

Volume 26, Issue 3

A Journal of the Plague Year Volume III

In 1915 Jack London published a short novel entitled *The Scarlet Plague*, based loosely on Edgar Allen Poe's famous short story, "The Masque of Red Death." The symptoms of the disease—profuse bleeding from the body and face followed by a rapid death—are almost identical. There is even an episode highly reminiscent of Poe's story, in which a small group of people barricade themselves in a large building. But in London's novel the survivors are professors and administrators—along with their families and servants—at the University of California, Berkeley, and they have taken refuge in the Chemistry Building. As in Poe, their efforts are in vain. In London's story, however, one man survives to tell the story of the plague: he is a professor of English literature, sitting around a campfire surrounded by feral youth, explaining how, in the past

we taught young men and women how to think. There was very much to teach. The young men and women we taught were called students. We had large rooms in which we taught. I talked to them, forty or fifty at a time, just as I am talking to you now. I told them about the books other men had written before their time, and even, sometimes, in their time.

"I talked all the time, and for this food was given me," the Professor concludes, to the astonishment of his young listeners.

There are days when I fear becoming that lonely professor, trapped in the abandoned offices of our departmental suite on the third floor of EPB, watching helplessly as the world crumbles around him. And then I remember that you're all still out there; we're still living our lives and doing our jobs, still teaching young men and women how to think, still achieving things that merit mention in *Reading Matters*. Let's keep it that way. So, if you haven't already, get out there and VOTE! And, if you've already voted, help Iowans Get Out the VOTE. Then we can continue to tell our story together in the months and years to come.

Faculty Matters

Jen Buckley was the invited plenary session speaker for the Association for Theatre in Higher Education's CA/Southwest Publication Development Forum on Oct 1.

Tara Bynum and **Phil Round** were panelists for an Oct 20 roundtable discussion on "Race and the Boundaries of the Book: Seven Early American Perspectives" at the Rare Book School at the University of Virginia. As part of the conference and in preparation for their discussion, they pre-recorded videos, which can be viewed [here](#) and [here](#).

Melissa Febos, **Louisa Hall**, and **Andre Perry** read from their work at a special NWP Faculty Reading on Oct 23 through Prairie Lights Books Virtual as part of the Krause Series in Contemporary Nonfiction.

Loren Glass' editorial, "[Trump order on 'race and sex stereotyping' disingenuously misrepresents history](#)," was published in the Des Moines Register on Oct 19.

Donika Kelly recently had the poem "I Never Figured Out How To Get Free" appear in the anthology *The Best American Poetry 2020* chosen by guest editor Paisley Rekdal. The poem "The moon rose over the bay. I had a lot of feelings" was published in the Library of America anthology *African American Poetry: 250 Years of Struggle and Song*, edited by Kevin Young. And on Oct 26, she appeared as a featured reader at the Asian American Writers' Workshop's reading series, *Mouth to Mouth*.

Kathy Lavezzo's essay, "Antisemitism and Female Power in the Medieval City," was the [article of the month](#) for the *Feminae: Medieval Women and Gender Index*. Congratulations to **Phil Round**, who was awarded the Richard Beale Davis essay prize in June 2020 for his essay in *Early American Literature* entitled, "Mississippian Context for Early American Studies."

Grad Matters

Congratulations to **Caroline Cheung**, who was chosen for Imagining America's [2020-2021 Publicly Active Graduate Education Fellows Program](#).

Matt Helm published [Food Traditions: A Tour of Food Heritage in the Iowa Valley Scenic Byway Corridor](#) as a part of his Humanities for the Public Good internship

with Iowa Valley Resource Conservation & Development. Matt also presented his paper "'Oh, hilloo, darling!': Telephonic Representation in Christopher

Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*" at the [Crossed Lines: Telepoetics](#)

[Conference](#) through Nottingham Trent University, and his work on Isherwood will feature as a part of their online exhibition. Additionally, his essay "Discerning Love, Recuperating Hope: The 'Search for God' in Carson McCullers' *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*" is forthcoming in Notre Dame's *Journal of Religion & Literature*.

Congratulations to **Maddison McGann**, who was awarded the UI Graduate College Post-Comprehensive Research Fellowship

E Mariah Spencer has had an article accepted for publication in the journal, *History of Education Quarterly* titled "A Duchess 'Given to Contemplation': The Education of Margaret Cavendish." Look for it in print in *HEQ*, volume 61, issue 2 (May 2021). E has also just finished co-organizing and conducting a successful

series of webinars for the International Margaret Cavendish Society (IMCS) titled *The Online Olios*, with panels on early modern insects, fancy and imagination, as well as education and accessibility. Recordings of the three-part series will be published to the *Digital Cavendish* and *IMCS* websites later this year.

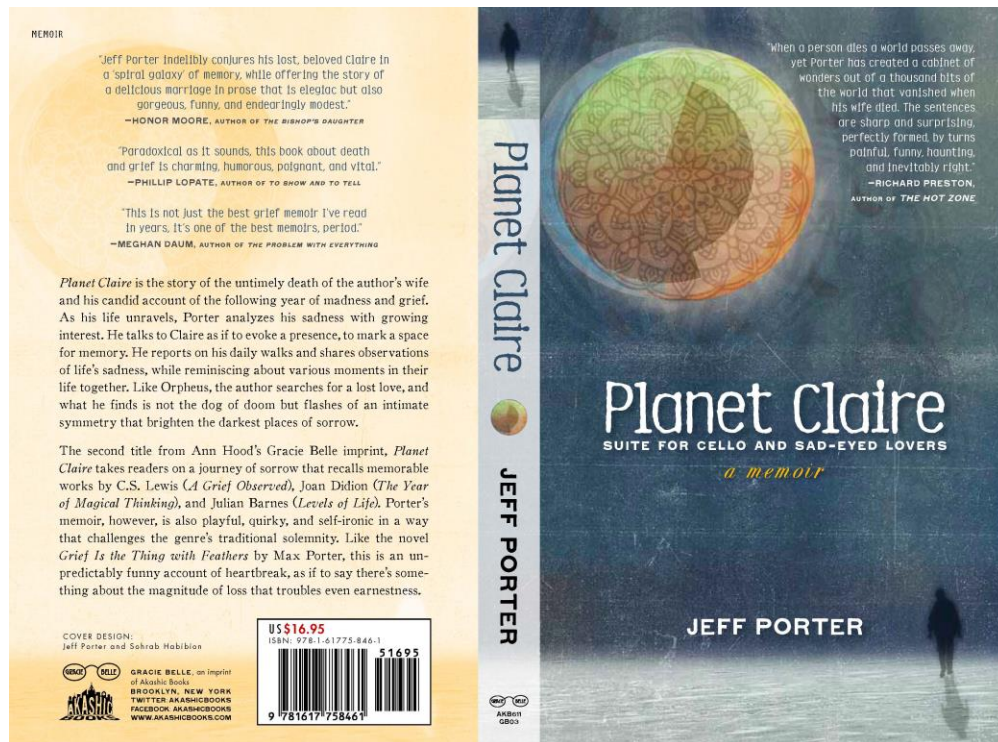
Alumni Matters

Congratulations to **Jacob Bender** (English PhD, 2017) on the publication of his book *Modern Death in Irish and Latin American Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

Congratulations to **John Hansen**, (English BA, 2007), who was selected as Educator of the Year for the 42nd Annual Andy Devine Awards presented by the Kingman Area Chamber of Commerce. John went on to receive an MA in English Literature from Oklahoma State University and his work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Summerset Review*, *The Pluralist*, *Philological Review*, *The Griot: The Journal of African American Studies*, *PopMatters*, *Aethlon: The Journal of Sport Literature*, and *Philosophy Pathways*. He is English Faculty at Mohave Community College in Arizona.

Emeritus Matters

Jeff Porter's new memoir, *Planet Claire: Suite for Cello and Sad-eyed Lovers*, will be published in two months and a virtual reading and interview (by the writer Ann Hood) is scheduled for December 10 at 7:00, hosted by Prairie Lights.



GEL Matters

I'm writing this spooky Halloween update deep from the depths of GE-HELL!!! Actually, and against all odds, this semester is going great, with TAs continuing to do heroic and creative work in our new teaching modalities. That's largely due to the wonderful work of two sets of people who have been observing classes and writing reports full of glowing praise and amazing advice. The first group are our Program Associates, Maria Capecchi, Kassie Baron, Ruben Cota Jr., Jonathan Gleason, Kirsten Johnson, and Mariah Spencer. The second group are our faculty advisors. Will Rhodes, Doris Witt, Tara Bynum, Laura Rigal, Florence Boos, and Lori Branch.

Blaine Greteman, GEL Director

ATI Matters

The robust leadership of Alpha Tau Iota (ATI), the University of Iowa chapter of Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society, has been quite active this fall, hosting a lively induction for fifteen new members on October 13th, followed by a convivial viewing of poet Jessica Care Moore in conversation with Professor Lakesia

Johnson, hosted by Prairie Lights (both events on Zoom). ATI and faculty welcomed April Bannister, Alexis Barrett, Axel Ohrvall, Grace Culbertson, Kali Postin, Kaya Schafer, Margaret Dalton, Mia Ugalde, Miah Clark, Tobias Graus, Sarah Moss, Alicia Edmundson, Stella Tarlin, Ella Michael, and Kate Struckman-Johnson. Successfully navigating the challenges of virtual gatherings, officers Shalini Jasti, Megan Lilly, Cassidy Pekarek, and Rachel Poppen enhanced a feeling of camaraderie by providing personal introductions for each inductee and creating a GroupMe chat during the reading.

Other bi-monthly meetings have offered opportunities for all English and English and Creative Writing majors, most recently a panel offering cogent advice to undergraduates interested in attending graduate school and/or planning for future careers. Hosted by ATI and held in conjunction with the English Society, the panel featured Professor Stephen Voyce, a peer advisor from the Pomerantz Career Center, and a host of accomplished graduates from our own department. Like other student-organized gatherings, this event reflects our undergraduates' marvelous dedication and spirit of fellowship.

Anne Stapleton, ATI Advisor

AAU Matters

English is one of four departments participating in the [AAU PhD Initiative](#). Based on information gathered from faculty, current grads and alums last year, the AAU team in English is pursuing two initiatives.

The first initiative is focused on pedagogy and has been led by Jen Buckley along with subcommittee members Bonnie Sunstein, Brooks Landon and Maria Capecchi. This initiative centers on pedagogy, and is working on developing a pedagogic dissertation track in our program. The group has identified a selection of courses, some of which are offered through the [COE's Graduate Certificate in College Teaching](#). As Jen puts it, "the E-portfolio that program requires could serve as one model for the kind of critical-pedagogy dossier we had discussed as one possible degree-completion project." Megan Knight and Carol Severino have kindly expressed their willingness to work with English on this track. This initiative may involve the creation of a Pedagogy Postdoctoral Fellowship for recent grads of the program, who would mentor the current grad cohort and teach.

The second initiative supports the broad variety of alt-ac or ac-adjacent positions Iowa English PhDs seek. Kathy Lavezzo, Claire Fox, Eric Gidal and Kyle Barton worked on this initiative last year. We have already begun some programming; alum Megan Alter (who works at ACT) visited last spring (pre-Covid) to discuss

translating English skills to jobs outside academia. Another alum, Shanti Roundtree (who works at Pearson), will be offering a similar workshop this fall or spring. This summer, Kathy, Kyle, Cherie Hansen-Rieskamp, Megan and Shanti worked together to create LinkedIn group for current PhD students and alums (<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12432508/>). This group also began drafting over the summer an Individual Development Plan or IDP for use by grads and mentors (both faculty and alums) starting as early as this spring. This initiative may involve the creation of Development Grants that will provide funds toward moving and living expenses for grads doing internships outside the Iowa City area.
Kathy Lavezzo

Faculty Assembly Matters

Faculty Assembly's October 21 meeting included a visit from Dean Sara Sanders, who introduced for discussion and a vote a proposal to reconfigure the makeup of the CLAS Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. This committee has always included representatives from Faculty Assembly, as well as graduate student, undergraduate, instructional track faculty, and staff. But Dean Sanders presented a plan to expand the membership from about 9 to 13-17 voting members, in order to allow for the formation of working groups and a generally more active committee. The change was approved. The remainder of our time was spent discussing various issues. Most tricky: whether and how Faculty Assembly should respond to recent news of the President's retirement/resignation. Most treaty: potential reforms to midterm exams (you may have noticed an increasing number of students asking for permission to miss your class because they have a midterm scheduled at night).

Blaine Greteman, Faculty Assembly Representative

Discursive Data Matters From Jon

Another way of counting the size of a department is by the number of permanent faculty. We currently have 37 colleagues with more than a zero percent appointment in English. Since some of those hold joint appointments, this constitutes 33 FTE (full-time equivalent) faculty. Broken out by rank, this group is comprised of the following:

Tenure track/tenured:
12 full professors (11.5 FTE), 8 male, 4 female;

15 associate professors (13.0 FTE), 8 male, 7 female;
9 assistant professors (8.0 FTE), 3 male, 6 female;

Instructional track:

1 associate professor of instruction (0.5 FTE), 1 female

We also currently have four zero-percent appointments.

In Fall 2020, then, we have 33.0 FTE teaching some 902 majors, along with 54 PhD students and 30 MFA students. Even with the wonderful influx of new assistant professors, this feels significantly trimmed down in faculty size in relation to our recent history. By way of comparison:

in Fall 2018, we had 35.0 FTE with 923 majors
in Fall 2016, we had 37.25 FTE with 787 majors
in Fall 2014, we had 39.75 FTE with 840 majors
in Fall 2012, we had 42.25 FTE with 961 majors
in Fall 2010, we had 47.25 FTE with 977 majors

With all the continuing vitality of the English Department, it certainly looks like we continue to have a strong case for further hiring.

Jon Wilcox, Associate Chair

Upcoming Matters

English @ Work: Kenna Castleberry '19, Digital Communications Specialist -
November 4, 2020 | 11:30 am-12:15 pm | Zoom

The Krause Series in Contemporary Nonfiction: Reading by NWP Alum Magda
Motiel Davis - November 6, 2020 | 7:00 pm | Prairie Lights Books (Online)

Ida Beam Fellowship: Karen Olsson, author of *The Weil Conjectures* - November 10-
12, 2020

English @ Work: Robert Lunn '12, Senior Consultant for Finance - November 11,
2020 | 11:30 am-12:15 pm | Zoom

English Dept. Colloquium: Harry Stecopoulos, "The Heat of Modernity: The Great Gatsby as Petrofiction" - November 11, 2020 | 3:30-4:30 pm | Zoom

Faculty Meeting - November 16, 2020 } 10:30 am-12:00 pm