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A Journal of the Plague Year

Daniel Defoe subtitled his famous novel “observations and memorials of the most remarkable occurrences,” and I think we all can relate: 2020 has indeed been a year of remarkable occurrences, and the fall semester has only just begun. In the midst of it all, our department continues with its work, of teaching and learning, reading and writing, collaborating and concentrating on meeting the many challenges this year has already presented. So, I want to begin my first issue of *Reading Matters* as DEO to express my deep gratitude to all of you—faculty, staff and students—for your dedication and devotion to our department.

Some of this year’s remarkable occurrences have been auspicious. First and foremost, we are fortunate to be able to welcome four new permanent faculty members: **Tara Bynum, Melissa Febos, David Gooblar, and Donika Kelly**; four Provost’s Visiting Writers: **Darius Stewart** (Nonfiction), **Micky Hill** (Poetry), **Matthew Kelley** (Fiction), and **Caroline Froh** (Translation); three new or returning Visiting Assistant Professors: **Matthew Blackwell, Nellene Benhardus, and Brittany Means**; and three new or returning Adjunct Professors: **Thomas Keegan, Andre Perry, and Bryn Lovitt**. And, finally, it is truly a pleasure to welcome **Gigi Durham** to the department as our new Director of the Nonfiction Writing Program.

Professor Durham arrives at a moment of reckoning for our department in terms of racial justice and diversity, and I am grateful for the honor of working with her and Melissa Febos on an application to the [CLAS Dean’s Office for a DEI Strategic Initiative Grant](#) to bring poet [Ama Codjoe](#) to campus next year to conduct a series of workshops for our department, along with the Writers’ Workshop and the MFA in Spanish Creative Writing, specifically addressing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion challenges in creative writing pedagogy. We will find out if it is accepted in mid-November. This application is only one part of our Racial Justice Action Plan, which has become the ongoing agenda for our department’s new permanent committee on Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access, and Social Justice (IDEAS), our first committee to include both graduate and undergraduate students. I want to thank **Marie Kruger, Melissa Febos, David Gooblar, Elizabeth Rodriguez Fielder, Rajorshi Das, Gyasi Hall, Shalini Jasti, and Cassandra Qi Qi Chia** for volunteering to serve on this crucial committee. They will be meeting with Dean Sara Sanders soon as part of her semester-long engagement with our department. And they will be reporting back to us as a group at our meeting on October 19. I look forward to receiving their guidance as we work together to make our department’s professional and pedagogical practices more equitable, accessible, inclusive and resolutely anti-racist.

I realize life these days feels like we're all stuck in the opening sequence of *The Brady Bunch* or an interminable episode of *Hollywood Squares*, but between my bouts of Zoom-fatigue I have also felt lucky to have the opportunity to engage with all of you on this ersatz face-to-face platform. Thanks to everyone who attended our departmental happy hour and fall party. I will continue to schedule such events, which I've found fun and socially stimulating. And I want to thank all of you for being so innovative and creative in managing multiple teaching modalities and finding imaginative ways to engage and support your students during these challenging times. It looks like we'll all be able to choose our modalities in spring and so, as Slavoj Zizek might say: Enjoy Your Modality!
Next Year in EPB!

Faculty Matters

Congratulations to **Blaine Greteman**, who received a book subvention for the publication of *Networking Print in Shakespeare's England* (forthcoming, Stanford University Press).

Congratulations to **Jen Buckley**, who received the [Association for Theatre in Higher Education's Outstanding Book Award](#) for her book, *Beyond Text: Theater and Performance in Print after 1900* (University of Michigan Press, 2019)

Congratulations to **Tara Bynum**, who was selected by the Obermann Center and the Office of the Vice President for Research for a Book Ends award for her project, *Reading Pleasures*.

Congratulations to **Corey Creekmur**, who was elected Second Vice President of The Comics Studies Society; he will become First Vice President next year, and President after that. This is the first U.S. professional society for comics studies scholars, of which Corey was a founding member.

Congratulations to **Ed Folsom**, who was awarded a grant from the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) to support an ongoing collaboration with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to develop a collection of Walt Whitman's correspondences between 1888 and 1892.

Harry Stecopoulos delivered a lecture entitled "Telling America's Story to the World: Postwar Literature and Cultural Diplomacy" at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign last March. An expanded version of this talk will appear in *American Literary History*. His interview with David Hamilton, emeritus professor of English, was published in the [Los Angeles Review of Books](#) this past May.

Jon Wilcox's article, "Humour and the Exeter Book Riddles: Incongruity in *Feþegeorn* (R.31)" was published this summer in [Riddles at Work in the Early](#)

Medieval Tradition: Words, Ideas, Interactions, ed. Megan Cavell and Jennifer Neville (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp.128-45.

Grad Matters

Alexander Ashland defended his dissertation, *The Documentary Turn: U.S. Literature in the Age of Compromise, 1850-1877*. His essay, "Documenting Novel Sources in Antebellum U.S. Literature," appeared in the Fall 2020 issue of the *South Atlantic Review*.

Rajorshi Das' poem, "Looking" was published in Aditi Angiras and Akhil Katyal's *The World That Belongs To Us: An Anthology of Queer Poetry from South Asia* (2020).

Darius Stewart has new essays appearing or forthcoming in *Salamander*, *Gertrude*, *Gargoyle Magazine*, *Fourth Genre*, *Barren Magazine*, and *Aquifer: The Florida Review Online*, and new poems forthcoming in *Cimarron Review*.

Staff Matters

Corey Campbell has a short story forthcoming in the Spring 2021 issue of *Story Magazine*.

Congratulations to **Barb Pooley** for receiving a 2020 University of Iowa Outstanding Staff Award from UI Staff Council.

Alumni Matters

Anne Flammang (English PhD) is writing a memoir of her time as a coach for the women's crew team at the Coast Guard Academy, and has published an excerpt: https://issuu.com/centeredwriters/docs/centered_magazine_for_kara_and_mich.

Kathleen Renk's (English PhD 1995) third scholarly book, *Women Writing the Neo-Victorian Novel: Erotic "Victorians,"* was recently published by Palgrave Macmillan. In November, Cuidono Press is publishing her first novel, *Vindicated: A Novel of Mary Shelley*.

Sarah (Ray) Schwarcz's (English BA 1963) memoir, *Pearls and Knots, Dancing on a String from the Mississippi to Lake Michigan*, was recently published by Hyphen8 Publishing Co. Schwarcz says, "The memoir traces my life from Dubuque to Chicago in prose and poetry, putting my English degree from the University to good use!" She is also working on a Middle Grade Magical Realism book to be released later this year.

Congratulations to **Jerald Walker** (English BA 1993), whose new book, *How to Make a Slave and Other Essays* (November 2020), was [long-listed for the 2020 National Book Award](#).

Emeritus Matters

Congratulations to Professor Emerita **Mary Lou Emery** on the publication of her book *Bungalow Modernity: A Study of Twentieth Century Fictions of Home* (McFarland, 2020).

In Memoriam

The English Department is saddened to learn recently of the passing of **Kevin Floyd** (PhD 1998).

Upcoming Matters

English Dept. Colloquium: Adam Hooks, "How to Make a (Shakespeare) Poem; or, Filling in the Blanks" - September 30, 2020 | 3:30-4:30 pm | Zoom

English @ Work alumni talk: TBA - October 7, 2020 | 11:30 am-12:15 pm | Zoom

Faculty Meeting - October 19, 2020 | 10:30 am-12:00 pm | Zoom