



# Out of Iowa

Spring 1995 The University of Iowa Department of English Volume 4: 1

## An Interview with New Faculty:

Judith Pascoe, Philip Round, Claire Sponsler, & Max Thomas

Out of Iowa: In our interview with him, Garrett Stewart suggested that English departments are becoming departments of cultural studies. To the extent that is true, you four seem to be examples of the change. Do you identify with cultural studies as a guiding principle or methodology? Max?

MT: I'm teaching both Renaissance literature and cultural studies, but I want to resist identifying what I'm doing as simply cultural studies because I want to resist identifying cultural studies with a field rather than with a set of approaches.

CS: What's your favorite cultural study?

MT: Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*, without a doubt. I remember reading it and suddenly being overwhelmed by the project. She talks about growing up in the 50s in Britain in a lower class family, and trying to negotiate a space within this culture which doesn't have a space for her—or has one which is rudimentarily defined. It's truly a stunning book. She's a beautiful writer.

OoI: Then maybe you half identify yourself with the Renaissance and half with cultural studies—

MT: I don't see them as opposed. Another reason I'm reluctant to identify myself with cultural studies is that it's primarily interested in contemporary concerns. I want to think of cultural studies as an historical project as much as a contemporary one. This is a problem I'm trying to work out, particularly by looking at London in the 1590s and Los Angeles previous to the earthquake. I don't know what it would mean to do historical cultural studies. . . .

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## Huntley Retires 37 Years Younger

The most recent retirement from our department is John Huntley. Many would say he left significantly younger than he came in. His last term teaching was spent on exchange with The University of Copenhagen, where he taught *Paradise Lost* (once more) and two sections of American Literature.

John, who was on phased retirement, has taught at Iowa for thirty-seven years. He arrived in 1957 while still officially a graduate student at The University of Chicago. He completed his Ph.D. four years later, an early Fulbright to London being crucial to his research. His long career seems structured along the idea of "role reversal," a term he dropped casually into our conversation at least twice. It is a reversal from identifying with the expertise of scholarship to the inquisitiveness of students, and from delivery of judgment to a grassroots search for what stands out. Over the last two decades, the medium of this exchange for John has been the emerging world of the personal computer. It is striking that our senior citizen of the year should have been so ahead of many younger colleagues in engaging with internet, e-mail, and other software advances. He has been a guide to our department.

In the early seventies, John discovered the "administrative terminal system," created for executives at IBM. And he was an early participant in designing mainframe software by which we can edit texts in our offices. Over a decade ago he talked central administration into spending \$73,000 for departmental computers. The clusters on the second floor of EPB and in the Zimansky room are extensions of his guidance. And he has aided the University Library in associated grantsmanship. His allegiance

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Cultural studies is interested in repersonalizing academic studies, rather than in saying our focus is purely on texts. Our own biographies matter.—Max Thomas

Hasn't that been some of your interest, Claire, in medieval studies?

CS: Yes, I'm continually working out what's meant by historical cultural studies, which for me always involves an interplay between past and present.

MT: Dialogic is a nice word for it. It's not historicism, which investigates the past, but something interested in recognizing the present. You're never solely in the present or the past.

OoI: How did you connect LA with London?

MT: Originally the project was to be about structures of violence within the city that didn't exist in earlier kinds of revolutions. The more I read Thomas Dekker's pamphlets, *The Bel-Man of London*, and so forth, I saw a circularity: the city's identification with its repressed other, the underworld. And I saw something similar in Los Angeles. The recent rioting had

something to do with my choosing LA as the other pole. And my own biography had something to do with it. Cultural studies is interested in repersonalizing academic studies, rather than in saying our focus is purely on texts. Our own biographies matter. I came to Los Angeles from Guatemala. LA was my first experience with a metropolis, with a freeway—these things resonated as I was working on the project; when they all blew up into one structure, I realized it was the sort

of investigation I wanted to pursue.

OoI: Emphasizing a personal stake in critical work seems wide spread, not just in cultural studies, but in other forms of criticism. It wasn't in my day as a graduate student.

CS: I think that was an important feminist contribution to criticism.

MT: Cultural studies has learned from feminist discourse, but the way that it conceives of itself is different, especially in the case of queer theory and gay and lesbian studies. It tries not just to find a personal stake in the project, but to use the personal as an epistemological or methodological stance. What I've experienced in my life isn't just the reason I care about this; it is the only way that I can think about it.

JP: Feminist theory did that, too.

CS: That started with the feminist

insistence on writing out of the body. You can speak only from your position as a subject and, from a feminist perspective, as a gendered subject. That gets tied to the body as material form and in symbolic ways as well.

OoI: One twentieth century precursor to this might be scientific theory, especially physics, with its realization that the observer is part of the system of knowledge.

MT: Well that supposes there's an observing subject doing an experiment, but cultural studies has learned from feminism that you're not just an observing subject; you're part of the object. The subject/object distinction is preserved in the Heisenberg formulation, though it's complicated, and not preserved in this other structure of inquiry, in the sense that you are not separate from what you're looking at; you are somehow interconnected. That's even the wrong metaphor because it assumes two alien things that have a point of union. I'm not sure what metaphor to pick up.

OoI: I'm not able to say whether that distinction is preserved in physics. Maybe it begins to break down and so imply the point you make. But what about you, Phil, is your work related to cultural studies?

PR: I think cultural history better describes what I'm up to. Cultural studies marks a certain political territory and aesthetic that I'm not much engaged in. And the word "historical" has to figure into what I do.

OoI: You're interested in historical

context?

PR: Well, "context" isn't a good word either. Nowadays we use "discourse" because it lets us bleed through all kinds of boundaries. It's all fair game. History isn't a frame for something else, but a tapestry. It's semiotic, if you will. It's all talk.

OoI: What are you working on here? What are you teaching?

PR: A class in Chicano lit and an undergraduate class in Thoreau and Fuller.

OoI: Do you find a personal stake in some of that?

PR: I was raised right next to the Mexican border. . . . If we weren't taping this I'd tell you the true story, which is that I owe some of my friends a favor. Many of my friends back home are Chicano. We were all sitting around last December, having a beer, and they said, "This guy's a professor." Even though I'm Anglo, I'm from their neighborhood, and they're proud of the achievement of someone from their neighborhood. So, I thought I'd teach *their* literature to honor the respect they showed me.

JP: And the American transcendentalists are your background period?

PR: Not really. Well, in a weird way. Being an "Americanist" enforces a certain generality in your projects. My project begins in 1630 and ends with the transcendentalists. 1630 marks the beginning because of the Great Migration to Massachusetts. I then

follow the discourse of natural history as a structuring rhetoric.

OoI: What about you Judith? Are you also involved in cultural studies?

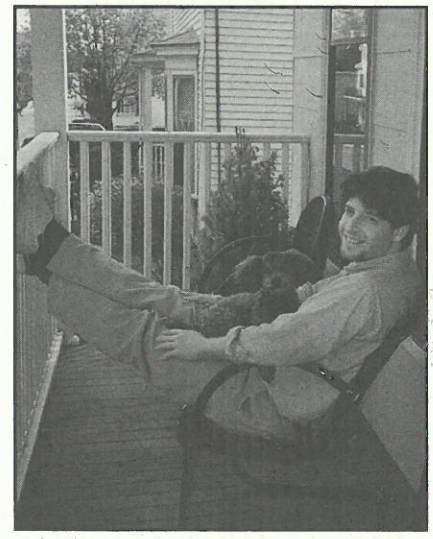
JP: Maybe. I identify with it to the extent that I'm looking at texts that people haven't usually looked at before. I'm troubled by what has or hasn't been defined as literary and by what's been left out of those definitions. I'm not that interested in "literariness."

PR: Let me add parenthetically that I too am interested in what gets called literary. What are "belle lettres" in 1690 America? I'm concerned about who gets excluded or included under this rubric. The definition of the "literary" is particularly problematic in colonial America—where each region has its own set of standards for defining what is "literary" determined by its economics and demographics, yet all regions are in some ways aesthetically indentured to the mode of London, the metropolis.

OoI: That's true of other older literatures. Old English is full of non-lit-

erature as far as cultural studies is concerned? The way a particular culture sees X as important, rather than assuming that X has some sort of intrinsic value or even intrinsic domain of perception? I think it's just as easy to look for metaphors and structural ambiguity, all the things a new critic would look for in a poem, in a government report. In fact, sometimes it's more revealing and important to do so. Why do we allow that pursuit with one set of texts and not with others?

PR: Right. For example, I read geological surveys from the middle of the nineteenth century. The irony is that in 1850 a geological survey was in fact



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erary works which are treated as literature simply because they exist. You wouldn't necessarily think of the Anglo Saxon chronicles as literature, except they got read in literature courses for generations. And so some readers began to admire, among other things, their prose style.

literary, then in the 1950s it becomes not literary, and now it is literary again by modern standards, by postmodern critical standards.

OoI: I suppose it's along those lines that people are taking an interest in late Thoreau and Thoreau's journals

4 now, and not primarily *Walden*. I remember people saying, Well, who would want to read the journals. And now people say the journals—Emerson's as well Thoreau's—may be a new literary form.

PR: Larry Buell did that with *Literary Transcendentalism*. His whole argument is that you go from the journal to the essay or to the longer work such as *Walden*, and *that's* what transcendentalism is: it's a literary act, not a particularly philosophical act. The journals are central. I have my students writing transcendental journals.

it went into fifteen editions. Her sonnets were serial enactments of desire, and they emphasized the landscape as



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Their final paper will be based on their journals, much as *Walden* was based on Thoreau's journals.

OoI: Judith, your main area of interest has become—I was starting to say the Romantics, but you would want to complicate that, wouldn't you?

JP: There's been an on-going debate about what "Romantic" literature means. Does that define a chronological period or an aesthetic? The debate has been complicated recently by work done on the women Romantic poets. Can we even call them Romantic poets? Do they belong to a separate "feminine" Romanticism, versus a "masculine" Romanticism? Plus, a lot of these women were working earlier than 1789, when people usually date the beginning of the period. Nobody pays much attention to Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*, but

well as her own feelings—qualities we identify with Romantic poetry. When people today look backwards from Coleridge and Wordsworth to see who was publishing sonnets earlier, they neglect Charlotte Smith, although Coleridge really admired her. People forget that both Wordsworth and Coleridge were reading Smith.

OoI: Perhaps we could find evidence of the Romantic much earlier, in the Renaissance or the Middle Ages.

CS: You can say that the whole idea of the Middle Ages is something created by later periods, especially by the Romantic period, so there is clearly a relationship between the "medieval" and whatever we define as the "Romantic."

JP: There's been some interesting work, too, by Margreta deGrazia,

Max's dissertation director, on how Shakespeare becomes Shakespeare in the 1790s, on how the Romantics as editors shape our view of Shakespeare.

CS: Are you seeing the poets you're working with as Romantic poets, or as something else?

JP: I'm seeing them as Romantic poets, but Romantic defined in a more generous way than it ever has been before. There are a number of critics now who are trying to say that the women poets were doing something entirely different from the men, but I really don't think that's the case. I think they were all reading each other and were influenced by each other, using similar strategies throughout their work. For example, Mary Robinson's 1800 *Lyrical Tales* was a response to Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. It's interesting to read those two collections side by side. Mary Robinson figured prominently in the literary landscape then. She published a lot of poems in periodicals, then recollected them in volumes. In fact, she was the poetry editor for the *Morning Post*. She published about ninety poems there under seven different pseudonyms. So the newspapers were important vehicles for women Romantic poets. They were for the men, too, but the men pretended they weren't. Wordsworth later distanced himself from the *Post*.

PR: It looks as if you could get a lot out of one year of her work at the *Post*. In my work, I sometimes like to reach down into a pocket of time and scoop out everything I find. I recently dug around in the year 1764. History is

sort of a filter anyway; ephemeral data just doesn't come down to us. Then I put the materials from this time together in a way that gave me something the canon did not give me. Do you do that in the Middle Ages, Claire?

CS: Not in my current project, which ranges from the late fourteenth through the early sixteenth centuries. The book I'm writing examines how various discourses of bodily control—sumptuary laws regulating dress, conduct books encoding rules of deportment, and Books of Hours modelling devotional practices—constructed a certain kind of subjectivity and sense of identity that we can also see in late-medieval drama. It wouldn't serve my purposes to focus on just one year or even one decade.

PR: But you are looking at a lot of what we would call non-literary texts.

CS: Yes, but by our standards few medieval texts are literary. I'm interested in what historians would call documents of practice, in texts which we wouldn't consider literary, but which did important cultural work—often the kind of cultural work literature does for us today.

JP: I confess to being attracted to Phil's approach. My project is basically a 1790s book. One of the more interesting books published recently is Jerome McGann's *The New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse*. Instead of being organized by author, it is organized chronologically: poems from 1789, '90, '91, '92. So, instead of getting Wordsworth as a block, you get

Wordsworth against everybody else who published a poem in 1789.

OoI: There are the Braithwaite volumes of *American Magazine Verse* of the 20s that do something like that. I mostly pass them by. I don't know what I'd do with the Oxford book.

MT: Stop studying Wordsworth? (Laughter)

OoI: I guess we do something like that at *The Iowa Review*. Here are poems and stories from 1989, '90, and so on. But we'd make you happier if we let chance do more of the selecting. Maybe we should print the first 100 poems to arrive after today.

PR: Now that would be cultural history. (Laughter)

MT: The first hundred pieces of *mail* would be cultural studies. (Laughter)




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You can speak only from your position as a subject and, from a feminist perspective, as a gendered subject. That gets tied to the body as material form, and in symbolic ways as well.—Claire Sponsler

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*Judith Pascoe received her BS in Biology from Duke University in 1982, an MA in English in Creative Writing from Syracuse in 1984, and a PhD in English from the University of Pennsylvania in 1992. Her dissertation is entitled "Staging Romanticism: Self-Representation in 1790s."*

*Philip Round earned his PhD from the University of California, Los Angeles. He is currently completing a book length study of New England's literary culture entitled, "Scientific Americans: The Discourses of Empire and the Formation of New England Literary Culture."*

*Claire Sponsler received her PhD in Comparative Literature in 1989 from Indiana University and taught at George Washington University and the Bread Loaf School of English before coming to Iowa. She has recently completed a book on discourses of bodily control and late medieval theatre and is at work on a book called "Ritual Imports: Medieval Drama in America."*

*Max Thomas received his PhD in 1993 from the University of Pennsylvania. His dissertation, "Practices of Poetry in Early Modern England," focuses on poetic commonplace books and the "materiality of textual production and consumption." His article "Kemps Nine Daies Wonder' Dancing Carnival Into Market" appeared in PMLA; "Reading and Writing the Commonplace Book: A Question of Authorship?" was reprinted in *The Construction of Authorship*, edited by Woodmansee and Jaszi, Duke University Press, 1994. His current work centers on the material constitution of memory in the Renaissance.*

## The Beginnings of English at Iowa: 1861-1961

The University of Iowa opened its doors in 1855, but the term “English” didn’t appear in the curriculum catalog until the fall of 1861, when two courses in “English Literature” were offered. “Purists,” says former chair and Professor Emeritus John Gerber, “can argue that the Department of English did not come into being until the spring of 1900,” when it was established by regents. Gerber provides a fascinating study of this very early history—and the first hundred years of English at Iowa—in his new book, *The Teaching of English at The University of Iowa: 1861-1961*.

Gerber discovered that the character of the department changed with the changing chairs, reflecting their particular interests and concerns. So he divided his book into five chronological chapters. Each deals with a different period, as it came under the influence of the first three chairs and, in 1930, the new director of the School of Letters. The first chapter sketches for us the department’s tentative beginnings (1855-61).

English literature was at first deemed a poor subject of study by founders and faculty. Many Iowans favored more “practical” instruction: training for the doctors, lawyers, engineers, and teachers that the new state needed. And early faculty dismissed English—which they compared unfavorably to the rigorous study of classical languages and literatures—as too “easy” to school the mind. There were no professors of English until 1868. By 1889, though, with only one professor and one instructor to teach eight offered courses, “the English program was one of the most popular on campus.”

Clarke Fisher Ansley became the new department’s first chair in 1899. During “The Ansley Years” (1899-

1917), the seeds of Iowa’s excellence in teaching and writing were sown. He dreamed of creating a “bastion of arts and literature at Iowa,” and to this end he “assembled a well-proportioned staff of able teachers, and prepared the way for the creative writing program that would blossom in the 1930s.” Iowa soon gained a reputation for “prizing good teaching” and for teaching good writing.

But with the appointment of Hardin Craig in 1919, the department began to focus less on writing. Craig was an Elizabethan scholar who encouraged strict study of the literary text as the product of its period and place. His decade of leadership was the “high-water mark of literary history at Iowa” and helped to establish Iowa’s reputation for first-rate scholarship. In 1928 he left behind him a department that had doubled its faculty and distinguished itself in American literature.

During “The Maxwell Years,” the department was torn between two distinct characters, Baldwin Maxwell and Norman Foerster. Maxwell had been hand-picked by Craig so shared most of Craig’s views about the function of an English department. Two years into Maxwell’s chairmanship, though, Foerster was appointed director of the School of Letters, and Maxwell’s superior. Foerster’s “mission” was to apply neo-humanistic principles to the college curriculum.

shifted to Macintosh over time, and few of us now can imagine him using anything else. But he worked through it all, it seems, to get there, and well in advance of the rest of us.

John’s special interest has been in designing courses that use the computer’s organizing power. His Milton Annotator, developed over several years, allows students to create their own annotated *Paradise Lost*, utilizing colorgraphics, crosslinks, the *OED*, and other resources. “The profit was in their doing it, in the community of action that formed around Milton.” Students took away four diskettes, containing the sum of their work, which they could refine further. John’s goal was to turn them into their own teachers.

He criticized the narrowness of literary historicism, embraced the idea of “ethical imagination,” and came into direct (though gentlemanly) conflict with the more philologically-minded Maxwell.

In 1944, with Foerster gone, the “schism” in the department “began to heal.” Faculty meetings, Gerber notes, “quieted down.” Maxwell led the department into a renewed period of literary historicism. The number of faculty expanded, over twenty new courses were added to the curriculum, and the Writers’ Workshop (which Paul Engle had shaped into a renowned program with Foerster’s support) thrived. Most notably, graduate student scholarship “took off.”

1961, the end of “The Maxwell Years,” also marked the beginning of Gerber’s fifteen-year tenure as chair. “I got lucky with the dates,” Gerber says, “I can claim that I was writing the first hundred years.” He has modestly declined to cover the period of his own “influence.” Professors Carl Klaus, John Harper, and Richard Lloyd-Jones have that pleasure as authors of a planned second volume of the history of English at Iowa.

The first volume, Gerber’s volume, will be available from the Maecenas Press of Iowa City in April 1995. We will announce in the next issue of *Out of Iowa* how alumni and friends of our department may receive a copy.

## Faculty Books in the 90s

**Marvin Bell**, *The Book of the Dead Man*, Copper Canyon Press, 1994.

**Clark Blaise**, *Man and His World*, Porcupine's Quill, 1992, and *I Had a Father*, Addison-Wesley, 1993.

**Florence Boos**, ed, *Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris*, University of Missouri, 1990; *The Design of William Morris's "The Earthly Paradise,"* The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991; ed, *History and Community: Essays in Victorian Radicalism*, Garland, 1992; and an edition of *The Earthly Paradise* by William Morris, two volumes, Garland forthcoming.

**David Chamberlain**, ed, *New Readings of Late Medieval Love Poems*, University Press of America, 1993.

**Frank Conroy**, *Body & Soul*, Houghton-Mifflin, 1993.

**Stavros Deligiorgis**, translator, *Halo, Romanian Poems by Paul Celan*, The Coffee House Press, 1991.

**Kathleen Diffley**, *Where My Heart Is Turning Ever: Civil War Stories and Constitutional Reform, 1861-1876*, University of Georgia Press, 1992.

**Anne DiPardo**, *A Kind of Passport: A Basic Writing Adjunct Program and the Challenge of Student Diversity*, NCTE, 1993.

**Barbara Eckstein**, *The Language of Fiction in a World of Pain*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.

**Mary Lou Emery**, *Jean Rhys at "World's End": Novels of Colonial and Sexual Exile*, University of Texas Press, 1990.

**Ed Folsom**, *Walt Whitman's Native Representations*, Cambridge University Press, 1994; *Walt Whitman: The Centennial Essays*, University of Iowa Press, 1994; *Walt Whitman and the World*, University of Iowa Press, forthcoming.

**Patricia Foster**, ed, *Minding the*

*Body: Women Writers on Body and Soul*, Anchor Books, 1994; ed, *The Sister Plot*, Doubleday, 1996.

**James Galvin**, *The Meadow*, Holt & Company, 1992.

**Miriam Gilbert**, *Shakespeare in Performance: Love's Labours Lost*, Manchester University Press, 1993; co-ed, *Modern and Contemporary Drama*, St. Martin's Press, 1994; co-ed, *Stages of Drama* (3rd edition), St. Martin's Press, 1995.

**Jorie Graham**, ed, *Best American Essays*, Scribners, 1990; *Region of Unlikeness*, Ecco, 1991; ed, *The Golden Ecco* (2), Ecco, 1994; *Secrecy*, Ecco, 1995.

**David Hamilton**, co-ed, *Transgressions: The Iowa Anthology of Innovative Fiction*, University of Iowa Press, 1994.

**Cheryl Herr**, *For the Land They Loved: Irish Political Melodramas, 1890-1925*, Syracuse University Press, 1991.

**Kevin Kopelson**, *Love's Litany: The Writing of Modern Homoerotics*, Stanford University Press, 1994; *Beethoven's Kiss: Pianism, Perversion, and the Mastery of Desire*, Stanford University Press, forthcoming.

**Ruedi Kuenzli**, co-ed, *Surrealism and Women*, M.I.T. Press, 1991.

**Brooks Landon**, *The Aesthetics of Ambivalence: Rethinking Science Fiction Film in the Age of Electronic (Re)Production*, Greenwood Press, 1992.

**Richard Lloyd-Jones & Andrea Lumsford**, *Democracy Through Language*, MLA & NCTE, 1991.

**Tom Lutz**, *American Nervousness: 1903*, Cornell University Press, 1991.

**James Marshall**, *Teaching Literature in the Secondary School*, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1991; *The Language of Interpretation: Patterns of Discourse in Discussions of Literature*, NCTE, 1995.

**W. Cotter Murray**, *Irish Fictions*, Maecenas Press, 1994.

**Peter Nazareth**, *The General is Up*, TSAR Books, 1991; *In the Trickster Tradition: The Novels of Andrew Salkey, Francis Ebejer and Ishmael Reed*, Bogle-L'Ouverture Press, 1994.

**Herman Rapaport**, *Heidegger and Derrida: Reflections on Time and Language* (2nd edition), Nebraska University Press, 1991, and forthcoming in Japanese translation from Tokyo University Press; *Between the Sign and the Gaze*, Cornell University Press, 1994.

**Robert F. Sayre**, ed, *New Essays on Walden*, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

**Tom Simmons**, *The Unseen Shore: Memories of a Christian Science Childhood*, Beacon Press, 1991; *A Season in the Air*, Ballantine Books, 1993; *Erotic Reckonings: Mastery and Apprenticeship in the Work of Poets and Lovers*, University of Illinois Press, 1994.

**Alvin Snider**, *Origin and Authority in Seventeenth Century England: Bacon, Milton, Butler*, University of Toronto Press, 1994.

**Gerald Stern**, *Leaving Another Kingdom*, Harper & Row, 1990.

**Garrett Stewart**, *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext*, University of California, 1990.

**Daniel Weissbort**, *Fathers*, Northern House, 1991; co-ed & translator, *Twentieth Century Russian Poetry*, University of Iowa Press, 1992; *Red Knight, Serbian Women's Songs*, King's College, 1992; *Inscription*, Cross Cultural Communications, 1993; *Lake: New and Selected Poems*, 1993; *Ererskelev (Dogland)*, Carmel Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1994; translator, *The Jews and Germany* by Enzo Traverso, University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

**Jon Wilcox**, *Aelfric's Prefaces*, Durham Medieval Texts, forthcoming.

He has continued this strategy with The Quality Evaluator, by which writing students organize their responses to course work. As they notice the striking overlap in their rankings of more or less successful essays, students are often moved to offer suggestions for improvement within a framework of shared, communal judgement. Quality Evaluator and InfoBook—a tool for organizing research in a way that seems more openly logical than hypercard systems—are two software projects that John carries into retirement. Each has one or more journal articles behind it by now, and each seems to have commercial potential.

Perhaps it is his engagement with all this that has kept the brightness in John’s eyes, the firm and outgoing resonance in his voice, and the quickness in his step. As he says, he is more happily busy now than ever. That is a reversal to which we might all aspire.

### About this Newsletter

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