

From (the edge of) the Chair's Seat

This, as I recall, was always the title that Professor Claire Sponsler gave to her issues of Reading Matters; sometimes it was "From (under) the Chair's Desk." I never really knew why. Was the implication that she was barely hanging on? That can't be it, since she was utterly unflappable, and one of the most fiercely intelligent and creative scholars to grace our or any other department. I was reminded of that recently when Kathy Lavezzo's guest, Taylor Cowdery (UNC) opened his talk on the Canterbury Tales by expressing his gratitude to her work and dedicating it to Claire. She was, I believe, only the second female chair in our department, behind another powerhouse, Dee Morris, whose log of her daily runs ("11-11-1982, to River Bridge and back, good crisp run,") I found tucked away in a drawer when I moved into the office. Reading Matters is devoted to all the exciting things going on in the department now, but I love these small reminders that this department is a collective effort, built from the vision and service of such brilliant predecessors.

Speaking of brilliant: have our medievalists drunk from some holy well? As you'll see below, Kathy Lavezzo and Will Rhodes have been on a road show. And Jon Wilcox has been interviewed by Ian Hislop, editor of *Private Eye*, for a projected BBC series on early British Humor. If you don't know *Private Eye*, or Hislop, suffice it to say that he's responsible for the work of – in my view – the greatest 20th century poet, E.J. Thribb, whose memorial poems helped bid adieu to a generation of politicians and celebrities. For a sample:

In Memoriam, Raymond Cusick, designer.

So. Farewell
Then Raymond Cusick.

You designed the
Daleks, enemies of
Dr. Who.

"Satanic pepperpots,"
That is how
They have been
Described.

Famously, they could
Never go
Upstairs.

But now that is
Where you have
Gone.

"Exterminate, exterminate,"
That was their
Catchphrase.

They live on.
Alas, it is you
Who are ex
And, like all
Earthlings, you have
Been terminated.

E.J. Thribb (17 ½)

Read on for more brilliance and achievements from graduate students, staff, and emeritus colleagues. But as I conclude, I think I'll borrow another technique from Claire and use this space to remind you of something practical and important: if you have not given your students grades yet for participation and for other assignments, please do before you leave for fall break. It's important for them to know where they stand, and there's still (a little!) time left for them to try to resolve outstanding issues.

Best,
Blaine

Faculty Matters

The *Journal of Transnational American Studies* recently reprinted the introduction to **Harry Stecopoulos'** book *Telling America's Story to the World: Literature, Internationalism, Cultural Diplomacy* (Oxford UP, 2023). On Nov. 3rd, Harry presented new work on *Native Son* at the American Studies Association conference in Montreal.

In July, **Kathy Lavezzo** delivered a paper on "Stuart Hall's Piers Plowman" at the London meeting of the International Piers Plowman Society, where she also witnessed an amazing talk by Will Rhodes. In November, she organized and chaired a panel on Paule Marshall at the American Studies Association. The panel featured a paper by Iowa English PhD Joanna Davis-McElligatt. Lavezzo also delivered a paper on "1989-9 at Cornell, When Theory Still Mattered" at the meetings of the National Women's Studies Association and the American Studies Association. Colleagues Deborah Whaley and Elizabeth Fielder heroically attended the ASA panel, which took place at 8:00 am on a Sunday. Amazing colleagues!



Jon Wilcox, whose book, *Humour in Old English Literature: Communities of Laughter in Early Medieval England*, just came out from the University of Toronto Press, spent an hour talking with Ian Hislop (Editor of *Private Eye*, BBC personality, and the most sued man in Britain) in a BBC-broadcast-quality studio to serve as a talking head (radio version) authority on medieval humor for a projected series on early British humor, possibly to be titled Ian Hislop's Oldest Joke, to be broadcast on BBC Radio 4 next February.

Graduate Student Matters

Rajorshi Das is the recipient of the NWSA (National Women's Studies Association) Graduate Scholarship Award 2023.

Their article, "Jai Hijra, Jai Jai Hijra'- Self-Respect and Performance during 2015 Telangana Swabhimana Walk" got accepted for publication at GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies.

Sarah Khatri is published in issue 98 of AGNI Magazine with an essay entitled, "Afterlives."

Several NWP students were featured in podcasts featured in Frictions Magazine. Podcasts include:

[Sense of Belonging/Ingredients for Belonging](#) (Sarah Khatri)

[Sense of Belonging/A Word for That](#) (Caelainn Barr)

[Sense of Belonging/Difficult Images](#) (Connie Chen and Aaron Pang)

[Sense of Belonging/Kiruv Exploring the Art of Welcoming](#) (Jenny Singer)

[Sense of Belonging/Mary-Anne](#) (Ilana Bean)

Hannah Bonner has a book review up at [Senses of Cinema](#). She also has a review up at [Los Angeles Review of Books](#) and a poem up at [Washington Square Review](#).

Staff Matters

Staff member **Corey Campbell's** short story "Everybody's Good," published in *The Gettysburg Review*, was recognized as a distinguished story in this year's Best American Short Stories anthology.

Alumni Matters

Tim Johnston, recently published his book *Distant Sons*. Tim is an alumni of the English program from the University of Iowa and received his MFA from Univ. Mass-Amherst.

Emeritus Matters

On Wednesday, 6 December 2023, 17:00 hours, the Rector and the Dean of the Fakultät Kulturwissenschaften of TU Dortmund University, Professor Manfred Bayer and Professor Patricia Ronan, will confer the honorary doctorate at the Auditorium Maximum on **Professor Ed Folsom** of The University of Iowa. One of the premier scholars of American literature in the US, Ed Folsom has devoted his life to the study of Walt Whitman and his oeuvre. He is the co-founder of a major Digital Humanities project, the "Walt Whitman Archive," one of the first and by now most comprehensive digital archives devoted to a single author. Ed Folsom was a Fulbright professor at Dortmund in 1996 and responsible for the Iowa-Dortmund exchange for almost 30 years. The "Whitman Week," which he founded with international scholars, took place in Dortmund for the first time in 2008 and has since taken place annually at universities around the world. The laudator will be **Professor Christopher Merrill**, Director of the University of Iowa's International Writing Program, and a leading voice in international cultural diplomacy. German and international guests are warmly invited. For detailed information, please contact Walter Grünzweig at Walter.Gruenzweig@tu-dortmund.de

Obermann Center Matters

Teresa Mangum shares news from The Obermann Center:

Writing for the Humanities Workshop, Online, November 17 | 12:30–2:30pm

Join us for an [online workshop](#) with Professor Eric Hayot (Comparative Literature & Asian Studies, Penn State University), author of one of the most recommended guides to academic writing in the humanities (*The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities*) and an important commentator on the state of the humanities in general.

Labor Strikes: An Obermann Conversation at the ICPL | November 28 | 4:00–5:00pm

This summer, the Writers Guild of America (WGA) and the Screen Actors Guild – American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) both went on strike, something that hadn't happened since 1960. These strikes brought Hollywood to a standstill for months and ultimately forced the studios to make major concessions. In September, the United Automobile Workers (UAW) union went on strike against the major automakers GM, Ford, and Stellantis. For the first time ever, a sitting president visited a picket line in support of the autoworkers. 75,000 workers from the Kaiser Permanente health care system went on strike in October, the largest health care worker strike in U.S. history. With all these strikes happening, are we in the middle of a labor union renaissance? Join us for this Obermann Conversation with University of Iowa faculty and local labor leaders to discuss the history of labor in the U.S. and in Iowa, and to imagine what the future of organized labor could be. Free and open to all.

Wide Lens: Artificial Intelligence at the Stanley Museum of Art | November 30 | 4:00–5:30pm

In the last week, you've probably asked Google to answer questions, chatted with Siri, rocked out to a new band recommended by Spotify, or asked Chat GPT to produce a first draft of a form letter for you—reminders that our lives are already deeply entwined with artificial intelligence. The term "AI" covers a host of technologies. What connects them? Our very human ambition to create machines that can learn to solve problems. Join us for the next Wide Lens panel as experts from computer science, engineering, health care, the law, language learning, ethics, and the arts share how they're engaging with AI, which forms AI takes in their work, and what questions they're asking about future interactions between humans and machines. All are welcome to this [rapid fire pecha kucha presentation](#) by faculty members discussing AI in relation to ethics, the law, medicine, language learning, the arts, driving, and social justice issues.

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