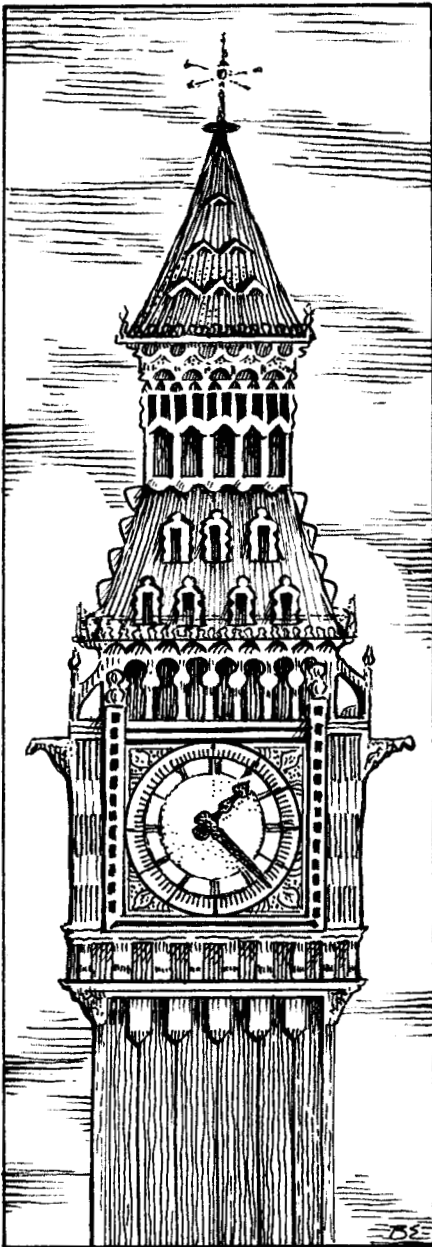


# Loose Canons

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19th Century Literature Revisited

## The Value of the Literary



In 2005, Emory's faculty in 19th-century British literature nearly doubled with the arrival of two new senior members: Laura Otis, a MacArthur Foundation Fellow and Professor in English and the ILA, who works at the intersections of science and European literature, and Sue Zemka, Associate Professor of English, whose current work explores time and utopianism in British and American literature of the 19th century.

In this issue of *Loose Canons*, we offer a look at the depth and diversity of work taking place at Emory in 19th-century British literature. Beginning with a round-table discussion among five members of the faculty, this issue also includes essays in and about 19th-century literature and culture by undergraduates, current graduate students, and graduate alumni. What comes into view is a program which is strikingly interdisciplinary in the topical interests and theoretical approaches of its members, but which finds its center in a shared commitment to the specificity and value of the literary. As William Kenan Rand University Professor Walt Reed puts it, "there is a history of literature itself, however problematic that term always becomes, that is as interesting as the history which weaves literature into the larger fabric of the culture and politics of a period or century." Within this large commitment are exciting points of connection that define and invigorate us as an academic community, including, for example, a fascination with poetics, the novel as a genre, spatiality in literature, natural history, and psychoanalysis. What emerges especially clearly in the faculty discussion that follows is a set of distinct but overlapping interests in the way that literature depicts and, indeed, shapes the human experience of being in time. As Deborah White observes, one finds in 19th century literature not only "the paradoxical origins of modern historicist scholarship," but also "the articulation of a particular kind of temporal and historical consciousness that may not be so easily assimilable to historicism per se, an articulation that engages the earthliness or finitude of human existence—Wordsworth's vision of this world as the one in which 'we find our happiness or not at all.'"



Roundtable discussion continued on page 2

Kate Brown is guest editor  
of this edition

Inside: Jones on Effect & Cause • Crowther on Baggy Monsters • Young Named to CW Faculty • Bowser's Letter Home

*How would you characterize the central questions that your work addresses?*

**Walt Reed:** My work addresses issues of personhood and authority. In my first book on the Romantic hero, I studied the kind the narrative framing that both heightens and renders ironic the human person with apparent autonomy as well as authority over nature and society. My next book looked at the novel in longer historical perspective, going back to its roots in the Spanish Golden Age. From this perspective, the novel emerges as a genre which perennially questions the authority of literature itself, as measured against the prose of an apparently real world of experience. And in my most recent book on the Bible as literature, I use the literary theory of Bakhtin to study the poetics of an authoritative as well as authoritarian dialogue between a personal deity and the highly individualized and unheroic representatives of his people who mediate between higher and lower forms of personhood. At present, I'm particularly interested in authorship as a form of creative personhood as well as the personification of creativity which, as Keats says of Shakespeare's, has no identity of its own, is "every thing and nothing."



Reed

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## Loose Canons

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**Laura Otis:** In my research now, I'm looking at the ways that techniques developed to interpret literary texts can reveal new meanings in texts produced for other fields. More generally, I'm interested in comparing the ways that literary and scientific writers develop and express their ideas. I'm currently trying to fulfill both these aims in a narrative case study in which I compare the ways that seven students wrote about their mentor, the 19th-century physiologist Johannes Müller (1801-58). When each student wrote retrospective accounts of him, reconstructing him as a literary character in personal letters and memorial addresses, he consciously shaped the history of science so that his advisor became a precursor who made his own science look as good as possible. In this project, I'm trying to show how narrative and rhetorical analyses can be of use to the history of science.

**Deborah White:** In my earlier work, I was concerned with redressing a subtle injustice towards romanticism in the work of literary critics that sought to demystify romantic ideology as an aesthetic evasion of romanticism's historical conditions. In my view, such critics failed to acknowledge the seriousness of romanticism's own engagements with the problems of aesthetics and ideology with which they themselves were concerned. I see romantic theories of "imagination" as a coming to grips with historicity rather than a retreat from history. But it is a coming to grips with historicity that also asserts the singularity of literature and its ability to critique given contexts—to critique what the radicals of the 1790s disdainfully called "things as they are"—and even to interrupt or explode the historical work of narrativization that risks naturalizing them.

My current research project is a book on dates, which writers often use much as they use proper names: although they appear as referential markers, dates often carry a metaphorical and allegorical significance that exceeds their referential function. This occurs in a particularly marked fashion in writing on revolution, and a major section of the book will examine representations of revolution, including work by Hugo and Marx. I am also increasingly interested in the problem of "political romanticism." I hope to trace the heritage of romanticism in liberal, radical, conservative, and reactionary thought, returning to the question that initiated a great deal of cold-war romantic scholarship: what was the role of romanticism in the emergence of totalitarianism? And, what can romanticism tell us about the emergence of totalitarianism?

**Sue Zemka:** Right now, I am working on a history of Victorian novels that places them in the context of changing technologies of timekeeping. The idea is that such technologies created a much greater precision in the social perception of time, and that this change in turn affects the novel, which is, after all, inherently a temporal form. But what I am discovering is that the sociological element is taking a back seat in my manuscript, which winds up focusing on the ramifications (philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic) of the innovative ways in which novelists depict temporality in their works. And yet this differs from a formal approach, because ultimately I do believe the novels are sites of memory, important ones, for their cultures. I am looking for a new way of reading them as such, one which discovers some social and historical knowledge of the human past, but does so via an understanding of the texts as aesthetic objects that practice an aesthetic (and not a sociological or historicist) method.



Zemka

**Kate Brown:** In my work thus far, I have wanted to understand why the novel – a genre long suspected of inducing credulity, indolence, and even moral laxity in its reader – achieved such cultural centrality during the Victorian period. My first book project reads the pleasures of fiction against the imperatives of grief, characterizing the realist novel as a mode of mourning that works to comprehend (and so also to expose) the irrationality of modern social life. More tendentiously perhaps, I wanted to offer a defense of pleasure from within an academic and political culture that I see as tending to privilege the death drive. I tried to show that pleasure can serve as a means of perpetuating loss that also entails an ethical response to living persons. I have recently begun to shift my focus from remembrance to futurity: I am beginning a project that will look at figures in Victorian literature (poetry and prose, as well as the novel) in which a yearning for advent – for radical and felicitous renewal – is both elaborated and shown to fail. What I think is at issue in these moments of failed beginning is an attempt to theorize a model of subjectivity in which other persons can be recognized precisely in their recalcitrance to fantasies of renewal or fulfillment.

*What sparked and maintains your interest in 19th-century English literature?*

**Reed:** At Yale, I had a series of extraordinary teachers—Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, and Charles Feidelson, Jr.—who argued for the dialectic of modernism and traditionalism that makes the period such a great vantage point for looking at the history of British as well as other European literatures. At Emory, I've had a series of great students, graduate and undergraduate, who begin to see how the period provides a lens on the complex mediations of literature and other forms of human culture. (Blake speaks of seeing through the eye rather than with the eye.)

**Otis:** Back in 1978, the admissions essay for MIT was to pick a year and explain why you wanted to live in that year, and without hesitation I picked 1885. The rapid developments in science and technology, the growing women's rights and labor movements, and the philosophical debates in 19th-century Europe will hold my interest forever. I also love the novel as an art form and can never get enough of the slow, subtle development of character and plot in huge masterpieces like *Middlemarch* and *War and Peace*.



Otis

**Zemka:** As an undergraduate and beginning graduate student, I was mainly interested in poetry, Modern and Romantic, and philosophy. I had never really read Victorian fiction. My conversion experience happened while standing in line at the D.M.V. in Palo Alto and reading *Our Mutual Friend*. It was the scene where Rogue Riderhood almost dies, then doesn't. I thought it was the most brilliant thing I had ever read. The same passage has recently become a set-piece in theory, since Deleuze made it a pivotal example of his ideas of the virtual and of "a life" in his late works. So I am excited to discover that a passage which initially took me away from philosophy and into the pleasures of the novel now delivers me back to philosophy. I think this is one of the payoffs of a reading life, that your relationship with the same texts continues to grow over time, and even changes directions.

**Brown:** What tends to interest me in the Victorian period is the difference, even the deep strangeness, of an historical moment that is often taken to be the origin of our own. (Oddly enough, *Our Mutual Friend* was the conversion text for me, too, although my fascination was with the dust heaps.) For me, the Victorian period offers a way to participate in the project that Walter Benjamin described, of using the past to call into question the inevitability of the present – of fanning the spark of hope in the past, as he puts it.

*What do you see as the value of a cross-national or interdisciplinary approach to literature? What do you see as the challenges or limits?*

**Reed:** While there are national and linguistic specificities in literature, the literary imagination of a period crosses such boundaries quite freely. Observing national and linguistic differences illuminates the specificities of, say, British literature. The differences between the novel as a form in mid-19th century American and Victorian Britain (e.g. between *Moby Dick* and *Middlemarch*) have always seemed to me as interesting for criticism as the commonalities of Hawthorne and Melville or Eliot and Hardy. And the same is true for the lyric, the Gothic novel, and critical theory as they emerged in complex interchange between the English and the German literary traditions.

**Otis:** To me, the value of interdisciplinary approaches to English is that they help people see the world as 19th-century writers saw it, when the disciplines were not as separated by technological advances as they are today and it was possible to learn a great deal about medicine, law, or astronomy to write a novel. The risk is of “reading in” – for example, of attributing more scientific learning to writers than they had. Another risk is of talking about science instead of constructing a real reading of a novel – using scientific information as a replacement for interpretation of literature as art.

**White:** My training was heavily theoretical at a time when theory involved a good deal of work in philosophy. Since many crucial romantic figures in the European tradition were in direct dialogue with philosophy, a background in philosophy is extremely helpful for understanding their work. But the same might also be said of a background in the natural

and human sciences. Nowadays universities are very eager to support an interdisciplinary agenda that goes far beyond such scholarly points of connection, and interdisciplinarity has the potential to enrich and transform all fields of study. That said, I remain a little wary of uncritically assuming that interdisciplinarity will save us (the humanities in particular or the academy in general) from excessive narrowness or creeping irrelevance. Interdisciplinarity risks the elision or erasure of the disciplinary which, in our case, means an elision or erasure of the literary, and the implications of that elision are not always sufficiently thought through. I recently heard a colleague speak of the need for an interdisciplinarity that concerns itself with the differences between the disciplines, and that’s a formulation I find congenial. I would say, to speak within my own areas of relative expertise, that the conjunction of literature and philosophy, for example, becomes most productive when one considers how literature brings philosophy to crisis or vice versa.



White

**Zemka:** Crossing national boundaries in our criticism draws attention to unexamined premises – premises that develop when a corpus of texts is studied in a kind of national vacuum, but that don’t stand up to a comparativist approach. One example in my own field is a tendency, even in very sophisticated Victorian criticism, to assume you can extract from the novel ideas about how 19th-century people actually lived and thought. But comparing, for example, the differences between the publishing industries of England and France, one sees a whole new level of artifice at work in the novels. Even the most realistic novels of the period were highly mediated affairs, depictions of life that had been passed through implicit systems of censorship and marketing, and thus, perhaps, fairly far afield, in their avowed moral beliefs (or lack thereof), from the complexities and contradictions of actual social life. •

## The Corruption of a Victorian Gentleman

An intense “male homosexual panic” began to develop in the middle of 19th-century England and rapidly became “cripplingly knotted into the guts of British men and, through them, into the lives of women,” writes Eve Sedgwick in the *Epistemology of the Closet* (183). According to Sedgwick, the growing intangible fear of homosocial bonds among British men resulted in a surge of Victorian literary undercurrents of homosexual panic. Because homosexuality was regarded as a taboo subject in 19th-century Britain, many of the prominent authors, Henry James included, often wrote of “marginal” male figures subtly plagued by forms of what Sedgwick terms “compulsory heterosexuality” (212). While several male characters within James’s writing refrain from publicly expressing homosexual longings, their often-ambiguous attitudes toward female characters casts their sexuality into question. Kelly Cannon states in the introduction to her book *Henry James and Masculinity*, “The frequent occurrence of this marginal type suggests James’s consciousness of alternative masculinity and an awareness that he was creating a world substantively different from the typically masculine world one reads about in conventional fiction” (1-2). Responding to the sexual hysteria around him, James often incorporates into his fiction literary figures of “alternative masculinity” without labeling them as literal homosexuals.

Sedgwick further explains this literary concept of marginal characters and alternative masculinity: “In the increasingly stressed 19th-century bourgeois dichotomy between domestic female space and extrafamilial, political and economic male space, the [literary] bachelor is at least partly feminized by his attention to and interest in domestic concerns” (189-90). While such “partially feminized” male characters are not necessarily meant to represent overt homosexual desire, Sedgwick theorizes that the inclusion of these marginalized men in Victorian literature signifies the intensifying fear of deviant sexuality. By creating overly sensitive and domesticated male characters, James uses his writing to both reflect and critique the homosexual panic of his era. Delving into the world of hyper-masculine bachelors and ultra-sensitive young men, James explores the fluctuating boundaries and inherent contradictions of expected male behavior within the socially accept-

able confines of Victorian aristocracy. As Gregory Woods writes in “The Art of Friendship in Roderick Hudson,” “This new type of fiction is not yet about homosexuality as such, but it does show signs of an incipient anxiety about homosexual identity which would grip the Modernist novelists, the later James included, during the first decades of the 20th century” (77).

In this essay, I claim that Henry James’s novella *The Turn of the Screw* provides glimpses of alternative sexual desires and expressions in childhood, refracted through the Victorian fear of an abnormal sexual development among society’s young elite. As Michel Foucault writes in *The History of Sexuality*, “It was in the ‘bourgeois’ or ‘aristocratic’ family that the sexuality of children and adolescents was first problematized...It was this family that first became a locus for the psychiatrization of sex” (1:120). According to Foucault, the fear of “peripheral sexualities,” where sexual possibility reigns over generally accepted heterosexual desires, originated in the child rearing of Victorian aristocratic families. Thus, the concern for how to properly raise a young gentleman of society in order for him to become a dignified patriarch transforms itself in nineteenth-century Britain into an issue of the most vital importance. Almost a century prior to Foucault’s study, I suggest that James uses *The Turn of the Screw* to fictionally depict the Victorian battle between the ambiguous sexually developing male self and the imprisoning aristocratic society with little tolerance for sexual rebellion. Miles, the “extraordinary little gentleman” of *The Turn of the Screw*, attempts to maintain a pleasant surface of respectability and feigned ignorance in order to survive within the rigors of a male-dominated, heterosexual environment. The governess’s unwavering belief that Miles may revel in secret pleasures, however, quickly becomes a “horror” whose moral contours and antisocial practices are not merely unspeakable, but inadmissible to



Schottenstein

Corruption continued on page 14

## “Talking of Effect and Cause”

*And over there my Paladins  
Are talking of effect and cause,  
...  
As one leaves off, the next begins.*  
—T. S. Eliot, “Convictions”

I have always liked this poem, from *Inventions of the March Hare*, because it captures nicely, if through parody, the central place of causality in discussions of philosophy, science, art, and especially history in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Admittedly, that is a pretty broad brush, but the enigma of cause and effect became more, not less, mysterious as the Victorian age progressed. Victorian culture arguably begins with Thomas Carlyle’s famous denunciation of “Cause-and-Effect Philosophy” in *Sartor Resartus* (1832), and by the time T. S. Eliot writes “Convictions,” Einstein has already formulated the special theory of relativity. In between, George Eliot could proclaim that “invariability of sequence . . . alone can give value to experience.” Indeed, it is hard to find a serious Victorian writer who does not meditate on causality. Twenty-first century readers, well accustomed to the metaphysical pyrotechnics of, say, Beckett and Stoppard, may be surprised to discover in the loose, baggy monsters of Victorian fiction more subtle and paradoxical accounts of cause-and-effect than perhaps we have previously recognized.

For despite George Eliot’s confidence in invariability of sequence, Victorian writers more frequently register ambivalence about causality, or distinguish between our intellectual recognition that causality exists in the world and our daily experience of bafflement. And, naturally, writers placed widely diverging emphases on the nature of causation. While Charlotte Brontë could affirm, in *Shirley*, that “Great effects may spring from trivial causes”; her reviewers, like E. S. Dallas, could complain about the “chief defect of Currer Bell’s novels, [that] she must find a motive for every little act.” In *Shirley*, characters find themselves stymied at every turn by phenomena that elude causal analysis. Robert Moore, a mill owner, complains that the government’s policies are choking him: “I cannot get on—I cannot execute my plans because of them; I see myself baffled at every

turn by their untoward effects.” (“Untoward” here needs to be read in both senses: undesirable and unpredictable.) The most favored worker in the novel, William Farren, bemoans that “I’m getting different to myself: I feel I am changing”; in response to this change, he finds himself endorsing violent acts that he knows can only be counterproductive. Brontë’s response to this malignant proliferation of causes is quite striking: *Shirley* foregrounds interpretation as a survival mechanism. But it is an odd sort of interpretation: It does not seek to disclose the world—it is not a mimetic or scientific interpretation, is not beholden to Ockham’s razor—rather, interpretation provokes the world, stirs things up, in order to produce a different set of effects. We are given a vision, in this novel, of effects seeking out new causes in order to make the world more sustainable.

There is another discourse that emerges in the 19th century that follows this exact interpretive pattern: psychoanalysis. Freud’s patients sound as though they’re reading from *Shirley*: They’re “baffled at every turn by . . . untoward effects,” and they certainly complain of “getting different to” themselves. In response, Freud usually does not claim to disclose the historical truth of what happened to a patient; rather, he offers an interpretative explication of the patient’s fantasy, in the hopes that the interpretation will help the patient come unstuck from the crisis in which he or she is mired.

I want to suggest, then, that psychoanalysis deserves a special place in the interpretation of Victorian literature, and especially Victorian fiction. Confronted with a world modernizing faster than many people could well tolerate, writers like Carlyle, Dickens, Brontë, Eliot, and, yes, Freud, offer us narratives that help us to find our way as effects of causes that are, primally, permanently, and at the end of the day fortunately, lost. •

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## ALUMNI/AE NEWS

• **PAMELA BARNETT, Ph.D. '96**, Assistant Professor of English and African American Studies at the University of South Carolina, has a new book out, *Dangerous Desire: Sexual Freedom and Sexual Violence Since the Sixties*, published by Routledge, 2004.

• **MARSHALL BOSWELL, Ph.D. '96**, Associate Professor at Rhodes College, had his first novel, *Alternative Atlanta*, published by Delacorte Press, a Random House/Bantam imprint. He is scheduled to read and hold a book signing in Atlanta in March.

His book, *Understanding David Foster Wallace* was published in January 2004 by University of South Carolina Press.

• **CATHERINE BURROUGHS, Ph.D. '88**, Professor of English at Wells College, was invited to present a keynote address in November 2004 at a conference in Bertinoro, Italy that concluded a two-year project directed by *Centro Interdisciplinare di Studi Romantici* at the University of Bologna. Seven Italian universities concentrated on the subject of English Romantic Theatre and Drama. Burroughs' address was titled "The Erotics of Home: Staging Sexual Fantasy in British Women's Drama." The conference proceedings will be published.

• **BRIAN CLIFF, Ph.D. '01** has accepted a tenure track position as Assistant Professor of Irish and Contemporary British literature at Montclair State University beginning this Fall.

• **TONY CUDA, Ph.D. '04**, Visiting Assistant Professor at Emory, has three articles scheduled to appear in *The American Book Review*: "Sheer Genius," a review of Philip Larkin's *Collected Poems*; "An Angel Marching into Darkness," review of Nancy Willard's *In the Salt Marsh*; and "In Among these Silk Screens," a review of Sylvia Plath's new *Ariel: The Restored Edition*.

• **KATHERINE ELLISON, Ph.D. '04**, Visiting Assistant Professor at Emory, presented "Tracing the Way of an Eagle in the Ayre: Script and Print in 17th-Century Cryptography Manuals" for the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing at the Conference of the American Society of 18th-Century Studies held in Las Vegas, in March.

She accepted a tenure-track assistant professorship at Illinois State University to teach 18th-century literature. Ellison also signed a contract with Routledge to publish a revision of her dissertation for their series on Studies in Literary Criticism and Culture, tentatively entitled "Fatal Information: The Idea of

Overload in Early 18th-Century Literature."

• **PATRICK ERBEN, Ph.D. '04**, a Fellow at the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture at the College of William and Mary, presented his paper, "'The Most Accomplish'd Maid in Philadelphia': Manuscript Exchange, Difference, and the Education of Quaker Women" at the November 2004 conference "Beyond Colonial Studies" in Providence, RI. His review of *Becoming German: The 1709 Palatine Migration to New York* by Philip Otterness appeared in *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62.1 (2005).

• **CASSANDRA JACKSON, Ph.D. '00**, Assistant Professor of English and African American Studies at The College of New Jersey, has published *'Barriers Between Us': Interracial Sex in 19th-Century American Literature*, Indiana University Press, 2004.

• **JASON B. JONES, Ph.D. '02** is Assistant Professor of English at Central Connecticut State University. His essay, "The Time of Interpretation: Psychoanalysis and the Past," appeared last May in *Post Modern Culture*, and his book manuscript, *Lost Causes: Psychoanalysis and Victorian Literature*, is currently being reviewed by external readers at Ohio State University Press.

• **JENNIFER MARGULIS, Ph.D. '99** has recently been named one of the nonfiction editors of *Literary Mama*, a magazine for the maternally inclined. She is also writing a weekly column, "Tales From the Crib," for the *Ashland Daily Tidings*.

• **CAROL NEWELL, Ph.D. '03** served as an Adjunct Professor in the Department of English at Lafayette College in Easton, Penn. this past Fall. She is serving as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Lafayette for the Spring semester, teaching College Writing, Literary History, and American Modernism.

• **KAREN POREMSKI, Ph.D. '00**, Assistant Professor at Ohio Wesleyan University, presented a paper entitled "Jessica Lynch as American Captive" at the "War in TV, Film, and History" conference sponsored by the journal *Film & History*; the conference took place in Dallas in November 2004.

Poremski and **AMY BENSON BROWN Ph.D. '00** edited *Roads to Reconciliation: Conflict and Dialogue in the 21st Century* published by Sharpe, 2005.

• **ANDREW SILVER Ph.D. '97**, Assistant Profes-

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# The Surprising Adventures of Digital Text

*Erika Farr, Ph.D.'04*

The Women's Transatlantic Genre Fiction Project, funded by a three-year grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, will digitize and disseminate 300 genre novels by women from 1860 to 1920. This project joins a dynamic community of digital initiatives committed to literary and cultural studies, including its parent project, the Emory Women Writers Resource Project (EWWRP), the Victorian Women Writers Project, and the Wright American Fiction Project.

As a student of 17th-century English poetry, I never imagined myself managing a project devoted to transatlantic genre fiction. In fact, my work for the EWWRP started some five years ago with texts by 17th-century writers. The leap to this current project may seem daring, but it speaks to the impact of digital text initiatives and the unexpected adventures involved in such projects. I managed the genre fiction project while also writing my dissertation on the poetics of place in early modern verse, two fields that seem to share few, if any, borders. However, the process of digitizing and encoding these texts prompted me to consider the geography of genre fiction, which includes formats ranging from multi-volume editions to slim yellowbacks. I began to understand text encoding as a form of mapping and myself as a textual cartographer. This connection between text and space resulted in surprising, but rewarding insights into my own area of specialization.

Transatlantic Genre Fiction will make important contributions to numerous disciplines once it is published online and freely accessible. As my example illustrates, the project's enrichment of scholarship has begun well before its publication. The planning and execution of this project has already influenced the academic work of graduate students in departments you might expect, such as English, and those you might not, such as History.

*Lillian Craton, graduate student, English*

It is the nature of our field to study quality—to explore the beauty, impact, or uniqueness of a text. Yet at times in my own research, quantity has also mattered. By the end of graduate coursework, my

reading in the 19th-century was just wide enough to show me the vast scope of my field. My interests led me to make culture-based claims in my dissertation, but such claims require great context. Imagine my delight when Erika Farr invited me to contribute text selections to the genre fiction project. Here was an opportunity to immerse myself in raw cultural data. As I thumbed bibliographies, plot summaries, and the novels themselves, I added detail to my 19th-century landscape. Instead of an abstract notion of Victorian fascination with eastern cultures, for example, I now hold a catalog of Indian- and Japanese-themed novels. Instead of a vague sense that Victorian fiction avoids discussion of pregnancy, I now have a boom of fictional babies born to unexpectant readers. The century's classics no longer seem isolated phenomena—they now fit or fight larger patterns in popular fiction.

Many of the project's texts are more than cultural artifacts. Some beg our attention as true aesthetic treasures, and one Florence Marryat novel inspired me to redesign an entire dissertation chapter. Still, I think the project's greatest strength is the breadth it offers as a collection. Intertextual conversations unite the novels, such as when Edith Wharton apologizes to Grace Aguilar for appropriating the title of Aguilar's sentimental *A Mother's Recompense* for her own novel of domestic discord. This project offers a rich body of cultural information useful to anyone concerned with popular ideology in the 19th-century.

*Caitlin Stewart, graduate student, History*

I would like to make the case that the Genre Fiction Project has relevance outside the discipline of English and comparative literature. You, gentle reader, might very well ask how the Women's Transatlantic Genre Fiction Project relates to the work of a modern American historian, but I assure you it does! The text database should be viewed not only as a rich source of primary texts from the 19th century (which it certainly is), but also as a means for scholars to engage in the ever-vaunted task of interdisciplinary study. Specifically for me, editing the texts of several sensational novels about Mormonism resulted in the birth of a research topic and future paper.

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# Re-Presenting the Victorian Novel

*Colonel Henry Esmond is just arrived. He looks very antique and distinguished in his Queen Anne's garb; the periwig, sword, lace, and ruffles are very well represented by the old Spectator type.*

So wrote Charlotte Brontë in an 1852 letter to her publisher George Smith about William Makepeace Thackeray's new book *The History of Henry Esmond, Esq.* Brontë's word-play transforms the three-volume novel into the very gentleman whose story it purports to tell. Posing as an autobiography – a very common genre for Victorian novels – the physical book, fully titled *The History of Henry Esmond: A Colonel in the Service of Her Majesty Queen Anne. Written by Himself*, becomes the man himself, with the old Spectator-style font serving as his 18th century costume, “his Queen Anne's garb.” Thackeray's novel postures so insistently as a real autobiography that it uses the exterior of the book to add to the fiction – the book looks as if it were written in the era in which it is set, during the reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714) – and it is transformed by its appearance into the actual journal of Henry Esmond.

The appearance of the Victorian novel is exactly what makes it daunting to teach – a challenge I encountered last semester in my Victorian Women Writers course. Being confronted with these “loose, baggy monsters” (as Henry James described Dickens' last novel) and reading assignments of 800 pages strikes dread in the hearts of students; even holding the book makes the hands of the sturdiest Victorianist ache. Yet this intimidating physical presence actually brings the history and significance of the novel in the 19th century into the present and into the classroom; it carries with it the publication history and material concerns of the Victorian era and becomes a visible example of the demands of form on content. Upon learning that *Lady Audley's Secret* was originally serialized, the students in my class were excited to trace the progress of the mystery in relation to its original “installments.” Similarly, several other novels we studied, like George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, were published in the common “three-decker” format, with the novel divided into three volumes which were published separately. The three volume form was partly the result of Charles

Edward Mudie's lending library, which allowed customers to borrow volumes of popular novels for an annual fee of one guinea. The success of Mudie's library obliged authors to produce their work in the three-volume form, which had a dramatic impact on the structure, plot and style of the novel. This imposition of publication practice and economic factors on the production of the novel lends new insight to the text itself, providing an additional way to “read” a Victorian novel.

Bringing the presence of the novel as a material book to the classroom connects my dissertation research to my teaching in an exciting way. In my own writing, I am exploring the way in which the physical form of the novel enters into the fiction itself. Not surprisingly, the explosion in publication and the dramatic increase in the reading population during the 19th century are reflected in the concerns of the fiction itself. Scenes of reading and writing, copying, printing and publishing proliferate in novels during the 19th century, reflecting the writer's concern with the material form his fiction will inhabit. Hence we see, with books like Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*, that the form of the novel becomes implicated not only in the publication history of the 19th century, but also in the fiction itself. So when my students groan at the sight of the hefty novels on our reading list, I convince them that the length of the texts is one of the most interesting aspects of the Victorian novel. And, I tell them, by picking up *Henry Esmond*, they are a participant in the fiction, greeting—like Charlotte Brontë before them—Henry Esmond himself, complete with his “periwig, sword, lace, and ruffles.” •

—Kathryn Crowther is a graduate student focusing on Victorian fiction. She can be reached at [kcrowth@learnlink.emory.edu](mailto:kcrowth@learnlink.emory.edu)

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Alum News from page 7

ator at Mercer University, is scheduled to have his book, *Southern Humor and Cultural Crisis*, published by Louisiana State University Press in the Fall of 2005. •

## STUDENT NEWS

• **MARY CARTER** submitted an entry on “Wendell Berry” to the *Dictionary of Literary Biography. Twentieth-century American Nature Writers: Poetry*. 2004.

In March she presented a paper, “The ‘sober retrenchments’ of Dryden’s *Virgil*” at the Conference of the American Society for 18th-Century Studies held in Las Vegas.

• **TARA CHRISTIE** published “‘Something to Write Home About’: Seamus Heaney at the Hardy Birthplace” in *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, June 2004. She published “Seamus Heaney’s Hardy” in *The Recorder: The Journal of the American Irish Historical Society*, Summer 2004.

Christie’s “‘For Isaac Rosenberg’: Geoffrey Hill, Michael Longley, Cathal O’Searcaigh” is forthcoming in *The Oxford Handbook of 20th-Century British and Irish War Poetry*, edited by Tim Kendall.

Christie presented a paper, “‘Our Donne Redivivus’: Rupert Brooke and the Cult of Donne in Prewar England,” at the Modern Language Association in Philadelphia on Dec. 29.

• **MICHELE CRESCENZO’S** essay, “Poor Lutie’s Almanack: Reading and Social Critique in Ann Petry’s *The Street*,” will appear in the collection *Reading Women: Literary Figures and Cultural Icons from the Victorian Age to the Present*, to be published this Spring by the University of Toronto Press.

• **KATHRYN CROWTHER’S** extended review essay “Reading Time: Capturing the Moment in Victorian Periodicals, Prose and Poetry,” in which she discusses *Gender and the Victorian Periodical, Images of the Woman Reader in Victorian British and American Fiction*, and *Victorian Photography and Literary Nostalgia*, will appear in *Peer English* Ed. Kris Siefken, 2004.

Crowther’s “Sister Carrie” entry in *Facts on File Companion to the American Novel*, Ed. Abby Werlock, is forthcoming.

• **BRIAN CROXALL’S** review of Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harigan, eds. *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*. Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2004 is forthcoming on *The Iowa Review* Website.

• **HANS-GEORG ERNEY** presented a paper entitled “Postcolonial Landscapes and Environmental Ethics: J. M. Coetzee’s *Animals and Humans*” at the 14th Annual British Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies Conference in Savannah, Feb. 25.

• **ERIN GOSS** has accepted a tenure-track position at Loyola College of Maryland. In the Fall, she will begin teaching classes in Romanticism and the Introduction to Literature.

• **KERRY HIGGINS WENDT** has had accepted for publication entries on Philip Roth’s *The Ghost Writer* and *Zuckerman Unbound* for *The Facts on File Companion to the American Novel*, edited by Abby Werlock, forthcoming.

• **KELLI RANDALL** presented a paper entitled, “Black Women Writers in the Age of Realism” at the Hawaii International Conference on the Arts and Humanities in Honolulu, Jan. 12-18.

• **SARAH SCHIFF** published a book review of *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson* by Judith Farr in the June 2004 edition of *The Emily Dickinson Journal*. She also published a book review of *Technical Communication 2002* by Mike Markel in the August 2003 edition of *Technical Communication*.

• **GITANJALI SHAHANI** participated in a Fall semester seminar at the Folger Institute in Washington, D.C. Entitled “Emerging Ethnographies in Shakespeare’s England,” the course was taught by Professor Virginia Mason Vaughan from Clark University. •

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### Women’s Project from page 8

As a modern Americanist with a particular focus on intellectual and religious history, these texts prompt me to think about the way contemporaries of the 19th century perceived Mormonism—the only originally “American” religion—at the time of its birth. Captivated by Mormonism’s initial doctrine of polygamy and tales of pioneer hardship, both American and British women writers discovered a rich source to mine for their own writing. Approximately one hundred years later, thanks to this database, I have found an equally rich topic to research! •

## Changing Spaces

Spending a year in Beijing, China during graduate school was not something I had considered, but my husband's work has landed us here and I have learned that I am more adaptable to change than I thought. The appropriateness of this lesson is not lost on me—I am reading for my oral examination, focusing on Victorian England, a time and place of disorienting and dizzying change, while living in a city that is frantically working to complete the fastest makeover in history. Beijing did not at first seem particularly suited to studying Victorian literature. But then I got here, and read these lines from Matthew Arnold's "Scholar Gypsy"—

For what wears out the life of mortal men?  
 'Tis that from change to change their being rolls;  
 'Tis repeated shocks again, again,  
 Exhaust the energy of strongest souls.

Things began to seem more appropriate.

I cannot speak to the full scope of recent change in Beijing, but what I have seen in nine months convinces me of its magnitude. The announcement of a successful bid for the 2008 Olympics came amid an explosive economic growth spurt. A dizzying real estate market has developed and the urban population has soared. Official counts place it around 13 million, but local residents claim as many as 25 million, most coming in to work on temporary construction projects. All these people, buildings and projects give the city a hectic bustle not unlike Dickens's description of Victorian London: crowded with industry, sometimes dirty, noisy, confusing, its inhabitants bewildered and disoriented while negotiating such an unprecedented space.

This is a time when I think about space a lot. I think about it because it forms part of my interest in Victorian literature, and because living in China it is difficult not to think about. There is a crowding that is hard to ignore, but also a sense of inflexible history and anxious potential on all the streets. As I consider the state of the Victorian mind in a Victorian city, the state of this city changes around me almost daily.

Many of the renovations being done in Beijing are conceived with the intention of making the city more internationally friendly. There is an initiative to standardize English translations on street signs, and taxi drivers are reportedly involved in mandatory English training. Many of these changes are extraordinarily positive, like the push for more transparency in the state-run media and improved health care facilities. Many others seem too fast and too dramatic. Part of



The fragile side of Beijing

the attempt to internationalize Beijing seems to involve making it look newer and shinier. This often means the elimination of older, more traditional buildings and neighborhoods. This has been devastating for the city's hutongs and their populations.

Hutongs are winding alleyways lined with brick walls. On the other side of these walls are interconnected living spaces and courtyards, most of which were built in the 17th

century. In nice weather, these alleys are crowded with people and scenes of neighborhood life. When I first explored the hutongs, I was stunned by how quiet and peaceful they are. Somehow, the clamor of Beijing does not infiltrate these alleys. Road-widening projects, however, are more persistent, and a vast majority of the hutongs will be gone by 2008, sterilizing much of the city's charm and displacing large numbers of closely knit neighborhoods.

While these changes are erasing some images associated with Beijing, they are bringing welcome new ones as well. Attempts to clean local rivers, heighten air quality and improve public transportation are extremely beneficial to local residents. It is impossible to be in Tiananmen Square without remembering the image of the lone demonstrator in front of the tanks. But now, on the west side of the square, there is a huge clock counting down the days, minutes and seconds until the Olympics. In so many ways, Beijing is trying to move forward. It is, as was Arnold's Victorian London, experiencing an "epoch of expansion."•

—Rachel Bowser is a graduate student focusing on the Victorian novel and culture. She can be reached at [rbowser@learnlink.emory.edu](mailto:rbowser@learnlink.emory.edu)

## The Sound of Silence (with apologies to Simon and Garfunkel)

**N**PR's "Morning Edition" has lately aired reports forecasting the lifting of the ban on the use of cellphones on airplanes in flight. According to the forecasters, a plane and its passengers are no longer endangered by the phones interfering with electrical navigational and flight systems. The reports I heard viewed this change as progress—a traveler can talk to anyone in any place at any time. No reporter questioned whether constant phone banter might disturb the comfort of passengers not so occupied.

I can already hear the obvious rejoinder: if the blather bothers you, plug your ears with the earphones the airlines provide and listen to other synthetically reproduced sounds. One more reminder of the ever-expanding place of noise, and the apparent craving for it, in contemporary life, and the ever-diminishing value that is accorded "the sound of silence." The chief competitor to the transmission of the human voice as a staple of popular culture is the sound of music, especially loud music. Talk shows on every subject, commentators of every stripe, elaborate automobile sound systems, karaoke bars—everywhere our ears are bombarded.

To be sure, the communications miracles wrought by technological advances have produced great benefits and enjoyment for many. To take but one instance, radio brought baseball games at first-hand to countless fans outside the ballpark. But the hallmark of our consumer culture is overkill. Television transmitted play-by-play visibly, but proceeded on the conviction that it is not enough to watch a ballgame unfold, without having several sportscasters constantly telling me what I'm seeing (and assuming I'm not seeing what is important). However, I can in this case turn off the sound.

Certainly, the cellphone has alleviated the frustration of not having a phone at hand when you really need one. Nonetheless, such moments appear to be far outstripped by the proliferation of yakking as a recreational activity. Fine, for those who relish it, but should this activity intrude upon those who

enjoy other activities while in the air—reflecting, napping, viewing the clouds outside one's window and the terrain below?

**F**or me, the most pleasurable part of air travel is the time it allows for reading—one of the surest and best ways to be enveloped by the sound of silence. Reverberating therein one hears the little horse's bells from Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," the snarl and rattle of the saw from his "Out, Out—," or the buzzing of Emily Dickinson's fly at the moment of death. There, too, one hears the unforgettable timbres of different voices:

"If the law supposes that, the law is a ass—a idiot."

"There are always people who will quit buying stamps just to get on the right side of Papa-Daddy."

"I am perfectly convinced by it that Mr. Darcy has no defect. He owns it himself without disguise."

"Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?"

"Then I can play / On them golden streets / Where the number not only / Comes out – but repeats!"

"These grew; I gave commands; / then all smiles stopped together."

"We said there warn't no home like a raft, after all. Other places do seem so cramped and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft."

If, as it appears, cellphones will now become our flight companions, Mr. Bumble should have the last word. \*\*

—Peter Dowell is the Interim Chair of the Department of English. He can be reached at [pdowell@emory.edu](mailto:pdowell@emory.edu)

\*\* How many speakers did you recognize? Mr. Bumble; Sister, postmistress of China Grove, Miss.; Elizabeth Bennett; J. Alfred Prufrock; Alberta K. Johnson (Madam to you); the Duke of Ferrara; Huck Finn.



Dowell

# What's Essential to American Democracy?

Laissez Faire

(...or a Free Public Library)

Here is an institution doomed to scare

The furious devotees of Laissez Faire.

What mental shock, indeed, could prove immenser

to Mumbo Jumbo-or to Herbert Spencer?\*

Free Books? Reading provided by the Rates?

Oh, that means Freedom's ruin and the State's!

*Poem (unsigned) from PUNCH, October 24, 1891*

The poem above goes on for another 18 lines, mocking those Victorian gentlemen who weren't so sure that free public libraries, supported with property owners' money, were such a good idea. One-hundred-and-fourteen years later, the poem made me wonder, again, just what the core values in America really are. We still support public libraries, don't we?

It turns out most of us do think fondly of that institution, at least according to a 2002 American Library Association (ALA) survey. (A phone survey with a margin of error plus or minus three percent, and we trust that, don't we? These are librarians!) Ninety percent of those questioned agreed libraries are places of opportunities for education and self-help; 83 percent believe libraries and librarians play an "essential role" in our democracy and "are needed more now than ever."

But the ALA's tracking of library funding cuts nationwide is sobering. More than 1,100 libraries nationwide have reduced operating hours or cut staff. In December, John Steinbeck's hometown of Salinas, Calif. made headlines all over the world with the announcement that its three public libraries would close. All 52 libraries in Buffalo and Erie County, N.Y. would have closed if the legislature hadn't decided at the last minute to share part of a one-cent sales tax with municipalities.

All that at a time when visits to public libraries in this country total more than 1.2 billion a year. "Librarians," an ALA fact sheet says primly, have "long believed that when the economy goes down, public library use goes up." I don't know if the economy is



Williams

down as 2005 begins (I haven't checked my watch), but it's easy to see how many people depend on the services of the DeKalb County branch in nearby Clarkston, Ga. Kids crowd around computers waiting to use the Internet, some of whom I've heard confide to the librarian they don't have a computer at home. Somali and Kurdish families check out books together. Elderly women haunt the new-releases shelf waiting for the new book in the Mitford series.

It's true that governments, and taxpayers, have to make hard choices. Salinas, Calif., for example, is a struggling city hit with dramatic health care cuts, rapid growth, and cuts in state funding. Its mostly blue-collar population, 1,900 of whom showed up at the library every day, is struggling, too, to raise their families and put food on the table. They rejected a half-cent increase in the sales tax that might have saved at least one library. But I'm not sure an effective case was made about just how much the loss of the library system would effect their everyday lives.

One of the many things that saddened me in November was that I couldn't think how to combat the apparently widespread feeling that the American government is not an us, but a them. But Public Libraries are an us, right? Isn't there a chance that we can go disagree about everything else under the sun and still line up behind public-and publicly funded-libraries? Yes, I want the First Amendment to protect what goes on those shelves, and someone else's top priority may be deciding what their child reads, and when. But isn't it possible neither of us wants a coffeehouse called the See You Latte where the public library was? And isn't it just barely possible that, while getting out the vote for libraries, we might stop calling each other names long enough to create an atmosphere in which real conversations on other issues can happen?

Eighty-three percent of the people the ALA surveyed believe libraries are essential to American democracy, remember? Do you know the last time 83

Writerly Perspective continued on page 14

## Porter, Merling Inducted to Phi Beta Kappa

Two English majors were among the most recent inductees into Phi Beta Kappa at Emory University. Angela L. Porter, a junior from Pensacola, Fla. and Devon E. Merling, a junior from Cincinnati, were inducted into the Gamma Chapter of Georgia at events held in Cannon Chapel on Nov. 15.

Porter plans to attend graduate school but, as yet, is undecided if she will pursue an M.F.A. in theater or a Ph.D. in English. She remembers fondly her first English class in poetry with John Bugge. “He took a very kind interest in all of the students, and I left the class with more confidence in my writing. Last semester I had Native American Literature with Michael Elliott and Chaucer with Jim Morey. . . the two most interesting English classes I’ve had so far. Morey has this amazing ability to bring older texts to

life and Elliott always challenged us to develop our critical thinking.”

Merling notes her experience in Catherine Nicksen’s Asian American Autobiography class has been “foundational for my study of English at Emory. My English advisor, Michael Elliott, has been extremely important in my growth in literary studies. . . including his 19th Century American Novel class. Also highly influential for me was a class [which Elliott] co-taught with Rick Rambuss called Literature and Culture.”

In addition to student Phi Beta Kappa inductions, the evening’s events included faculty recognition for excellent teaching. Mary Behrman, a Visiting Assistant Professor, and Elliott, Associate Professor, were both recognized. •

### Corruption from page 5

consciousness. In his discussion of a different Henry James novel, Gregory Woods writes, “It is an ambiguous hinterland between spirit and physique, between nature and artifice, between love and friendship, and between the invisibility of the ordinary and the potentially dangerous conspicuousness of the ‘queer’” (77). In *The Turn of the Screw*, James uses the ghost of Quint to represent the presence of sexual vice without a body, to portray the unspeakable same-sex lust that not only haunts the governess’s perception of Miles, but also the unconscious minds of James’s age.

Plagued by horrific suspicions regarding the former bond between Quint and Miles, the governess cannot escape her fears that Quint’s dangerous spirit continues to lurk around the house of Bly. Free from the confines of patriarchal supervision and within an era in which homosexuality is ostracized as deviant, Miles, the young, impressionable bourgeois male, is believed to hover over the “abyss” of sexual corruption (87). While much acclaimed criticism has been written questioning the authenticity of the ghosts the governess sees in *The Turn of the Screw*, I suggest in this essay that the importance of the novella lies not in whether Quint’s spirit literally haunts Bly, but why the governess is so terrified that his ghost may exist at all. The ghost of Quint is irrefutably real once one accepts that, despite his dubious nature, he is a feared

presence within the confines of the story as narrated by the governess. Quint’s ghost unmistakably serves as a character in James’s tale, and his importance lies in precisely what he signifies in the story. Quint represents the governess’s suspicion of young Miles’s sexually-tainted nature, and James uses Quint’s unaccountable presence to highlight the growing Victorian fear of homosexuality within the realm of male-dominated English gentility. •

—Cathryn Schottenstein was the winner of the 2004 English Department Undergraduate Essay Contest.

### Writerly Perspective from page 13

percent of people polled agreed with me about anything but the capital of Delaware? \*\* That’s right, never.

In 2005 I plan to use 83 percent of the energy I was using to castigate talk radio hosts to support the ALA in its efforts to remind all of us just what we get from libraries in our communities. •

—Lynna Williams, Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing, is at work on a novel, a story collection, and a collection of essays. She can be reached at [lwill03@emory.edu](mailto:lwill03@emory.edu)

\*In a confused tribute to the library research of my childhood, I did not look up Herbert Spencer on the Internet. I have no idea who he was.

\*\*It’s Dover.

## FACULTY NEWS

- **KATE BROWN'S** article, "Futurity and Postponement: Christina Rossetti and the Yearning for Advent" was published in *Intertexts* 8:1 (2003).
- **JOHN BUGGE'S** essay, "Fertility, Myth and Female Sovereignty in The Wedding of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell" was published in *The Chaucer Review* 39.2 (2004): 198-218.
- **JIM GRIMSLEY** is a finalist for the Rome Prize, for the second consecutive year. The fellowship winner, derived from nominations of the 250 members of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, is given by the Academy in Rome.
- **LAWRENCE JACKSON** chaired a panel at the December 2004 Modern Language Association Conference entitled "Philadelphia and Black Writers on Fire." He presented a paper, "1989: A Year in the Life of a Man in the Street," at the American Studies Association Conference in November; he gave a lecture in October at North Carolina Agricultural & Technical College called "Ralph Ellison from Left to Right"; he introduced the 2004 Pulitzer Prize fiction winner Edward P. Jones at his reading on the Emory campus; and also in October he presented his research to a seminar in the African American Studies department at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
- **RICHARD RAMBUSS** delivered a lecture in October called "The Passion of the Magdalene" at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario about Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* and Dan Brown's bestselling religio-conspiracy novel *The Da Vinci Code*. He also conducted a Cultural Studies Department graduate seminar. In November he was invited to present a paper, "Male Masculinity" at a conference at Harvard Law School on "The Law of Dignity / The Politics of Shame." Rambuss also delivered a shorter version of "The Passion of the Magdalene" at the Modern Language Association Convention in Philadelphia in December, as well as participated in a roundtable commemorating the 10-year anniversary of the publication of *Queering the Renaissance*. He traveled to the West Coast in January, where he delivered a lecture called "Crashaw and the Metaphysical Shudder" at the UCLA's Clark Library and then another lecture, "Indicatively Male," on the relations between gay and queer studies and feminist theory at Pitzer College.
- **RONALD SCHUCHARD'S** article, "Did Eliot Know Hulme? Final Answer," was published in the

*Journal of Modern Literature*. Schuchard was invited to deliver a lecture titled "The Mask of Lust and Rage in Yeats's Last Poems" at Princeton University, Feb. 11, and a lecture at the University of Aberdeen, March 16.

- **JOSEPH SKIBELL** read his essay "Willis Alan Ramsey & Me: A Bad Case of 2nd Novelitis" on WMLBN 1160 AM in December. Published this Fall in *MAGGID: A Journal of Jewish Literature*, the essay has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.
- **NATASHA TRETHERWEY** has been named the 2005-2006 Lehman-Brady Joint Chair Professor of Documentary and American Studies at Duke and UNC-Chapel Hill. Her third collection of poems, *Native Guard*, is forthcoming from Houghton Mifflin. •

### Young Named Haygood Professor, Danowski Poetry Collection Curator

**K**evin Young, the Ruth Lilly Professor of Poetry at Indiana University and the recipient of a 2003-04 fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation, will join the Emory faculty in Fall 2005 as the Atticus Haygood Professor of English and Creative Writing and Curator of the Raymond Danowski Poetry Collection.

Kevin Young's first book, *Most Way Home*, was selected for the National Poetry Series and won the John C. Zacharis First Book Award from Ploughshares. His second book of poems, *To Repel Ghosts*, a "double album" based on the works of the late artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, was a finalist for the James McLaughlin Prize from the Academy of American Poets. Young's poetry and essays have appeared in the *New Yorker*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *Paris Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Paideuma*, *Callaloo*, *Fence*, *Verse*. *The Village Voice* named him "Writer on the Verge" in 2001. Young's latest book of poems, *Jelly Roll: A Blues*, was released by Alfred A. Knopf in 2003 and was named a finalist for both the 2003 National Book Award in Poetry and the 2003 *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize in Poetry. *Jelly Roll* was also awarded the 2004 Patterson Poetry Prize. •

# Lessons from a Whale Ship

In *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville wrote that “a whale ship was [his] Yale College and [his] Harvard.” At the dawn of my senior year and the eve of my 21st birthday, I sat alone on a charter from Boston to New Bedford and realized that higher education is certainly a trip to be taken on a whale ship. Traveling to the city that once “lit the world” with the leviathan’s oil, I looked for traces of Melville’s visage in vague, bus-window reflections against the twilight, remembering from his portraits the stolid brow, the dark beard and the bright eyes. But I quickly gave up the game; Melville traveled down the Acushnet River to New Bedford, anyway, not Route 495.

Admittedly, after a summer’s worth of reading in preparation to write my senior thesis on the interplay between technology, writing and the body in Melville’s work, I continued to find it extremely difficult to conceive of the author beyond the way I usually introduced him to my friends and family (“...you know, that guy who wrote *Moby Dick*...”) and wondered if, when it was all over, after months and months of thought and research, I could look back and say something else, anything else, that would resonate. But, perhaps, at that moment I should not have been so hard on myself; to some degree the metaphor did hold water (excuse the pun). Like Melville I was embarking and, like him, I didn’t know the ship I would board.

This nascent sense of identification returned in the unnerving first moments of my arrival in New Bedford. The shrill cry of seagulls, the smell of oil and salt, the strange cadence of passengers speaking around me converged with a complete sense of familiar yet alien other; how, like Ishmael upon waking in Queequeg’s quilted embrace, I found a type of comfort in the unknown and, in doing so, remembered the great mysteries inherent in that which I thought I knew, the inexplicable “supernatural hand” of the narrator’s childhood nightmare. Yet learning how to interpret Melville’s text in a dirty bus station didn’t fit the bill. Armed with books, pens and every other accoutrement I imagined would help me undertake “serious research,” I came eager to prove that I was up to the task.

Such was the capricious nature of my vessel, however. Before long, many of my carefully wrought expectations were disassembled with intimidating rapidity. This began, somewhat humorously, at my first point of interest, the famous Seamen’s Bethel where Ishmael heard his final sermon before boarding the *Pequod*. Real cenotaphs in memorial to lost seamen lined the walls, but a garish reproduction of Father Mapple’s famous pulpit, shaped like a ship’s prow, protruded from the front of the sanctuary. It was a stage prop, built in the 1950’s after too many tourists demanded their money back when they found only a standard-issue lectern instead.



Interior, Seamen’s Bethel

Looking back over my notes, it’s interesting to notice how, somewhat unknowingly, I began to pick up the threads of disparate ideas and facts and follow them to conclusions, other thoughts, or even dead ends. I was moving through a body of knowledge, nevertheless. A few days after my arrival, I unexpectedly found myself in Harvard University’s Houghton Library, awestruck, turning the

leaves of Melville’s handwritten journals and manuscripts. After bumbling through the dark forecabin, I slowly gained confidence in my sea-legs and took my first few steps on deck. Though I still didn’t feel like a true scholar, I did feel something else – genuinely invested in an iterative process of getting lost and finding oneself again.

Many told me that the senior honor’s thesis is an act of discovering the ways in which we discover. Determined to board my ship and sail it too, I shelved this friendly reminder until it became manifest in New Bedford. Nathaniel Hawthorne once captured Melville’s personality perfectly with a single sentence when he remarked that Melville “can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other.” If, in the future I must introduce Melville again, perhaps I should say; “a man who taught me to be brave enough to lose my way.”

•  
—Meriwether Tull is a BA/MA student majoring in English.

