wished us luck.

The next few hours are a blur of pushing over hills, thinking we'd found the right section several times, splitting up to scan names and dates on the graves more efficiently, and running out of water and almost hope. Looking for help, we headed for a desolate-looking concrete building beyond

one edge of the cemetery. Several old trucks lay around it. When a man in a grimy shirt appeared, instead of raping and murdering us—as I had begun to picture in *Boston Globe* headlines—he whipped out a walkie-talkie and called for help.

Soon another man, with grave-digging equipment in another beat-up truck, appeared and began cursing the map. This reluctant rescuer had the largest potbelly and most bulbous nose I have ever seen, and seemed hard of hearing. That must have made working with that walking-talkie all day great fun. But after getting lost in the maze of graves himself, he was on it again, shouting for more help. Mary and I

had long since begun to dream of our favorite tapas bar back in Boston, but we couldn't quit now.

Next, a woman covered in long red swaths of angry poison ivy popped out of the sedan. She turned the map, and then herself around, scratching absent-mindedly. She seemed to be the manager of the place and coaxed the gravedigger into joining her wrestling match with the map and unreadable signposts.

And so we all set off—Mary and I, the gravedigger, and pox-ridden boss lady. Apparently, it takes a village to do a lot of things. Up green rises capped with tilting stones we trod, and down through groves of oaks that shaded low markers. The edge of the cemetery, and the highway behind it, finally came into sight. We had come to the end. see page 16

After a while, I realized why I had come. I asked Sarah's forgiveness for writing about her—for invading and re-constructing the inner world of this intensely private person...

A Word with Jim Grimsley

AB: Have you made any literary pilgrimages recently?

JG: A visit I made recently to Louisiana felt more like a pilgrimage than anything else. My novel *Dream Boy* is being made into a film. And they have set it in Louisiana. I watched part of the filming in St. Francisville, just west of Natchez—one of the places in the country where big plantation houses survive.

Watching the filming, I felt like I was watching the characters of *Dream Boy* become not mine anymore. This movie may bring more readers to the book. But probably more people will see the movie than will ever read the book, and I found that kind of disconcerting. It felt like a journey to visit the characters, and in a sense, to witness them pass beyond me.

AB: “Pass” is a synonym for dying too, to pass on. Is there a kind of grieving process here?

JG: Sort of. My imagination of them, the characters, has been the authoritative one. They’re not dying of course. You could even say they’re being given a new lease on life. But they are not mine anymore.

AB: Isn’t that something that happens inevitably even whenever a work is published? Readers see things authors don’t. The characters, the work, takes on a broader life in print as it circulates among readers.

JG: Yes, but this is different because it’s a movie. A person reading *Dream Boy* is still basing his or her ideas of the characters on my words. But viewers will be seeing a certain interpretation.

This is a very faithful script by people who love the book. But they have made some changes that I was surprised to find bother me a bit. Moving the story from North Carolina to Louisiana, for example. It is a move that made sense economically for the filmmakers. And it’s still a small Southern town. And at first I was puzzled about why it kept bothering me; then I could see myself explaining over and over to moviegoers who might talk to me about it that this is a North Carolina story.

AB: What difference does it make that the book is set in North Carolina?

JG: That’s where I grew up. Stories are specific to place. And Louisiana is a whole different country in some ways. If I had set the book in Louisiana, it would have been different. But movies aren’t really about place, not in the way books can be. It made me wonder if movies ever really are about place.

AB: Clearly, place and identity are integral to each other for you as an artist. Do you think that is especially true of you as a Southern writer?

JG: It may be because I’m Southern, but I suspect it has more to do with being from a little town of 300 people. That experience was very important to me and what I was writing about in *Dream Boy*. •

—*Jim Grimsley is Senior Writer in Residence and Director of Creative Writing. Dream Boy was published in 1996 by Algonquin Books and 1997 by Scribner’s as a trade paperback.*

The movie Dream Boy is being produced by Herb Hamsher and directed by James Bolton. He can be reached at jgrimsley@emory.edu

Alumni/ae News

JASON B. JONES, PhD ’02, had his book, *Lost Causes: Historical Consciousness in Victorian Literature* published on October 15, 2006, by Ohio State University Press as part of Donald Hall’s Victorian Critical Interventions series.

GREG JOHNSON, PhD ’79, has a new book, *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations*, which was published by Ontario Review Press in October. A professor in the graduate writing program at Kennesaw State University, he has several other books to press, including a new collection of short stories entitled, *Women I’ve Known: New and Selected Stories*. He is also editing *The Invisible Woman: Journals 1973-1982*, by Joyce Carol Oates, for HarperCollins.

Then the manager remembered a Weld family plot and pointed to flat expanse across the path. Theodore Weld, a fairly famous abolitionist, married Sarah's sister and they had several children. I knew his grave was here—it's pictured on gravesdotcom, after all—and thought I should at least see that. But my heart sank. I've hunted through special collections of Weld's papers for scraps of Sarah's life. And now to find only his grave. . . .

Mary tactfully chatted with our little group, while I slipped off to see the stone supposed to be Weld's. The afternoon sun illuminated his name and his grandsons' below it. I walked into the shade behind the waist-high, gently pointed marker and noticed some faded etching on the back. Kneeling for a better look, I read her name. Sarah Moore Grimké.

The top of the stone was rough against my fingers when I grabbed it to steady myself. Born in Charleston 1792. Died in Hyde Park, 1873. I called out to the others. Of course, as the righteous poor social reformers, they wouldn't waste money on multiple markers—simplicity unto death. But, my God, on the other hand, he stole her grave.

Whether or not it was anybody's intention, the power of her grave to signify something about the life of the person whose remains lie beneath was re-addressed. This space was now sacred to the memory of Theodore Weld, prominent nineteenth-century minister and abolitionist.

Mary and I took some photos, but it was hard to capture Sarah's inscription in this shade. The cemetery crew discretely scattered. We enjoyed the cool provided by an enormous maple that Mary mused may still be recycling some of Sarah's dust and talked a little about her life.

After a while, I realized why I had come. I asked Sarah's forgiveness for writing about her—for invading and re-constructing the inner world of this intensely private person, for trying to illuminate the half-erased lines of her life with just the mercurial spotlight of imagination.

I left a few poems I had brought propped against her grave and began the process of letting this one go. •

—Amy Benson Brown directs the Program
for Manuscript Development in
the Office of the Provost.
She can be reached at abrow01@emory.edu

AB: In terms of needing time to work, some graduate students take seven to ten years to complete their degree. What do you say to those who are concerned about the length of time required for graduate training in the humanities?

MB: We are firmly committed to timely completion of degrees. And our track record proves it. All of our graduate fellows finished their Ph.D.s while at the Center, and all of them have academic jobs.

Young researchers today navigate an increasingly complex world of scholarship, often crossing disciplines. In some cases people also need additional research skills beyond the doctorate. While each Fellow is trained in a particular discipline, at the Center they engage with other Fellows from across the humanities and related areas. We've had Fellows from History, English,

Philosophy, Music, and the foreign languages, but also from Anthropology, Performance Studies, and Political Science. While they are teaching and learning from each other, they are also discovering what it means to be part of the humanities community.

Keith [Keith Anthony, Fox Center Associate Director] and I will never forget what one graduate fellow said about his time at the Center because it hits at the heart of what we aim to do. After graduation, he told us, "When I first came here, I thought of myself only as a seventeenth-century Latin American historian. What I realize now is that I'm a humanist." •

—For more information about the Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry visit www.chi.emory.edu

SU FANG NG, M.A. '96, is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Oklahoma and has a book forthcoming in January, *Literature and the Politics of Family in Seventeenth Century England*, published by Cambridge University Press. She is also the author of the upcoming article, "Global Renaissance: Alexander the Great and Early Modern Classicism from the British Isles to the Malay Archipelago," which will appear in the Fall 2006 issue of *Comparative Literature*.

DANSBY EVANS, PhD '98, was recently promoted to Senior Associate within the Strategic Communication practice of Mercer Delta Consulting. Headquartered in New York City, with offices across the U.S. and in London, Paris, Frankfurt, and Toronto, Mercer Delta provides management consulting services to Fortune 500 companies seeking help in designing, implementing, and sustaining large-scale organization change. Dansby has been a member of the New York office for the past four years.

ELIZABETH DEWBERRY, PhD '89, has had her fourth novel, *His Lovely Wife*, published by Harcourt. It has also been translated into French and will be published in the next year in Dutch and Turkish.

BRIAN CLIFF, PhD '01, is Assistant Professor of Modern and Contemporary Irish and British Literatures at Montclair State University in Montclair, NJ. He has contributed an entry on Paul Muldoon in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Poetry*, published an article in *The Irish Review* 34 (Spring 2006) called, "Community, the Desire to Belong, and Contemporary Irish Literature," and completed an essay on Martin McDonagh's play, *The Pillowman*, to be published in a forthcoming Routledge Casebook on McDonagh's work. He presented a paper on teaching Joyce's *Ulysses* at the Mid-Atlantic meeting of the American Conference for Irish Studies (Fall 2005), a paper on Martin McDonagh at the national meeting of the American Conference for Irish Studies (April 2006), and a paper on Emma Donoghue and Anne Enright at the annual meeting of the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures in Sydney, Australia (July 2006).

DONNA SCARBORO, PhD '89, is currently a Fellow of the American Council of Education. The Fellowship enables her to serve as part of the administrative team at a host institution for one year. Her host college is St. Mary's College of Maryland. She is also the Assistant Vice President for

Special and International Programs and Assistant Professor of English and Honors at the George Washington University.

MARVIN BASSETT, PhD '83, works as a research and writing specialist for Air University Press at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, AL. He and his wife, Elaine, live in Troy, AL, his hometown, where he taught in the English Department at Troy State University (now Troy University) prior to accepting a position with AU Press. Their daughters, Katie and Mellie, attend the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. In his spare time, he tends to a dozen or so rose bushes, his only successful venture into horticulture.

JENNIFER P. NESBITT, PhD '99, presented "Rum Histories: Imperial Hangovers and Decolonization in three Mid-Twentieth Century Novels" at the International Conference on Caribbean Studies, South Padre Island, TX, November 2-5, 2006 •

our conception of agency. The slaves, maroons, slave owners, and travelers who moved through the American tropics were not the sort of citizens associated with the U.S. revolution—that is, they were not revolutionary subjects in the way that Benjamin Franklin was. Those in plantation spaces used emphatically embodied terms to represent themselves and others, yet they were also always potentially disaggregated bodies: slaves pulled apart by the regimes of mastery; masters under siege by the slaves and maroons who resisted them; travelers caught in the perpetual warfare of the plantation and also (at least according to the naturalist William Bartram) pulled into the tropics' devouring vegetable life. I think these disaggregated bodies are significant because they don't allow us to posit agency as a mental phenomenon, or as a crudely materialist phenomenon, or as some utopian combination of mind and body. Rather, agency (somehow) emerges across bodies instead of emanating from them. All this strikes me as offering material for interesting discussions about what we mean by the word 'agent' and how we imagine animate forces are connected.

When Amy Benson Brown asked me to write about my research for this newsletter, she asked if it isn't sometimes depressing to focus on often-forgotten revolutionary actors who witnessed death regularly and were often violated themselves. Amy's question is a good one, and it made me think anew about why this topic inspires me and my students. Leonora Sansay, William Bartram, and the Haitian military leader Jean-Jacques Dessalines remade the terrain of the American tropics, offering evidence of a propulsive desire for transformation that fascinates me. Again and again, it seems that the hard facts of plantation life yield new forms. Here an example might be useful: Early in Leonora Sansay's travelogue, black revolutionaries in Cap François detonate a mountain, making persons and their habitations into rubble. The majesty of the mountain (and it's worth noting that the mountain is the preeminently canonical sign of the grand, totalizing ambitions of the eighteenth-century—think Jefferson's Blue Ridges or Wordsworth's

By moving to plantation spaces,
I hope to offer new stories about the age
of revolution. For one, focusing on revolution
in plantation spaces requires
that we change
the cast of characters and the archives
we use to tell stories.

Mt. Snowden) is transformed into the sharpness of rocks that cut the feet of the white women who flee the burning city. So how is it that we can imagine that anything at all is produced from this blood-marked landscape? Well, in Sansay's travelogue Cap François is rebuilt and reinhabited. What's more, her white protagonists, like the black insurrectionists they watch, give up then-conventional ideas about revolution even though they realize that doing this might cause them to be permanently exiled in the African Diaspora. So for Sansay revolution does not culminate in a political form that promises life, liberty, and happiness. Instead, it is a peripatetic movement and an effort to make something of tropical landscapes that are sometimes as obdurate as the rocks from exploded mountains.

Since my research and teaching moves from famously revolutionary places to plantation spaces, it seems fitting that I have physically removed from Philadelphia to Georgia. So far, settling in Atlanta has been a happy project, and I look forward to learning more about the city. In the meantime, I like that if I drive just a bit in any direction, I arrive in Georgia's highlands and lowlands, where I take long walks and think about how plantation revolution continues to shape the present. •

—Assistant Professor Monique Allewaert can be
reached at mallewa@emory.edu

explanation. I want to pry and get inside the stories. I suppose that their hidden nature is part of what attracts me, especially in a time when we seemingly have access to everything. What appears miraculous one moment is banal the next. Once-forbidden thrills are available at every moment on our computer screens. We've seen people deliberately fly planes into big buildings and those same images become saccharine in a Hollywood movie. You can walk down the street in Poughkeepsie while speaking to a friend in China. In a movie theater, we can watch polar ice caps melting in glorious detail, then drive mindlessly home in the machines that make this happen. Astonishment and dismay, shock and awe, seem the order of the day. The vastness of our contemporary perils often makes us want to shut our minds off. We suffer from curiosity fatigue syndrome.

What I experience when I stumble upon those disquieting old stories is a quickening of my sense of wonder, what Descartes called "a sudden surprise of the soul which makes it tend to consider attentively those objects which seem to it rare and extraordinary." When I go digging my little curious tunnels below ground, down in the parts of libraries where they keep the stories that make your eyes bug out, I need to get my bearings when I come up for air; Emerson, Stowe, Douglass, Melville, Hawthorne, and Whitman are the stars I set my compass to. Partly I love to read and teach literature from this period because of its propulsive power and intensity, but I also like to look through the window it opens onto a time when people could still fall dead in their tracks, could still stop and stare—even if sometimes it meant gawking and gaping. Melville's famous protagonist offers dozens of rationales for setting out on his whaling voyage: he needs the money, he's depressed, he has contempt for the respectable world, he likes to travel, he craves the open air, God made him do it. But, he tells us, "Chief among those reasons was the overwhelming idea of the great whale himself." And so he takes us on a voyage as idiosyncratic as anything you can find on YouTube, in a spirit we have almost forgotten how to access: "The great flood-gates of the wonder-world swung open." So call me Ishmael. •

—Benjamin Reiss is the author of *The Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum's America* (Harvard UP, 2001) and is finishing a book manuscript called *Theaters of Madness: Insane Asylums and Nineteenth-Century American Culture*. The first half of the project examines the role that cultural activities played in the treatment and management of patients in insane asylums; the second half examines how literary and intellectual figures of the period such as Emerson, Poe, and Melville responded to the rise of the new institutions. Benjamin Reiss can be reached at benjamin.reiss@emory.edu

The vastness of our contemporary perils often makes us want to shut our minds off. We suffer from curiosity fatigue syndrome.

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Department Chair Frances Smith Foster
Director of Graduate Studies

Michael Elliott
Director of Undergraduate Studies

Peter Dowell
Director of Creative Writing Jim Grimsley
Editor Amy Benson Brown
Designer Molly Smith

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As I write this column on a hot autumn day, I am smiling. In each of my columns last year, I asked you to let me know what we're doing right and what suggestions you had for our continued growth and success as a department. Many of you did just that and I was happy, but not surprised, that most of what you told me was positive, even inspiring. All that you shared with me was taken seriously and incorporated into the two-volume self study that will guide the English Department's continued growth and development.

The second stage of our evaluation took place at the end of September when we hosted an external review team consisting of eminent scholars and administrators from four of our peer institutions. We await their written report, but they have already told us they were extremely impressed with the students, undergraduate and graduate, who responded to our open invitations to meet with the visitors. As expected, our visitors thought our students were smart. They are, after all, Emory students. It relieved me, though that they were judged to be "much happier than the average English majors" and that they had good ideas about how their Emory English experiences might be further enhanced. I take this as affirmation of the hard work of our former Director of Undergraduate Studies, Deborah White, who is this year enjoying a well-earned residency as Senior Fellow at Emory's Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry. I credit the large turnout of students and the good report also to our current DUS, Professor Peter Dowell, who has returned to teaching after several years as Senior Associate Dean of Undergraduate Affairs for the University. Most of the credit, though, goes to our faculty's excellence in both scholarship and teaching. Though the self-study is over, our interest in your opinions and ideas is not. Please feel free to write me.

One of the most heart-warming responses last

semester came from an alumna of ten years who called to acknowledge Professor Lee Pederson's role in her intellectual development. She followed that call with a detailed letter explaining why, after more than a decade, she still appreciates what and how he taught her. When we presented Dr. Pederson with "The Most Influential Professor after at Least a Decade" award at our graduation celebration, it was both fun and serious. I would like to make this an annual recognition. So, I'm asking you now—if you still remember an English professor who made a difference in your life, please write a letter telling us about it. Luckily, some of us didn't have to wait a decade for accolades. The two highest teaching honors,

The Emory College Humanities Teacher of the Year and the Emory University Scholar/Teacher of the Year went, respectively, to Professor Richard Rambuss and Professor Frances Foster.

To our dedicated, respected, and productive department faculty, we are adding more strong and enthusiastic scholar/teachers. When the Fall semester began, I gleefully introduced not one, not two, but three new faculty members at the first meeting of the Emory College Faculty. It is rare for one department to have so many arrive at

once. It is even rarer when they come from three different places, represent three generations of scholars, and three distinct and yet overlapping areas of expertise. Assistant Professor Monique Allewaert earned her PhD from Duke University just this year but had already held a highly competitive Barra Fellowship at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies. Dr. Allewaert's expertise in comparative early American literature complements work by scholars such as Cristine Levenduski, Michael Elliott, and Barbara Ladd. Allewaert's work extends into the nineteenth century enough to make a fine fit also with that of Associate Professor Benjamin Reiss, who joins us from Tulane University. As author of a widely acclaimed book on P.T. Barnum and antebellum spectacles of race, Reiss can claim a strong cohort of cultural studies scholars including Michael Elliott, Deepika Bahri, Mark Sanders, see page 13

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