

## A Dangerous, Backbreaking Issue

**We've squeezed two issues into one: lift with your legs, not your back!**



*Administrative Secretary Cynthia Ferrera;  
she's the greatest*

*The Channel* is back-- and bigger than ever. After a regrettable, unforeseen hiatus, the English department newsletter is at long last making its triumphant return with a massive 30-page issue--and just in time for the holidays!

A lot has transpired since our last issue-- department and university events,

retirements, new hirings, changes in leadership, promotions, program developments, fancy awards, and more. And we've jam-packed this issue with as much information about all of those happenings as time and space would allow.

A few items herein might be a tad on the dusty side, but we promised that nothing has sprouted mold. And there's even more to report from the semester we've just finished up, though we've left much of that out until the next issue-- which, we promise to our devoted friends, students, and alumni, will be forthcoming in a much more timely manner than the issue now before you.

At any rate, we're glad to be back and we're pretty confident you'll find this issue worth the wait!

### Also in this issue

**More Teaching Excellence**  
Team English honored again!

**Politics as Sport**  
Laam on the OU hosted GOP debate

**"Unlikely Things"**  
Hoepfner celebrated

**Flash Fiction, Ekphrasis**  
Student fiction and poetry

**Kresge Fellowships Awarded**  
And one goes to Kathy Pfeiffer

**The Cosmopolitans**  
A book review by Chris Apap

**... and that's not all**  
The long and the short on the year's events, faculty awards and publications,

# The English Channel

The Alumni Newsletter of the Department of English

## English Dept. Pulls Off Faculty Award Hat Trick

Insko, Plantus Sweep Teaching Awards; Knutson Recognized for Achievement in Scholarship



Jeffrey Insko (right) with President Russi

At the annual Faculty Recognition Luncheon in April, Jeffrey Insko received the 2012 Teaching Excellence Award—the university’s highest honor for teaching—and Doris Plantus won the Excellence in Teaching Award—for non-tenure-track and part-time instructors. Insko is the ninth English faculty member to win the Teaching

Excellence Award, instituted in 1982, and Plantus is the first English faculty to earn the Excellence in Teaching honor. “This really belongs to the English department,” Insko said of the award. “There are so many excellent teachers among my colleagues, every bit as deserving of this recognition as I am. It’s an honor to represent a department that considers teaching excellence a basic condition of membership.”

Both awards recognize superior teaching, innovative instructional practice, high educational standards, the creation of productive learning environments, and the ability to inspire and motivate students.

Teaching a variety of courses in literature, screenwriting, and film, Doris Plantus has been a special lecturer at OU since 2009. She

brings a unique background in music, dance, and foreign languages to her classes. Her students praise her “free-thinking, multidisciplinary, creative, positive, and inquisitive” classroom environment.

The English department is pleased to congratulate Professors Insko and Plantus on these prestigious awards!



Gary Russi and Doris C. Plantus

### English Department Teaching Excellence Award Recipients

1984	Nigel Hampton
1987	Bob Eberwein
1991	Bruce Mann
1993	Brian Connery
1995	Brian Murphy
1998	Natalie Cole
2002	Jude Nixon
2008	Susan Hawkins
<b>2012</b>	<b>Jeffrey Insko</b>

### Knutson Honored for Scholarship

Andrea Knutson was given a Faculty Recognition award for achievement in scholarship. Professor Knutson’s first book, *American Spaces of Conversion: The Conductive Imaginaries of Edwards, Emerson, and James*, was published in 2010 by Oxford University Press. Professor Knutson’s book represents scholarship of the highest caliber and is certain to have wide influence in the fields of American literary and religious studies, while also bringing national recognition to Prof. Knutson and OU.

## Pfeiffer Wins Kresge Grant

Professor Kathleen Pfeiffer was awarded a prestigious 2012 Kresge Fellowship in Literary Arts for her work in creative nonfiction. Since receiving news about the award in late June, Pfeiffer's been asked a number of questions about the award and what it means to her work.

*How do you feel to be named a Kresge Fellow?*

I'm thrilled and honored and extremely happy. There are so many layers to why this is special to me: for one, it validates my work as a creative writer (all of my past writing and publication has been literary criticism, but the writing samples I submitted with this application were all creative nonfiction -- personal essays, really.) But in addition to that, I'm humbled at the fact that the panelists judging applications included so many writers I admire. These are people whose work I've been teaching, they've been artistic role models to me, and to think that they've now read my work -- let alone that they chose my work -- is just delightful.

*How do you plan to use your fellowship funds?*

Well, believe it or not, I'm still paying off student loans from graduate school. So, I mostly look forward to getting out of debt. This money will free me from summer teaching, and thereby buy me some valuable time to think and write; it will give me a bit of a cushion for family and living expenses, a new roof, that sort of thing. The symbolism of the money



*Kresge Fellow Kathy Pfeiffer*

is just as valuable to me as the actual cash, because it's just so significant. I feel a level of commitment and responsibility to the craft of writing in a way that I didn't before, and that's already very motivating.

*Describe your current memoir? What do you hope to achieve with the work?*

It's still very much a work in progress, and so in some ways, it hasn't yet fully revealed to me what it wants to be exactly. It will be a memoir of step-motherhood and loss. I'm writing about the experience of marginalization and invisibility that I struggled with for many years in my particular experience as a step-mother. But I'm also writing about all of the unexpected ways and unlikely places where I found my experiences reflected in literature. In the opening pages of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, for instance, or in an Edith Wharton high society dinner scene -- I continually found uncanny and compassionate reflections of my own experiences. That's the story I want to tell, the story of how we all find ourselves in the books we read.

*What themes and ideas do you hope to convey? Why are these important to you?*

The most important thing to me is not merely telling the story of my experience, but using language to craft that experience into something meaningful, something aesthetically valuable and therefore transcendent, something that is significant apart from the experience itself.

**[Read more about Prof. Pfeiffer's award here.](#)**

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## Edwards, Laam Promoted, Awarded Tenure

We are proud to report that effective last August, two members of the Oakland English department were promoted to the rank of Associate Professor with tenure. Kevin Laam and Kyle Edwards joined the Oakland English department in 2006. Since that time, both have been active scholars, effective teachers, and valuable department and university citizens. Edwards is the Director of the new Cinema Studies major, a degree program that he was instrumental in creating. Kevin Laam is currently the Chair of the department's Undergraduate Programs Committee. In addition to their dedicated service work, both Laam and Edwards regularly receive rave reviews for their teaching and maintain productive research agendas. Please join us in congratulating Professors Edwards and Laam on this important career milestone.



*Associate Professors Kyle Edwards (left) and Kevin Laam*

## Department Welcomes New Faculty

The Department of English is happy to welcome three new faculty. Joanne Lipson Freed is our newest Assistant Professor of Contemporary American Literature. Professor Freed earned her graduate degree at the University of Michigan, and her dissertation, "Haunting Encounters: The Ethics of Global Reading" asks the question, "What are the ethical stakes of reading works of fiction that circulate beyond their country or culture of origin?" With an article published in *Comparative Literature Studies* and another forthcoming in the *African American Review*, Dr. Freed's scholarly career is already well launched; the enthusiasm of her students at Ohio University, where she has spent the past year as a Visiting Assistant Professor, testifies to her success in the classroom.

"I am tremendously excited to join the English department at Oakland," Professor Freed tells the *Channel*, "and I'm looking forward to the many rich and rewarding relationships I will form with students and colleagues." She adds, "A grad-school friend of mine, Becca Cheezum, joined the faculty in Public Health in the fall, and before the semester we exchanged giddy emails about how excited we were to be coming to Oakland. She put it best when she said that the highlight of accepting Oakland's offer was knowing that she would get to be "part of the team" in her new department. My sentiments exactly."



Joanne Lipson Freed



Courtney Brannon-Donoghue

The Department of English and the Cinema Studies Program welcomes Courtney Brannon Donoghue as an Assistant Professor of Cinema Studies. Professor Brannon Donoghue earned her PhD at the University of Texas in Austin and specializes in media industries, Brazilian cinema, Global Hollywood, transnational cinema, and transmedia storytelling. She has published articles and book chapters on Brazilian film management cultures, Hollywood co-productions, and *Ugly Betty* as telenovela format. Based on her extensive field research and interviews with film professionals in Brazil and Europe, she currently is working on a book manuscript exploring production cultures and relationships between these local professionals and Hollywood midlevel managers outside of the Anglophone media market.

"Joining the English faculty is a dream job for me," Brannon Donoghue says, "I am honored to be part of such a passionate, dedicated, and supportive group of educators." Bringing a conversational and interactive style to the classroom, she works to make her cinema studies classes challenging, fun, and relevant for her students. The small class size allows for an intimate learning environment. "My Oakland students are incredibly hardworking and excited to learn about media industries. It is a pleasure to work with them."

Alison Hoffman-Han also joins Cinema as an Assistant Professor. Recently awarded her doctoral degree with distinction from the University of California, Los Angeles, Hoffman-Han specializes in experimental and feminist film, contemporary East Asian cinema, and international film and media history & theory. Currently, her book, *Sofia Coppola: Reveries in Pink*, is under contract with University of Illinois Press as part of their "Contemporary Film Directors" series, and her chapter on the independent cinematic and new media practices of artist Miranda July appears in the anthology *There She Goes: Feminist Filmmaking and Beyond*. Hoffman-Han's forthcoming articles include a piece on Sissy Spacek's "star text" as it relates to New Hollywood's representations of feminism for the anthology *Star Bodies and the Erotics of Suffering*, and a piece on the Korean New Wave director Park Chan-wook for *The Journal of Japanese & Korean Cinema*.

"Just after one semester, I'm already beginning to feel quite at home at Oakland," Professor Hoffman-Han notes with a smile in her chat with the *Channel*. "My Cinema Studies and English colleagues and students couldn't be more wonderful to work with." She continues, "The positivity and enthusiasm I've experienced so far in everything—from classroom discussions to departmental events to my involvement with the Grizzdance Film Festival—has exceeded my expectations, and those expectations were pretty high."



Allison Hoffman-Han

## Letters from the Chairs: You say Goodbye and I say Hello

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### LETTER FROM THE (OUTGOING) CHAIR by Susan Hawkins



This is my final, final act as Chair of the English Department. My official retirement from the university and the department was August 14th. In cleaning out the corner office, I found many wonderful notes from students and colleagues, reminders of generous and kind moments in my twenty-seven years at OU.

These years as chair have been immensely rewarding. In overseeing the creation of the Cinema Studies major and the new Creative Writing BA, it has been my especial pleasure to welcome talented new faculty to the department. Such programs would not exist without the support of Virinder Moudgil and Michelle Piskulich.

The business of saying farewell, it turns out, is hard. I am blessed with colleagues who are The Best in every sense and among whom I count some of my dearest friends. It has been a privilege and honor to serve them and you. I say good-bye knowing that the department will thrive under the new leadership of Kathleen Pfeiffer—scholar, teacher, and

Tigers fan extraordinaire.

Finally, I could not have done the work of the department without the faithful, cheerful, and generous assistance of Cynthia Ferrera, Administrative Secretary, aka department Angel.

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### LETTER FROM THE (INCOMING) CHAIR by Kathleen Pfeiffer

The fall 2012 semester has called on all of us in the English Department for a renewed commitment to our *Esprit de Corps*. As our office spaces in O'Dowd Hall have been under construction even as we've worked in them, we have all learned the value of maintaining a good sense of humor and an even better supply of Excedrin. On the one hand, directing people to our building was easy -- just look for the giant crane! -- but we will all be happy when we leave those consecutive days of constant jackhammering to the past.

It's been a busy, exciting and delightful semester for Team English, as we've said goodbye to dear friends, welcomed new colleagues, launched the Creative Writing major, hosted the U.S. Poet Laureate, celebrated our colleagues' Teaching Excellence, and more. Through all of this, we continue to be inspired by our students, dedicated to our research, and generally pleased to be sharing our careers in each others' company.



*[Editor's note: speaking of outgoing, stay tuned in our spring issue for reflections of and tributes to our now-retired colleagues Susan Hawkins and Gladys Cardiff, whose careers and contributions we celebrated this past summer.]*

# “Attentiveness is the natural prayer of the soul.”

## Ed Haworth Hoepfner Honored with 2012 Judd Family Faculty Achievement Award

[On April 12, English department faculty, students, alumni, and family gathered to honor Ed Haworth Hoepfner with the Judd Family Faculty Achievement Award, established through the generosity of OU alumni Pat and Randy Judd, with the counsel of their former teacher, Professor Joan Rosen. Following Channel tradition, we reprint here a portion of department chair Susan Hawkins's eloquent tribute to Professor Hoepfner, delivered at the ceremony, followed by the text of Prof. Hoepfner's gracious acceptance talk.]

Welcome to the 15th Judd Family Faculty Achievement Award ceremony at which, as you know, we are honoring Ed Haworth Hoepfner. I'm very pleased to welcome Pat and Randy Judd, OU alums who are the founders and sustainers of this Award. I also want to welcome our Emeriti faculty—Joan Rosen, prime instigator in creating the award; David Mascitelli; and Distinguished Professors Bob and Jane Eberwein. And while Ed's wife, Susan, could not be here today, she is here in spirit.

We are honoring Ed today for his numerous contributions to the department and university in all of these areas, but most particularly for his outstanding achievement as a poet and as the person who made the Creative Writing major a reality. Kudos, Ed, applause.

First, the Poetry: Ed is the 2010 winner of the Ohio University Press Poetry Award for his collection entitled *Blood Prism*, published in 2011. The volume is divided into three sections: memory, politics, and age. The three sections are related through the notion of “blood”—the blood of family, the often-violent nature of politics, and age as the coming end of one story in a bloodline. As noted by Annie Gilson in her nominating letter, “His work is nuanced and graceful and lovely.” With this prize he receives the national recognition he has long deserved.

*Blood Prism* joins his previous two collections, *Ancestral Radio* (2008) and *Rain Through High Windows* (2000). His study of contemporary poets W.S. Merwin and John Ashbery, *Echoes and Moving Fields*, was published in 1994. And his many poems—I counted 174 listed on his CV, not including anthologies and translations—have appeared in prestigious quarterlies.

Second, the Creative Writing Program

Here I will quote from Annie Gilson's nominating letter on Ed's contributions to our new major:

“Over the last three years, Ed has put in a phenomenal amount of energy in the drafting, presenting, and

implementing of the Creative Writing proposal and major. He was the main author; he edited and revised it; and he attended numerous meetings wherein the proposal was reviewed. Each meeting required more tweaking of the proposal and Ed did all of that work. But each meeting also required considerable tact and diplomacy. Without Ed's rock-solid sensible leadership, and his calm, unflappable demeanor, this proposal would have stalled long ago.”

Our new major, of which we are proud, is marked in

every way by Ed's hand—his knowledge, professionalism, and skill have created a rigorous and challenging program. Even though the program doesn't officially begin until fall, Ed has been serving as the main advisor and director of it this year.

I want to conclude my remarks by speaking to what is apparent throughout my comments but bears repeating. As a poet, teacher, colleague, and friend Ed is an immensely generous human being. Students make a beeline to his office to talk about their writing and seek his advice; he has directed 33 Independent Studies and six Masters Projects, surely a department record; former students stay in touch, and a number of them

have gone on to MFA programs and become creative writing teachers themselves. His colleagues share their writing with him and find his comments enlightening; he has chaired the Undergraduate Programs Committee and written too many Assessment reports for any one individual—the last one nominated for a university award; he served as the major advisor for five years and has generously taken on that duty when Rob and I have been on sabbatical. The list of his contributions to the department and to the life of poetry at the university and in the community is simply too huge for me to enumerate here, but we are all aware of the ways in which Ed keeps us honest and reminds us of why the life of the mind is worthy of our constant vigilance.

It is the department's honor and privilege to present this year's Judd Family Faculty Achievement Award to my friend



Ed Haworth Hoepfner

of twenty-five years, Ed Haworth Hoepfner. The plaque reads “In recognition of your artistry as a poet and in appreciation for your dedication to the Creative Writing program.” The quotation, from 17th century French philosopher, Nicolas Malebranche, reads: “Attentiveness is the natural prayer of the soul.” Congratulations, Ed!!!

*Ed Haworth Hoepfner's remarks upon receiving the 2012 Judd Faculty Achievement Award:*

Well. I think Susan used “unflappable” to refer to me, somewhere in her gracious introduction. I have to say that I feel pretty thoroughly flapped at the moment. . . . But I want to thank Susan for her very kind words. And thank you all—colleagues, staff, students—for showing up, and for this reception. When my wife and I have found ourselves in some social situation that seems at the moment to call for a toast, she tends to nudge me, saying, “you’re a poet, can you say something?” Through all the years we’ve been married, I’ve never been able to convince her that I can’t, in fact, say something. Truth of the matter is, the reason I became a poet in the first place is that I can’t “say something.” It’s difficult.

There’s a poem by Kay Ryan, “Paired Things,” that puts forward this notion: if we knew nothing, how possible would it be—upon observing in the snow the tracks of a bird—to imagine a bird in flight? There is this great, unlikely quality to everything, I think. It’s at the heart of poetry, the unlikely and instant linking, moving from light shining off a hubcap to the look in my father’s eye. It’s the yoking and resemblance that is at the core of the powerful intelligence in metaphors.

And it’s unlikely that I should be here today, that all of us should be here, come from where we have. It’s unlikely that I was given this job in the first place. In 1987, I’d been living in southern Mississippi. I’d sent out, in the previous year-and-a-half, 473 job applications, many of which were directed to positions in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan, since my family then lived in Minnesota, and I was fond of the upper Midwest. Most of these applications were aimed at positions I had no business applying for, little chance of getting, since I applied for everything I could imagine applying for: jobs in composition, in 19th century American literature, in theory.

When I attended the MLA convention in San Francisco that December, I had a handful of interviews lined up. Two of them were back-to-back: one for a theory job at IUPUI, the second for this job at Oakland. I’ve said it was San Francisco. It was raining. It was raining in San Francisco and I got lost, arrived a bit late, soaking wet, for the theory interview. There was only one man in the room when the door opened, a

stocky man with red hair and a red beard. He seated me on the bed and, after a brief preliminary, said “Why don’t you begin by giving me a Marxist reading of Aristotle’s Poetics?” I had no idea. I began talking, but I had no idea. I knew I was in the middle of a Jamesian sentence; I could almost see the semi-colons I was using; I knew I was in the midst of a parenthetical; but I had no idea what I was saying.

***There is this great, unlikely quality to everything, I think.***

None. I finally ground to a halt, mid-sentence, and just blinked like one of those little seals waiting for the club to fall. And it did fall. The man took me by the elbow, lifted me off the bed and walked me to the door. Shaking his head, he said, directly, “Don’t call us; we’ll call you.”

After this, I walked into the Oakland interview. Still wet. Shaken. Bob Eberwein, Susan Hawkins and Mark Workman were there; they introduced themselves and asked how the MLA was going. Unable to stop myself, I said “terrible.” I said I had just totally gassed a theory interview, and I recounted how that interview had gone. Briefly recounted. Everyone laughed. And a few days later, as I was driving back south from Minnesota, I got a call from Bob, asking me to come for an on-campus interview. The rest is, as they say, history.

So here I am. Unlikely as it is. And also unlikely because I came staggering to Oakland as a newly recovering alcoholic. A man who’d just become a father and who realized that his life needed a desperate change. An unlikely thing. I was someone who needed a chance. Really badly, I needed a chance, and Oakland gave me that. And so here I am. And, in my way of thinking, just as things are so unlikely, they also are configured. Something like fractal theory, I suppose. Here we are, all of us from our separate ways, unlikely as that is, and where these are gathered there is a configuration, inevitably. And to that configuration there is an ethos, a spirit, and it’s been my great fortune to be part of that configuration here, in this department, which—because of Bob and Jane and Joan and David, because of all those who came before us in English—is touched by an ethos that is genial and supportive, full of concern for others and their work, for the lives of our students. It’s an atmosphere we all care about, and caring about, generate again, still.

So I want to thank you, again, thank Annie and Gladys and Natalie and Brian for the nominations they wrote, thank my colleagues and the great staff we have, the students, everyone. These years. It’s been my honor to be part of you all.

—Ed Hoepfner

BONUS HOEPPNER TRIBUTE

In Praise of Unlikely Things *by Jim McClure*

rationalists, wearing square hats,  
think , in square rooms,  
looking at the floor,  
looking at the ceiling.  
they confine themselves  
to right-angled triangles.  
if they tried rhomboids,  
cones, waving lines, ellipses —  
as for example, the ellipse of the half-moon —  
rationalists would wear sombreros.  
—Wallace Stevens, *Six Significant Landscapes*

My first impression of the course was not the professor himself, but rather the required coursepack I dutifully picked up in the university's cramped bookstore. Beyond the simple, typewriter-produced cover were pages and pages of photo-copied poetry, sizes and fonts shifting and sliding with abandon from one poem to another. Some tilted and askew, some with darkened edges, and some with faded words lost in the transition, they were a foreshadowing of voices that spoke of buzzing flies and cruel Aprils, cold plums, and blackbirds.

Other books followed. Rich, Merwin, and Vendler – strangers whose voices I came to know well even before I went on to hear them in person – and Robert Creeley, whose rhythms and images were in my head long before I had ever read one of his poems.

As the semester progressed, it's fair to say that I didn't always understand the complex structural analysis chalked on the board and bearing an uncomfortable resemblance to the graphs I was trying to escape. Ashbery, much like the art of which he wrote, remained

distant and unknowable, beautiful only in his bewildering complexity, while Elliot laughed derisively at my flaying attempts to penetrate the cloud of allusions that seemingly swarmed around his poems like so many of Emily's flies.

Despite myself, I learned such terms as cognitive dissidence which, despite my tenuous grasp of its meaning, added to my growing repertoire of analytical tools whose names I could use much like the secret, knowing handshake of an exclusive club. I also learned, and never forgot, what made up the poetic moment. That thought and image, time and memory, the abstract and the concrete, could come together in an unlikely coalescence was something I had always experienced but never trusted – until now.

I finished the course with a tortured analysis of Theodore Roethke's *The Far Field*, cranked out by hand at the kitchen table of our basement apartment.

Looking back, I realize that I had selected Roethke, and this poem in particular, not because I understood it but because I knew that he understood me, and that was a long way from where I had started.

***I learned what made up the poetic moment.***

So thanks Ed. Thanks for providing me with a lifetime of memories and images and voices and most of all for those few, fleeting, unlikely moments as we stood talking on the sidewalk in the summer sun over twenty years ago.

We never know who's sitting in our classroom, and we often try to convince ourselves that behind many a sullen or timid face is a promising scholar. Every once in a while, however, it's just a lost soul, wanting nothing more than for someone to show him that the round hat may just be the salvation he has been looking for.

## An American Treasure, a Michigan Gem *by Jenifer DeBellis, creative writing major*

A hum of enthusiasm infused the campus community for two months as Oakland University awaited the welcome of Bonnie Jo Campbell as this winter's guest feature reader. Campbell—acclaimed author of *Once Upon a River*, *Q Road*, and *American Salvage*, Pushcart Prize winner, and National Book Award finalist—was everything the enthusiasts anticipated and more. Her March 8th visit left a permanent imprint upon the hearts and minds of the university's literary community.

No one breathes life into local Michigan color the way Campbell does. Her writing is provocative and dares to shed light on some of the darkest internal landscapes that exist within rural, working class communities. Her prose is compelling, offering readers a unique perspective that seeks to uncover the redeeming qualities of society's discarded, abused, and undervalued members. Her ability to make accessible a side of the human condition that is often treated as taboo or misunderstood is without comparison.

Before her evening reading engagement, Campbell made guest appearances in several OU English classes. During these visits she led intimate discussions about her short story

collection *American Salvage* and took an active interest in encouraging aspiring writers in many areas of the industry. The passion she presented toward her literary works was as compelling as the stories themselves. The valuable resources she generously shared about opportunities within the literary world demonstrated her commitment to the craft and exposed a heart that is zealous about seeing others succeed.

The selections Campbell shared from *American Salvage* and *Once Upon a River* during her evening reading event offered the audience an unforgettable sensory experience. She brought these rural Michigan landscapes and unruly, intricately complex characters off the page with vivid tangibility. And she didn't leave the crowd there. In addition to sharing her stories, her willingness to share her creative processes exposed a dimension of her character that is both genuine and impressive. Her pursuit of pushing toward deeper understandings was contagious. The energy she brought to campus was inspirational and impacted her entire visit. The memories of Campbell's day on campus still linger upon the minds and tongues of those who had the privilege of spending time with her.

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## Poet, Former Faculty Member Returns *by Chelsea Grimmer*

In early November, poet and teacher Michael Heffernan returned to the Oakland University campus after a sojourn of more than forty years, visiting with one of the poetry workshops in our new Creative Writing major and offering a reading for a couple hundred of OU's poetry faithful. Attendees included several OU faculty emeriti who remembered Heffernan from his days as a young assistant professor in the English department in the late 1960s.

Local poet and essayist, former OU student, and longtime friend of the department, Thomas Lynch, credits Heffernan with showing him that "an ordinary life in southern Michigan could produce a share of extraordinary words" as Heffernan wrote "in a bungalow on Brown Road near Pontiac, Michigan, in the shadow of auto factories and the interstate." Lynch and Heffernan had toured Michigan the previous summer in support of Heffernan's ninth collection of poetry, *At the Bureau of Divine Music*, published by Wayne State University Press in its Made in Michigan series.

Heffernan's reading included poems from the new volume, many of which included brief details from his youth in Detroit -- buying an ancient Roman coin at Hudson's or having a drink with his father at Tommy Burke's on Vernor -- woven into other reflections on stories and landscapes in west Ireland, Paris, and the American south. Throughout his visit, which he concluded with a stop at Lafayette Coney Island, a few blocks from where he grew up, Heffernan marveled at the changes at OU and in Detroit, reflections which will likely produce yet more poems. Since leaving OU, Heffernan has taught at the University of Kansas, the National University of Ireland at Galway, and, since 1986, at the University of Arkansas – Fayetteville.

He has been awarded three NEA grants, the Iowa Poetry Prize, two Pushcart Prizes, and the Porter Prize for Literary Excellence. The department was honored to welcome him back, and he was immensely pleased to be here with us, to meet our students, and to see the extraordinary development of the department over the years.



## Lively Crowd, Poems at the 14th Annual Tax Day Poetry Bash

Between 40 and 50 people showed up at the (fourteenth annual) Poetry Bash on Monday, April 16. Some came to read, others to listen. The unofficial theme of this year's Bash was a tribute to Adrienne Rich, who died on March 27. Professor Niels Herold and Kevin Laam joined graduate student/teaching assistant Joanna Dressler in reading Rich poems. Susan Hawkins, our beloved and departing chair, read poems by our own Ed Haworth-Hoepfner and Gladys Cardiff (who is also retiring after this semester).. Professor Cardiff, who has been a mainstay at the Poetry Bash, particularly since she organized the Ekphrastic poetry contest (whose winners are announced at the Bash), will be sorely missed at next year's Bash. Senior Jennifer DeBellis read her award winning Ekphrastic poem—and, from memory, Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus." Professor Insko stole away from his class to read two monkey poems. Cyndie Ferrera, the department's backbone, read Anne Sexton's "Words." One of the many highlights of the evening was Steven Wynne's reading of Chaucer in Middle English. The quality of the student-written poetry has gone up dramatically over the years, and this year's Bash marked a high point on that trajectory. Throughout the evening, some 15 books were given away by drawing—thanks to the faculty members (Gladys Cardiff, Susan Hawkins, and Rob Anderson) who donated the books. See you next year on April 15th at 5:30 in the Oakland Center for the 15th Annual Poetry Bash!



*Clockwise from left: Ashley Gordon, Joanna Dressler, Susan Hawkins, Steve Wynne, Jennifer DeBellis, Kris Darlington*

## BOOK REVIEW

What is the Point of Immigration? *by Chris Apap*

The title of Nadia Kalman's promising debut novel, *The Cosmopolitans* (Livingstone Press, 2010), refers to a internationalist, even global humanist sensibility that her characters understand to be both fundamentally Jewish and essentially Russian in nature. Critics of Jewish literature have come to wonder whether the Jewish American imagination, having "arrived" in the fictions of Saul Bellow or Philip Roth, can keep pace with emerging and often exuberant ethnic American voices. Kalman makes an undeniable case for the vibrancy of her cosmopolitan approach to literature—and for the place of an avant-garde of young writers of both Russian and Jewish extraction beside recent stars like Jhumpa Lahiri or Sherman Alexie.

Kalman traces the lives of a Russian émigré family that has settled, finally, in the dreary suburb of Stamford, Connecticut: Patriarch Osip Molochnik, an engineer and lover of Jewish Russian dissident poet Alexander Galich; his wife Stalina, who holds deep, dark secrets and training as a lab technician; their eldest daughter Milla, an obedient daughter and accountant whose marriage to Malcolm Strauss masks her own lesbian longings; strident middle daughter Yana, who strives to be a Marxist and feminist in a world that seems to truly value neither; and the youngest, Katya, who hides behind silence because, when excited, she speaks in a "strangely mannish voice" that repeats soundbites from Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev's public speeches.

The book's plot ostensibly centers on the marriages of the Molochnik sisters, each unconventional in its own way. The language is descriptive and fresh, eschewing the now-clichéd yiddishisms of earlier generations for colorful Russian idiom and the tortured English of native Russian speakers. That cultural sensibility extends to the story's thematics, adapted from the familiar Russian literary conceit that suffering is a means of redemption.

But the book is, at its core, a story about what makes this proudly Russian family so recognizably American. Some of this is the result of the book's humor, a mash-up of Russian absurdist influence and a Jewish-American magic-realism. Katya's disability provides consistent humor and, later, pathos; however, more funny, and recognizable, is Yana's

courtship by a Bangladeshi Muslim student. The resulting wedding, a comedy of errors, is drawn as a series of failed moments of cultural détente between two ethnic communities whose intense awareness of their own outsider status is not enough common ground to bring them together.

The novel is structured as a series of vignettes from the alternating points of view of multiple characters. The strength of this approach is that the book is quite readable, and the style is perfect for satire and critique; Kalman's withering portrait of the Strauss family, which coddles Milla's husband Malcolm into a selfish, ivy-leagued-educated man-child who wants to be a rock star, seems an indictment not only of a kind of East Coast privilege, but of the previous

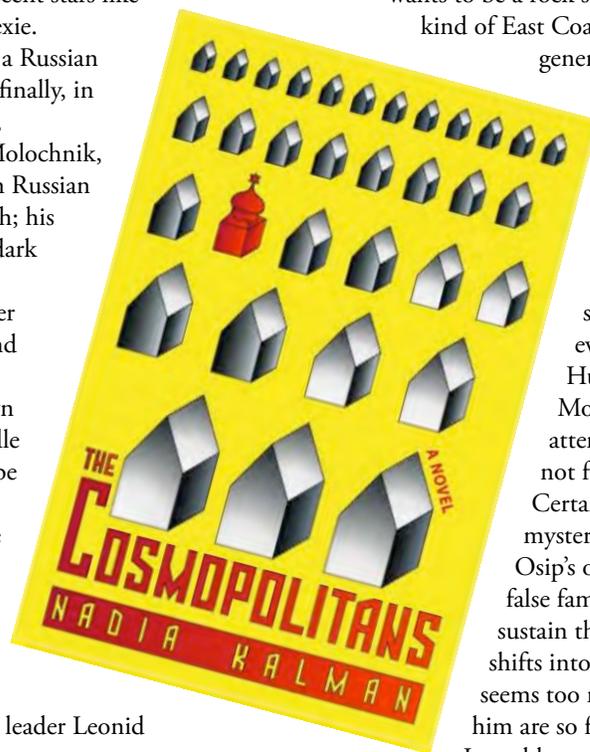
generation of Jewish immigrants (and authors, natch) who now proudly boast their pedigrees and jostle to announce their children's marriages in the *New York Times*.

The form does have its weaknesses.

Readers may be frustrated by the episodic structure, finding it difficult to sustain their interest in the characters and events. When the flooding catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina is re-enacted in the Molochnik home during a tragicomic suicide attempt as the novel winds down, some may not feel the resolution is fully satisfying.

Certain characters are left frustratingly mysterious by the novel's structure, especially Osip's older brother Lev, a dissident who spun false family stories for Osip in order to inspire and sustain the younger Molochnik in Russia. Lev's shifts into first-person narration are gripping but he seems too much a cipher because our glimpses of him are so few and far between.

I would argue that this is precisely Kalman's point. Lev is a relic, a loner, and while perhaps the philosophic soul of the novel, not it's heart. *The Cosmopolitans* is Kalman's literary declaration of independence from needing to address explicitly and exclusively Russian and dissident themes. At the middle of the novel, Lev asks "What . . . is the Point of Immigration, if not new stories?" Based on her auspicious debut, we look forward to more new stories from Kalman, and embrace this one.



## TELEVISION REVIEW

*Mad Men* Musings from a Devoted, Critical Fan L. Bailey McDaniel

Five years ago AMC'S *Mad Men* set its first season in 1960, a juicy-ripe moment in US culture when many Americans faced a loosening grip on the stability and certainties of post-war culture. Although they weren't always fair, notions of who people were (and were supposed to be) were more consistently defined than they would be in the years to follow. For the last four seasons viewers have been treated to characters wrestling with anxieties surrounding Vietnam, the Cold War, and (an increasingly public debate on) socio-political inequalities. In a real, personal way, *Mad Men*'s characters are trying to figure out the country's and their own newly defined identity. This is what the show does best: three-dimensional, brilliantly performed and written characters who wrestle with that question ubiquitous to some of literature's greatest protagonists, "Who am I (and who am I supposed to be)?"

Beyond its stellar acting, writing, and direction, however, the series occasionally misses what it could be, what it tries to be. More than deft and complicated explorations of characters plagued by uncertainties surrounding identity and purpose, the show often attempts but frequently fails to represent still largely unheard voices from the cultural and political tumult of the 1960s.

The series hits it out of the park in the tortured confusions of, for example, the Bette Friedan-inspired anti-heroine Betty, a woman trapped in the domestic success she's been raised to think she wants, only to find herself bored, irritated, and unsatisfied with (and not good at) motherhood. Increasingly angry, even though she's not sure why, Betty presents a masterful portrait of the issues informing second-wave feminism – narrowly defined options for women based exclusively in domesticity, if not infantilization. Equally brilliant are the explorations of Peggy and Joan, pencil-skirt warriors who, with strength and vulnerability, battle for some/any professional identity. Peggy and Joan speak boldly back to cold war sexual ideologies that would deem much of their behavior deviant (if not criminal, depending on the season). But second-wave feminism had limits and many had to do with its narrow focus—a focus informed almost exclusively by concerns facing white, middle-class women. This political myopia is analogous to some of the series' blindspots.

Consider this: the current season is set in 1966, a moment defined by public tension and private confusion. While 1968's riots in Newark, Detroit, and Chicago were yet to occur, the country was dealing with race-based violence in Harlem, Watts, and a six-day riot in Benton Harbor, MI. Set in the same year that the US Supreme Court decided *Loving v. Virginia* (in which anti-miscegenation laws were finally found unconstitutional), *Mad Men*'s sixth season makes

insufficient reference to the racial politics of American culture as those power imbalances were felt at all levels. It's the occasional moves toward acknowledging these conflicts that seems troubling. Clearly aware of the relevance of the increasingly fervent civil rights movement, or even the gay rights movement that would be soon be taking place (the Stonewall Riots will occur in 1969), the series dips a toe in the waters of race- and queer-based oppressions, but never jumps head first in a narrative pool that takes these oppressions seriously. By season three, Sal Romano's gay identity was established, but the trajectory surrounding his character's queerness was short lived. Serving primarily as a too-brief-episode-ark of cultural finger wagging (i.e., "Look how backward it used to be"), Sal is eventually let go, departs from the series, and worse, much of his character's existence can be justified in terms of what it told us about protagonist Don (how Don reacted, what Don did with the information regarding Sal's sexuality).

This phenomenon of having secondary, marginalized characters exist to tell the spectator more about the main/more important character is something I talk about often with my students. Yes, I'll say, this character-of-color is interesting or "colorful" or "deep," but does s/he function for reasons other than helping the main (white) character evolve? To tell us more about how we should feel about that (white, protagonist) character? This phenomenon happens on *Mad Men* regularly. While the series attempts to incorporate the social angst that would define race relations in much of the 1960s - and for that it should be applauded – it's never long-term. Worse than the temporary nature of minority characters' screen time, they typically exist merely to reveal more about the "main" characters they engage.

Paul Kinsey dabbled in the Freedom Summer, but this excursion served more to tell us about Kinsey and generic cultural background for the season's time period; Lane Pryce had a relationship with an African American woman, but this served to tell us about Lane, his moral shortcomings, and flawed relationships with his wife and father. Most recently, Peggy shared a brilliantly performed scene with Don's secretary Dawn, an African American woman. As the two share a qualified moment of "solidarity" when Dawn spends the night in Peggy's apartment (a crime wave and race riots have made going home alone unsafe), a sincere Peggy is desperate to engage in political sensitivity and connection. Emanating just the faintest whiff of white guilt, Peggy tells Dawn: "We have to stick together. I was the only one like me there for a long time." Before allowing Dawn to reply, she quickly adds, "Do you think I act like a man?" This exchange is telling. Dawn's character and reference to her plight(s) speak to the show's awareness of broader political

(continued from page 11)

implications. But Dawn isn't a main character. Her narrative trajectory tells us about Peggy. Doubtlessly, there are infinite stories to be told from the point of view of gay or ethnically marginalized characters in a series set in the 1960s. But just as the queer Harry Crane exists to reveal more about Don Draper, Dawn will likely exist to further complicate Peggy or Don. Peggy's dialogue alludes to this narrative blind spot. She begins with a statement that articulates solidarity: "We're in this together"—a sentiment pervasive to second-wave feminism's unity-oriented discourses. But she immediately follows up with a query that speaks to her own concerns regarding her own place in the world, her own identity. The

scene is flawlessly performed in its exploration of Peggy's concern/guilt/suspicion of Dawn; but the scene reveals more about Peggy; Dawn's existence becomes justified in terms of dramatic foil, at best, psychological window dressing at worst.

Cultural and political upheavals will increase in frequency and intensity as seasons continue. It remains to be seen how/if the series will pick up the baton of stories that deserve to be but are still untold on mainstream television. But I'm a sucker for the brilliant, deliberate, three dimension characters and stories *Mad Men* offers, so I'll keep watching, if skeptically and hopefully.

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## APPRECIATION

### Rich Renewal *by Niels Herold*

On the morning of March 28 I read in *The New York Times* a glowing review of Cheryl Strayed's new memoirs, *Wild: Lost and Found on the the Pacific Crest Trail*. The title multiplies its denotative reference, at once to Strayed's days growing up in Minnesota, in a ramshackle, farm-house without plumbing and electricity, and to her druggy, sexually promiscuous time in Portland before setting off on an 1100 mile solo hike. It so happened that Strayed was interviewed on NPR that same morning of the 28th, and I was struck by the clarity with which her voice recounted the experiences of her troubled past, the sudden and untimely death from cancer of a much loved mom, the ensuing breakup of her family in Minnesota, and all the compensatory self-destructive behaviors that rushed in to fill the vacuum created by catastrophic loss and fragmentation.

Beside this painful past, one of the burdens Strayed carried on her long walk along the crest of the Sierra Nevadas and then the Cascades was a back-pack named "Monster." In order to lighten its load along the way, Strayed burned in her evening campfires pages she'd finished reading—from Faulkner's *As I lay Dying*, Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, among others. One book she didn't turn to ashes but carried all the way to a final destination at the Bridge of the Gods over the Columbia River was Adrienne Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language*. As Strayed writes in her memoir:

"In the previous few years, certain lines had become like incantations to me, words I'd chanted to myself through my sorrow and confusion. That book was a consolation, an old friend, and when I held it in my hands on my first night on the trail, I didn't regret carrying it an iota—even though carrying it meant that I couldn't do more than hunch beneath its weight. It was true that *The Pacific Crest Trail, Volume 1: California* was now my bible, but *The Dream of a Common Language* was my religion. I opened it up and read the first poem out loud, my voice rising above the sound of the wind

battering the walls of my tent. I read it again and again and again."

That first poem is called "Power," and its radioactive troping on the life of Marie Curie, one of several female heroes that appear in Rich's early 70's collection, still irradiates upon repeated reading. (I tried to give it one at the recent Poetry Bash.) It's not an easy poem to perform out-loud because Rich was already writing without punctuation—and with double spaces between words and phrases, as if the opening lines of the poem, digging around in the archeological dirt of a common past, suddenly turn up an objective correlative for one's living in the present:

Living in the earth-deposits of our history

Today a backhoe divulged out of a crumbling flank of earth  
one bottle amber perfect a hundred-year old  
cure for fever or melancholy a tonic  
for living on this earth in the winters of this climate

Today I was reading about Marie Curie:

Madame Curie's body suffered from having been bombarded for years by the very substance her chemistry sought to purify, the horrific radiation sickness of a woman made famous by the time of her death from wounds that came, as the final stanza of "Power" memorably puts it, "from the same source as her power." These last lines from the poem were fated to resonate for me yet again in the next day's papers of March 29, which carried an obituary for the poet herself, who unlike Strayed had grown up in a family and place of wealth and academic privilege. *The New York Times* quoted "Ms. Rich," who had become the most famous and best-selling female poet of her generation, as asserting that "Art means nothing if it simply decorates the dinner table of power which holds it hostage."

POLITICAL OBSERVATION

## The Republican Debate at OU: A (Sort of) Insider's View *by Kevin Laam*

I was fortunate enough to attend the Republican presidential debate held on the Oakland University campus November 9, 2011. I thought scoring tickets to Foghat back in '78 was a coup, but this was bigger and badder, what with the likes of Tea Party royalty Michele Bachmann, Rick Santorum, and Newton Leroy Gingrich all assembled on one stage. Not even the dulcet tones of Dave Peverett could compete with that. I was mildly unsettled, however, by the ease with which I was able to get in to the O'rena on my arrival. No pat-downs, no menacing glances from security, nothing (how did they know I wasn't planning to glitter-bomb Ron Paul?). The only trouble I had was trying to find an empty seat in my assigned section. Seats were filled early and packed densely, as if to roll the audience into a delirious swirl of NObama camaraderie. I finally slunk between a pair of nattily dressed young Republicans; made some polite small talk; and braced myself for what was sure to be a magical evening, or at worst a memorable scrum.

The November debate was promoted by CNBC with the unintentionally damning tagline: "Your money, your vote." You have to remember that this was some five months before Mitt Romney had been declared the presumptive GOP nominee. Pizza magnate Herman Cain was the new GOP darling, thanks to his highly credible 9-9-9 economic plan. Governor Rick Perry had lost a bit of his trademark Texas swagger after a series of subpar debate showings but was still a contender. Jon Huntsman, Rick Santorum, and Newt Gingrich were all trying to gain traction for their campaigns. The field was wide open, and it was thrilling for someone like me, who relishes the sport of it all. I had watched the prior Republican debates on television, and when I learned that the candidates would be coming to our campus I knew I had to be a part of it. Reps from the Romney campaign turned down my offer of an insider's tour of the English department, so attending the debate was the next best chance to get my GOP on.

Early signs pointed to a mild-mannered affair. Governor Snyder and President Russi graciously welcomed the crowd with their opening remarks. Applause was hearty but polite. It was left to the local Republican luminaries to throw us the red meat we came for, most notably L. Brooks Patterson quoting William F. Buckley, Jr.'s quip that he'd "rather entrust the government of the United States to the first 400 people listed in the Boston telephone directory than to the faculty of Harvard University." I couldn't agree more: those surnamed Aaronson and Abraham are plainly fitter to lead than egg-headed "researchers" and "intellectuals".

At last the candidates took the stage. They looked fantastic, all fresh and minty. But the scene grew quickly awkward as they just stood there, smiling, waiting for their next cue. At least on "American Idol" the contestants get to burst into some hastily choreographed song-and-dance routine.

Finally at 8 p.m. EST, the lights dimmed, the candidates took their places at their podiums, and it was game on. Cain elicited thunderous applause for skirting an early question about the sexual harassment accusations that had dogged him in recent days. (He would work the same trick later by referring to House Speaker Pelosi as "Princess Nancy") The subject then turned to the economy. My knowledge of economic issues is sketchy at best, so it was informative to hear the candidates outline their respective positions. Romney, as always, was fluent and confident, and Huntsman too was impressive. And there is no more passionate advocate for the free market than Ron Paul, the rare politician who not only speaks his mind but also reaches out to the most overlooked voting bloc besides the poor: college students. In the end the candidates fundamentally disagreed on little, and the conversation occasionally succumbed to the usual small-government, low-tax sloganeering. But overall it was a useful primer on conservative economics. I was impressed.

The debate drew its loudest headlines for Perry's infamous "oops" moment, as the Texas governor stumbled to remember the last of the three government agencies that he would cut upon taking office. The spectacle of seeing a man's presidential hopes implode before my eyes was uncomfortable enough, but more dispiriting was how the moment betrayed Perry's utter lack of conviction in what he was saying. No one but the most hardened MSNBC or Fox News pundit would begrudge a public servant the occasional gaffe. Even the best and the brightest of us draw blanks sometimes. Yet it was clear to everyone in the room that evening that Perry was not merely at a loss for words. He'd forgotten his words because they never had any meaning to him. He'd been mimicking talking points fed to him by his handlers in the vain hopes of rousing the base and winning the room. He did neither, and the last I saw of him he was reprising his amnesia bit for cheap laughs on the late night talk shows. If nothing else he provided weeks' worth of material to hack comedians. I trust he got royalties.

Sometimes I feel guilty for loving the theater of politics. The citizen in me cringes when I reflect upon the fact that highest office in the land goes to the most gifted performer, not to the most qualified woman or man for the job. There were actual ideas debated at the November event. Few got any media play after the big "oops". I'm not saying Perry deserved another chance; those we trust to lead us probably shouldn't wilt beneath the glare of the bright lights. We needn't reject wholesale the spectacle of political campaigns, but we do need to be aware of it and to work extra hard to see through it. I was genuinely excited to see the Republican presidential candidates live! in person! at Oakland! I hope the Democrats come to see us in 2016.

ESSAY

Poems in Pieces *by Natalie Cole*

Every Wednesday I get to go to the South Oakland Boys and Girls Club, its spaces rickety and energized, where I tutor two boys, a first grader and a ninth grader. T., the first grader, a fluent speaker of English and Arabic, brings a brightly colored workbook. Its word problems and rhyming exercises remind me of my twenty-year old son's elementary school days. M., the high school freshman often brings essay drafts on which to work, or I give him prompts for short essay paragraphs. One day, early in our tutoring experience together, I wrote down some lines of Robert Burns' "A Red Red Rose," tore them into scraps, and asked him to reassemble them. We didn't talk about the poem's dialect or rhyme scheme or metaphors—M. just moved the pieces around until they made the most sense to him.

And fare thee weel, my only love,  
And fare thee weel awhile!  
And I will come again, my love,  
Though it were a thousand mile.

I did not realize until later I had substituted Burns' dialectic "luve" with Standard English "love." It didn't seem to matter, though, as the session ended and M. went off to play basketball. The next week I brought two poems, typed out and cut strategically into pieces. These were hard for M., and I ended up giving lots of hints. I started to see again how occult an activity poetry reading could seem to someone not used to it. In Frost's "Fire and Ice" the "ice" of hate registered more strongly with M. than did the "fire" of desire. For me at least, perhaps the end of the world idea registered not at all, as I delightedly hunched over a small table, peering with M. at pieces of poetry.

The next week I didn't bring any poems, and M. asked for some the following week. Someone wanting extra, unrequired poems? I was ecstatic, and felt authorized to bring in my personal favorites, such as Gwendolyn Brooks' "Song in the Front Yard." M. "definitely" knew the restrictions of perfect façade vs. craved experience:

I've stayed in the front yard all my life.  
I want a peek at the back  
Where it's rough and untended and hungry weed grows.

Blake's poem, "To See a World in a Grain of Sand" interested M. with its series of paradoxes:

To see a world in a grain of sand  
And a heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour.

M., it turns out, prefers a straightforward rhyme scheme like ab ab, and we had the conversation about whether all poetry rhymes or not. Comfortable now in our tutoring relationship, M. brings in his term grade report to show me. We continue to take apart and put together poetry, taking it in small morsels. M., a hockey player, relates to Tennyson's "The Eagle": "He watches from his mountain walls,/And a like a thunderbolt he falls." We struggled with Roethke's "The Waking," most of all with how loss can be a positive presence:

What falls away is always. And is near.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow  
I learn by going where I have to go.

M.'s favorites so far might be a nursery rhyme and Langston's Hughes' "Sylvester's Dying Bed." This nursery rhyme, in fact, might be the impetus for this whole discussion, as today is my son Hollis' twentieth birthday, and this was a favorite of his when he was still being read to, and practically the only poem I can always recite without a mistake:

If all the world were apple pie,  
And all the seas were ink,  
And all the trees were bread and cheese,  
What would we have to drink?

[Note to self: assign and teach more whimsical poetry, fiction and film in my classes!]

Last week M. made a whole from fragments of Langston Hughes' "Sylvester's Dying Bed," noticing how the poem's teller was returned from the dead to say his poem. I launched into "posthumous point-of-view" and "allusions to the River Jordan" before I could restrain myself, but stopped before M. mentally checked out on me. "This guy," says M., "makes the most of things."

So I hollers, "Com'ere, babies,  
Fo' to love yo' daddy right!"  
And I reaches up to hug 'em—  
When the Lawd put out the light.

Then everything was darkness  
In a great . . . big . . . night.

FICTION

## The 2012 Flash Fiction Contest Winners

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### One Fish *by Alexandra Giese*, undergraduate winner

I went fishing with him that day. The sky hung heavy with salt and the ocean was calm like after any good storm. There were no docks. Just an uneven line of beached fishing boats covered in bigger than life colours, except for his. One blue eye was painted on the right stern of his skiff and looked as if it winked when the tide began to rise.

"Hey, there you are." he said, opening a beer out of a net hanging part way in the water, "You want one, they're not exactly cold but no one's got any ice in the marina. The fishing dhows came in early this morning with a shit load of prawns and needed it for their catch."

He started throwing boat lines frayed from brine into the bow, pushed the boat into waist high water and then came back for me. He asked if I had brought a hat. "It'll be dawn soon and you're gonna fry. Here, take my cap."

"What will you use?" I said.

"Well, I'm half bald so I can douse my head with sunscreen and when it gets really hot I have a keffiyeh in my tackle box."

I grew up with brothers who sailed the waters of the Great Lakes. Bays that are open and choppy, made me experienced crew. Water is learned perception. The Persian Gulf is silky even as the land disappears but that's not the same thing as safe. There are tides with hidden shifts of currents and a moon that stalks the desert navigating everything.

We drifted all morning in comfortable quiet. He'd packed a cooler with cucumbers and pita to spread thick with labna cheese, just in case we didn't get lucky by lunch.

"Let's head over to the island. I want to show you something," he said.

Sofiliyah means Lower Island. The shore was wide, with a sand bar that went out for a half a mile where families sat all day sunning in shallow water playing with their children until sunset. The middle of the island sported cactus so unless you had brought boots, no one left the beach.

As we bumped our way to the northeast side of the island, the rebuilt engine on his boat revved itself up, sounding like some tin windup toy. We cut across the reef sun blind by the day's last as well as first, morning star. And then he killed the motor.

"What's your favourite colour?" he asked.

But I said nothing as we floated into a coastline of flamingos standing one legged dunking their lopsided heads under water, the perfect fisher.

"Oh Eddie, there must be hundreds of them. Look at them, so stately. You'd think they were attending a fisherman's ball or something. Who would ever think that birds could illuminate the sea this way?"

"Fish are not the only fish in the sea." He said laughing.

When we finished lunch, he threw the left over pita into the air for both fish and fowl and then headed towards the city port as we resumed trolling for dinner. He said we couldn't go back without a feast to consume.

"You know we could just stop by some of the dhows and buy what we need for dinner." I said.

"I came prepared for this." He said as he dragged out a duffle bag filled with diving equipment. "If you can't hook dinner, you spear it. There's more fish under those docks than in the middle of the sea."

Masked and armed, he entered the water backwards off the side of the boat with fins facing the sky. He looked more like any clown fish I had ever seen, bright, mercurial. I managed to get the boat tied to the dock and still keep my eye on him. He kept diving, sucking in air and slapping the surface playfully. I don't know the colours of any other Gulf but the sun sets orange on the waters of the Middle East. It is more alive as it disappears behind sweaty saltwater and modern cities with dunes that stretch for miles. Bedouin fires were already lit along the gaps of beach, where men in thobes fried their catch while listening to the cacophony of the call to prayer that spiced the humid night. I looked up to see him silhouetted on the dock holding up an enormous speared fish.

"He's gorgeous, at least twenty pounds of grouper." He yelled. "We can feed the whole bloody compound if they all show up. Meet me down by the rocks where those guys are cleaning fish."

The sound of the men appreciating his one, big fish made me laugh as they handed him their own cutlery with pats on the back and 'Mabrook Habibi'. He went to work scraping gills that flew everywhere. I sat there on my haunches and watched as the fishermen dumped fish entrails into the water.

I'm not sure you can say there's a gentle way to gut any living thing. But he did. I had seen shop keepers point chickens towards Mecca, slit their throats and let the blood run down the gutters. It's just the way.

I picked up a bloody gill, spit on it and placed it on my cheek like some beauty mark. When he saw what I did he pulled something out of the pile of fish insides and rolled my fist around it. It pulsed warm. Staring at him I held the fish heart until it stopped. An entourage of stars had already filled up the sky so I knew where I was.

"Come on." I said. "We have people counting on us to feed them."

## The Stranger at the Checkout *by Kurt C. Krause, graduate/alumni winner*

They stood at the “No Limit” U-Scan, emptying the remainder of their grocery funds from their pockets faster than the perishables could reach the end of the conveyer belt. The woman scanned the items with a heavy heart, knowing that each bleep meant one less quarter she could give to her children when they asked for something from the gumball machines on the way out--one less utility bill that would be paid on time; and it stabbed her like the sting of a thousand hornets.

As for her husband, he directed the items she sent down to him--carefully categorizing them and separating them into the appropriate bags. He knew she was upset and steadily growing weary--not necessarily of him, but of the situation--of the merry-go-round that had become their lives. It never stopped and rarely slowed, and the places and people and things they passed over in the process seeded in her that itch--the one that causes good families to fall apart and promising people to venture down dark paths they otherwise would have steered clear of. And he blamed himself. It wasn't that he didn't make honest money--just that he didn't make enough. What's more, he loved being a family man, but feared that his role would eventually be shared or replaced by another--one who had better people skills, more talent, thicker hair and some honest to God lady luck--something that never fared kindly on him.

Lately, she began to make mention of her colleague's new cars and latest doodads; she started pointing out fancy clothes and sparkling jewelry in magazine ads; and he knew that that meant she was progressively becoming discontent--and that discontent leads to thoughts of what could be if only things were different. This drove him crazy: the thought of another man stepping in for him--of giving to them what he couldn't--of being a real father--of eating the food that she prepared and had an annoyingly cute habit of taking a test bite from before serving it--of teaching his kids the ways of life--of touching his wife! However, he didn't imply that anything was bothering him, and she never alluded to the fact that his fears were never acted upon--but definitely considered. Instead, they feigned a smile for the other's benefit because regardless of all the guilt and discontent, they still loved each other--very much.

She continued to filter the goods over the scanner--each bleep edging the total ever closer to the dreaded hundred dollar mark. She sighed, thinking... there goes a night out at the show... I can forget about that cute blouse I was looking at... Then, it happened--that momentary loss of composure that tells everyone around you: “Eh, look at me! I'm a freaking basket case!” See, she dropped her bundle of coupons, and a few of them skidded beneath the pop cooler at the end of the checkout line. She consequently threw the milk down that she had in her hand, and it burst open and flooded the floor at her feet. She encoed it with a “dab

nammit!”--only she didn't censor it this time. And then she tucked her face into her palm and began to shed the anguish.

Her husband didn't jump up to comfort her as she wished he would, instead dug in his pockets and fished out the twenty dollar bill he had left over from tips and handed it to his son.

“Eh buddy,” he said, “can you do me a big boy favor and go give this to mommy?”

The little boy smiled and zipped over to his distraught mother.

“Here mommy!” the little boy exclaimed. Daddy has some money. Don't cry. It's just milk.”

Her husband then searched for something to clean up the mess, and she took the bill from her son, subsequently grabbing hold of him and holding him tight. About that time, the baby joined in, and the weeping attracted gawkers.

One of them, a large man dressed casual but in an expensive shade of it, suddenly brushed past the crying lady's husband, intrepidly grabbing hold of one of her hands and placing something in it, saying: “Here, this should take care of it.”

The lady's husband glanced away, and when he got up the nerve to look back the man was gone; but his shadow profoundly stained. The woman held the money in her hand for the better part of a minute and tenderly stroked it between her fingers before she decided to feed it into that cursed bleeping machine. The couple's eyes met, but only for a second or two following the peculiar cash exchange. Much was said in that meeting of the eyes... So who is he? I never saw him before in my life. How could you? I give you my word--on my mother's grave. Is this the beginning of the end? Please stop! Then, they filled the belly of the shopping cart in which their youngest was seated and still crying and quietly wheeled their way out of the store and toward their car.

She once again began to weep, but this time it hurt even worse; she felt dirty and yet did nothing to warrant it. Her husband held their oldest boy's hand and told him not to jump in the puddles.

“But daddy, it's fun!” The boy replied.

The man chuckled over it, but there was distress tucked under it.

Neither knew the stranger who paid for their groceries, but each felt overwhelmed by his kindly gesture; they wondered what greater price was attached to it. Who was he? Why did he do it? What did he really want? They drove home and said little--each pondering the concept of “Good Samaritan”, wondering if there truly could be such a thing.

They didn't sleep in the same bed that night, and neither did much in the way of sleeping; for every shadow that danced on the walls and every light that shone through the windows reminded them of him.

EKPHRASIS: STUDENTWINNER

Peep Show, a Tango *by Jennifer DeBellis*

inspired by Giorgione's *Venus Sleeping*

Even before the invited spectators wriggle  
free from the safety of their second skin<sup>1</sup>;

before anxious feet shuffle single file  
down a hallway<sup>2</sup> built for queens and kings;

before the swarm of expectant excitement  
drives these voices above a beehive<sup>3</sup> vibe:

a release of testosterone pollinates<sup>4</sup> the air,  
tickling my senses, intoxicating my mood.

I close my eyes lest a single ounce of guilt  
infect the great reveal—the big striptease<sup>5</sup>.

Pull back the shutter<sup>6</sup>. As pure as the love  
that formed these curves, I'm yours tonight.

Spring has sprouted a leak that overflows  
with milk and honey in this Promise Land<sup>7</sup>,

diverting ravenous eyes away from the i-  
mpending storm. Enjoy now, atone<sup>8</sup> later.

<sup>1</sup>Transparent reptilian shells like wimpled  
latex litter the threshold, bidding for a time.

<sup>2</sup>For the road is stretched far and wide  
while the predicated pathway is narrow.

<sup>3</sup>Through a convoluted maze this militant  
mindscape moves as one in its mission.

<sup>4</sup>This: the blush of vermilion petals fallen  
upon fertile earth, one seedling at a time.

<sup>5</sup>Welcome gentlemen; follow the curves  
that fashion these hands, these thighs.

<sup>6</sup>Peel back forbidden's veil; dim the filter  
of understanding; freefall into obscurity.

<sup>7</sup>Here lies the tree of knowledge. Partake  
of its fruit and behold this carnal harvest.

<sup>8</sup>Does not transgression's fine outweigh  
what can be upheld in a given lifetime?



**EKPHRASIS: ALUMNI WINNER**

He, the fiery Flemish master, Bruegel the Elder  
Pieter, father to younger Pete & Jan the Elder.  
Daddy to the dance.

How does one color the dance?  
Dressed down in camouflage, to spy  
on inspiration, though you live on  
the hill overlooking the lowlands.

Such hearts stung by spring's red –joy  
the hunted prey, the peasants  
caught kissing the brutal season  
away, kicking up rehammered heels  
in the first full day of May on mud  
muddled lanes of cobblestone & dung.  
Love in every doorway, one thinks,  
is yours & mine.

Even the Cardinal, loud proud songbird  
thieves his kisses aggressively, forgets  
his costs & vows. Happy they are in poverty  
you & I, eye the dancing peasants lusting

## The Peasant's Dance *by David R.*

### *Bowman*

inspired by Breugel's *The Peasant's Dance*  
to capture the moment, the love, sweet  
elixir, drunk on sour mead & malt,  
of meager festive board, the crust of life  
littered upon the crowded table, bellies  
full of mirth.

A tavern banner dangles listless in no winds  
& absence awe. Music of a bagpipe squeaks  
is enough tempoed noise to make us dance.  
Church, an afterthought overgrown & stretched  
sunlight cast shadows down like sinners  
to their knees.

Drunk they are as we watch them waltz-  
eyes will not forget such joy as rapture  
to paint, with whip of brush, to tame a dance  
yes you are the master- rushing home back  
to your window to capture the last of light  
the first warm day in May in stroke  
of hurry & dash painting a moment when all  
The Peasant's Dance.



## News Shorts

### Department Welcomes Special Lecturers

The English department was pleased to welcome four new special lecturers this year. Justin Remeselnik is teaching courses in modern literature and intro to film. Vanessa Stauffer teaches poetry, fiction, and creative writing. Tara Hayes is teaching courses on Shakespeare and African American Literature. And Philip Williams teaches film production. The department is fortunate to be able to bring such a talented group of teachers into our English classrooms. Look for full profiles of these new department members in our next issue.

### English Faculty Earn Teaching Excellence Nominations

In keeping with tradition, four English department faculty members have been nominated for the 2012 Teaching Excellence Award. Annie Gilson and Andrea Knutson are nominated for the Teaching Excellence Award (for tenure track faculty). Chris Apap (for the third time!) and Justin Remeselnik are nominated for the Excellence in Teaching Award (for non-full time faculty). Congratulations to them all!

### Insko Speaks to New Online Instructors

Last March, Jeff Insko shared tips with new online instructors at the Orientation for Recipients of Online Course Development Stipends. Insko's topic as 'Finding your Rhythm in an Online Course'.



*Jeff Insko*



*Brian Connery in Ireland*

### Knutson Elected to MLA Post

Andrea Knutson was elected to serve as a member of the Modern Language Association's Regional Delegate Assembly. She will represent the Great Lakes Region from Jan. 9, 2012 through the close of the Jan. 2015 convention.

### Cole Wins Scholarship

Natalie Cole was awarded a scholarship to the Sarah Lawrence College Summer Seminar for Writers, which she attended last June.

### Connery Speaks in Ireland

In October, Brian Connery traveled to Dublin, Ireland at the invitation of The Catholic University of America to attend the Eleventh Dublin International Symposium on Jonathon Swift. Connery presented a paper on Swift for the Symposium which took place under the auspices of St. Patrick's Cathedral. The Meeting took place in the Deanery House, which Swift himself inhabited from 1713-45.

Prof. Connery was also invited by the Very Revd the Dean to the annual service in commemoration of Jonathon Swift (Dean of Saint Patrick's 1713-45), whereby the address was given by His Excellency, Michael D. Higgins, the President of Ireland.

### Eberwein Update

Nobody will be surprised to learn that Distinguished Professors Emerita Jane and Bob Eberwein continue to be productive in retirement. Jane recently published, "'Dangerous fruit of the tree of knowledge': Mary Ann Evans, Emily Dickinson, and Strauss's Das Leben Jesu" in the fall 2012 issue of the Emily Dickinson Journal. In January, she will deliver a conference paper, "A Different God? Religious Revelations from Dickinson's Holland Correspondence, at the Modern Language Association annual conference in Boston. The paper is part of a panel arranged by the Conference on Christianity and Literature and the Division on Literature and Religion. Bob Eberwein contributed "War Films"--a specific bibliography for the Oxford University Press online Cinema and Media Studies bibliography.

## Program Updates

### CREATIVE WRITING

Although students could not declare the new creative writing major until mid-February of this year, interest in the program is strong. As of mid-April, thirteen students had declared the major—some were students who had no previous major; some transferred their major from English to creative writing; some intend to double major—and the first students to graduate with majors in creative writing will do so this coming December. Students who will enter Oakland for the first time this summer or this coming fall have shown a lot of interest as well: while it's difficult to get firm numbers from the Registrar at this time, nearly 50 students who have attended recent orientation sessions have said that, should they eventually attend OU, they will declare a creative writing

major. The program proposal called for seven majors by the end of the first year; we'll have far more than that, so things are off to a good start. With this kind of potential enrollment, however, it will be crucial that we meet staffing requirements. We hope to have the screen/television writing tracks in the major up and running in 18 months, and this depends on new hiring, and the retirement of poet Gladys Cardiff, who has been an excellent teacher and model for our students for many years, makes it imperative that the major find continued support from the administration. We have enjoyed that support from the upper-levels of the administration, and so remain optimistic and excited to be able to offer our students this opportunity.

### CINEMA STUDIES

The 2011-2012 academic year was a busy one for the Cinema Studies program. Major highlights included the hiring of two new faculty members, the formation of a two-year partnership with Made-in-Michigan Entertainment production company, and the celebration of the largest Cinema Studies graduation class to date.

Here are just a few of the highlights:

- English department faculty members Ross Melnick, Kyle Edwards, Hunter Vaughan and Jeffrey Insko presented films at the 2011-2012 College of Arts & Sciences Water Film Series. Thanks to all who participated in the lively discussions of *Open Water* (2005), *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2006), *The Cove* (2009) and *Moby Dick* (1956).

- Several Cinema Studies students entered films in the Seventh Annual Grizzdance Student Film Festival in November. Special congratulations to Katie Hepfinger and Geneva Brunetti on their award-winning entries.

- Michael Manasseri, Julien Decallion and Ben Decallion were named OU Cinema Studies filmmakers-in-residence for 2012 and will be providing professional mentoring and production internships to Cinema Studies students throughout the year.

- Academy Award-winning director Louie Psihoyos visited campus in January to present his 2009 film *The Cove* and share insights on filmmaking to OU Cinema students.

- Cinema Studies faculty participated in the inaugural Critical M.A.S.S. (Michigan Alliance for Screen Studies) conference in Ann Arbor in February.

- Cinema Studies and Communication faculty collaborated to form the 'Film and Media—Teaching, Research, Collaboration' Faculty Learning Community,

which will focus on film- and media-oriented teaching and research projects.

- Two Cinema Studies undergraduate students, Kaelie Thompson and Rachel Light, presented original research at academic conferences in winter 2012.

- Fifteen students graduated with the B.A. in Cinema Studies in the fall 2011, winter 2012 and summer 2012 semesters. Congratulations to Philip Berard, James Bialk, Katie Hepfinger, Michael Kline, Matt Lockwood, Dennis McDermott, Alex Nardelli, Alexis Nemeth, Tobi Ogunyemi, Michael Rhadigan, Raymond Rodgers, Alexandra Scratch, Kaelie Thompson, Kendall Waterman, and Angela Worrel!

- We welcomed two new faculty members (see p. 3.)

Thanks to all who helped make 2011-2012 a great success. We invite all English Channel readers to check the English department and Cinema Studies program web sites for important announcements and film events in the upcoming academic year.



## Program Updates (continued)

### AMERICAN STUDIES

The American Studies Concentration has seen significant growth and a heightened campus presence over the past year. Last fall, in partnership with the Rochester Hills Public Library, American Studies co-sponsored two events focusing on the life and work of Louisa May Alcott. a screening of the film “Louisa May Alcott: the Woman Behind Little Women” followed by a Q & A with the film’s director Nancy Porter. The second event was a roundtable discussion on “Louisa May Alcott and Social Reform” with presentations by OU American Studies faculty Kathy Pfeiffer, Andrea Knutson, and Jeff Insko.

In January, AMS hosted its first-ever student recruitment event—a “pizza party,” attended by about 20-25 students and several AMS faculty.

In March, we launched the first annual American Studies colloquium featuring a presentation by Professor Christopher Hanlon of Eastern Illinois University, who spoke about his forthcoming book, “America’s England: Antebellum Literature and Atlantic Sectionalism.”

This fall, renowned historian David Roediger delivered a terrific lecture to standing-room-only crowd. The title of his talk was “U.S. Spring: The Freedpeople’s Jubilee and the Spread of Freedom

Dreams.” AMS affiliated faculty member Graham Cassano was instrumental in making the event a success.

Over the summer, a number of AMS students formed a new student organization which is now official. In addition to summer “field trips” to the DIA and Meadowbrook Hall, the group participated in OU Welcome Week activities this fall. Currently, the group is planning an inaugural “American Studies Symposium” where students will present their academic work. The symposium will take place in April. For more on the founding of the student group, see President Shannon Cooley’s essay on page X. Concentrator Allison Graves successfully completed her senior project on XXXX. Two other students are currently finishing their projects as well. Cody Armstrong is completing an anthropological study of the underground Detroit music scene and Jillian Vrazo Hamilton is wrapping up an internship at the Rochester Hills Public Library.

Finally, perhaps the best news of all: American Studies began the fall of 2011 with 3 concentrators. Currently, the number of concentrators is 19! True to its interdisciplinary mission, AMS concentrators are majors from English, History, Political Science, Music, Sociology, and Anthropology.



*Christopher Hanlon at the inaugural American Studies Colloquium*



*Historian David Roediger*



*American studies students and faculty at the DIA*

# Student News

## Graduate Students Earn Travel Grants

Three M.A. students, Joanna Dressler, George Walsh, and Aaron Richman received travel grants from the University Research Committee. Dressler and Walsh attended the 2011 Dickens Symposium. Aaron Richman received a grant for his presentation of "'Clearing Away the Rubbish': Reinventive Virginity in Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*."

## Student Teacher Travels to New Zealand

Colleen Krumholz, a former STEP student, was admitted into the Fulbright-Hayes study abroad program for new teachers. She traveled in May to New Zealand and Australia to visit numerous classrooms in different schools. Her research focuses on cultural similarities and differences in the English classroom. Colleen visited Nancy Joseph's ENG398 last summer to report on her experiences through the program.

## Students Win Writing Awards

In an unequalled display of talent, four students from Pamela Mitzelfeld's Advanced Critical Writing course swept the nonfiction category at the Writing Excellence Award Luncheon on March 28. Seth Clarke, Aaron Perry, Kelsey Hanna, and Jacqueline Van Skiver took 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and honorable mention, respectively, for essays written during the fall semester of 2011. Congratulations!

## Scholarship Winners

The English department is pleased to announce its most recent scholarship winners. The Eva L. Otto Scholarship Award winners are Charity Dotson, Don Drife, and George Larkins.

The Kyes Scholarship awardees are Erin Miller and Tyler Van Loozen.

The Dressler awardees are Brian Michael and Shannon Waite.

We are ever grateful to the Otto, Kyes, and Dressler families for their generous support of our students.

## English Major Directs Shakespeare in England

Beth Roznowski (English '11; British Studies at Oxford '10) is studying at the University of Birmingham's Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon. She directed *As You Like It* at the Institute in July.

### Flash Fiction Winners

#### Undergraduate Category

1st Place: M. Graham, "One Fish"

2nd Place: Jenifer Debellis, "The Things We Buried"

3rd Place: Morgan Laidlaw, "Unspoken Melodies"

Honorable Mention: Kathleen Welch, "Colored Umbrellas"

Honorable Mention: Jenna Savasky, "Daisy"

#### Graduate/Alumni Category

1st Place: Kurt C. Krause, "The Stranger at the Checkout"

2nd Place: Evan Pham, "Unfinished Face"

3rd Place: Justin Rettger, "The River Goddess"

Honorable Mention: John Coughlin, "Race the Sun"

## American Studies Students Launch New Group

On April 17, a group of American Studies concentrators met with Professors Knutson and Insko to discuss the founding of an American Studies group. We went into the meeting with little idea of exactly how the meeting, and organization as a whole, would operate. We left the meeting instilled with the founding spirit, our heads filled with images of ourselves as the founding fathers (and in many cases, mothers) of a new organization with the promise of a long lasting legacy at Oakland University. We discussed the idea of lecturers presenting on everything from eighteenth century music to rock and roll, and exploring America through the recipes Lydia Marie Child's cookbook, despite the overwhelming amount of lard in old fashioned cooking recipes. What is certain is that the ideas of the founders will create events that will span disciplines and interest groups, and gather students together in the attempt to learn more about American heritage from multiple viewpoints.

As an inter-disciplinary student myself, majoring in English and History, I am thrilled to see how we will apply our various academic methods to issues in American culture.

I'm interested to see other interpretations on subjects I'm interested in, such as the American South during Reconstruction, and to offer my own interpretations based on literary and historical knowledge. I believe that together we will be able to gain a greater knowledge of American life through the ages, and leave a legacy of fascinating scholarship and a successful organization behind us for others to enjoy.

But as I have learned in my own American Studies course, I foresee the organization as one with the potential to mold over the ages based upon those who inhabit the group. As founders, we have a great responsibility to create an organization with the ability to change over time. As Jefferson wrote, "the earth belongs in usufruct to the living," just as this organization belongs in usufruct to the founding generation. It is our job to create it and mold it, and to spread our enthusiasm to new waves of students. But after we leave our memories will remain, but the group must be able to change and grow based on the passions of the new students. As a founder, that is what I am most excited about experiencing.

—Shannon Cooley

## Sigma Tau Delta Report *by Bethany Boutin '12*

The English Honors Society Sigma Tau Delta hit the ground running this year. Brimming with ideas to expand English involvement on campus, the e-board (Ashley Gordon, President; Kaitlin Huff, Vice President; Bethany Boutin, Secretary; Allison Graves, Treasurer; and Shannon Waite, Webmaster) dove into plans to spread Sigma awareness. We tabled during Welcome Week, inviting people to decorate our literature mural with their favorite titles, authors, and quotes. (We attracted quite a few passersby due to Allison's performance dressed as a jester proclaiming poetry throughout the OC!) We campaigned relentlessly to recruit new members and found our first meeting so cramped we had to search for extra chairs.

In the fall, we held a literary game night where Sigmites and friends shared pizza and friendly competition over word games like Scrabble and Apples to Apples. In October, we experienced a heartbreaking setback when we lost student Jenna Balabuch and her friend Rachel Ring in a car accident on our way to King's Books in Detroit. We all felt a profound loss, but we drew together as a community and emerged strengthened by the knowledge that the bonds in the English department run deeper than academia. We held a memorial where friends, family, students, and faculty shared tributes to the girls, then we passed out tulip bulbs (generously donated by Professor Cole) to commemorate the beauty of their lives. We cheered on our webmaster Shannon Waite as she recovered from the accident, and we soon bounced back with our fall lecture, where Professor Knutson packed the house with a vivid, engaging presentation on "The Advancing Spirit:

The Puritan Experience in American Literature." Finishing off the fall semester, we gathered for cookies, cocoa, and good company at Professor Cole's home.

For our outreach event this year, we collected a plethora of old books, then held a three day sale in January, asking for \$5 donations in exchange for a bag filled with books. We collected \$400 to donate to Beyond Basics, and donated the remaining books to Grace Centers of Hope. In February, we held our annual African American Literature Read-In, where we welcomed readers to share poetry and stories by their favorite African American authors. For our winter lecture, co-sponsored by the History Honors Society Phi Alpha Theta, we welcomed the dynamic duo Professor Kathy Pfeiffer and her husband, History Professor Todd Estes, to interview each other. Many of us turned out expecting a battle of the sexes and the subjects, but they delighted us instead with an enlightening look into their respective academic careers and the mutual support they lend one another. (Note: we still hold that Team English won the debate!)

We thank the faculty and staff of the English Department for their continuous support, and we give special thanks to our adviser, Professor Bailey McDaniel, who has stuck with Sigma for three years. We inducted 34 new members this year! The board wishes all the best to the new board members and inductees, and we cannot wait to see what's in store next year for Sigma and the English Department, which we esteem the best and brightest of all departments at OU.

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### SIGMA INDUCTION ADDRESS

## Crisis? What Crisis? *by Kevin Laam*

In case you haven't heard, there is a crisis in the humanities. Classics, philosophy, and foreign language departments are endangered species because they don't address the bottom-line needs of 21st-century corporate/industrial/technocratic society. English is marginally safer insofar as it has become, for better or worse, the language of global enterprise, and yet as students and scholars and writers of literature, we are no less immune to the charge that the work we do has little place in the modern research university. In a recent *New York Times* editorial, Stanley Fish wryly notes that

"indeed, if your criteria are productivity, efficiency and consumer satisfaction, it makes perfect sense to withdraw funds and material support from the humanities – which do not earn their keep and often draw the ire of a public suspicious of what humanities teachers do in the classroom – and leave standing programs that have a more obvious relationship to a state's economic prosperity and produce

results the man or woman in the street can recognize and appreciate."

Before we launch into a collective panic about state funding for higher education, I think it's important for us to know about a similar crisis that beset the humanities about a century ago. It's described in Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature*, which is an illuminating (and highly readable) history of the profession of literary studies. Graff situates this early humanities crisis within the context of the changing complexion of the university in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. He describes it as follows:

"The university was dealing with a new kind of student, ill prepared to make sense of the more diversified literary education that was now presented to him. The growth in college enrollments between 1880 and 1910 had coincided with 'a change in the social and intellectual life of the college.' The reasons for attending college were becoming

*(continued on next page)*

## Induction Address (continued)

unashamedly opportunistic, as popular manuals urged that ‘schools that pay good wages want college graduates,’ and promised that during the four years a student ‘will become personally acquainted with hundreds of young men and young women who will become leaders in their own communities.’

Then as now, college graduates were in demand, and to this day the university remains an optimal place to meet the movers and shakers of tomorrow. And there is nothing patently wrong with using the university to increase one’s earning potential and to begin building networks. This evening all Sigma inductees have taken a pivotal step in that direction.

Still, as the early-twentieth century university transformed from a genteel bastion of higher learning into a more professionally oriented institution, it was perhaps inevitable that the perception of literary studies would suffer. As evidence, Graff cites a passage from Irving Babbitt’s volume of essays entitled, *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of the Humanities*, in which Babbitt observes that, in the large universities of the Midwest especially,

“the men flock into the courses on science, the women affect the courses in literature. The literary courses, indeed, are known in some of these institutions as “sissy” courses. The man who took literature too seriously would be suspected of effeminacy. The really virile thing is to be an electrical engineer. One already sees the time when the typical teacher of literature will be some young dilettante who will interpret Keats and Shelley to a class of girls.”

Babbitt published these words in 1908, and one cannot help but ponder how prescient they were. After all, females routinely outnumber males in the courses I teach, and I suspect the inverse is true in science courses. But my anecdotal experience also suggests to me that the perceived virility gap between sciences and letters is, if not entirely absent, grossly overblown. I’ve taught enough science students – men and women – to know that they are as awed by literature students as we are of them. As any English major can attest who has navigated the endless allusions of Eliot’s “Waste Land” – or labored through the thorny prose of *Finnegan’s Wake* – or God forbid read *Moby Dick* from start to finish – literary study is hardly “sissy’s work”.

***Understand that the work you do is important. Believe the work you do is important. You don’t have to be an English teacher or professor to appreciate how literature is central to our personal and collective well-being.***

Literature students have their beliefs tested, their sensibilities shaken, their pieties challenged on a constant basis – and they keep coming back for more. They’re battle tested in ways that are probably difficult to imagine for someone who hasn’t stayed up deep into the night wrestling down an incorrigible metaphor. Close readers experience the humbling effects of language firsthand. So much of what passes for dialogue and debate in our national discourse is comprised of pat sound bites that obscure truth rather than advance it. What the student of literature knows is that truth cannot be purchased so easily. When we pore over texts, we are not merely stroking our formidable intellects. We are actively resisting all those pressures that prize consensus and conformity above truth. When my class spends an entire class period discussing a single stanza of poetry, it’s not because we’re quibbling over minutiae. It’s because we don’t take ideas for granted. It’s that same spirit of restless inquiry that we take with us to our careers, to our relationships, to the important decisions that each of us has to make.

Lest I seem to suggest that studying literature is but a kind of eternal struggle, let me also make absolutely clear: the study of literature is, for us all, a labor of love. Probably each of us can identify a key moment that nurtured this love and set us on our way – an favorite book we were read as a child, a teacher who inspired us, a sentence expertly diagrammed. This evening is at once a culmination and

celebration of those moments, and I congratulate all Sigma Tau Delta inductees for joining a community of likeminded lovers of language and literature. I also want to encourage all Sigma members: be an advocate for your discipline. Don’t settle simply to be lit-geeks. Geekdom is a wonderful thing – most of my colleagues are geeks! – but not when it means assigning oneself second-tier status, or contenting oneself in the margins of one’s culture. Understand that the work you do is important. Believe the work you do is important. You don’t have to be an English teacher or professor to appreciate how literature is central to our personal and collective well-being. Be able to articulate to friends, parents, significant others, prospective employers, strangers on the street if they’ll listen, not only why you love literature, but why literature matters. And the next time someone tells you there’s a crisis in the humanities, ask them what else is new.

## RUNNING NEWS

## Eard Stapan: One Equal Temper of Heroic Hearts

Even an erratic but seasoned crew of runners like the Department's marathon relay team, Eard Stapan, sometimes bumps up against the unexpected. Running the Detroit Free Press Marathon annually since 2004 in one form or another, the team has seen snow, traffic, fire, rain, and sunny days when they could not find a friend. Having moved the Fortress of Speediness downtown for the 2011 race, closer to the start and finish, and having been notified that Team Golden Grizzlies, who narrowly defeated Eard Stapan in 2010, had succumbed to sloth and indolence over the summer and would not be running, this year's team stuck with last year's tripartite strategy: Run really really fast, try not to get hurt, and also try to have fun. Foolishly, they believed themselves prepared for every contingency. They had not reckoned on Homeland Security.

Eard Stapan was among the teams "randomly" selected to be interviewed by officers from Homeland Security at the packet pick-up and expo before being issued race numbers and timing chips. Technically, since only the Kevin "Grimm Reaper" Grimm and team captain "Trainwreck" Connery would be crossing borders during the race, Homeland Security's concerns should have been limited to them.

The Reaper was the first team runner downtown and may have roused some suspicion when, asked about his citizenship, he declared himself "a Spear Dane from across the whale road, loyal to Scyld Scylding, the ring giver." Grimm attempted to alert other team members via cell phone of the ensuing complications, and Homeland Security may or may not have been monitoring this sudden uptick in "chatter": as the other team members arrived on the scene, they did subsequently seem to raise the level of difficulty consistently.

At the outset of his own interrogation, Jeff "The Funster Runster" Chapman launched into an elaborate narrative illustrated with pencil sketches on the back of a map of the course and succeeded in both amusing and bewildering the agents to such an extent that they mutely handed over his number and chip without further questioning.

Trainwreck Connery and Kevin "The Laaminator" Laam seemed subsequently to confuse them further, as Trainwreck intervened tactfully after the Laaminator began dancing

menacingly about and demanding of a particularly surly agent, "Why doncha ask me something about John Donne? Huh? Why doncha?" The Laaminator returned the favor moments later, clapping his hand over Trainwreck's mouth just in time to stop the issuing forth of an ancient Irish curse regarding faeries, pig testicles, and the agents' ancestors, among other matters.

Declining to go to the literary mat or to take it outside with the Laaminator or Trainwreck, Homeland Security waited quietly for the arrival of Susan "The Blur" Beckwith, who may have already been on their radar for her recent passage from Canada to the U.S. legitimated only by her Michigan driver's license and a smile. When Homeland Security demanded to see her passport, Beckwith attempted to explain that her leg would take her only to Belle Isle and back and that therefore she would be remaining within U.S. territory for the duration of the race. This seemed to befuddle them, as it began to become clear that they were from Ohio. A patient geography lesson and a lot of smiles did nothing to advance the interview.

"OK, listen up," muttered the Blur, lowering her voice and leaning over the table. "This is my life, and it's ending one minute at a time. . . ."

Subsequently, all went well: buses were boarded; Trainwreck found a Mexican bar in Windsor still open and serving up huevos rancheros at 6:30 AM; exchanges ran smoothly; the Reaper and the Funster Runster set new PRs while Trainwreck, the Laaminator, and the Blur held steady; the newly improved Fortress of Speediness provided showers, quiet respite, a puppy to hug, and a downstairs café for runners as they finished; and the team turned in a total time of 3:58, placing 47th in the open male relay division of 120 teams.

During the post-race debriefing, it was remarked that the team has had a significant lapse in membership by Americanists, Knutson not having run since 2009 and Insko having turned in a lackluster "two and done" earlier in the decade. We hope a stronger American presence on the team in 2012 will help improve our relations with our friends in government. (For photos of the team, see page X)

## In Other Running News

Owing primarily to the pernicious influence of Brian Connery, running is fast becoming a mainstay of departmental cultural. At this rate-- recent addition of seasoned marathoner Joanie Freed and dedicated runner Courtney Brannon Donoghue-- "Running News" may warrant its very own section in future issues of the *Channel*. For now, the Channel will simply report that Jeff Insko completed his first-ever marathon last October (2011) in Chicago. He clocked in at a not-terribly-fast-but-nevertheless-respectable 4:22. This past October, Insko once again joined the English department relay team (re-shuffled and even re-christened!) for the Detroit Marathon. Insko "pulled a Connery," running the first leg of the marathon relay, then continuing on for the full 26.2. Stay tuned for a full report of that day and the valiant efforts of team members Joanie Freed, Kevin Laam, Susan Beckwith, and Jeff Chapman in the spring issue of the *Channel*.

## Faculty Notes

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### PODIUMS AND PRINT

The chapter that Rachel Smydra and Pamela Mitzelfeld contributed to Cathy Cheal's new book, *Transformation in Teaching: Social Media Strategies in Higher Education* is now in print!! The complete book (Rachel and Pam are chapter 17) appears for free viewing and download on [Google Books](#).

"Hunter Vaughan traveled to France last summer with the help of a University Research Fellowship to continue work on his current book project, *French Philosophy of Cinema: Reframing the Cinematic Century*. In France, he did archival research and met with contemporary philosophers to discuss cinema and the cultural and philosophical shifts of the twentieth century, filming these interviews and converting them into articles/book chapters and a short film on the subject. He also gave a paper, "Film and the Environment", at the Association for Studying the Arts of the Present (ASAP) conference last October in Pittsburgh, and another titled "500,000 Kilowatts of Stardust" at March's Society of Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) conference in Boston. In addition, Prof. Vaughan has been contracted to release his book, *Where Film Meets Philosophy: Godard, Resnais, and Experiments in Cinematic Thinking*, with Columbia University Press (forthcoming 2012).

Jeff Insko presented organized two panels on "Temporality and Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture" for the C19: Americanists conference in San Francisco last May.

Chris Apap was awarded a Peterson fellowship for research at the American Antiquarian Society for July. Such fellowships are much prized.

Kathleen Pfeiffer was an invited participant in the Liberty Fund colloquium, "Liberty and Responsibility in the American Anti-slavery Movement" in Cincinnati, OH in March.

Kevin Laam presented his paper, "Time, Place, and Politics in Andrew Marvell's Verse Epitaphs," at the annual meeting of the South-Central Renaissance Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana in March.

Andrea Knutson delivered a paper at the 2012 Northeast Modern Language Association Conference in Rochester, New York entitled, "Reading Emerson Pragmatically" for a roundtable called "Pedagogy versus Curriculum in the Evolving Literature Classroom." In addition she delivered a paper at the 2011 Society of Early Americanists' Seventh Biennial Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, entitled "Jonathan Edwards's Religious Affections: A Treatise Concerning Aesthetics." She organized and chaired the panel "Early American Affective Communities: Imagining a World of Relations"

Kyle Edwards presented "A Measure of Independence: King Bros. Production and Monogram Pictures Corporation" at the 2012 Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference, held in Boston in March. Edwards' article, "'Monogram Means Business': B-Film Marketing and Series Filmmaking at Monogram Pictures," appeared in the winter 2011 issue of *Film History*.

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## Shakespeare in Prague

In July of 2011, Niels Herold was in Prague, Czech Republic, where he attended the week-long International Shakespeare Congress, which meets every four years in a different world capital. Prague has deep historical and political connections to Shakespeare, especially since its celebrated National Theater, which has mounted so many legendary performances of Shakespeare, functioned as a rallying place for Czech national identity and freedom—first from Austro-Hungarian rule, then from fascistic incorporation, and finally from the Soviet regime. It was during this famously so-called Velvet Revolution from Communist appropriation that the great statesman, playwright, Nobel prize-winner, and noble human being, Vaclav Havel, played such a crucial role (Havel, scheduled to speak at the ISC with Tom Stoppard, another celebrity Czech, was already too sick in July to attend the conference and passed from the stage of world history shortly after).

At this conference, Herold presented a paper on the 2010 Shakespeare Behind Bars production of *The Winter's Tale*, one half of which takes place in Bohemia, recall! In the Fall of 2011, for the annual meeting of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference, this year at MSU, Herold re-fashioned this paper as a comparative study of Shakespeare productions behind two different sets of walls, those of an American prison in Kentucky, and those that incarcerated a whole culture under Communism. This paper is half slide-show and half commentary on "glocalizing" production methods and values. Herold's essay on teaching sacred texts in an academic setting, "Ironic Pedagogy," appeared in the Winter, 2011 volume of *The Oakland Journal*. For the last time before embarking on a slightly different research agenda, Herold taught a fall, 2012 seminar in Shakespeare and Adaptation called (by the title of the Canadian TV series that forms one half of the study list of texts) "Slings and Arrows."

## Alumni Corner

**Gary Miron '04** Late last year, I was finally able to finalize the publication of my first novel, *The Captive Generation*, with **Outskirts Press**. The book is available now through a number of different online retailers and select independent bookstores.

**Joy Gaines-Friedler** is the 2005 Winner of The Matilda Wilson Award. She is also the author of the poetry collection "Like Vapor," published by Mayapple Press in 2008. Joy teaches creative writing for the non-profit literary arts program Springfed Arts and for InsideOut Literary Arts Project that puts poets in residence in Detroit Public Schools. Recently, her book has been noticed as a Best Seller by Mayapple Press and three new poems will be published in the next issue of The Bear River Review, an anthology of work by writers from The University of Michigan Bear River Writers Conference 2011. Joy has recently returned to Oakland University as a graduate student in Literature. .

Recent graduate **Audrey Quinn** will be entering East Anglia (UK) University's MA in American Lit program in the fall.

**Elizabeth Pellerito** will defended her dissertation in July and has a one-year Visiting Assistant position at MSU for next year.

**Matt Bell's** new book of stories, *Cataclysm Baby*, comes out in April 2012 from Mud Luscious Press. He also edits the journal *The Collagist*. Bell is Assistant Professor of Creative Writing in the English Department at Northern Michigan University.

Graduate **David Hornibrook** will be entering U of M's creativ writing program in the fall.

**Becky VanBuskirk** (Winter '11) began studies in October at the University of York for a graduate degree in 19th-century literature and culture.

### Hey, Alumni: We Want to Know!

It's slim pickins in the Alumni Corner this time—alas! But we want to hear from you, what you're up to, where you've been, how you're doing, and what you're thinking. Let us know. You can submit your update or news by [clicking here](#).

Go ahead; try it right now!

Or, if you prefer, drop an **email to Kathy Pfeiffer**.

## ALUMNI EXPERIENCE

### Skills You Can Take Anywhere by *Marta Bauer*

I'm officially adding "Student Affairs Professional" to the list of careers English students are prepared for.

After a successful career as an overinvolved student at OU, I began my Masters program in Student Affairs Administration (SAA) at Michigan State University. I've spent the better part of my first semester submerged in psychosocial theories, holistic student development, and "intentionality"—the infamous buzzword for my cohort. I'm working on projects about the development of Native American college students, the effectiveness of career services for students with disabilities, and the success of Veterans Affairs offices. And I'm still using my English major. Those mythical transferrable skills professors told me about are now very real.

In an essay analyzing the organizational structure of institutions, my professor commented that I "deftly connect quotes and readings to make a well-organized analysis;" English taught me how to do that.

All my class projects demand that I analyze offices and services for effectiveness; English taught me how to do that. In fact, analyzing Hamlet is surprisingly similar to analyzing a university's Veterans Affairs division: given the goal of (Hamlet/Veterans Affairs), what is (Shakespeare/the office) doing well? What are they not doing well? What evidence do I have to support these claims?

English also taught me how to be perceptive. I counsel both grads and undergrads at MSU's Writing Center, and perception is key. Think of it like close reading, but for people. I used to look at semi-colons or word choice to parse out an authors' meaning; now, I use those same skills to determine if a client is frustrated, if they understand my suggestions, or if there is a particular strategy I can use to help them.

I miss English just about every day I'm in graduate school. Creating identity development models for Native American students is a great challenge, but what I wouldn't give for a conversation about what Waiting for Godot means or if the narrator in The Yellow Wallpaper really is insane. And, if given the choice between reading 20 pages on legal tradition in higher ed or early American captivity narratives, I'll choose Mary Rowlandson every time.

Even so, I love what I'm doing now. Student affairs might not be exactly like English, but I am still doing the writing, analysis, and close reading skills I enjoy. English, more than anything, made me a great learner. That's a skill I can take anywhere.

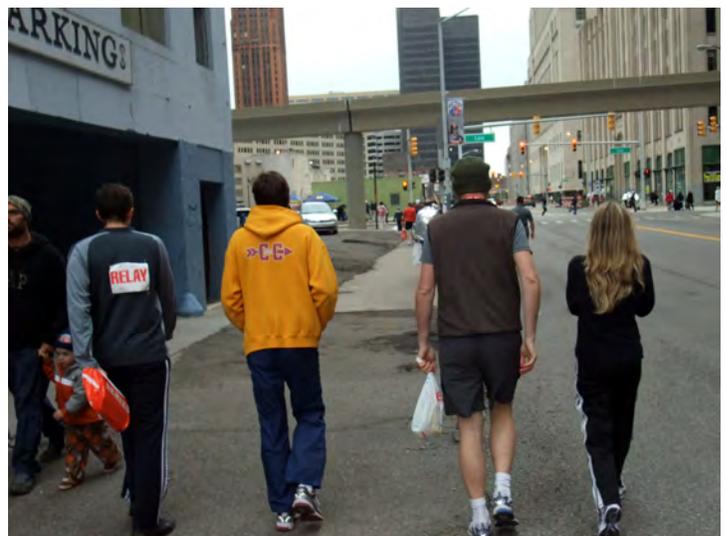
ALUMNI PROFILE

**Mathew George** *by Kathleen Pfeiffer*

I feel a special kind of pride and pleasure whenever I receive an email update from our former Master's student Mathew George. A Catholic priest from India with a deep and impressive educational background that includes several languages as well as training in theology, philosophy and world literature, Father Mathew first came to my office to seek advice before applying to the graduate program. Later, he was a student in my Harlem Renaissance graduate seminar. As I've followed his personal and professional development since completing our program, I cannot help but think that Father Mathew illustrates the tremendous and under-appreciated value of graduate study in literature. "My studies at Oakland University opened my eyes to a different world and perspective to the realities of life," Mathew notes. "I relate to a wide range of people because of that 'openness'." This openness was evident even when he was a student here: in my own class, his theological training and expertise in Biblical studies made him the unlikeliest but most consistent source of jaw-dropping insights about early twentieth century African American writing. I have studied the writings of the Harlem Renaissance for years, and yet I found myself consistently awestruck by the insights Mathew shared. His seminar paper for the class examined the Biblical references and crucifixion allegory in Waldo Frank's 1923 novel *Holiday* (a novel which I myself had researched extensively and ushered back into print) and it has fundamentally altered my understanding of a novel that I had previously believed I knew well.

Since completing his degree in 2005, Mathew has continued a life of priestly service that is richly informed by his devotion to liberal arts scholarship. At present, he maintains a blog documenting his work in Nairobi, Kenya. "My studies at Oakland had a great impact on my priestly ministry," Mathew wrote to me recently. "Command of the English language gave me confidence as I could effectively communicate with the people especially in my preaching. Later, when I began to write in the parish bulletins, blog and now in Facebook, I realized that many people like the way I write. From the reactions of my readers, I know that my writing has a positive impact in the lives of many. But I also have to admit, since English is my second language, I continue to improve to come to the level of a native English speaker who holds the same Degree as mine."

Mathew continues, "Also, my studies at Oakland helped me tremendously in the later studies I did. I could complete the STL degree (Licentiate in Sacred Theology) in three years (48 credits) working full time, including writing a thesis of hundred pages. The only way I could take this 'mission trip' in Africa was made possible because of my 'English background'. I could read and write for my thesis even when I am engaged in full time ministry here. Ghana and Kenya, the countries I spent time in this trip, are English - speaking countries. This "bragging" I made here is not to show any of my personal qualities but to show how much my English studies at Oakland University helped me to improve the way I relate to the rest of the world and also in my own ministry as a priest."



*Eard Stapan 2011, coming and going*

**APPEAL**

The Department of English depends on the continuing contributions and support of our alumni and friends to fund special student events such as lectures and readings, to support student research and travel, and to purchase special video and book materials for classroom use. We ask you to please consider making a contribution (which is tax deductible and doubly deductible for Michigan residents).

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