

The University of Michigan
Department of English
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**2008 Alumni
Newsletter**



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Cover photo of Angell Hall:
Anthony Cece



Sidonie Smith,
Department Chair

NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends of the Department,

The Department of English continues to grow and change as we welcome new faculty, say farewell to others, and face the challenges of maintaining excellence in teaching and research within the constraints of Michigan's troubled economy. But we forge ahead!

In January, A. Van Jordan, a major voice in contemporary American poetry, will join the faculty of the Creative Writing Program. Van comes to us from the University of Texas, Austin, but his journey to Ann Arbor brings him closer to his hometown of Akron, Ohio.

If you attended Michigan within the last twenty-eight years, you may have taken a course with Martha Vicinus. Martha is about to retire. To celebrate her career at Michigan we held a conference in April entitled "The Future of Victorian Studies," which brought together a good number of her former colleagues and students for two days of panel discussions. For the past several years Martha has been the Director of the Sweetland Writing Center. Those duties will now be assumed by Professor Anne Gere.

We note the passing of Walter Clark. Walter, along with Alan Howes, was the force behind the New England Literature Program and maintained his commitment to the program until the day he died peacefully in the woods near his home in New Hampshire. And in May, George Garrett, the founding director of our Creative Writing Program, passed away.

This year we began implementing our revised undergraduate curriculum. Concentrators are required to complete Introduction to Literary Studies and Introduction to Poetry. But they will now gain depth in at least one area of literary and cultural studies through an array of sub-concentrations, arranged according to historical period, cultural and geographic frameworks, or analytical approaches.

What never changes here is the high level of accomplishment of our stellar faculty. This year Peter Ho Davies was named a recipient of the twenty-first annual PEN/Malamud Award, given annually to recognize excellence in the art of short fiction. Lorna Goodison's lyrical narrative, *From Harvey River: A Memoir of My Mother and Her People*, was awarded the British Columbia Prize, one of Canada's highest literary awards. Laura Kasischke's book, *The Life Before Her Eyes*, was made into a movie. Linda Gregerson was named a Distinguished University Professor, one of the highest honors the University can bestow on an eminent member of the faculty. And there are so many others. I encourage you to visit our website (www.lsa.umich.edu/english/news/) to find out more about faculty who received fellowships, earned teaching awards, and published books. They make ours an outstanding department.

The financial outlook in Michigan continues to look bleak, as it does in many states around the nation, so the support of alumni and friends is critically important to us. Without your help, we would not be able to recruit and retain the best faculty, provide fellowships to attract the best graduate students, maintain innovative off-campus programs such as NELP, the Prison Creative Arts Program, and the Bear River Writers' Conference, and provide the kind of program that is the Michigan Difference. We are in your debt.

My colleagues and I appreciate your continuing attachment to this department. We wish you the pleasures of sustaining and unsettling literature, the imaginative play of language, and the insights into life and history they offer.

NEW FACULTY MEMBER **A. VAN JORDAN**

Born and raised in Akron, Ohio, poet A. Van Jordan is no stranger to the Midwest. Although much of his academic career has been spent in the South—he taught at Prince George's Community College in Maryland, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro and, most recently, at the University of Texas at Austin—he began his academic training at Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio, for his BA in English Literature. Coming back to the Midwest to join the English department at U-M seems like a natural transition for Van. He also holds an MA in Communications from Howard University and an MFA in Creative Writing from the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College.

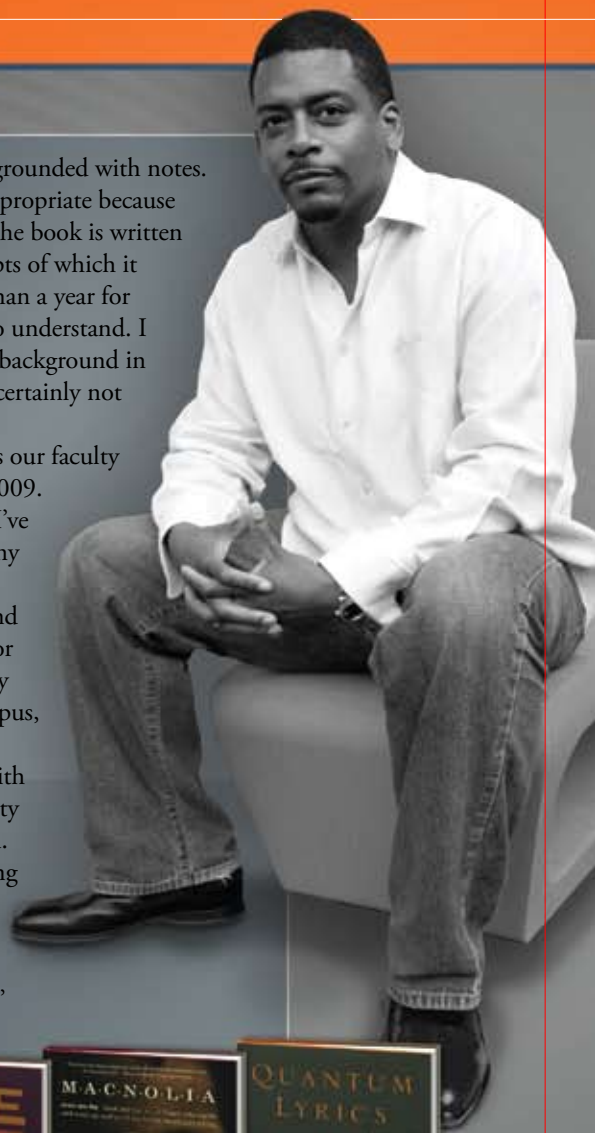
His first book, *Rise* (2001), published by Tia Chucha Press and distributed by Northwestern University Press, tracks not only the history of African American music, but also the music of his life growing up in Ohio. His second book, *M-A-C-N-O-L-I-A* (2004), published by W.W. Norton & Co,

tells the story of MacNolia Cox, an Akron resident who was the first African American to reach the final round of the National Spelling Bee competition in 1936. *Rise* won the Josephine Miles PEN/Oakland award; *M-A-C-N-O-L-I-A* was awarded an Anisfield-Wolf Award and selected as one of the Best Books of 2005 by the *London Times* (TLS). Van has also been awarded a Whiting Award and a Pushcart Prize.

Van is finishing up a Guggenheim Fellowship this year, and he recently published his third collection of poems, *Quantum Lyrics* (2007, W.W. Norton & Co.). Explaining this most recent collection of poems, Van states: "Physics becomes a unifying theme in the book. The tension is consistently the façade of male power with the undercurrent of male vulnerability. Comic book superheroes, Einstein and other famous physicists, my childhood and my relationship to my recently deceased father all come together in a bit of a cinematic montage. A good deal of the research for this

book is foregrounded with notes. It seemed appropriate because so much of the book is written using concepts of which it took more than a year for me simply to understand. I don't have a background in science and certainly not physics."

Van joins our faculty in January 2009. He writes, "I've admired many of my new colleagues and their work for years. On my visits to campus, I've been impressed with the collegiality among them. I'm so looking forward to being a part of this department."



RECENT FACULTY PUBLICATIONS

► (RIGHT L-R) Books published by our newest faculty member, A. Van Jordan: *Rise* (2001), *M-A-C-N-O-L-I-A* (2005), and *Quantum Lyrics* (2007).

▼ (BELOW L-R) Books published by our faculty over the past year: Gregg Crane, *The Cambridge Introduction to The Nineteenth-Century American Novel*; Nicholas Delbanco, *The Count of Concord*; Laura Kasischke, *Feathered*, and *Lilies Without*; Julian Levinson, *Exiles on Main Street: Jewish American Writers and American Literary Culture*; Anita Norich, *Discovering Exile: Yiddish and Jewish Culture During the Holocaust*; Eileen Pollack, *In The Mouth: Stories and Novellas*



MORE INFO:

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A Htate to
immo canti
cum noui
qua mirabi
lia fecit. **S**al
uauit fibi te
xteram eius
et brachiu

LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

▲ From a late 13th-century French psalter: Ps. 98, *Cantate domino canticum novum* ("Sing unto the Lord a new song"), with illuminated capital. In the C of *Cantate* are depicted three tonsured clerics chanting at a lectern. One of them indicates the text at hand, which may be interpreted as the psalm itself or, more generally, as the "new song." In use and in design, this page brings together text, visual image, and musical performance.

INTRODUCTION

—Macklin Smith

When I teach a Modernist poem like Eliot's "Prufrock," I find it useful to display a Picasso print, illustrating what seems to have been then a stylistic tendency toward fragmentation and incoherence. When I teach Milton, I do a similar show-and-tell with Mannerist painting and Baroque architecture. When I teach Chaucer, the more obscure "perpendicular style" of fourteenth-century English architecture seems germane as an analogue to the blocky logic of the first sentence of *The Canterbury Tales*; but then I must admit that this comparison, while perhaps also useful in understanding the organization of the Wyf of Bath's marital history, is utterly useless when it comes to the Wyf's lively language, her diction and syntax, her ironies and enjambments, her intimidating intelligence and seductive humor. When I make these comparisons, I am under no illusion that I've thought through their theoretical implications, but a number of my colleagues have approached such matters with rigorous discipline. Five testimonials follow.

ARCHITECTURAL SPACE IN LITERATURE

—Andrea Zemgulyš

In high school I was taught to study literature by answering a prescribed list of questions. At the top of the list was a question on setting: “A house,” I would duly write in answer, or “a street in small-town America.” It didn’t seem to matter what the setting was. We never discussed it. It was an obvious and pointless observation to make. Where else would a family drama be staged but a house? What was more transparent and generic (in my young mind) than a street in small-town America? Setting was deadly dull, and epitomized my untutored understanding of convention. It was an empty and meaningless obligation, superfluous to understanding literature even if somehow essential to it.

But now, I think: a *house*. Fundamentally, we are inside rather than out. What passes here should be private (is it?); what passes here should be homey and intimate (is it?); what passes here should be contained (no parti-walls, no shared entryways, right?) And then, what sort of house? One with rooms: dwelling is compartmentalized and specialized, perhaps even accommodating public life in “front.” One with multiple floors: life is made hierarchical, and perhaps made arduous. Thinking about architecture shows that setting is not the stuff of some old-fashioned checklist, but rather cause for inquiry and debate. Domestic or institutional, subtly or conspicuously represented, architecture both generates and limits meaning in literature.

As an instance, read Daphne Du Maurier’s *Rebecca* (1938) with an eye for the centuries-old mansion on which it centers. However jaded and unbelieving we are as readers, Evil lurks in Manderley. It does so because the mansion’s symmetry gives space to the unknown and the supernatural, and at the same time, endows an eerie familiarity to all its rooms. Passages, staircases, great hall, all work to tell a story of anxiety, aspiration, and degeneracy. The bedroom’s seaward windows compound the heroine’s exposure and vulnerability; in fine contrast, Alfred Hitchcock’s film adaptation uses grandly arched and mullioned windows to belittle and entrap. Such is the power of architecture (and place, more generally), that the heroine is driven by its memory long after its destruction. Such is the power of architecture that its representation even conditions its writer’s imagination, ensuring that *Rebecca* remains well within the formal conventions of gothic and domestic romance (though here might bump heads). But *Rebecca* also reminds us that architecture’s power is not total: the stately house is lived, inhabited, managed by the heroine. And despite Du Maurier’s contrary beliefs, the

Depression-era *Rebecca* glimpses its Elizabethan manor as mere anachronism.

Architecture expands and complicates the notion of setting I exercised in high-school homework assignments. A “great house” novel like *Rebecca* affords an obvious instance (as would others such as William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* and E.M. Forster’s *Howards End*). But architecture sets literature not solely through the representation of buildings. Fundamentally, architecture is the arrangement of physical space. Understood in this way, architecture enlivens almost any literary work in any genre and period. The psychical interiority of the “Western Wind” quatrain, for example, takes shape through markers of spatial exteriority: recall how the westerly and the “small rain” orient an “I” that positively aches, how astonishingly outside imbues inside (that plain old word *bed*) with desire. And literature reveals much about architecture

Thinking about architecture shows that setting is not the stuff of some old-fashioned checklist, but rather cause for inquiry and debate. Domestic or institutional, subtly or conspicuously represented, architecture both generates and limits meaning in literature.

as an arrangement of space. Literature shows how space is not a vacuum, but rather an articulation of social and power relations. It reveals how space is not inert and empty, but productive and positive. It reveals how space is lived and negotiated in this world, and how space structures cultural imaginaries. Literature, in other words, is a vast architectural repository of both the ordinary and the extraordinary. In its settings, literature archives the vernacular built environments that easily go unnoticed in life and that might otherwise go unremembered. Literary scholarship, for all these reasons, has helped make the case that space is key to utopia: in a world dominated by time or visual spectacle (as some have it), space is revolutionary, the site of possible new worlds, of post-modernity.

Because restricted by the laws of gravity and the principles of engineering, and because functional and used, architecture has at times been treated as a lesser “applied” art. But it has also been regarded as the finest and most formal of the arts, being “purely” an arrangement of space. It aroused envy in visual and literary artists of the early twentieth century who wished to produce “aesthetic emotion” in their work without mucking in “mere” representation or plot.

The envy of literary modernism, we can surmise that architecture inspired subsequent literary criticism of the mid-twentieth-century that searched for a definitive “spatial form” in modern narrative. Hardly a lesser art is architecture and certainly a rich topic for thinking about literature in its settings.

VISUAL CULTURE AT MICHIGAN: SEE WHAT'S NEW

—Sara Blair

Over the past decade, a new, vigorously interdisciplinary field of scholarship, known as visual culture studies, has come into its own. Under that rubric, graduate programs are flourishing, journals are being launched, and campus initiatives heralded. Much of the excitement follows on the fact that the study of

visual culture is inevitably interdisciplinary. To raise questions about the role of visuality and visual objects in the shaping of subjectivity, culture, and social life, scholars necessarily draw from terms and methods defining cultural studies, art history, media and film studies, anthropology, and more. The scope of the resulting work is impressively ambitious; as one prominent practitioner puts it, visual culture studies “is concerned with

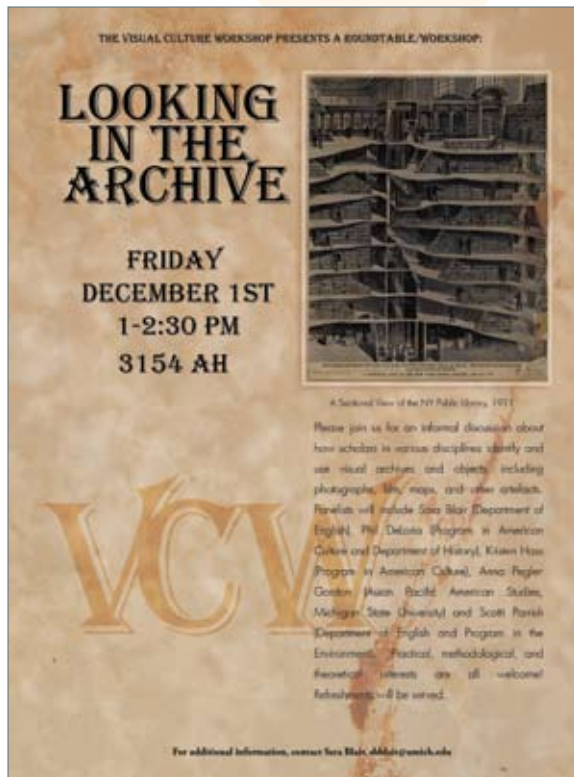
everything we see, have seen, or may visualize”—not only traditional fine art objects like paintings and sculptures, or such relatively recent media as film, television, and photographs, but also furniture, gardens,

dance, buildings, landscapes, advertising, and fashion, not to mention such everyday representations as maps, graphs, and websites.

Although much of the field's emphasis has been on contemporary developments (digital media, the internet), its brief extends into earlier historical contexts. Visual culture scholars have done groundbreaking work on such topics as the religious iconography of the medieval era, Victorian machines for visual reproduction, and thinking in the ancient world about visual perception. Likewise, visual culture studies encompasses a long history of technologies of vision, from Aristotle's writings on the optical principles of the pinhole camera to current work on hybrid electronic media. Contributors to this project converse robustly across longstanding divides between the humanities and the “hard” sciences, including fields like neurology, biology, and cognitive science that probe the nature of vision as a bodily event.

If such dialogue across disciplinary boundaries helps account for excitement about the field, it raises a question: what does literary studies have to do with visual culture and visuality? Accounts of the emerging field often claim that one of its key aims is to challenge a longstanding “textual” model for analyzing culture—that is, a perceived tendency to understand cultural and artistic practices, social interactions, and even history itself as texts, reducible to objects for reading. What, they ask, of forms of visual experience not encompassed by textuality? How might our understanding of culture be enhanced by considering visual experience as an embodied phenomenon, in dialogue with the aural, the tactile, and the performative?

In spite of this brief against (mere) textuality, literary scholars are making powerful, distinctive contributions to studies of visual culture. Most obviously, they bring into the mix a rich tradition of thinking, via the work of linguistics, rhetoric, and semiotics (and, yes, even textual analysis), about the complex relation between word and image—a relation that shapes our everyday encounters with visual objects, from photo-text documents, advertisements, film, and captioned museum images to commercial spaces and cityscapes, as well as our everyday habits of collecting, displaying, and even perceiving such objects. Literary scholars have long been familiar with the need to theorize imaginative engagement, contexts of cultural production, and systems of circulation. Consequently, they contribute critical tools for thinking about how visual objects mean—or in the phrasing of the influential scholar W.J.T. Mitchell, what they “want” and demand from us, the kinds of aesthetic and social experience they shape. Literary scholars have also opened new lines of inquiry into the text itself as



Looking in the Archive, one of the many workshops presented by the Visual Culture Workshop

a visual object, expanding on rich work on the history of the book and editorial theory to rethink the nature of reading as a perceptual act. In other words, visual culture and visual culture studies are not only good for literary scholarship, opening up new lines of inquiry and new ways of thinking about reading and texts. The relationship, and the benefits, are mutual.

Here at Michigan, the possibilities of this synergy are being explored by a new interdisciplinary enterprise called the Visual Culture Workshop. Founded last year by myself and funded by the English Department, the VCW brings together faculty, graduate students, and community members interested in the study of visibility and visual cultures and in thinking about methods and resources for that work. Over the last two years, the VCW has generated an impressive array of activities: workshops dedicated to the work in progress of group members; open panel discussions focused on specific issues; informal seminars on topics of shared interest; formal lectures and presentations by visiting scholars and artists. To these activities, the work and interests of literary scholars have remained central.

Among the highlights of the VCW's events this year was a panel discussion anchored by Professors Scotti Parrish and Lucy Hartley, who drew on their research on the influence of visibility and visual images in scientific discourses in colonial American and Victorian contexts. English PhD candidates Jennifer Sorenson and Joanna Patterson presented work in progress from their dissertations, respectively exploring the role of contemporary photography in the production of Virginia Woolf's fiction and the relationship between photographic practices in Victorian England and the development of Victorian poetics. I led an informal panel discussion on visual and literary representations of race, and visiting scholar Jacqueline Goldsby, a professor of English at the University of Chicago, lectured on African American poetry and visual arts of the postwar era, arguing that the distinctive interplay in this work of visual and textual strategies evolved as an expression of commitment to America's changing social landscape.

In the coming academic year, the VCW hopes to expand its activities further, joining with such



campus partners as the Bentley Historical Library, the Department of the History of Art, and other programs to explore in greater depth our shared interest in visual objects and cultures.

A featured theme of our work will be the relationship between texts and visual images and objects. Among our planned activities are a panel discussion of visibility and religious texts, a mini-conference on images and narratives of technological innovation, and a seminar on photography and narrative during the modernist era. We hope to initiate a website, linked to that of the Department, detailing the group's events; anyone interested in them should feel free to contact the VCW (sbblair@umich.edu), attend our events, and, as they say on Bravo TV, watch what happens.

Exquisitely decorated Chinese wares often graced the shelves of a woman's library in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century and may have functioned as *material correlates* to the books arrayed beside them

BRITISH RESPONSES TO CHINESE VISUAL CULTURE

—David Porter

For the past several years, I have been intrigued by the question of how English writers and consumers responded to the remarkable influx of luxury goods and

aesthetic ideas from China in the eighteenth century. The service of tea in willow-patterned porcelains now seems to us a quintessentially English ritual. But how, exactly, were these exotic commodities transformed from curious rarities in the Restoration period to everyday goods in Jane Austen's day? And how did the alien visual sensibility evoked by imported Chinese wares interact with English literary culture along the way?

In Addison's *Spectator* essay of April 12, 1711, the narrator describes his visit to a wealthy widow's library. Prominent among Leonora's literary collections are slightly scandalous narratives by well-known women writers along with other works written for a largely female readership, including popular French romances, a midwifery guide, and women's conduct manuals. The setting of this library is to me as interesting as its content, for intermingled with the books is a rich collection of Chinese porcelains. Alongside one row of finely bound folio volumes, for example, the *Spectator* admires the "great Jars of China placed one above another in a very noble Piece of Architecture."

The essay's explicit association of imported Chinese objects with a female literary space is not altogether surprising. Twenty years earlier, Queen Mary had first inaugurated the fashion of decorating interiors with Chinese wares, filling every room in her apartments at Hampton Court with imported porcelain and lacquerware. Well-heeled women collectors followed suit, and for most of the eighteenth century, the use and display of these exotic objects would be closely associated with women's quarters in the homes of the elite.

Addison's juxtaposition of romances with Chinese imports in Leonora's library may also reflect a view of their stylistic affinity, in that both were understood to be characterized by an aesthetic of strangeness and unreality. The eighteenth-century literary historian Clara Reeve described romance, for example, as "a wild, extravagant, fabulous story," while the iconography of Chinese goods was typically described as being "fantastic," "curious," "monstrous," or "grotesque." Both Chinese visual art and French romance, in other words, served emerging ideas of naturalistic representation in England as a foil, highlighting the rationality of new literary and artistic norms by contrast with their foreign others. This alleged cultural contrast was deployed by satirists, in turn, to demarcate increasingly divided gender spheres, so that the consumption of both romance and Chinese goods came to be widely associated in the eighteenth century with female extravagance and the morally suspect indulgence of a debased foreign taste.

But recognizing the satirical elements of Addison's description does not preclude accepting the accuracy of his description. Upper-class women are known to have collected Chinese wares, and we can readily imagine

that they might have often wound up in close proximity to the treasured books we know they also purchased in large numbers. To what extent, I wonder, might each have created a resonant space for the contemplation and enjoyment of the other, leading the delights of reading and viewing to be reciprocally enhanced? John Richetti encourages us, in his study of early eighteenth-century fiction, "to discard the customary pious gestures that 'literature' exacts and to treat fiction as a cultural artifact, a set of emotional and ideological stimuli, machines for producing pleasurable fantasies." If literature functions as a cultural artifact, as a tool for the imagination, in short as a fantasy machine, might not certain visual and material artifacts also function as imaginative literature, transporting their readers through richly evoked spaces and situations that can be perceived only dimly, if at all, in the contextual world of lived experience?

Literary critics often take it upon themselves to reconstruct the particular fantasies that texts made available to readers of a given time and place. Academic devotees of the written word are considerably less adept, however, at taking a larger anthropological view of how texts and visual objects might function together in the production of cultural meanings. What if we allowed the possibility that the exquisitely decorated Chinese wares that graced the shelves of a woman's library in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century might have functioned as *material correlatives* to the books arrayed beside them? Having spent too much time in the company of Augustan wits and wags, scholars of the eighteenth century have long been accustomed to dismissing the phenomenally popular Chinese taste in the decorative arts as a mere fashionable exoticism. Examined more closely alongside the female-authored fictions, poetry, and essays that provided the immediate literary context of their consumption in England, however, the scenes depicted on the illustrated porcelains of the early Qing dynasty evoke alluring imaginative spaces that are likely, I am discovering, to have resonated in profound and unexpected ways with Leonora and her peers.

SOUL COVERS AND/AS LITERARY CRITICISM

—Michael Awkward

While doing research in the early 1990s for an essay about Michael Jackson's apparent "racechanges," I resolved to write a book about some aspect of soul music. However, my extensive research over the next half decade did not easily yield an engaging approach.

For me, songs like Percy Sledge's "When a Man Loves a Woman," Aretha Franklin's "Ain't No Way," and Solomon Burke's "I'm Hanging Up My Heart for You" are what Simon Frith speaks of as "mini-narratives," but the biographical, political, racial, and musicological emphases of an increasingly rich field of study considered such songs as virtually interchangeable manifestations of ideological or aesthetic phenomena. However important these emphases were to situating R & B historically and otherwise, they did not encourage exploration of the *stories* detailed in the songs themselves.

In 2001, on a dark road in suburban Philadelphia, I experienced a vehicular epiphany that enabled me to focus on songs as stories and, hence, to begin to write *Soul Covers*. I was playing Al Green's *Call Me* (1973), listening less closely to its golden hits than to its more unfamiliar tracks. During the fadeout of "Your Love is Like the Morning Sun," the only song on the album I'd never listened to, heard of, or read about before I purchased the CD, I heard Green whisper, "I'm tired of being alone/I'm still in love with you/Let's stay together, together." Green's evocations of earlier definitive hits made me wonder: why is he repeating these songs' titles? Do these repetitions relate to the album's covers of songs written by country stars Hank Williams and Willie Nelson? Why is the image of the morning sun also used in an earlier track? Why do both that track and the cover of Nelson's "Funny How Time Slips Away" feature an anguished man's visit to an ex-lover he knows is involved with another man? And how do these repetitions support Green's claim that *Call Me* is like a "book" which, when "you open it at the first track," yields to attentive listeners the album's "the opening theme?"

To answer these questions, I turned to scholarship on the self-fashioning of literary artists, the perils



Top: Al Green and Willie Nelson
Bottom: Aretha Franklin and her tribute album to Dinah Washington



and possibilities of intertextual repetition and revision, and the challenges of creating unified works. But, having eschewed biographical approaches in my earlier investigations of the novels of writers like Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison, I found comments about singers' lives and work invaluable. For instance, in his autobiography, *Take Me to the River*, Green suggests how covers can enable skillful artists to develop and display distinctive styles. Describing his version of "How Can You Mend a Broken Heart," he insists that, while the song "had been a major hit for the Bee Gees..., they might just as well have given it right over

to me and saved themselves the trouble.... I *owned* that song from the opening refrain.... The Gibb boys had written a masterpiece..., and it was up to me to make it immortal." Covering this song helped Green to crystallize the image of the vulnerable male sufferer which became his essential artistic persona during his most successful period.

Green's emphasis on assuming ownership over another artist's composition is echoed in Otis Redding's much-cited bemused reaction in 1967 to hearing Aretha Franklin's version of a hit song he had composed, "Respect": "I just lost my song.... That girl took it away from me." Using this notion of artistic theft in the context not of her reign as the Queen of Soul that began with this cover, but of Franklin's initially unsuccessful efforts to actualize the previous Queen's prophetic vision of her as "the next one," I examine her underappreciated 1964 recording, *Unforgettable: A Tribute to Dinah Washington*. This album, on which Franklin covers songs associated with the recently deceased "Queen of the Blues," represents her efforts to assume a just-vacated cultural throne. Resolving to discover the range of her own prodigious gifts by approaching songs associated with Washington "in the way they felt best, whether [the results] happened to be similar [to] or different" from the older singer's recordings, Franklin's most successful covers refashion songs associated with Washington, allowing her to demonstrate that she was indeed prepared to replace her idol as the most luminous female singer in the black popular musical tradition.

Unlike Franklin and Green, Phoebe Snow insists that remaking familiar songs caused her a great deal of anxiety. Often mistaken for black because of her curly hair, olive complexion, and mastery of black vocal styles, she acknowledges that anxieties about race prevented her from recording a funk album she had envisioned that was inspired by her admiration of figures such as Franklin, Sly Stone, and James Brown. Her representation of herself as a performer moving, sometimes uncomfortably, between folk, pop, and soul music helped to shape my considerations of her covers on her 1976 album, *Second Childhood*, of three songs, originally recorded by and/or associated with blacks, whose status as "black music" has frequently been called into question. Specifically, I compare Snow's remakes to original versions of "boundary songs": Billie Holiday's re-imagining of a Tin Pan Alley composition, "No Regrets"; "There's a Boat Dat's Leavin' Soon for New York," from George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*; and "Going Down for the Third Time" by the Supremes, Motown's crossover darlings.

Ultimately, *Soul Covers* demonstrates that when talented singers perform familiar songs, their

performances can alter not just the songs' sounds but the attitudes of the songs' personae and, hence, their overall meanings. Most music scholars, however, have long held that when literary critics investigate popular music, they produce what Brian Longhurst calls a "crude form of analysis." Fairly or not, my own efforts have been met with such criticisms. But by recognizing that pop songs are, as Frith reminds us, "stories" or "implied narratives" that feature "a central character... with an attitude, in a situation, talking to someone," I have attempted to look at how, when artists perform familiar songs, their performances can alter, not just the songs' sounds, but the attitudes of their central characters, and, hence, their overall meanings. Soul covers, then, can be seen as an interesting example of the phenomenon of artistic self-fashioning that has long fascinated scholars of literature.

AESTHETICS, BEAUTY, AND VALUE

—Lucy Hartley

One of the many problems we encounter when talking about literature and the arts is that the language used to describe poems, novels, plays, music, and paintings is all too often specialized and unfamiliar. Whether we are in a museum, theatre, music venue, or university, or are reading a book or magazine in the privacy of our own home, interpretations of the arts tend to be littered with technical terms and obscure phrases. Our critical language often seems designed to express authority and expertise, but it does not always do the job of conveying what we can learn from a particular work of art or why it might be significant. Part of the reason rests on the assumption that there is an elite audience for the arts, an audience made up of what we might call custodians of culture who have privileged knowledge about the aesthetic realm of human experience. Yet we can all recall a moment when, for instance, we looked at a painting, ate some food, heard a piece of music or song, picked a flower, saw someone, glimpsed something, and felt incredibly moved by the experience. Any number of words might be used to express our delight in the moment and the feeling it involved, but the most common term is probably "beautiful." We might not readily acknowledge that to talk of beauty and the beautiful is to make an aesthetic judgment but the emergence of a specialist language for discussing literature and the arts is directly linked to aesthetics.

The term "aesthetic" was first used in a Latin form as the title of a two volume book, *Aesthetica* (1750, 1758) by the German philosopher Alexander

Baumgarten (1714-1862). The book was never finished, nor was it translated, and so its circulation was relatively limited in the eighteenth century. However, this work, along with Baumgarten's earlier *Reflections on Poetry* (1735), sketched out the beginnings of a theory of aesthetics that became immensely important in the nineteenth century and remains influential today, with especial relevance for those of us who work in the arts and humanities. Derived from the Greek, "aisthesis," meaning sense perception, the word Baumgarten coined for his new version was an attempt to find a more precise language for explaining the sense activity of individual subjects as well as the specialized human creativity of art. Aesthetics, he claimed, is "the science of sensory cognition." It is, in other words, the study of how we use our senses to apprehend the world and so puts a strong emphasis on material things that we grasp via sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell as distinct from immaterial things that we might think about in our minds. So we could say that aesthetics speaks about the experience of our sensory lives and offers us a way of interpreting the world as individual subjects. But aesthetics does something else as well, for it holds up beauty as the perfection of physical form. Thus, it seems to work on two levels of enquiry: the subjective experience of beauty and the objective form in which the beautiful is presented.

What is so significant about Baumgarten's new meaning of aesthetic is that it gives prominence to the first of these, focusing attention on subjective sensory experience and so making beauty relative to the individual. More than a hundred years later, Walter Pater explained in *The Renaissance* (1873) that the appeal of aesthetic criticism lay in defining beauty not as a universal quality or an abstract formula but a subjective impression: "what is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book to *me*?" This relativism goes a long way to explain how aesthetics became separated from social and cultural interpretations. By isolating beauty from the concerns of the world, aesthetic critics like Pater (and many subsequent ones) laid claim to the autonomy and uniqueness of subjective experience. To talk of art and beauty is to deal in the particular and derive pleasure from the immediate effect of the beautiful; beauty does not have to possess a stable and unchanging value but it must be exclusive. Not surprisingly, then, the emergence of aesthetics had the net result of making discussions of literature and the arts more rather than less specialized.

My own work, both teaching and research, tries to resist using specialized and unfamiliar language to explain ideas about the purpose and value of literature

and the arts. We ought to be able to convey the complexity of concepts such as beauty, goodness, and truth, for example, in such a way as to enquire into their meaning and significance while also interrogating the assumptions they contain. In this vein, my current book project, *The Democracy of the Beautiful, from Ruskin to Pater*, asks the following questions: What is beauty? Can we rationalize the experience of beauty? Does beauty give value to the social world? The book focuses on the industrial landscape of nineteenth-century Britain, tracing arguments for and against the value of beauty at a time and in a place when it became cultural capital in a market society. Specifically, I claim that a new way of speaking about beauty was articulated in the middle third of the century, which was distinct from traditional philosophical understandings of the aesthetic and, instead, identified as a translation of established and

To ask about beauty and its value requires us to contemplate our freedoms and responsibilities as interested citizens—and the social, political, and ethical challenges of doing so are as pressing today as in a previous (and no less fraught) historical formation.

emerging modes of political representation. Beauty, according to this theory, was instrumental: it provided a source of *practical* knowledge about human life and so could be established as a means of social improvement and redemption. Once learned, this language of beauty would democratize art by removing its association with an elite and privileged audience and emphasize instead its capacity to forge social relations via a process of imagining common interests and affiliations. This was a beauty for the people, to be seen and felt by all classes.

We live in challenging times, and the current economic and political climate makes it difficult to ask people to think about literature and the arts except, perhaps, as an escape from the pressures of the world. Thus, I hope my book will be able to articulate the reasons why beauty should matter in renewing our understanding of democracy, and why so often it fails to do so. For it seems to me that to ask about beauty and its value requires us to contemplate our freedoms and responsibilities as interested citizens—and the social, political, and ethical challenges of doing so are as pressing today as in a previous (and no less fraught) historical formation. ■



Civitas Fellowships:

The InsideOut Literary Arts Program of Detroit

—Keith Taylor

Four or five years ago a combination of interests led different parts of the University to create what came to be known as the Civitas Fellowships for Master of Fine Arts Students. An earlier grant from the Ford Foundation had allowed Professor Nicholas Delbanco, former Director of the MFA program, to work with Dr. Terry Blackhawk, Executive Director of the InsideOut Literary Arts Program of Detroit, to bring writers associated with the Department of English and their books into the Detroit Public schools. When that grant ran out, Professor Delbanco cast about the University, searching for funds that could help us continue what had now become a long relationship with Dr. Blackhawk and InsideOut. Former Provost Paul Courant agreed to fund a three year pilot program through the first incarnation of the Arts of Citizenship Program that would allow us to send graduate students into Detroit to work in the public schools there. Since these people knew of my interest and concern for Dr. Blackhawk's work, I was asked to describe, begin and administer what we came to call the Civitas Fellowships in Creative Writing. When the Arts of Citizenship Program had a temporary hiatus, the administration of the project was moved to the English Department.

Terry Blackhawk had been a teacher in the Detroit Public Schools for many years, and had even been named Michigan Creative Writing Teacher of the Year

for 1990. She had worked for most of 20 years to open and keep connections to the University of Michigan and to the writers in Ann Arbor, gently prodding several of us to come over to Detroit and to be a part of that literary community. In 1995 she found funding and support to begin the InsideOut Literary Arts Project, a not-for-profit educational outreach program "... to place professional poets and fiction writers in Detroit schools to encourage young people's imaginative writing and promote self-confidence and awareness through publicizing and celebrating their work." By 2005 she and her staff were working in more than 20 schools in the Detroit Public Schools system, and her writers were working with more than 2400 K – 12 students. She worked constantly to find the funds to maintain her program and even to allow it to grow. She was very eager to involve our graduate students.

We were able to fund four graduate students to work in the schools or for the InsideOut office. These students went over to the city one day a week and worked in a particular class for the academic year. Often the classes were very large and had teachers of record assigned only temporarily to them. In some cases, our graduate students became the representatives of continuity in their classrooms. The work was tiring and certainly not for every graduate student, but several of them have had exceptional experiences. Sara DiMaggio, a poet who had a Civitas Fellowship during her first year in our MFA program, was actually hired by InsideOut during her second year. Ms. DiMaggio says that she found the time in Detroit "such a refreshing change from work here in Ann Arbor. I feel as if I travel back into the world when I go to Detroit, where a large group of kids give me big hugs every week. We are all so genuinely concerned about each other."

After watching the first three years of the program, Dr. Blackhawk says, "The Civitas Fellows bring their creative skills and their love for children and the written work into InsideOut's classrooms. They have been passionate, inventive, and determined in their efforts to reach students, and we have received nothing but top-notch evaluations from their classroom teachers. All of us at InsideOut are deeply grateful for the vision and support of the Civitas program. These fellows are making a real difference in the lives of hundreds of Detroit children." The Provost's original commitment to the pilot project is over now, but Eileen Pollack, current Director of our MFA Program in Creative Writing, assisted by the generosity of Roger and Martha Pascal, has found a way to fund the Civitas Fellows for another year. She and I hope to continue to find ways to contribute to the creative efforts in the Detroit schools for years to come.

NOTEWORTHY TEACHERS

The 2nd annual **Ben Prize** was awarded to Louis Cicciarelli and Peggy Adler. The Ben Prize was established in 2007 in honor of Laurence Kirshbaum and was made possible through the generosity of Bradley Meltzer and a group of donors to promote the teaching of good writing. The award was named after Mr. Kirshbaum's grandson.

Two exceptional lecturers are chosen each year for their work with students to improve writing skills. This award includes a monetary stipend. The nominations for this award come from students. Kirshbaum was once again on hand earlier this year to present certificates to Cicciarelli (pictured below) and Adler, recognizing their achievement.

The four recipients of this year's **David and Linda Moscow Prize for Excellence in Teaching Composition** were Kelly Sassi, Staci Shultz, Mary-Catherine Harrison, and Alex Beringer.

The committee had to make difficult decisions from a field of highly qualified and talented instructors in the English Department Writing Program. The four instructors who were selected this year are remarkable for the energy, passion, insight, pedagogical skill and creativity, and commitment they bring to the teaching of writing. Please join us in congratulating these accomplished instructors and celebrating their achievements.

EVENTS

The Department hosted three major events this past year. The first was the 7th **Annual Introduction to Book Publishing Workshop**. This weekend workshop helped undergraduate and graduate students interested in book publishing gain an understanding of the many facets of the trade and the wide range of career and job possibilities. The workshop featured a number of visiting experts, including many U-M alumni, currently working in publishing in New York City, Illinois, and Michigan.

Also hosted by the Department, the 2nd **Annual Sarah Marwil Lamstein Children's Literature Lecture** brought Daniel Handler to campus. Daniel Handler is the author of the novels *The Basic Eight*, *Watch Your Mouth* and *Adverbs*, and serves as the legal, literary and social representative of Lemony Snicket, whose books for children, known collectively as *A Series Of Unfortunate Events*, have allegedly sold more than 56 million copies in 39 languages and are indirectly responsible for at least one major motion picture.

Finally, a conference in honor of Martha Vicinus's upcoming retirement took place in April. To celebrate her career at Michigan the conference, entitled "**The Future of Victorian Studies**," brought together a good number of her former colleagues and students for two days of panel discussions.

DANIEL HANDLER

The 2nd Marwil Children's Literature Lecturer, Daniel Handler, at Rackham Auditorium. This entire lecture, and much more, is available for download at: www.lsa.umich.edu/english/media



MARTHA VICINUS

THE MOSCOW PRIZE

L-R Staci Shultz, Kelly Sassi, Alex Beringer, and Mary-Catherine Harrison

THE BEN PRIZE

L-R Louis Cicciarelli and Laurence Kirshbaum



Undergraduate Honors Theses

Every year, our senior Honors students write an original, scholarly thesis as the culminating experience of the English Honors Program. They typically begin working on it as junior year draws to a close: they choose a field of inquiry, find an advisor, and create a summer reading list of primary texts. During the summer, they may read considerably beyond their own topic as they make themselves into apprentice-experts in their fields. One student this year read Homer, Virgil, and Dante to prepare himself to write on the theme of marriage in Milton's *Paradise Lost*; another read through decades of *National Geographic* before narrowing her topic to the magazine's coverage of Armenia and Cuba. They return in September with a specific topic—or, a burning question—which they'll seek to answer as they push their analyses forward. Next comes immersion into a critical conversation around the author, primary text, or discursive pattern he or she is studying. Sometimes, if the student is writing on a canonical author, criticism is easy to find—in fact, the challenge for this student is to continue believing that something *remains* to be said about Joyce or Hawthorne or

Shakespeare! If the student wants to write on contemporary texts or on a less “literary” topic—on the representation of race in stand-up comedy, for example—she has to draw together a critical conversation from across the fields which her topic traverses. Then comes the task of figuring out how to answer one's question in cogent writing, all the while adding to the critical conversation. Sometime during the writing process—often alarmingly late—a major light bulb moment occurs: after perhaps fifty pages of descriptive writing, the student finally figures out what he or she is arguing! Now, with the unifying argument in hand, as well as the perspective of the inevitable reader in mind, the student heartily revises his chapters. When they hand in those bound copies in mid-March, Honors students not only know a great deal about their topic, but they know about their own capacity for independent work, for joining a scholarly conversation, and for perseverance. Here are four of this year's thesis projects.

—Susan Parrish, Director, English Honors Program



01 “Dismantling and Discovery: Narratives of Trauma and the Cubist Idiom in Hemingway’s Works of the 1920s” —Michael Diamond

My thesis represents the culmination of my undergraduate course work on twentieth-century literary modernism and, more specifically, literature that engages the topic of modern war and modern memory. It treats Hemingway's consideration of soldiers and citizens in the pre-, inter-, and post-World War I periods in *In Our Time*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *A Farewell to Arms*, respectively, focusing on how Hemingway uses the visual dialectic of cubist practice to theorize trauma for his characters. I argue that cubism and trauma theory (parallel visions of radical disintegration and desired synthesis) afford an ideal vantage point for interpreting Hemingway's representations of war and its traumatic aftermaths in the minds and bodies of those exposed to its horrors. By countering traditional narrative structures and conventions of character development, Hemingway formally and theoretically enacts what I refer to as *literary cubism* on the surface structures and in the interior stylistics of his works. Ultimately I attempt to prove that he crafts a dialectic that illuminates and confounds the experience of working through trauma at many levels, from individual spoken or silent words to the constructions of characters, personas, and plots.

02 **"Reading Indian-American Women: Writers, Protagonists, and Critics"**

—Manisha Chakravarthi

Indian-American women writers are currently experiencing an unprecedented popularity in the American literary mainstream, and two of the most important are Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri. Yet, even as readers embrace these writers' stories, there is a gap in critical analysis; for the most part, critics' responses are limited to an examination of the portrayal of Indian culture within them, while the equally important themes of gender, assimilation and American culture are largely ignored. I designed this project to point out the limitations and problematic nature of existing criticism on these writers, and to offer a more comprehensive analysis of two particular works—Divakaruni's "Clothes" and Lahiri's *The Namesake*—that focuses on the development of each story's protagonist. I reject the reductive sociological reading employed by many previous critics, which evaluates this type of writing only in terms of perceived cultural "authenticity," and instead approach the stories as culturally-informed works of *art*.

03 **"Dialogues with the Past: Post-Truth Commission Literature in Argentina and South Africa"**

—Franco Muzzio

"We had a horrendous past," recalls South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1999. "We needed to look the beast in the eye." From 1996 to 1998, Tutu served as the chairman of South Africa's national investigative committee on apartheid's atrocities, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Many human rights activists have argued that only an active engagement with the past can heal wounds as deep as those suffered in places like South Africa, Argentina, and Cambodia. "Remembering is not easy, but forgetting may be impossible," explains truth commission scholar Priscilla Hayner. My thesis explores what happened after Argentina and South Africa underwent this process. My investigative focus was two books that deal with perpetrator testimony: Horacio Verbitsky's *Confessions of an Argentine Dirty Warrior* (1995) and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died That Night* (2003). Through these, I explored how the articulation of a democratic dialogue—between former military assassins and their victims—allows for a new kind of dialogical truth, one perhaps more compelling than that previously presented in the monological reports of each country's truth commission.

04 **"The Trouble with Paradise: Exploring Communities of Difference in Three American Novels"**

—Blair Nosan

When I embarked on my project last fall, I knew only that I wanted to explore why three very different contemporary American writers had each chosen to interrogate the seemingly benevolent notion of paradise. Their novels were about minority communities, feelings of exclusion, and "Otherness," and they presented the reader with constructed insular paradises that were inherently flawed. By exploring Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, Eileen Pollack's *Paradise, New York*, and Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, I strove to understand how and why their authors had chosen to redefine paradise. What I ultimately found was a motif of the tensions between unity and difference. As Toni Morrison stated in an interview about *Paradise*, her novel was her "interrogation of the whole idea of paradise ... the place full of bounty, where no one can harm you. But, in addition to that ... all utopias are designed by who is not there, by the people who are not allowed in." By exploring the impulse towards an exclusive paradise, these novels challenge the necessity of borders and boundaries. They look deep into the questions of identity and difference, so prevalent in contemporary America.



RALPH WILLIAMS - 2008 English Commencement Address

ENGLISH AND ITUNES U

The English Department has joined the University's initiative to provide world-wide access to the wealth of multimedia content produced by our faculty, students, and distinguished visitors. All content is free for download and/or use with iTunes and offers a broad range of material: from reading samples to lectures and presentations (such as the 2008 English Commencement Address by Ralph Williams). Take a look:

www.lsa.umich.edu/english/media

WHY MAJOR IN ENGLISH?

One of the questions asked most often by undergraduate students either pursuing a degree in English or considering doing so is, "What can I do with a Bachelor of Arts in English?" We know the career possibilities for English concentrators are as numerous as they are varied; therefore, we are currently working on creating a section of our website to address this question by way of example. Through offering a number of profiles of our alumni—working in a range of fields and at various stages of career development—we hope to show the value a degree in English has in achieving rewarding and successful careers. If you are interested in contributing your story or wish to see what we have collected to date, please see:

www.lsa.umich.edu/english/careers

English Needs Your Support



We are so grateful for the generosity of our alumni and friends, especially in these uncertain economic times. Over the past year, you have donated more than \$25,000 to our Strategic and Gift Funds to help support graduate students, enhance the undergraduate classroom, recruit and retain our excellent scholars and teachers, and respond to opportunities as well as budget constraints. You have been enormously generous in supporting our off-campus programs: the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) has received \$27,000 in donations; the Bear River Writers' Conference received more than \$29,000 in gifts; and our New England Literature Program (NELP) endowment to permanently fund the directorship is now complete and will ensure the future of this great program.

Many of you have already responded to President Mary Sue Coleman's Donor Challenge for graduate student aid, which will end in December. These funds equip us to compete with top universities around the world for the best graduate students and the next generation of scholars and leaders. For every two dollars donated, the University contributes one dollar. The University match is placed into an endowment, so that your giving can generate valuable graduate student aid into the future. You may designate your gift either as endowed or expendable; undesignated gifts are considered expendable under University guidelines. If your gift is designated for endowment, distributions from the Fund shall be made in accordance with the University's then-existing endowment distribution policy. If the University's endowment minimum is not met, all gifts will be used on an expendable basis for graduate student support. The Challenge continues until donors commit \$40 million to graduate support, triggering \$20 million in matching funds, or until December 31, 2008, whichever comes first. If you are interested in giving towards graduate student aid with matching funds from the University, your gift must be received by December 31, 2008. Please see the enclosed envelope.

No gift to the Department is too small, and each one contributes to maintaining the standard of excellence that is the Michigan Difference. We thank you all.

Thinking about giving?

Your support is always greatly appreciated.

☒ Please see the postage paid envelope inside.

If you would like to speak to someone directly, please feel free to contact the Chair of the Department or the staff of LSA Development who would be happy to discuss your giving options. The liaison officer for English in LSA Development is Peggy Burns. Peggy's contact information is as follows:

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