I am honored to assume the department chair position this year, after sixteen years on the English Department faculty. Thanks to the fine leadership of our previous chair, Jon Wilcox, who held the position for nearly eight of the past twelve years, I have the pleasure of serving a thriving community of over a thousand students and scholars who coalesce in our various departmental programs, at a University known for its longstanding support of creativity and innovation in the arts and humanities, and in a city that boasts one of the most lively literary scenes in the world.

As I am learning all too quickly, sometimes English seems more like a small city than an academic department. The Department houses two graduate programs, two undergraduate majors, three distinguished journals, and a General Education Literature program. Our most recent addition to the degree programs is the undergraduate major in English and Creative Writing, a cooperative venture with the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. The new major represents the expansion of a Creative Writing Track that initially operated within the English major and has now become a major in its own right, with both the English literary studies and English and Creative Writing students sharing a host of foundational courses. As of this fall, students from both English majors also have the opportunity to pursue a Literary Publishing Track, a multidisciplinary selection of courses especially designed for students who wish to pursue careers in publishing, editing, and the book trades. While many English departments around the country are experiencing a period of contraction, ours is gradually expanding, with approximately 850 undergraduate students enrolled across our two majors.

Just as the new English and Creative Writing major was launching, College Magazine ranked the University of Iowa first among “Top 10 Universities for Aspiring Writers” in an article that cited one of our English majors. Among my challenges in the coming years is to maintain that reputation by satisfying the demand for high-quality English courses on the part of undergraduate students who are coming to our department from all over Iowa, the United States, and indeed, the world. When I joined the English Department, there were over fifty professors on the faculty. Now there are approximately thirty-five. In a time of declining state funding, we have managed to do more with less, largely because of the wisdom and leadership...
The New Major: Iowa Gets Creative
English and Creative Writing Major Draws Hundreds of Students

When Irene Enlow came to the University of Iowa as a first-year student, she knew that she wanted to write. She had grown up filling notebooks with supernatural tales and stories of other worlds. During her first college writing workshop, she felt defensive and apprehensive. No one had ever critiqued her stories before, and she worried how other students might respond to her writing. But Enlow found that the experience was more than rewarding. Not only did she discover new ways to grow as a writer, but she found a new community. “It felt wonderful to know people had read my work and reacted thoughtfully,” Enlow recalls. “Every writing class I have been in has always felt like taking part in a community where everyone is welcome to contribute genuinely and joyfully.”

Writing classes at Iowa, she says, have introduced her to a community of writers who are as passionate and driven as she is.

“We make our communities in a lifelong commitment that radiates far beyond the classroom.”

-Robyn Schiff

Enlow is majoring in English and Creative Writing, a new undergraduate degree offered by the English Department. The University of Iowa is already renowned for its prestigious graduate writing programs, and the degree goes one step further in cementing the University of Iowa is already renowned for its prestigious graduate writing programs, and the degree goes one step further in cementing the new English and Creative Writing major that English and Creative Writing major evolves from the Creative Writing Track that English launched nearly a decade ago. In the second year of existence, the major has already seen a boom in enrollment. Over five hundred undergraduates are now registered as English and Creative Writing Majors, and they are joined by over three hundred students who are pursuing the English Major.

The new major, which College Magister ranked #1 for aspiring young writers, is as challenging as it is inventive. Majors have opportunities to take classes in playwriting, translation, creative nonfiction, fiction, and poetry, and they also receive a rigorous grounding in literary study, learning their craft from the great writers that have come before them. “Exploring and hearing the breadth of voices present in English literature has been such a fulfilling experience,” says Melissa Lauer, a graduate of the Nonfiction Writing Program who was present in English literature has been such a fulfilling experience. “We make our communities in a lifelong commitment that radiates far beyond the classroom.”

“The English and Creative Writing Major at Iowa has led me to be more confident and comfortable in my own skin, which has been beneficial not only for the evolution of my writing but also for my growth as a person. It has encouraged me to challenge myself in my art, and this has translated to me doing the same thing in my personal life,” says Enlow. Bringing together a distinguished faculty, dedicated students, and a vibrant literary community, the UI English and Creative Writing major is unique among undergraduate creative writing programs in the U.S.

Introducing the New Publishing Track

In addition to the new English and Creative Writing Major, the English Department introduced a new Publishing Track in the spring of 2016, drawing on the department’s expertise in publishing and book studies. 40 students from both the English and English and Creative Writing Majors have enrolled thus far.

In the core courses, Publishing I and II, students gain hands-on experience in creating their own literary journal, an exercise that calls upon them to critically reflect upon their own identities as consumers, producers, and distributors of literature. “I believe that a publishing class can transcend its obvious appeal as a vocational tool and actually be an essential component in how students learn about the creation of art and culture,” says Ethan Madore, a graduate of the Nonfiction Writing Program who was integral in designing these classes.

“A note from the Chair, continued from page 1

of first-rate professors, a dedicated staff, and talented, motivated students. As the creative writing area expands in our department, I am thrilled to report that English will be searching for a professor of Fiction Writing this year.

This issue of Out of Iowa features many highlights from the past academic year, including the Department’s prominent role in the global celebration of Shakespeare on the occasion of the four hundredth anniversary of the Bard’s death and the Lloyd-Jones Residency, which brought seven Iowa high school teachers and their students to UI for three days of intensive writing classes taught by our Department’s Nonfiction Writing MFA students and English Education students from the College of Education.

This fall semester 2017 began on a bittersweet note with a symposium, “Performance, Culture, and the Book,” in honor of Claire Sponsler (1954-2016), M.F.A. Professor of English, awarded the 2016 Award for Outstanding classrooms on topics ranging from the poetry of Walt Whitman to Early Modern publishing, Medieval European Jewish communities, the Fluxus movement, creative writing in Iowa City, and community-based stories about climate change in the Midwest. To learn more about these and other exciting projects, I invite you to visit the faculty pages on the UI English website.

I look forward to sharing further news about the English Department with you in the coming years. As recruitment and career placement of our English students becomes increasingly central to our departmental operation, we value all the more our connections to alumni, colleagues, and friends. I would love to hear from you, and I thank you for your support.”

When Irene Enlow came to the University of Iowa as a first-year student, she knew that she wanted to write. She had grown up filling notebooks with supernatural tales and stories of other worlds. During her first college writing workshop, she felt defensive and apprehensive. No one had ever critiqued her stories before, and she worried how other students might respond to her writing. But Enlow found that the experience was more than rewarding. Not only did she discover new ways to grow as a writer, but she found a new community. “It felt wonderful to know people had read my work and reacted thoughtfully,” Enlow recalls. “Every writing class I have been in has always felt like taking part in a community where everyone is welcome to contribute genuinely and joyfully,” Creative writing classes at Iowa, she says, have introduced her to a community of writers who are as passionate and driven as she is.

― Robyn Schiff

Melissa Lauer (left) and Austin Hughes (right), English and Creative Writing major and president of the English Society at the Undergraduate Honors Reception in April 2017.
The product of a collaboration between faculty, librarians, and students, the exhibition provided an excellent opportunity to connect the public with literary scholarship and demonstrate the important value of the humanities. Professor Blaine Greteman led a tour of the exhibition for the Burlington Shakespeare Club, a historic women’s club devoted to the study of the author, while Professor Emerita Miriam Gilbert gave a lecture accompanying the exhibition. A digital extension of the exhibition with additional texts, videos, and photos, is now available online at http://shakespeare.lib.uiowa.edu.

Audiences jumped at the chance to view the First Folio, the first collection of Shakespeare’s plays, that is usually, as Hooks says, “locked away in the vaults of rare book rooms.” Though nearly three hundred copies of the First Folio exist in circulation, with many digital versions available online, the exhibition presented a unique opportunity to see the First Folio up close. The exhibition was so popular that it attracted over three thousand visitors during the course of its run, the highest number of visitors the library has ever had for a display of this kind. The exhibition’s popularity points to the enduring value and appeal of the mysterious playwright who shaped over time, sometimes in unexpected places—like the prairies of Iowa. The project fulfills what its organizers see as the duty of all diverse public with literary scholars and students to participate alongside their teachers in learning the art and craft of nonfiction writing and was a unique opportunity for those who have been drawn to the works of nationally influential non-fiction writer and English educator Professor Richard “Jix” Lloyd-Jones, who died in 2014. In addition to a gift from Lloyd-Jones, Sunstein received a Community Impact Grant from the Office of Outreach and Engagement.

The lasting influence of Shakespeare, Hooks says, can be traced to the rise of the early modern book trade. “Attending to the ways in which his works were printed and published, bought and sold, and collected and catalogued in his own time can help us understand how and why he came to inhabit the center of our literary canon. We continue to explore the ways Shakespeare has been read and re-defined over time, sometimes in unexpected places—like the prairies of Iowa,” he says.

The Translate Iowa Project, a new student-run organization on campus, unveiled its first anthology, Boundless, featuring a selection of creative writing translated by Iowa undergraduates. With the belief that translation transcends the simple mechanics of moving between languages, the project aims to celebrate and promote intercultural collaboration and connection. “This collective work presents a shared effort to create a common space for people who come from various places, cultures, and languages,” said Zhenyu Mu, a senior from China majoring in English and Creative Writing who is Vice President of Translate Iowa. The group translates works from a variety of languages, from Japanese to Turkish, Portuguese, and Thai. Their projects also include a weekly radio broadcast sharing news, world music, and conversations with established translators, writers, and students from the University of Iowa. The project fulfills what its organizers see as the duty of all diverse communities to provide a safe and inclusive environment for voices of all backgrounds. 

In the tumultuous wake of the November election, George Orwell’s dystopian classic 1984 soared to the top of the bestseller list. What does it mean to live in a world where dystopian fiction resembles reality? This was the question posed by English Professors Adam Hooks, an Associate Professor of English, first encountered Huxley as a teenager in his local public library. “I’ve spent the years since then trying to understand why I felt compelled to do so, in part by tracing Shakespeare’s lines and shortness to print,” says Hooks, the author of Seling Shakespeare: Biography, Nihil- ography, and the Book Trade (Cambridge, 2016). On the four hundredth anniversary of the writer’s death, Hooks curated “The Books That Made Shakespeare” at the UI Main Library, featuring many Renaissance books from the UI Library Special Collections.

The enduring value and appeal of the mysterious playwright that we maintain our sense of nuance and complexity in a world of sound bites and slogans. Indeed, one thing all dictatorships suppress and regulate the reading habits of their citizenry,” says Stewart. “Under these conditions, reading itself becomes a political act.”

This spring, 27 high-schoolers from seven schools around Iowa participated in master classes taught by graduate students in the Nonfiction Writing Program. Led by Professor Bonnie Sunstein, the project was named in honor of nationally influential non-fiction writer and English educator Professor Richard “Jix” Lloyd-Jones, who died in 2014. In addition to a gift from Lloyd-Jones, Sunstein received a Community Impact Grant from the Office of Outreach and Engagement. Designed to be a short but comprehensive introduction to the genre, this class allowed students to participate alongside their teachers in learning the art and craft of nonfiction writing and was a unique opportunity for them to experience writing at the college level. According to Sunstein, “There’s nothing better than seeing a kid feel free about creating, informing, and feeling as if their voice has something to say to a reader.” According to Brenna Griffin, an English teacher at Cedar Falls High School and a University of Iowa alumna, “Getting to watch [the students] sort of wrestle with words in a way that was not tied to any standard or any kind of assessment is a powerful experience.”

The residency culminated in a final reception at the Old Capitol Museum, where each high school student read an original piece of writing. “I was confident in my writing from the get-go, but I remember the first day being here, I was thinking, ‘maybe I’m not good enough to be here,’” said Madison Larsen, a student at Cedar Falls High School. “Through this, I learned to be confident in my own writing, and I realized it’s not about comparing [your writing] to other people’s work.”

The Books That Made Shakespeare” Exhibition at the UI Main Library.
Lori Branch Awarded NEH Grant

Professor Lori Branch has been awarded a $33,900 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to teach a Summer Seminar for College and University Teachers as part of the agency’s program to provide funded opportunities for educators to study a variety of humanities topics.

Branch taught the course “Post-secular Studies and the Rise of the silent to the sound era” at Berlin’s Institute for Cultural Inquiry, and a third on Victorian art collectors to Virginia Woolf at the University of Neuchâtel, another on visual puns in screen comedy from the silent to the sound era at the University of Moscow, and a fourth on standing religion in all its breadth and complexity, dismantling the secular/religious binary in order to grapple with uncertainty, interpretation, and faith in new ways that are distinctively literary and post-secular.

John D’Agata Named M.F. Carpenter Professor in English

The University of Iowa College of Arts and Sciences has appointed Professor John D’Agata the M.F. Carpenter Professor in English. D’Agata, the director of Iowa’s top-ranked Nonfiction Writing Program, is the author of three books, The Lost Origins of the Essay (Graywolf, 2003), The Making of the American Essay (Graywolf, 2013), which is a Halls of Fame title, and A New History of the Essay (Graywolf, 2013), which is a Halls of Fame title.

Barbara Eckstein Creates Program for Lifelong Readers

This past winter and spring, undergraduates from the Department of Interpretation of Literature classes could be found reading every Friday not in the familiar haunts of dormitories or libraries, but in the elementary classrooms of Grant Wood Elementary School in Iowa City.

Over the course of twelve weeks, English Professor Barbara Eckstein, Director of the General Education Literature program, paired university students with 88 fourth- and fifth-graders. Students from the College of Education served as peer mentors, observers, and guides for the UI students. “One thing I think they are learning is that reading is a lot about relationships: reading to other people, listening to other people read, talking about books that you like,” says Eckstein. Younger readers and their teachers also had the opportunity to sample all the cultural offerings of the university: classes in literature and rhetoric, the university library, and dance performances culminating in a dance performance in the Vosman Music Building. According to Eckstein, “if the project nudges all of them closer to habits of lifelong reading, that’s an assessment I can live with.”

Garrett Stewart Lectures Abroad

Garrett Stewart’s international lecture this year included a paper on literary language from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf at the University of Neuchâtel, another on visual puns in screen comedy from the silent to the sound era at Berlin’s Institute for Cultural Inquiry, and a third on Victorian art collectors at the Villa La Pietra in Florence. In December, he delivered another keynote address at the University of New South Wales in Sydney on “Presse Style: Dickens to Don Delillo.” Stewart has been designated an alternate for the Berlin Prize of the American Academy, for a Spring 2018 Residency at the Humboldt Center in Berlin.

Stephen Voyce Honored with Collegiate Teaching Award

Associate Professor Stephen Voyce was selected to receive a 2016-2017 Collegiate Teaching Award in recognition of his exemplary performance as a teacher. The awardees are chosen by the College of Liberal Arts and Science’s Teaching Awards Committee from nominations by students and colleagues. In commendation of the recipients, Dean Chaden Djalali said, “Great teachers do more than classroom teaching. They are mentors and role models who care deeply about the personal as well as academic development of their students. That is true of these individuals, and I am delighted that their passion and commitment are being recognized.”

FACULTY HONORS

Ed Folsom Receives Grant to Digitize Whitman

Ed Folsom, Roy J. Carver Professor of English and Co-Director of the Walt Whitman Archive, received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to publish thousands of more new documents on the online, open-access archive devoted to America’s most famous poet. One of the most respected scholars of Walt Whitman and his work, Folsom is also a leader in the development of digital humanities.

The Archive, the most comprehensive record of works by and about Whitman, aims to make the extraordinary collection of marginalia and annotations Whitman left behind, many of which have never before been published, freely accessible. Through the Walt Whitman Archive, readers can explore Whitman’s reactions to the literature, history, science, theology, and art of his time. These documents reveal the mind of a poet in the making.

In their new book, Invisible Hawkeyes: African Americans at the University of Iowa during the Long Civil Rights Era (University of Iowa Press, 2016), Professors Lena and Michael Hill illuminate a long-concealed chapter in the University’s past: the stories of the first black students at the University of Iowa. In collecting the testimonials of these trailblazing alumni who sought an education in an era when African Americans were barred admission from most colleges and universities, the Hills examine “the quieter collisions between Iowa’s probite Midwestern progressivism and African American students’ determined ambition.”

In the fall, Invisible Hawkeyes united with the dance company Step Afrika!, one of the top ten African-American dance companies in the nation. Their performance “The Migration: Reflections on the American Experience” was commissioned by the Hancher Auditorium. The result was “Fields of Opportunity: UI’s Black Migration Stories,” a three-day event that probed black students’ experiences at the University of Iowa from the 1930s to the 1960s through lectures, screenings, and performances. “With a long overdue flourish,” says Lena Hill, “Fields of Opportunity” recuperates and celebrates the achievements of black Hawkeyes who introduced American pluralism to a Midwestern city that often resisted such progress.” By emphasizing the messiness of human progress, the event communicated both the lessons of the past and the challenges for the future in the ongoing struggle toward racial equality.
Adam Hooks
Selling Shakespeare: Biography, Bibliography, and the Book Trade
(Cambridge University Press, 2016)
Selling Shakespeare tells a story of Shakespeare’s life and career in print, a story centered on the people who created, bought, and sold books in the early modern period. The interests and investments of publishers and booksellers have defined our ideas of what is “Shakespearean,” and attending to their interests demonstrates how one version of Shakespearean authorship—based not on external life documents, nor on the texts of Shakespeare’s works, but on the books that were printed, published, sold, circulated, collected, and cataloged under his name.

Inara Verzemnieks
Among the Living and the Dead: A Tale of Exile and Homecoming on the War Roads of Europe
(Norton, 2017)
Inara Verzemnieks’s grandmother’s memoirs recalled one true home: the family farm left behind in Latvia, where, during WWII, her grandmother Livija and her grandmother’s sister Ausma were separated. They would not meet each other again for more than 50 years. Raised by her grandmothers in Washington State, Inara grew up among artifacts, scattering smuggled Latvian sand over the coffins of the dead and singing folk songs about a land she had never visited. When Inara discovers the scarf Livija wore when she left home in a box of her grandmother’s belongings, this tangible remnant of the past points the way back to the remote village where her family broke apart. As she comes to know Ausma and the trauma of her exile to Siberia under Stalin, Inara pieces together Livija’s survival through years as a refugee. Weaving these two parts of the story together—surviving war and the trauma of her exile to Siberia under Stalin—Inara reveals how fraught moments of interracial collaboration, meritocratic advancement, and progressivism through an increased emphasis on the postwar rise of the creative writing program, titled The Program Era (Harvard, 2009). Glass focuses on American fiction and the traditional MFA program, and this collection aims to expand and examine its insights in terms of other genres and sites. Postwar poetry in particular has until now been neglected as a product of the Program Era even though it is arguably a “pure” example since poets now depend almost entirely on the patronage of the university. Similarly, this collection looks beyond the traditional MFA writing program to explore the pre-history of writing programs in research universities, as well as alternatives to the traditionally structured program that have emerged along the way. Taken together, the essays in After the Program Era seek to answer and explore many of those questions and continue the conversations McGurk only began.

Jeff Porter
Lost Sound: The Forgotten Art of Radio Storytelling
(University of North Carolina Press, 2016)
In Lost Sound, Jeff Porter examines the vital interplay between acoustic techniques and modernist practices in the growth of radio. Concentrating on the 1930s through the 1950s but also speaking to the rising popularity of today’s narrative broadcasts such as This American Life, Radiolab, Serial, and The Organist, Porter’s close readings of key radio programs show how writers adapted literary techniques to an acoustic medium with great effect. Addressing avant-garde sound poetry and experimental literature on the air alongside industry policy and network economics, Porter identifies the ways radio challenged the conventional distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow cultural content to produce a dynamic popular culture.

Len A. D. Hill and Michael D. Hill
Invisible Hayworthies: African Americans at the University of Iowa during the Long Civil Rights Era
(University of Iowa Press, 2016)
Between the 1930s and 1960s, the University of Iowa sought to assert its modernity, cosmopolitanism, and progressiveness through an increased emphasis on the fine and performing arts and athletics. This reorientation coincided with a period when an increasing number of African American students arrived at the University from both within and outside of the state, seeking to take advantage of its relatively liberal racial relations and rising artistic prestige. By examining the quieter collisions between Iowa’s polite Midwestern progressive and African American students’ determined ambition, Invisible Hayworthies focuses attention on both local stories and their national implications. By looking at the University of Iowa and a smaller Midwestern college town like Iowa City, this collection reveals how fraught moments of interracial collaboration, meritocratic advancement, and institutional invisibility shaped our understanding of America’s painful conversion into a diverse republic committed to racial equality.

Jonathan Wilcox, co-ed.
Anglo-Saxon England and the Visual Imaginary
(AARMS Publications, 2017)
How did the Anglo-Saxons visualize the world that they inhabited? How did their artwork and iconography help to confirm their identity as a people? What influences shaped their visual imagination? This volume brings together a wide range of scholarly perspectives on the role of visuality in the production of culture, Jews, weapons, crosses, coins, and other artistic descriptive passages in literature, types of script, deluxe illuminated manuscripts, and runes and other written inscriptions, whether real or imagined, all receive scrutiny in this collection of new essays. Noteworthy for its interdisciplinary scope, the volume features arresting work by experts in archaeology, art history, literary studies, linguistics, numismatics, and manuscript studies. The volume as a whole demonstrates the power of current scholarship to cast light on the visual imagination of the past.

Garrett Stewart
Transmedium: Conceptualism 2.0 and the New Object Art
(University of Chicago Press, 2017)
If you attend a contemporary art exhibition today, you’re unlikely to see much traditional painting or sculpture. Instead, artists are today preoccupied with what happens when you leave behind assumptions about particular methods—such as painting or woodcutting—and instead focus on connections between these and the new forms and ideas that those collisions generate. Garrett Stewart in Transmedium offers this new approach “Conceptualism 2.0,” an allusion in part to the computer images that are so often addressed by these works. A successor to 1960s Conceptualism, which pointed that a material medium was necessary to the making of art, Conceptualism 2.0 features artworks that are transmedial, that place the aesthetic experience itself deliberately at the boundary between often incongruous media. The result, Stewart shows, is a work that forces convergences break open new possibilities that are wholly surprising, intellectually enlightening, and often uncanny.
ROBYN SCHIFF’S critically acclaimed third volume of poetry, A Woman of Property, was named as one of the top books in 2016 by the Chicago Tribune and the New Yorker. Schiff was also named as a finalist for the LA Times Book Prize in Poetry. According to the New Yorker, the work is “a study of the imagination’s darker powers and their daily, domestic insurrections.” Schiff’s poetry has been lauded for its apocalyptic vision, formal precision, and flair for intelligence. Intimate and breathtaking, the poems forcefully traverse the Iowan landscape, American history, and the treacheries of parenthood and domestic life. “Schiff’s poems,” the New Yorker says, “with their Hitchcock-like distrust of appearances, their alertness to hidden binds and nuances, offer something few poets ever discover: a vision of the whole world.”

Located in a menacing, gothic landscape, the poems that comprise A Woman of Property draw formal and imaginative boundaries against boundless mortal threat, but as all borders are vulnerable, this ominous collection ultimately stages an urgent and deeply imperiled boundary dispute where haunting, illusion, the presence of the past, and disembodied voices only further unsettle questions of material and spiritual possession. This is a theatrical book of dilapidated houses and overgrown gardens, of passageways and thresholds, edges, proscriptions, unearthings, and root systems. The unstable property lines here rise from heaven to hell, troubling proportion and queering propriety in the name of unflinching propagation. Are all the gates in this book folly? Are the walls too easily sealed to hold anything back or impose self-confinement? What won’t a poem do to get to the other side? “What is the purpose of these walls too easily scaled to hold anything back or impose self-confinement? What won’t a poem do to get to the other side?”

FLORENCE BOOS’s History and Poetics in the Early Writings of William Morris, 1855-1870 (Ohio State University Press, 2015) examines Morris’s literary development in the context of his Victorian contemporaries, probing the cross-influences of temperament, cultural milieu, early reader reactions, and his restless search for an authentic of temperament, cultural ambiance, early reader

FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS 2016-17

Patricia Foster was awarded the 2017 Clarence Cason Award for Distinquished Novelization by the University of Alabama and the Theodore Hoepfner Award from Southern Humanities Review for her essay “The Problem.” She served on the Nonfiction Prize Jury at Yale University for the 2017 Windham-Campbell Literature Prizes. Her essay “The Lost Years” was named a 2016 Notable Essay in The Best American Essays, and has essays forthcoming in Piegogistic and Anticrit Review.

Eric Gidal co-authored with Michael Gavin (University of South Carolina) both an introduction and a contribution (“Topo Modeling and the Historical Geography of Scotland”) for a symposium on “Spatial Humanities and Scottish Studies” published in the most recent online issue of Studio: Scottish Literature Vol. 42 Issue 2 (2016).

Blaine Greteman published an article in Slon on teaching poetry after the election titled, “What It’s Like To Teach Poetry in the Age of Trump.”

LenA and Michael Hill penned an opinion piece in the Iowa City Press-Citizen titled “For Our People: celebrates African-American experience at UI.” They were also part of the Sunder Speaker series for the Johnson County League of Women Voters. The Hills hosted a Hawkeye Lunch and Learn Series on Invisible Hand: HILLS, which won the Schambaugh Certificate of Merit with sess-ions in both Iowa City and Des Moines.

LenA Hill was named one of the Iowa City Press-Citizen’s Top 11 to Watch in 2016.

Michael Hill was featured on the front page of the Daily Iowan in an article titled “When Socializing Meets Activism.”

Inara Verzemnieks penned the article “Life in Obamacare’s Dead Zone” for the New York Times. She was subsequently interviewed by Newsweek about her story.


Kathy Lavazzo delivered the Milton Seminar at the Newberry Library in October 2016 on “Milton and Readmission.” Kathy was also the recipient of a 2016 Summer Collaboration grant from the Digital Bridges for Humanistic Inquiry for her project “Remappings: Christians and Jews in Early England.”

KATHERINE NESBIT presented papers at five conferences this academic year: Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies (INCS), Midwest Victorian Studies Association (MVSAA), the University of Iowa’s “Hawkeye Shakespeare” conference, the English department’s Graduate Fiction Conference, and the Graduate College’s Jakobsen Conference. Kate’s paper, “The Photographic Trick: Sound Forms and Transformations in Conrad Doyle’s Detective Fiction,” won the Jakobsen Conference’s first place in the Humanities. Kate’s paper on elicitation and melodrama was published in the August 2016 issue of European Romantic Review. Through her role as a Graduate Teaching Fellow in the Humanities, Kate led a Center for Teaching Workshop, “Serious Fun: Teaching with Play,” as well as designing and hosting the General Education Literature program’s “Pedagogy Idea Swap.”

MARIA REIFF gave a conference presentation at the North American Victorian Studies Association conference in Phoenix, Arizona, and she also participated in their pre-conference graduate student workshop. She has several publications: a chapter, “The Creative Calling,” was published in the book After the Purge (ed. by Loren Glenn), an article, “Contended To Be Free: Lucy Snowe and Everyday Anxieties in Charlotte Bronte’s Villette,” is slated to be published in an upcoming edition of The Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies and, she wrote an entry on the playwright Elizabeth Robins for the Dictionary of Literary Biography, Number 381. Written on Women’s Rights and United States Suffrage, Marion was awarded a Presidential Bill and S_ISSUE 2017-2018 as well as a Marcus Bach Fellowship, though she declined the latter, as it is incompatible with the former.

CAITLIN SIMMONS passed her qualifying exams in the fall and was recently selected as a co-leader for the Professional Development Program in Rhetoric. This year at the Western Literature Association in Bloomington, Montana, she presented a peer-reviewed article, “Pulp Fiction in Regional Contexts: Theatre Pulps: ‘Remediating Genre: Cavendish, SF, Slipstream, and the Cinema of Pulp’.” Mariah was also selected for the Newberry Graduate Research Symposium on “Redrawing Forms: Energy, Media, Science, and Life.” The Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies Association conference in Phoenix, Arizona, and she also participated in their pre-conference graduate student workshop. She has several publications: a chapter, “The Creative Calling,” was published in the book After the Purge (ed. by Loren Glenn), an article, “Contended To Be Free: Lucy Snowe and Everyday Anxieties in Charlotte Bronte’s Villette,” is slated to be published in an upcoming edition of The Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies and, she wrote an entry on the playwright Elizabeth Robins for the Dictionary of Literary Biography, Number 381. Written on Women’s Rights and United States Suffrage, Marion was awarded a Presidential Bill and S_ISSUE 2017-2018 as well as a Marcus Bach Fellowship, though she declined the latter, as it is incompatible with the former.

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DINA PEONE specializes in the study of modernist poetry and literature, with a focus on the interplay between visual and verbal arts. Her research interests include the intermedial relations between poetry and photography, particularly in the works of T. S. Eliot and W. B. Yeats. She has published articles in various journals and is currently working on a book project that explores the visual and textual dimensions of modernist poetry.

LYDIA MAUNZ-BREESE is a graduate student at the University of Iowa, where she is pursuing a Ph.D. in English with a concentration in Victorian literature. Her research focuses on the intersections between gender, race, and Disability in Victorian literature, particularly the works of Charles Dickens and Emily Bronte. She has presented her research at several conferences, including the Midwest Victorian Studies Association and the Society for Victorian Literature, and her work has been published in refereed journals such as the Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies and the Mid-Victorian Novel.

ERIN MCINERNEY is a graduate student at the University of Iowa, where she is pursuing a Ph.D. in English with a concentration in the history of print culture. Her research interests include the study of early modern printing practices, with a focus on the role of women in the book trade. She has presented her research at several conferences, including the Society for the History of Print Culture in the Americas and the International Association for Printing History, and her work has been published in refereed journals such as the History of the Book and the Journal of the History of Ideas.

JESSICA ALBRIGHT is a graduate student at the University of Iowa, where she is pursuing a Ph.D. in English with a concentration in contemporary American literature. Her research focuses on the intersections between literature and popular culture, particularly the role of social media in shaping cultural discourse. She has presented her research at several conferences, including the Conference on Literature and Culture in History and the Society for American Literature, and her work has been published in refereed journals such as the Journal of American Culture and the PMLA.

AUSTIN HUGHES is a graduate student at the University of Iowa, where he is pursuing a Ph.D. in English with a concentration in the history of the book. His research focuses on the study of early modern printing practices, with a focus on the role of women in the book trade. He has presented his research at several conferences, including the Conference on Literature and Culture in History and the Society for the History of Print Culture in the Americas, and his work has been published in refereed journals such as the History of the Book and the Journal of the History of Ideas.
Claire Beth Sponsler, who died on July 29, 2016 from the irreversible effects of a cerebral aneurysm, was the M. F. Carpenter Professor of English at the University of Iowa, where she taught for twenty-three years. Claire was born on January 28, 1954 in Easton, Pennsylvania, in the Lehigh Valley. Her father Clark worked for the Penn Central Railroad, a job that took the family from Charlotte, Levittown, and Atlanta to Valparaiso, Indianapolis, and Cincinnati.

Her Nanna supplied Claire with a variety of books even while she was still in her crib. She was a ferocious reader of Agatha Christie by the age of six. By seven, Frederic Nietzsche. Throughout her childhood, Claire was an animal lover, rescuing stray rabbits (Hermione-Joe) and lost cats (Susi), a fact she often repeated as an adult. There was Milo, her beloved dog, and of course her husband.

Claire had a passionate belief in large public universities, a commitment that evolved from the influential experience she had as a Classics Major and Semple Student Scholar while an undergraduate at the University of Cincinnati. Claire went on to receive her Ph.D. in English at Indiana University in English and Comparative Literature, completing an innovative dissertation on the literary, legal, and social status of medieval merchants under the direction of C. Clifford Flanagan.

Claire’s work centered on medieval literature, with a special interest in the literary, legal, and social status of medieval merchants under the direction of C. Clifford Flanagan. Her second publication, RhitSnap: Polymer Medieval Drama in America, was awarded the 2005 Barnard Hewitt Award from the American Society for Theatre Research. Her fourth book, The Queen’s Dumbshows: John Lydgate and the Making of Early Theater, received the Bevington Boyce Award from the Medieval and Renaissance Drama Society in 2015. At the time of her death, she was finishing a book on the Beauchamp Pageant and embarking on a cultural history of tragedy in the Middle Ages. Claire was not only a nationally recognized Medievalist but a beloved teacher and colleague. Students cherished her classroom gifts not only for the keenness of her thought but also for Claire’s dedication to their growth as interested and aware adults. A masterly editor, Claire leaves behind scores of students and colleagues whose hidden arguments she detected and whose stray sentences she brought home.

From her own family origin, Claire inherited a strong work ethic and a discerning personal prudence. During her four-year tenure as the chair of the English department, she worked to ease bureaucratic pressures on faculty and staff members, sometimes by taking on heavy administrative work herself and by recognizing when a committee task had ceased to serve its purpose. She steered a large department through a period of financial uncertainty with skill and grace.

The conference, “Performance, Culture, and the Book,” brought over a dozen of Claire’s former graduate students and colleagues to the English department for two days of stimulating presentations that explored Claire’s scholarly contributions to the study of medieval performance, material and print culture. A highlight of the event was a standing-room-only reading by Jeff Porter, who shared excerpts from “Planet Claire: A Love Story,” his memoir in progress about his life with Claire. The conference also featured keynote addresses from Kathleen Ashley, Distinguished Professor of English (emerita), University of Southern Maine, and Jody Enders, Distinguished Professor of French at the University of California, Santa Barbara. A gift economy reign’d in the English-Philosophy Building that weekend, as Porter invited conference participants each to take a book from Claire’s office library, and the presenters themselves modeled a spirit of scholarly generosity based on citation, collaboration, and recognition.

IN MEMORIAM

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT PAYS TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR CLAIRE SPONSLER

IN MEMORIAM

PATRICIA FOSTER RETIRES

Patricia Foster celebrated her retirement after a long and distinguished tenure as a professor at the University of Iowa. As a respected writer and teacher, known for her incredible energy, acute perception, eloquence, and razor-sharp intelligence, Foster touched the lives of many students throughout the years. “I admire her brilliance, her vitality, her compassion, and her curiosity. Being in workshop with Patricia is like playing Operation with a brain surgeon,” says Dina Poono, an MFA student in the Nonfiction Writing Program. “She is such an inclusive reader and explorer of boundaries. She knows exactly which nerves need testing, and which delicate tissues need preserving. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve sat back in my seat in awe of her extractions.”

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