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Boston University

English Department Newsletter

A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

The 2009-10 year witnessed several significant developments in the Department of English. Prof. David Wagenknecht retired as of August 31, 2010. The Department successfully hired in the field of Nineteenth-Century American Literature: Prof. Joseph Rezek will join us in the Fall of 2011. Several faculty were involved in planning and directing the hugely successful Sedgwick Symposium in October. And three of our faculty received prestigious year-long external research fellowships for 2010-11, while two senior and one junior faculty received semester research fellowships from the Boston University Humanities Foundation. In May, 112 undergraduates received their B.A. degrees at the English Department Convocation; in addition, 9 M.A. in Literature and 1 M.F.A. in Creative Writing students marched. Four students received their Ph.D.s in English at the Graduate School Doctoral Hooding ceremony. All in all, a busy and highly successful year. More details on several of these stories are given below. Please take a look at the new department website at <http://www.bu.edu/english>.

-- William C. Carroll, Chair

Faculty Research News



Gene Jarrett

Professor Gene Jarrett has been awarded a year-long research fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University for 2010-11, where he will work on a definitive biography of Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906). Born in Dayton, Ohio, Dunbar was the first African American writer to earn a living from his craft, as well as the first African American to be admired by both the nation's president (Theodore Roosevelt) and its literary dean (William Howells) for his literary talents. Yet, privately, Dunbar's stature made him miserable. Publishers pigeonholed him as merely a Negro who penned verse in Negro dialect. Each month, financial trouble forced him to publish and perform so many poems (and some more than once, in both America and London) that he could not help but sacrifice their literary quality. Personal misfortune worsened Dunbar's commercial challenges. Alcoholism, violent behavior and mood swings strained his marriage and his relationships with family and friends.

To paint the backdrop of this story, at Radcliffe Jarrett will examine Dunbar's correspondence about his family, study his ancestry, birth and childhood, the influence of his father (who was also an alcoholic), his life after his parents' divorce, and his early adulthood. The biography, tentatively titled *Paul Laurence Dunbar: The First African American Poet Laureate*, reflects the broader concentration of Jarrett's scholarship on the longstanding struggles of African American writers with racial representation, or the responsibility of portraying race in culturally and politically progressive ways. Dunbar is one of the more famous African American writers to fall victim to this burden while enduring a stressful private life.



Joseph Rezek

As a Barra Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies (Univ. of Pennsylvania) in 2010-11, Prof. Joseph Rezek is working on a book entitled “Tales from Elsewhere: Fiction and Literary Ambition in the Anglophone Periphery, 1800-1850.” Rezek argues that the ambition to succeed in London profoundly shaped Irish, Scottish, and American literature of the early nineteenth century. He explores the strategies resulting from such ambition, as authors like Maria Edgeworth, Washington Irving, Walter Scott, and James Fenimore Cooper accommodated an English audience unfamiliar with the local landscapes of their fiction. In addressing England from the Anglophone periphery, their work imagined the transnational literary exchange as independent from a contentious and divisive political world. Such idealization produced the fantasy of an autonomous literary sphere, an elite Anglo-American republic of letters grounded in a shared moral and aesthetic sensibility. Professor Rezek will join the Department in September, 2011.

Prof. Amy Appleford has been awarded a year-long research fellowship at the Humanities Center, Stanford University, where she will continue work on a book entitled *Learning to Die in London, 1350-1530* – the first full-length study of death in English, and specifically London, literary, religious, and civic culture in the late medieval and early Reformation period. Using a range of pastoral, visionary, poetic, bureaucratic, and dramatic texts, Prof. Appleford argues that death provided poets and other cultural makers in late-medieval London an imaginative tool for artistic, psychological or political analysis and expression. The book is an interdisciplinary project; although grounded in recent work in literary, religious, and book history, it draws on work in social and urban history, epidemiology, and current work in the philosophy and modern culture of death. Important but little studied works of pastoral care, such as the *Visitation of the Sick* and *The Book of the Craft of Dying*, are discussed in their manuscript context and brought into conversation with writings by William Langland, Geoffrey Chaucer, Julian of Norwich, Thomas Hoccleve, John Audelay, John Lydgate, and Thomas More; and the urban monuments and institutions funded by London politician Richard Whittington and designed by London bureaucrat John Carpenter.



Amy Appleford



John T. Matthews

Prof. John T. Matthews has been awarded a year-long Fulbright Fellowship to teach American literature in the Department of Anglophone Literatures and Culture at the Charles University in Prague – the most distinguished university in the Czech Republic. Prof. Matthews’ own scholarship and teaching on Faulkner, Southern literature, and US fiction have taken global turns, as he notes: “I look forward to these new opportunities for cross-cultural pedagogy, as well as to exploring central European contexts for my research interests in international modernism, the history of European colonialism in America, and points of contact with current global South studies. New World cultural manifestations of colonialism, with which I am more familiar, correspond to similar formations in European experience.” Prof. Matthews, who again served as Associate Chair in 2009-2010, team-taught much of this material with Prof. Nina Silber (History) in a graduate seminar.

Honoring Eve: A Symposium Celebrating the Work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick

31 October 2009

English Department faculty, staff, and students gathered for a day of rich intellectual exchange celebrating the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a former member of the Boston University English Department and one of the most important theorists working in gender and queer studies. The symposium was organized by the Junior Faculty Gender and Sexuality Studies Group, led by the untiring efforts of Erin Murphy (from English) and Keith Vincent (Modern Languages and Comparative Literature), and co-sponsored by the BU Humanities Foundation, the College of Arts and Sciences, as well as the departments of English, Modern Languages and Comparative Literature, Romance Studies, Religion, Psychology, the Women's Studies Program, the School of Theology and the Distinguished Teaching Professor of the Core Curriculum. Among the 220 attendees were scholars hailing from around the world, and a number of independent artists, musicians, and writers.



**Keith Vincent (MLCL), Erin Murphy (EN),
and Hal Sedgwick.**

In preparation for the event, members of the Junior Faculty Gender and Sexuality Studies Group, Gina Cogan (Religion), Suzanne O'Brien (History), and Carrie Preston (English), sponsored two student workshops on Sedgwick's provocative text "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay" (1991), attended by over 100 undergraduates. Members of the newly formed BU Graduate Student Network on Women's Studies, Gender, and Sexuality also met in advance of the symposium to discuss the texts, and many professors incorporated Sedgwick's work into their classes.

"Honoring Eve" began with the moving opening remarks of Sedgwick's husband Hal, who remembered being at Boston University with Eve in the early 1980s as she was writing her seminal book, *Between Men* (1985). The panels were organized around specific texts, available on the conference website, and addressed topics representing four important areas of Sedgwick's thought: "Feminism and Queer Theory," moderated by Erin Murphy, included Carolyn Williams (formerly a professor of English at BU), Lee Edelman, and Siobhan Somerville addressing selections from *Epistemology of the Closet*.

Suzanne O'Brien moderated "Writing and Illness," a panel on *A Dialogue on Love* (1999) that included Ed Cohen, Michael Moon, and Cindy Patton. "Affect and Reparative Reading," organized by Keith Vincent, took up *Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading* (2003), with discussions by Jonathan Flatley, Heather Love, and Tavia Nyong'o. Leland Monk (English) moderated "Reading Proust," and panelists Bill Goldstein, Joseph Litvak, Katy Hawkings, and Jonathan Goldberg discussed "Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet" from *Epistemology* and "The Weather in Proust," an unpublished talk.

The impressive group of speakers represented various degrees of intellectual and personal proximity to Sedgwick: some were her peers or students; many were close friends, while others knew her primarily through her writing. Their presentations combined intellectual engagement, appreciation, and disagreement with moving personal remembrances of her impact as a teacher, reader, and mentor. The symposium closed with "Writing the Plural," a performance of writing by members of the BU ID 450 Collective, an innovative feminist writing/reading/research group that Sedgwick co-founded while she was at BU. As the list of speakers and contributors highlights, "Honoring Eve" signaled Boston University's significant position in the arena of queer and gender studies. If you missed it, please find film of the engaging panels on BUiverse: <http://www.bu.edu/buiverse/view/?v=110iXn9O>. Essays based on the symposium presentations will also be published in a special issue of the journal *Criticism*.

Faculty Retirement

Prof. David Wagenknecht, who retired on August 31, 2010, was honored at a reception attended by faculty and students in May 2009. Prof. Wagenknecht has deep roots in the BU English Department: he earned a BA in CAS'62 and an MA in GRS'64, and then his doctorate at the University of Sussex, England. After a brief stint teaching at Northeastern University, he returned to the BU English Department in 1971, this time on the faculty. An international authority on British Romanticism and psychoanalytic theory, Prof. Wagenknecht began editing *Studies in Romanticism* in 1978, leading it to its position today as the premier journal in the field of British and Continental Romantic literature and the arts.

David Wagenknecht's father, Edward Wagenknecht, also taught at BU, as Professor of English from 1947 to 1965, so whole generations of BU students have been brilliantly taught by the Wagenknechts. David Wagenknecht's colleagues presented him with a unique retirement gift: an aeolian harp, custom-made by Prof. Charles Rzepka's son Toby (see images below). To Romantic writers, the aeolian harp – an instrument played only by the wind passing over its strings – represented nature as poetic muse. It was, we thought, the most suitable memento for this distinguished Romanticist who inspired his colleagues for three decades of dedicated service.



Graduate Student Awards

The annual Departmental Graduate Awards went to: Emily Field (George and Helen Christopher Fellowship), Emily Griffiths Jones (Albert Gilman Shakespeare Prize), Liam Meyer (Celia Millward McCullough Prospectus Prize), and Daniel Salerno (Warren and Myrtle Ault Graduate Fellowship). In addition, the following students won other University awards: Stephanie Byttebier (Humanities Foundation Summer Fellowship), Sheila Corder (Humanities Foundation Summer Fellowship and Graduate School Research Abroad Fellowship), Emily Field (Humanities Foundation Summer Fellowship), Heather Holcombe (Graduate School Teaching Prize), Liam Meyer (Graduate School Research Abroad Fellowship), and Amos Rothschild (Humanities Foundation Summer Fellowship in Early Modern Studies and Graduate School Research Abroad Fellowship). Congratulations to all!

Deciphering the Past: Nathaniel Amos Rothschild



Nathaniel Amos Rothschild

Nathaniel Rothschild wants to know more about pedants. “I guess I must be self-centered,” he quips, “a scholar studying scholars.” This scholar prefers to be called by his middle name, Amos, citing an affinity for the quiet prophet of the bible. Though the fourth-year PhD candidate obviously leans towards the understated, his adventures in scholarship have been attracting a lot of attention. Most recently, The Boston University Humanities Foundation honored Amos with a summer dissertation fellowship in Early Modern Studies. Last year, he was awarded a fellowship at the Folger Institute in Washington D.C. where he had the opportunity to advance his studies through the use of their extensive archives. He has also devoted much of his academic career to his own development as an educator. He will spend the Fall semester conducting dissertation research at the British Library in London.

Making Sense of Ethnicity: Emily Donaldson Field

It is an unfortunate truth that texts by minority authors often end up segregated not only from traditionally canonical texts but also from one another—each group shuffled neatly into a survey course unit or anthologized and analyzed discretely. Like many literary scholars, Emily Donaldson Field would like to see this practice changed. What sets Emily apart, however, is her commitment to making this change a reality. “The real problem with most [multi-ethnic] studies is that somehow the minority writers drop out all together,” she says.



Emily Donaldson Field

Her goal is to write the kind of multi-ethnic literary criticism that she believes the literature deserves. A fourth year PhD candidate, Emily has already written two articles in the field of multi-ethnic studies, “‘Excepting Himself’: Olaudah Equiano, Native Americans, and the Civilizing Mission,” which appeared in the Winter 2009 issue of *MELUS*, and “The Souls of Henry Adams: DuBoisian Aspects of *The Education*,” which is forthcoming in *Arizona Quarterly*. Emily will spend the Fall semester, thanks to the Christopher Fellowship, working full time on this project.

Memorials

Read at the CAS Faculty Meeting by William C. Carroll

Donald James Winslow

Donald J. Winslow spent most of his long and distinguished academic career in the Boston University Department of English. After earning his B.S. and M.A. degrees from Tufts, he took his Ph.D. at BU in 1942. He had already begun teaching in the Department of English as a Teaching Fellow from 1936-39, and as an Instructor from 1939-1946 (with a leave of absence for military service in World War II). Over a total of 38 years, he moved steadily through all ranks to Full Professor in 1953. He served as Department Chair from 1952-1962, the crucial years in which the various college English departments in the university were being amalgamated into an all-University Department of English. He retired from the University in 1977.

Professor Winslow was a specialist in eighteenth-century literature in general, and in particular, in biography as a literary genre. He taught such courses as “The Age of Johnson,” “The Age of Pope,” and “Literature of the Eighteenth Century,” as well as a full range of writing and introductory literature courses. One of the students in “The Age of Pope” in 1972 wrote this comment about Professor Winslow’s comprehensive approach in teaching:

He presents an excellent background of politics, biographical sketches, all the fine arts, architecture, gardening, and other related topics which enable his students to develop an excellent understanding of all aspects of life in eighteenth-century England. His lectures are always well organized and interesting analyses of literature interspersed with anecdotes drawn from the professor's wide range of reading and his many trips to England. He brings in related material in the form of reference books, slides, and paintings.

Above all, this student said, "Professor Winslow is a rare combination of a brilliant intellect, an excellent and well organized teacher, a kind and humane person." In addition to his teaching and research, he was an exemplary citizen outside the university, serving for example on the Board of Trustees of Lasell Junior College.

I was fortunate to overlap with Professor Winslow my first five years at BU. He was thoughtful and generous to a callow junior faculty member – as his student said, he was a kind and humane person. Perhaps the most eloquent testimonial to his personal and professional qualities came in a citation in 1955, when an anonymous donor established an endowed undergraduate scholarship to honor Professor Winslow and several other favorite professors. The citation included a flowing "Tribute to Professor Donald James Winslow, who instinctively expresses the dignity and happiness of enlightenment, awakens enthusiasm for learning, and exercises reserve in judgment; who orders scholarship so skillfully that even while the whole rich expanse of an era grows clear and meaningful, particulars fall into harmonious relationship and receive all the significance which their individual beauties command; who lets definiteness of statement and attention to the relevant bring clarity and force to his own sharing of knowledge and bring discipline and joy to others' inquiring; whose sympathetic insight evokes a warm appreciation for letters; and whose gentleness, understanding, and good will become a source for enduring fellowship.

Donald J. Winslow passed away in July, at the age of 99.

For more on Prof. Winslow, see the story in the *Boston Globe*:

http://www.boston.com/yourtown/newton/articles/2010/09/24/donald_winslow_professor_at_bu_specialized_in_life_writing_at_98/?page=1

Michael Ragussis

Professor Michael Ragussis taught at Boston University from 1970-1974 as an Assistant Professor of English, before moving on to Georgetown University where he spent the rest of his distinguished career.

Michael did his graduate work at Columbia and at Johns Hopkins University. He was the recipient of numerous fellowships, including several NEH Fellowships, an ACLS, and a Folger Library Long-Term Fellowship. He retired after the Spring 2010 semester and was Professor Emeritus at the time of his death.

A distinguished scholar, Michael published many essays and four books with major university presses. His work spanned the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His most recent book was *Theatrical Nation: Jews and Other Outlandish Englishmen in Georgian Britain*, published in 2010. Earlier works, such as *Figures of Conversion: The Jewish Question and English National Identity* (1995) were praised for their energetic and subtle readings and for bringing questions of Jewish identity to the forefront of historical literary studies.

As a teacher, Michael was known for his rigor and careful attentiveness to the intellectual growth of his students. He taught courses on the novel and on Romantic poetry at all levels. In his relatively brief time at BU, Michael made a huge impression on those of us lucky enough to know him. He was an energetic and probing colleague, contributing much to the intellectual life of the English Department and the University.

We will remember Michael as an extraordinary and productive scholar, a generous colleague, and an inspiring teacher. Michael Ragussis died at his home in late August, 2010. He was 65 years old.



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Questions? Suggestions? Stories for the next newsletter? We'd love to hear them! Please contact Administrative Secretary Alexa Ray Corriea at alexaray@bu.edu.