

From the Chair

Dear Colleagues, Coworkers, and Friends of the English Department,

Looking back on the most challenging semester of my tenure as chair, I'm inspired to quote from the D.H. Lawrence poem "Spring Morning":

AH, through the open door

Is there an almond tree

Aflame with blossom!

—Let us fight no more.

Among the pink and blue

Of the sky and the almond flowers

A sparrow flutters.

—We have come through,

We have indeed come through and, as the achievements below affirm, we've come through in flying colors. Spring is here, and I encourage you to set aside your fears and worries and enjoy the trees and the flowers and the birds that signal the renewal of life.

And I also encourage you to read Florence Boos's reflections on her fifty-year tenure with our department. We come through every year due to the dedication and determination of colleagues like Florence. Please join me in keeping her legacy alive.

Enjoy Your Summer!

Loren

Department Matters

Several faculty, graduate students, staff and alumni were named in senior exit surveys as someone who made a positive difference in their lives during their time at the University of Iowa: Kaveh Akbar, Caelainn Barr, Hannah Bonner, Margaret Bowlin, Lori Branch, Matthew Brown, Sydnee Brown, Jennifer Buckley, Annie Burkhart, Tara Bynum, Jamie Chen, Justin Cosner, Ruben Cota, Andrea Cramer, John D'Agata, Rebecca Flowers, Claire Fox, Richard Frailing, Kyra Goldstein, David Gooblar, Blaine Greteman, Naomi Greyser, Louisa Hall, Adam Hooks, Liv Kane, Tom Keegan, Donika Kelly, Sarah Khatry, Ben Kirbach, Brooks Landon, Kathryn Lavezzo, Paige Lewis, Tom Lin, Sarah Minor, Thomas Mira Y Lopez, A. Darryl Moton, Derek Nnuro, Christine Norquest, Elizabeth Rodriguez-Fielder, Bennet Sims, Harry Stecopoulos, Bonnie Sunstein, Kate Torno, Tobias Veeder, Doris Witt, Shannon Yost.

Faculty Matters

Harry Stecopoulos profiled Iowa City for *Public Books*. On April 2nd, Harry Stecopoulos discussed his book *Telling America's Story to the World: Literature, Internationalism, Cultural Diplomacy* (Oxford, 2023) with American Studies and English students at the CUNY-Graduate Center in New York. On June 14th, Harry will deliver a lecture entitled "Creative Critical Writing" at Kyoto University; and on June 21st he will present a talk entitled "Temple Drake's Speeding Body: Faulkner, Gender, Energy" at the William Faulkner Festival in Nagano, Japan.

Christopher Merrill was awarded the 2025 Ottaway Award for the Promotion of International Literature.

Bluford Adams was awarded the John Gerber Undergraduate Teaching Award.

Hannah Bonner's review of Ariana Reines's *The Rose* was published in *Poetry*.

Summer Funding for Humanities Research was awarded to **Harry Stecopoulos**, **Kathy Lavezzo** and **Eli Rodriguez Fielder** by the Office of the Vice President for Research. **Harry Stecopoulos** will use his Summer Humanities Fellowship to spend two weeks studying the María Amparo Ruiz de Burton Papers at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. With the help of this research, he will examine Burton's novel *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) as a meta-diplomatic commentary that bears directly on her place in a hemispheric literary canon. The resulting chapter will form part of Harry's book project on diplomacy and 19th century literature. **Kathy Lavezzo** will be in the UK researching Stuart Hall and J. R. R. Tolkien for her fourth book project, entitled *The Hobbit and the Critic*. She'll be working with the Stuart Hall papers at the Cadbury Library at the University of Birmingham, and doing fieldwork at Oxford. **Eli Rodriguez Fielder** will use summer funding to supplement a fellowship to the Center for Book Arts in NYC; to host a residency in Iowa City; and to help fund an exhibit in collaboration with the medical library at University of Iowa for Fall 25.

Harry Stecopoulos won the 2024-25 International Engagement Teaching Award.

John D'Agata won the 2024-25 CLAS Outstanding Outreach and Public Engagement Award.

Claire Fox won the 2025 Honors Mentoring Award.

Beth Yale, **David Gooblar**, **Eli Rodriguez Fielder**, **Kaveh Akbar**, and **Aron Aji** received promotions.

Graduate Student Matters

Riley Hanick (PhD) 's article "Scavenging, Harvesting, and Contested Territories: The Fiction of Hugo Martínez-Serros" is forthcoming in *Resistance: A Journal of Radical Environmental Humanities*. He owes a debt of gratitude to **Prof. Eric Gidal**, who introduced him to an earlier incarnation of this journal (*Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities*), as well as **Prof. Claire Fox**, who offered invaluable feedback to earlier drafts of this work. Riley was also awarded the Prairie Lights/ Sherman Paul Dissertation Fellowship.

Bethany Kaylor (NWP) was featured in a [5Q interview](#).

Reflections, April 18th, 2025, Florence Boos

Delivered at Florence's retirement party on April 18, 2025.

I want to thank all those who have come out today to make this occasion a gratifying one. Without the aid of generous friends, colleagues, students and staff members, I couldn't have spent so many absorbing years as a teacher at the University of Iowa. My relationships in these otherwise murky halls have been close and meaningful, and it is these—and the intellectual energy which bursts out, every day, in lectures, classes, informal events, and even meetings—which have made my life here rich and satisfying.

When I arrived in 1973, to my perhaps-biased perception at least, most of my new colleagues were elderly men. How could one spend 40 plus years doing the same thing, I wondered! Now I know, of course. It wasn't the same thing. Let me count the ways—

When I first came to Iowa I was 30 years old. Both the world and I were vastly different. The Vietnam War was just ending, and with it the many protests and upheavals that had accompanied it at all of the universities I had attended. These had prompted participants to think hard: about a stagnant “canon,” then-new methods of teaching and evaluating, gender assumptions, the roles of women and the ways family life had been arranged, the scant presence in the university of persons of color, or indeed, of any non-white non-members of the middle-class, and how educational institutions and the wider society were, for better and for worse, inextricably entwined.

One issue affected me directly, whether I willed it or not. In a department of about 52 there were then three women, only one with children (although a fourth, hired through Comparative Literature, was the soon-to-be famous Gayatri Spivak). I was also the first faculty member hired who had previously suffered unemployment—having lived for the past two years across the Canadian border from SUNY Buffalo, where I had taught volunteer courses at the confederated “Free University,” a product of the times.

I might have been pleased to just get on with it, but a nagging historicist bent made that impossible. I knew that I owed my job to the courage of brave antecedents, even though I didn't

know the details which had made the University of Iowa (along with other universities) the target of government investigations into its hiring practices during the 1970s. As you know, in a change of wording added only at the last minute, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had made gender discrimination illegal, along with that of race, and a presidential order by Lyndon Johnson in 1970 had specifically applied the law to the Civil Service, that is, university faculty and staff positions. Had I arrived in 1953 there would have been no women on the faculty, let alone 3. But more proximately, while I was in graduate school two U. S. faculty women took their cases of tenure denial to the courts—one a professor in Pennsylvania, and the second Annette Kolodny of the University of New Hampshire. I shuddered to think of all the charges which must have been leveled against their scholarship and characters—it took more than the usual determination to mount such a case. Though as graduate students my husband Bill and I had an income of less than \$6000 a year, I contributed eagerly to Kolodny's defense fund. Amazingly, both women won their cases. I started to get job interviews, among them one in a small town by a pleasant river in Iowa I'd never visited.

At the time I had no paid employment. Bill wanted to leave his unsatisfactory job as an instructor of mathematics in SUNY Buffalo night school, and was preparing for an interview with the city of Bremen, which, short of trained math and science teachers for the upper years of the Gymnasium, had advertised for German-speaking Americans to fill these posts. To secure him the recruiters would have been willing to hire me also. Tears filled my eyes as I looked at my shelves of Victorian books and journals—carefully gathered and preserved in preparation for a life which was ever-less likely to be possible. The night before I left for my Iowa interview, desperately wishing sleep to strengthen me for the next days' tasks, I lay awake until morning. A map of North America appeared before my eyes, our home in Ontario toward the margins, and the as-yet-unvisited Iowa City in glowing red and yellow at the center. I made a vow—not to be disclosed—but which had a modest corollary. Each of two earlier campus interviews had been quite dramatic but had left me unemployed. If I should lose the chance to teach, I prayed, let it not be from some mistake of mine, but from events beyond my control.

I was fortunate to join a department in which the men who taught nineteenth-century literature were kindly and welcoming, after the decorum of the time. I learned from them all, in the constant faculty and graduate student exam meetings which then characterized academic life—from the kind

and reflective Arch Coolidge, the elegant and moderate Bob Irwin, and the sage and non-judgmental Jix Lloyd-Jones, a source of wise counsel, and further distinguished by his admirable family and Frank Lloyd Wright antecedents. I owe much to Frederick MacDowell, who perhaps worked with more doctoral students than any other in the department's history, and who cheerfully instructed all his current students to put me on their committees! A model of organization and scholarly endeavor, he was also an artist in daylilies—2000 varieties of which he tended in his garden, a fun-loving satirist, fond of opera and classical music, and a comic actor in such parts as the lion in Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion*. Though he retired in 1985 and died in 2009 at 93, for many years afterwards in my imagination he still walked the halls of EPB.

To cite Arthur in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, "The old order changeth, yielding way to new." I was in the first year of those who were favored with a 3-2 load, down from the previous 3-3. Students registered in person at the old Field House, to which faculty members were dispatched the weekend before classes to sign forms by hand; as a new teacher, I had the 8 a. m. shift. Faculty members smoked unchecked, causing my eyes to smart and my head to throb by day's end. Evening meetings were common and mandatory, for in that day the department made most of its own decisions, and its head, the shrewd and farseeing John Gerber, was at the helm of the School of Letters as well as English, a happy administrative arrangement which, in ways I fail to grasp, enabled English to grow and molt new progeny almost at will—American Studies, African-American Studies, Women's Studies, the Windhover Press, the Translation Workshop, interdisciplinary and general studies majors, and a now-defunct Ph. D. in Modern Letters.

I sat mesmerized at these nighttime gatherings, hearing what to me were marvels of rhetoric on the scale of Milton's Satan and his angels. What were they angry about? Why did tears come to their eyes as they debated the modern language requirement? Why did they believe that they, and they alone, should remake the humanities curriculum? Was the future of intellectual endeavor at Iowa really, that evening, at stake? The best speakers seemed to carry the floor, their prestige and crafted language bringing a whole faction with them to the votes.

And in those days of frequent hirings and departures, job decisions preoccupied me, as well as the ornately deceptive, seemingly polite questioning to which unwary visitors were put. So much turned on each answer! So many I supported and wished could have been hired weren't. Some were, and left, to my sorrow—several women hired after me were denied tenure—and others I

didn't support showed up and I liked them. All this churning, frenetic by today's leaner, tighter standards, altered the atmosphere of department life, with literally dozens of social occasions each year to fete candidates, and new views on a myriad of topics expressed in constant public talks. Qualification decisions were made in open faculty meetings, so that anyone could (and often did) offer personal remarks on a student's character or record. What with department meetings, the mandated 3-4 committee load, Saturday and even weekend meetings, the 12-hour weekly team-taught English semester with its nighttime drama group practice, and proliferating university committees, I could find myself away from home six nights a week. One night while caring for our son and preparing an English semester session on *Paradise Lost* for the next day, I stumbled and fell on the kitchen floor from exhaustion. Oops--I had to ask myself, "Was this what my life choices had wrought?"

I can't say every change since has been for the worse! Outside reviews mandated the end of governance by declamation. The graduate program was decimated by two-thirds, in accord with the national market for college and university teachers; but in compensation, more aid and perhaps attention was available for those admitted, whose lives became less insecure. Although the founder of African-American Studies, Darwin Turner, died young, and his colleague Fred Woodard later retired to a life of artistry in the countryside, the presence of African-Americanists slightly increased, though the demographics of the English department is still in several respects incongruent with that of the nation as a whole.

Foreign exchanges with the Université Paul-Valéry—and for a time Københavns Universitet—began in the 1980s, and I had the great benefit and pleasure of teaching in Montpellier, Copenhagen, and (on a Fulbright) in Reykjavík, Iceland. Far beyond the linguistic knowledge gained or historic sites visited, stretching my mind to try to see how people of good will with quite different interests viewed the world was bracing for me. In recent years the English department has been well administered, in my opinion, by impartial chairs who have sought the benefit of all specializations and types of departmental enterprise, not just their own—Adelaide Morris, Brooks Landon, Jon Wilcox, Claire Sponsler and Claire Fox, Blaine Greteman, and now Loren--and the kind of puzzling factionalizations by specialty or subunit which confronted me when I arrived in the 1970s faded beyond memory. Yet lest I be accused of scattering a rosy glow around truth, however, I do miss one aspect of life in the 70s—with only a card of hand-scribbled notes in my

in my hand, I could walk into an undergraduate classroom whose students had been assigned to read a long and serious Victorian novel, even during midterms. “Well, what did you think—of *The Story of an African Farm*, say, or *Villette*, or *Mill on the Floss*?” I would ask the assembled students, and—yes, they had read it!

I had been hired to replace Carl Baker, a firm-minded eccentric whose original specialization had been Victorian prose and poetry, and who, after founding a teaching area in “Modern European Literature and Thought,” had not approached his original subject for 25 years. Clearly no one seemed to have noticed. It was a day of independent ventures, and I announced that if anyone wanted to study any aspect of Victorian poetry or non-fiction not covered in the curriculum, I would read with them. About 1980 we started a weekly reading group with the mission of better preparing graduate students for the comprehensive examination—a period which in my own graduate years had been an anxious time devoid of guidance. Some years it met for one semester, then for two—averaging perhaps four or five graduate students in attendance, falling at its ebb to just one, and rising to as high as 13. These sessions have helped me renew acquaintance with material which would otherwise have faded into my past, and to witness changing tastes in action—what one generation of students contemns, another finds intriguing or even inspirational. No grades, no need for conformity or pieties—and it’s a pleasure to hear the largely unfettered opinions of one’s fellow human beings.

I want to add, too, that at times I have pursued what were unfashionable topics within the field of literary studies at large. In the days before “cultural studies,” I spent almost a year of my life studying the European socialist history and political theory which enabled me to edit William Morris’s *Socialist Diary* and his political essays. Over a period of perhaps fifteen years, I invested considerable time in locating and reworking the material which became *Working-Class Women Poets of Victorian Britain: An Anthology* and a follow-up book on working-class women’s memoirs. It took the William Morris Archive about eleven years to gain “peer review” status; and even then, of course, a digital presentation is not publication. I’m grateful that my department, if not always wildly enthusiastic about some of these excursions, nonetheless permitted its members to make individual decisions. Freedom is relative, and I’m aware that I was able to approach what to me were urgent and needed ventures, whereas other academics had been restrained from similar projects.

Most of all, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my late husband, Bill, a mathematician and philosopher who died in 2014. An early male feminist and an excellent editor and participatory critic, he furthered and aided in all these endeavors throughout our nearly fifty-year partnership, as he traveled with me for research and shifted his career to enable me to obtain work in a difficult market.

So these are just a few of the ways in which 50+ years have rushed by. I've been happy to be able to speak of these things today, and what I most wish in life is that others—and in particular, a younger generation—will have similar choices. One of life's greatest desires is to pass on what one has valued. Higher education—and indeed, as we together deeply feel, all forms of “reality-based” knowledge and inquiry—seem now threatened—not merely the institutions themselves, nor even financial access to them, but respect for the very ideals of mutual understanding and a cohesive, progressing society, which at their best have undergirded these. I thank all who have shared these values and experiences with me, and have come out today, and hope that our fellowship may continue, both in presence and spirit, into such future as may be granted us.

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