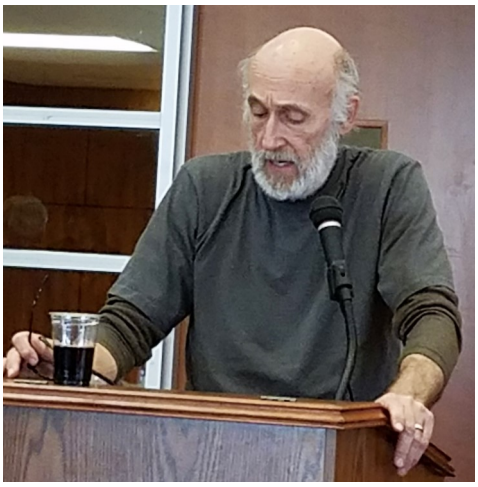
FORUM | The Newsletter of the UH Department of English



Message from the Department Chair
Dr. Kastely encourages your collaboration with us

The study of English is a dynamic and evolving field, and the energy in our Department reflects the excitement of innovative scholarship and creative work. As a faculty, we are involved collaboratively in an intricate intellectual balance. We engage in historical studies of literature and culture. At the same time we extend the range of texts, writers, and cultures, as we investigate the ways in which English as a global language and in which English language literatures shape and are shaped by the necessarily transnational activities that define our field. The effecting of this balance brings challenges and requires a faculty and students open to re-imagining the subjects that they study. There are significant gains for departments that accept these challenges. Perhaps the most important gain is that an innovative faculty and an innovative study of English prepare students for a world that is increasingly global, interconnected, and changing. To study English is to equip oneself to meet the world in flexible and creative ways. We educate our students so that they can thrive in the cultural, political, economic, and physical environments that they inherit and that they, in turn, will help determine for the next generation. Over the next several issues of our newsletter, we will inform you of some of the achievements of our faculty and students. Further, we will offer you opportunities to support the Department's effort to pursue the scholarship, creative work, and education that helps shape our students to become responsible and innovative citizens in an increasingly global world. We hope that you will collaborate with us as we pursue these goals.

j. Kastely, Chair
Department of English

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If you wish to have your voice heard, please email Sadie Hash, our editorial assistant, at uhenglishforum1@gmail.com.

Inside Houston's Arts/Activists Community — Maria C. Gonzalez

The opportunity to work with a community organization outside the English department but important to our work is one of the great pleasures of living and working in Houston. Houston provides a dynamic and very active arts community. I have been a participant with one of the most amazing projects in the city, Voices Breaking Boundaries. It was founded by Sehba Sarwar, an artist and community activist who conceptualized a space that would produce art from the Houston communities themselves. Individual artists

working within their communities to explain and explore their world represent the collective creative environment that produced the work of Voices Breaking Boundaries (VBB), which is an event that is a neighborhood block party and protest space with poetry and essay readings, art instillations, snow cones and beer, food trucks, dogs and cats, neighbors new and old coming together, and artists, writers, activists, and scholars hanging out. From this environment, in collaboration with my colleague, Dr. Margo Backus, we edited three volumes entitled Borderlines. The hybrid texts we have produced defy simple definitions for genre but because of the importance of community, activism, and creativity—all of which we tried to capture in each volume—the boundary between the academy and the community is dissolved.

Our efforts usually begin with Sehba Sarwar conceptualizing projects and seeking funding, and then Margot Backus, my co-editor, Ana Laurel, past managing editor, Sehba, and myself sitting down and conversing about who to invite once we have agreed upon the direction of the project. We are always trying to engage voices from around the world, and our contributors are from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kashmir, Mexico, Canada, and the United States. They have provided us with pieces from borderline spaces all over the world. This truly is a collective process, with our creative leader being Sehba and our pragmatic get down to earth organizer being Ana Laurel for much of this project. Our current managing editor, Anna Saikin, is now our logistics person who reminds us of deadlines and whose turn it is to edit each contribution as well as provide the one person we all turn to in order to remind us of what we said we would do. While Margot and I trade off editing duties, the contributors are preparing their manuscripts for review. Josh Turner and Angela Martinez are our graphic designers whose eyes have made the volumes the beautiful pieces of art they are. The final proof of this work goes to the VBB Advisory Board, which includes additional colleagues from the English department, Dr. Oui Duran and Dr. Lauren Zentz. The final products are a representation of the international collective this project represents: the borders of Houston, the US and Mexico, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan.

Our first volume, Borderlines I, was a beautiful success. As my co-editor Margot Backus said in the introduction to that volume, it captures the “feel [of] the ways borderlines affect and shape” and explore “risky and enriching encounters situated on historically-charged borderlines.” This first volume attempted to capture the lived experience of art and activism in specific neighborhoods and communities.

For Borderlines Part II: Migrations and Movements, Voices Breaking Boundaries invited artists to explore the unique geopolitical spaces they occupy, including a range of indeterminate spaces between two worlds clearly demarcated by usually hostile political entities. What happens when individuals see a world beyond the so called simple borders distinguishing one place from another? Those gifted individuals produce the pieces included in these volumes.

Like the work in the first volume, the second volume’s contents are products of the living room art productions created by Houston’s Voices Breaking Boundaries founder, Sehba Sarwar. In these living room art projects, artists from Houston and from distant locales present their work in homes in local neighborhoods, installations drawing together far-flung creations on a unifying theme. The boundless creativity of these living room arts contributors is captured in the volumes.

The final volume, Borderlines Volume III, is at the final stage of the editorial process and ready to move to production. This volume explores, through multidisciplinary art projects, labor across border regions with a focus on the experiences of stateless workers and communities upon whose labor virtually every country depends but who are without official status or civil protections in the countries where they live and work. The question of national belonging is one that haunts increasing numbers of individuals and communities around the world.

The relationship between the academy and the community is well represented in the volumes produced for Voices Breaking Boundaries. In many ways, there is no real separation. My work at the University of Houston is only an extension of my work in the city of Houston, and these volumes record that work.

Digital and Physical Inroads to Sustaining Scholarly-Community Rapport: Toward a Research Collective On Writing, Community, and Global Culture — Dr. Lauren Zentz

Five members of the English Department received a $10,000 grant this year from UH's Hobby Center for Public Policy, for a project titled Digital and Physical Inroads to Sustaining Scholarly-Community Rapport: Toward a Research Collective on Writing, Community, and Global Culture. The faculty members involved in the project are Chatwara Duran, Carl Lindahl, Nathan Shepley, Jennifer Wingard, and Lauren Zentz. The researchers' aim in this project is to collect various types of data, using qualitative research methods, in order to understand the viewpoints and experiences of various members of what they call Houston's "super-diverse" community, meaning that Houston is home to groups of people from many places in the world, the nation, and the state, who all have various reasons for migrating here, and who plan on staying here for various lengths of time.

The researchers' goal in collecting the stories of their research participants are multiple. First, they wish to understand, from the "ground-up," which means, as defined by Houston residents themselves, how communities here are structured, defined, and interconnected with or separate from each other. Second, they wish to understand how migration experiences affect people's linguistic and cultural practices as embedded in their senses of community and identity. Third, the researchers wish to learn what public policy issues affect their participants' lives, such as education policies and public infrastructure policies, so that they may use what they have learned in order to inform public policy discussions. Finally, the group plans to create a public website on which they will share the stories of participants who wish to make their stories public.

The group has hired two research assistants and one web designer in order to accomplish their goals. Duran and Zentz point out that their research assistants are enabling them to reach out to communities that they would not otherwise have access to, such as members of Turkish, Venezuelan, and Jamaican communities throughout the city. This is in addition to the communities that Duran and Zentz have already been establishing connections with, such as Cuban and Indonesian students at UH, diverse members of Houston's refugee/asylee populations through both PAIR and Catholic Charities, as well as members of the local French community. The student RAs' participation in this project is also providing them insights into qualitative research methods and opportunities to use their work in senior honors thesis projects. The web designer will work to create a public access point that provides a public interface for sharing stories with a broader audience of people.

States Duran: "This project is more timely than ever before considering the current heated issues. Within the 'super-diversity' we have discussed, there's complicated intersectionality such as socioeconomic status, educational level and linguistic hierarchy contending details of diversity. And, as we move forward, we will find that needs and concerns will vary based on the data from the ground-up." She goes on to give an example, from the data she has already collected: "Emerging differences across communities/families start to form. From two families that I have interviewed (so far), one of the two is minoritized because of their race. The family has college degrees, and they spoke English as their primary language though not Standard American English. Another family has no previous English education and currently lives below the poverty line with limited support (e.g. limited healthcare and educational resources)."

Shepley further notes: "I have visited two creative writing classes that use Houston sites as raw material for poetry or fiction, and I've visited one first-year writing class that is using 'Houston Matters' as its theme. Particularly in the first-year writing class, the students seemed eager to share. They appeared to get it when I explained that even descriptions of a community or culture in Houston can act as persuasive writing because descriptions can tell readers, 'I'm here, or we are here. Notice us.' I saw several heads nodding when I shared the example of a first-year student I once had at UH who, for an analytical paper about a local subculture, wrote about a vibrant breakdancing group that he participated in on the far southwest side of the city."

The group plans to continue to collect, analyze, and write about their data, as well as seek additional funding, through the 2017-18 academic year.

"I am the bravest writer you will interview": on writing and persisting on the academic fringes. An interview with Lacy Johnson — Margot Backus

Lacy Johnson (pictured left), Rice University Assistant Professor of Creative Writing, is the author of two outstanding memoirs. Her second book, The Other Side (2014) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for autobiography, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, the Edgar Award for Best Fact Crime, and the CMLP Firecracker Award in Nonfiction, and was recognized as a best book of 2014 by Kirkus, Library Journal, and the Houston Chronicle. Johnson earned her doctorate in Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Houston Department of English. She defended her dissertation, i, mongrel: an interactive, multimedia web installation, in 2008.

[…] Professor Johnson has all the right CV lines to make her a certifiable credit to the UH Department of English and an apt role model for any aspiring writer or teacher. But what really qualifies Johnson as a role model and advisor is not in her CV. Rather, her greatest insights arise from wisdom gained through what Devoney Looser would call her shadow CV, and what Johnson herself might call the "hidden curriculum of academia." […] Rather than rehearse the recognition that Johnson's work has received or her job description at Rice, my focus is on how she persisted and stayed brave long enough to get her two memoirs written and published, and to land her tenure track position, not only at Rice, but more astonishingly, in Houston, where, in 2010, she made the uncompromising (by any rational index, disastrous) commitment to stay put.

I kicked off the interview by saying, a little timidly, that I really just wanted to glean more of the insights she shared with the UH graduate students in English who were preparing to go on the job market at an academic career-path workshop I organized in 2011. I added that I was interested in how her sense of post-defense career paths in academia might have changed since that day in 2011 when she awed us with a tour-de-force account of her principled refusal either to do work that has no meaning for her, or to feel badly about periods of uncertainty and unemployment because, as she said, "there is more than one right way." At that time, her first memoir was not yet in print. She was piecing together a combination of editing and teaching work in order to support her writing. With characteristically un-saccharine, defiant ebullience, she told anxious UH grad students preparing for the job market that after several years doing innovative work with graduate student writers at the University of Kansas, she had returned to Houston because this is where she wanted to be. She was parenting her children, writing, and teaching writing to children with terminal cancer. I recall that presentation, and the image I have in my mind's eye is not of a person, but of a presence, an ethos, a human flame.

Today, I am wondering how she has been coping with all the success that has, since that time, looked from the outside like a sort of unstoppable avalanche.

LJ: It's interesting that you mention that talk, because I just gave a version of that same talk to graduate students at Rice as a guide to the Alt-Ac-Ac job market. And little had changed since my [2011 presentation], except that now I also have the experience of an additional administrative position, which I held in the Mitchell Center at UH. My cumulative administrative experience means I have seen how academia works, and what I have seen has not always been flattering to the institution. Working really hard and being really brilliant is often not enough. Most everyone I know who got a job right out of the gate had, of course, a book, but they also all had a very involved mentor who worked hard to help that specific student in really specific ways.

MB: I know exactly what you mean. I wasn't even aware of this myself for exactly the reason you describe – because I was inside what I only later came to understand was a patronage system. My mentor invited me and other graduate students to conferences, introduced us to people, invited us out to dinner when visiting dignitaries were in town. I thought that was just how it was until I had an office mate at my first job

who had had a completely different experience. She came from a department that, while equal to my own in rank, had no investment in its graduate students getting jobs. […] So what were things like for you?

LJ: Well, for the first year or two, I had been working closely and very productively with Claudia (Rankine) but when she left, and then Ruben (Martinez) left, I felt … unmoored. This is not anyone's fault, because at that time I was interested in doing very experimental work that was hybrid or digital or interactive, but we had a very traditional faculty who didn't take much interest in my bizarro work. I don't blame them! It wasn't that interesting! […] I think a lot of successful graduate students -- those who get placed right away -- learn to inhabit the confidence of their mentors, and to lean on it in important ways. […]

MB: So what did you do to stay afloat? What can anyone do in this kind of situation?

LJ: [Reflectively] I actually think that for anyone who doesn't get a tenure-track job right away, and probably for many who do — because a lot of tenure-track jobs out there now are absolutely brutal -- 5/5 or even 6/6 teaching loads -- it would be better for your career in the long run to leave academia. This is especially true for creative writers. Like, be a park ranger and get your boots muddy and do research and let your work expand organically. And then if you decide to re-enter the academic job market, you look more interesting to a search committee – if you are working in environmental literature or eco-criticism and you have been working as a park ranger and writing about trees for a few years you look a lot better informed, a lot more experienced. Your work is better for that time away. […]

MB: But what about when you did decide to "re-enter the academy." […] What happened?

LJ: I think one thing that made it possible for me to get this job at Rice was that I asked for a lot of help. I had four or five people reviewing my CV, my letter, my writing sample – a whole team of people that it took me until now to assemble. And if I'd had that earlier… well, I don't know how I could have. But one challenge I faced that I didn't expect was: how do I talk about myself? I've had all these kind of weird jobs, and in addition to the two books, I've got all of these kind of weird projects that don't look at all like books and might not make sense to a search committee. How do I talk about that in a way that makes as much sense to others as it does to me? And I actually went to a marketing agency, like, a branding agency, where a friend of mine works, because I understood that the question I needed an answer to is: what holds everything together here? And he said: 'you know what, you are brave. That's your thing. You are about chutzpah, about telling your truth and telling the story that needs telling even if everyone around you says 'oh, you can't or shouldn't say that.' And that is how I pitched myself to Rice. It meant believing that I was the bravest writer they would interview, and the only one who could teach students to be brave writers, too. But I have to admit, it felt risky to make that kind of bold claim about myself because I know that brazen confidence in a woman can go against a lot of social and professional gender norms. I decided it was worth the risk. […]

Dr. Backus and family pictured above

To read the full interview, go to http://www.uh.edu/class/english/newsletter/

New Faculty: Sebastian Lecourt — Wendy Wood, PhD candidate, Literature

In Spring 2016, I found that I was in a bind. Due to a number of scheduling conflicts, I hadn't been able to take any graduate classes in Victorian Literature (my focus), and I was having trouble finding a professor who could give me advice on my rather unique dissertation focus (the emergence of Science Fiction in Victorian period). During this mini-crisis, Dr. Connolly connected me with our new Victorian faculty member, Sebastian Lecourt (pictured below), who was still teaching at John Hopkins University. Dr. Lecourt went above and beyond to help me. He took time out of his busy schedule to email me a list of foundational texts I could read, and he also told me about a few different seminars that were coming up in Spring

2017 that I could take within my field. But he didn't stop there. He even took the time to call me and spent an hour advising me on avenues I could explore within my field and scholars I should focus on in my search. When he arrived in town, he took it upon himself to meet me for coffee and talk about my dissertation focus in even greater detail. Thanks to Dr. Lecourt, I have a clear plan of what I want to explore and where I need to go to start. This is why I am so excited to welcome Dr. Lecourt to the University of Houston as our newest Victorian scholar.

Dr. Lecourt's main focus of study is religion in the Victorian period. Dr. Lecourt explains, "I look at religion as the genesis feature of society and how religion gets corrupted. My work focuses on the politics of domain in religious constructs and how religion woks as a cultural ethnicity." In fact, Dr. Lecourt recently had an article published in PMLA (PMLA 131 (3)) entitled "'Idylls of the Buddh': Buddhist Modernism and Victorian Poetics in Colonial Ceylon." Dr. Lecourt is also working on his second book entitled, The Genres of Comparative Religion, 1783-1947. The project looks at how Victorian writers used established genres to frame their writings of non-Christian, religious works. Dr. Lecourt received his Ph.D. from Yale University in 2011. He then spent the next six years working as a post-doctoral professor at Brandeis University, Boston University, Rutgers University, and John Hopkins University. He also spent some time researching in Germany.

This semester I am excited to be exploring Victorian critics in Dr. Lecourt's first graduate class here at U of H. The course focuses on social critics of the period and traces the rhetoric and ideas from Thomas Carlyle through Oscar Wilde. Through the lens of these influential rhetoricians, one is able to better examine the rhetoric of today. Another of Lecourt's current students, Rose Pentecost (Ph.D. student in Literature) describes the course: "Sebastian Lecourt situates Victorian prose within the social, political, and cultural context of the early and mid-nineteenth century. Each class day begins with a discussion of the author, the sociopolitical climate, theories, and ways in which ideas merge or clash with those of other nonfiction authors of the time period."

What I enjoy about the class is how well prepared Dr. Lecourt is for every lecture and how he sets up each discussion and author within the larger context of the period. Rose agrees: "Dr. Lecourt serves as a facilitator, guiding us thru passages, providing historical background, and enhancing the discussion by posing additional questions. I especially appreciate the way he continually engages members of the class, allowing for various perspectives and new ways of thinking about the texts we read." Thus because of the way Dr. Lecourt foregrounds each discussion, I, like Rose, feel like I both understand where the ideas are coming from and how they connect to the larger picture of the period. It makes a difficult subject easier to understand. I am so glad that Dr. Lecourt has joined the UH faculty, and I look forward to working with him further over the next few years as I complete my PhD.

Wendy Wood, pictured above

Studying Medieval Literature—Travis Kane, undergraduate, PURS recipient

When I came to UH, I wasn't interested in realist literature. I had always loved fantasy […] so I looked for the closest thing to fantasy and found medieval literature. Dr. Lorraine Stock took an approach to medieval literature which involved looking at medieval literary works and how contemporary culture interprets them in film adaptation. Since I was an honors student, I petitioned for extra work and wrote an extended final paper on the interpretations of the monster Grendel in Beowulf. That same paper won the Gentile Undergraduate Scholarship in literary criticism. In Dr. Stock's class, I learned the skills of research and analysis. Most importantly, I discovered that I could actually have fun writing literary analysis and research papers, something I never thought I would enjoy.

Eventually I took it upon myself to meet Dr. John McNamara. […] I expressed my interest in his graduate seminars on Old English language and Beowulf. He allowed me to take both seminars through independent study courses.

The next fall I began learning Old English. Every week I, along with other graduate students, would translate passages from various texts such as "The Anglo Saxon Chronicle," "The Wanderer," and "The Battle of Maldon." Each week we would read lines from our translations in class. It was exciting to learn in the same room as graduate students. I love how they were as serious as I was and how they would engage in actual discussion with questions and thoughts. At first it seemed intimidating, but then I realized they were just like me, curious and knowledge-seeking. The best part was hearing how everyone else translated sections and comparing them to how I translated the text. I remember one graduate student's translation read exactly like her own poetry, a kind of gloomy and rhythmic weaving.

In the process of learning Old English, I learned about the history of the English language, the syntactical beauty of Anglo-Saxon verse, and various translation methods such as foreignizing and domesticating. In the second semester, each of us had to present on a topic dealing with Beowulf and the Anglo-Saxon culture. I had to present on Interlace and the structure of Beowulf as a poem. At first I was extremely nervous, because I was worried my presentation would not be good enough compared to the graduate students' presentations. But it turned out I did just as well as they did. My presentation went over well, and everyone seemed to get something out of it. Ultimately, I felt like an equal to everyone else in this class because I tried just as hard as anyone else to learn about the Old English language and the culture that spoke it.

The two-semester seminar concluded with translating Beowulf. I had never thought of translation as an act of creativity. […] Ever since this class, whenever I buy a translated book, I pay attention to the translator. I also learned the intricacies of linguistic meaning in words that are still used today. […] I wanted to learn more about Beowulf, the various ways to translate it, its cultural analogues, and the way people treat Beowulf today.

Now I am a recipient of the Provost's Undergraduate Research Scholarship [PURS] Scholarship. My project is to help Dr. Stock gather scholarship on Beowulf in order to assist her in developing an undergraduate research capstone course focused solely on Beowulf, its analogues, and its literary and multimedia adaptations. The scholarly materials I find will either be used in the class or will be used as references that the class's students could apply to their own research projects. The PURS work has also taught me research methods that are applicable in my future studies in graduate school. I have been exposed to work that typically only graduate students perform. My hope is that I will apply what I have learned through this PURS research and in courses taught by both Dr. Stock and Dr. McNamara, to other epics, languages, and literatures in graduate school. It has been an honor to study under both these teachers.

Dr. John McNamara — Tribute, Reminiscences, and Retirement

On February 9, 2017, the UH English Department celebrated Dr. John McNamara. Current and past chairs, Dr. Jay Kastely and Dr. Wyman Herendeen, and colleagues and students of Dr. McNamara gathered to share their memories and appreciation. Below are some reminiscences by students from Dr. McNamara's Old English Seminar.

Erika Jo Brown (PhD candidate, Poetry): As a poet with an interest in literary translation, this class made different theoretical aspects come to life. Cogitating on sound and rhythm, on beautiful kennings, on lineation and pronouns, and our rich English language lineage was an irreplaceable experi-

ence. Of course, Dr. McNamara's humor and patience created a supportive environment for us to make mistakes and ask questions related to our specific interests. It was also a great blend of different majors and degree programs, which I miss.

Adrienne Perry (PhD candidate, Fiction): Dr. McNamara had a wonderful sense of humor in class. There were a few times when I absolutely butchered my translation, usually of Beowulf, and he would just listen thoughtfully, perhaps with a slightly quizzical look on his face, and then say something like, "OK, OK, let's go back . . ." And we would sort through the lines slowly and in a jolly way. At the end of each class, he would send us off by saying, "godspeed," holding up his hand as though blessing us. I appreciated his modesty and good will, especially given all of his expertise and scholarship. He always entertained other points of view, even when the research may not support them. Most importantly, his love for translation, Old English, and his students was clear.

Reminiscences of Dr. McNamara — Joan McAninch Samuelson, PhD, English Department, Lone Star College

As I recall, the young Dr. John McNamara arrived at UH around 1967/1968: he was only a few years older than his students. I was a junior and had signed up for his Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Lit course. I didn't yet know him, nor did I know I was in love with the poetry until I listened to him read and interpret works like *Beowulf*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Morte d'Arthur*, "The Owl and the Nightingale," and of course *The Canterbury Tales*. He was magical, and I think most of us were happily smitten with him. Dr. McNamara would walk about the room, casting spells with his knowledge of history, philosophy, religion, psychology, myth, imagery, and literature. I was hooked and went on to take more courses with him in Chaucer and literary criticism.

I always found Dr. McNamara charming, insightful, and kind. I remember going to his office to talk about a paper: I was nervous at first because he is so brilliant, and I was awed by the book-crammed sanctuary, but he was easy going, without pretensions, and instantly made me comfortable. I was never again afraid to go to a professor's office for help. I also recall that one of my papers in his Medieval Poetry course was rhapsodic about *SGGK*: he wrote lovely comments, but suggested that I might want to tone down the "flights of fancy" in my youthful rush of adjectives. He was right, and my writing improved in all my courses. I'm still working on that simple, perfect advice, and, I think, usually succeed. But I'm a bit defiant in this reminiscence that has become an essay, because it is about the mentor who changed my life.

After the BA, I moved on to grad school. I now had a teaching fellowship, and Dr. McNamara recommended me to teach the sophomore *Canterbury Tales* course. The MA program--sitting together around a conference table in small classes of English majors, listening to him weave lectures into amazing stories that brought literature and history to life; then trying out our own fledgling wings in discussions led by a gentle, wise teacher who cared about us--was the highlight of my college years. My Master's Thesis (labored over on a typewriter with correct tape!) was a study in myth and ritual in *SGGK.* Dr. McNamara was my thesis director and helped me write a thesis I could be proud of. It was Dr. McNamara in grad school who gave me confidence that I could do this work, the opportunities to find my bliss, and the inspiration to continue to the doctorate and eventually teach college rather than high school as I had originally planned when I first started at UH.

Though I was accepted into the UH doctoral program, I also knew by now it would be good for me to study at another university, even in another region of the country. Dr. McNamara wrote a recommendation for me to Ohio State, my chosen graduate program, where I studied with some of the best professors and scholars in the country, […] But after graduation, and also finding myself newly divorced, I came home with my young son to family and Texas. I now had a child to support alone, but was fortunate enough to be hired as one of the founding faculty at Lone Star College-Kingwood campus: 34 years ago. Dr. McNamara was one of my references […] I knew I was lucky and wrote to thank him once again. He wrote a note back and told me it was perfectly okay to call him "John" by now, but I have never been able to do that.

Ohio State was an important experience in my life I treasure, but I have always loved UH and John McNamara. He remains the finest teacher I have ever known and the inspiration throughout my own college teaching career. I sent English majors to him from Lone Star for many years, but he has now retired (I'm only a few short years behind him myself). I'm happy he can rest, read, write, travel, and enjoy whatever else his retirement holds for him. However, for me, he will always be Dr. McNamara: my teacher who has also taught my own students as well. I have "channeled" him in my teaching for decades, and students hear his name from me all the time when I am teaching British Literature or advising students to "cut the flights of fancy."

As the beloved Christa McAuliffe said, great teachers "touch the future." Dr. McNamara's legacy to thousands of students over five decades will live on because the students who were inspired by him to become scholars and teachers now pay it forward to future generations. He is authentic—a born teacher who gave everything he had to his students.

"*And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche.*"
From Chaucer's *General Prologue* portrait of the Pilgrim Clerk

Reminiscences of John McNamara — Lorraine Kochanske Stock

I joined the faculty of the English Department in 1976, just as John McNamara, the department's senior-ranked medievalist, was elected Chairman. I was hired straight from earning my doctorate in Medieval Studies at Cornell, and as my feet hit the ground running at UH, I found myself in the position of having to cover all the upper division medieval literature courses (Chaucer, Early Medieval Literature, Late Medieval Literature, Survey of British Lit I, Survey of World Lit I) as well as all the graduate seminars (Survey of Old and Middle English, Chaucer's Dream Visions and the Troilus, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales).

Since my senior colleague was busy running the department, his share of those courses fell to me. General disgruntlement with the previous Chair and John's willingness to lead the department rendered him something of a messiah figure; it took quite a leap for me even to stand upon his shoulders. Barely out of graduate school myself, I was intimidated to be assigned two graduate seminars, and four different upper division courses in my first year of teaching—the whole range of the five centuries of the long medieval period in England and on the continent. John was always entirely supportive, giving advice when I asked for it but mostly allowing me to find my own way.

Once he came back to the ranks of the regular faculty, we congenially alternated teaching the roster of our period's courses, revising the curriculum, and administering doctoral comprehensive exams over our 40-years together as the English Department's medievalists. We mutually agreed upon a division of labor: he covered Anglo-Saxon; I taught Middle English; we alternated on the two Chaucer seminars.

His sudden retirement, during a summer when I was abroad doing research, was a shock to my system. He graciously mentored me in my early years at UH and after four decades of harmonious collegiality, I will miss his presence acutely. Equally, however, I welcome the opportunity to "pay forward" his early generosity to me by providing the same mentorship and support to some bright junior colleague, an Anglo-Saxon scholar I hope to welcome to the department as he welcomed me in 1976 and with whom to collaborate, further developing medieval literature curricula. That would be an appropriate legacy to John's service to the department as a specialist in Old and Middle English.

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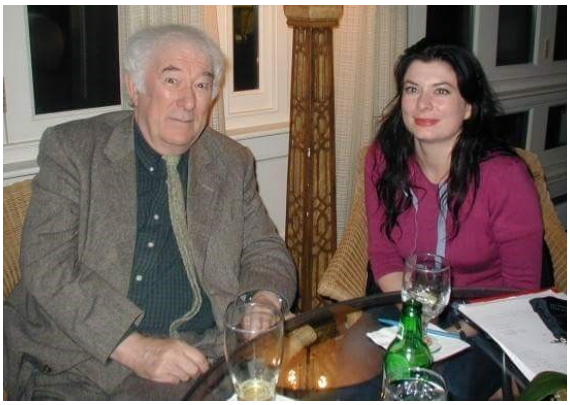

Faculty Publication Excerpt

Sally Connolly, Director of Graduate Studies and Associate Professor of Contemporary Poetry, recently celebrated the publication of her first book which is excerpted here. Also, featured is a picture of Connolly and Seamus Heaney. Connolly had the opportunity to discuss Heaney's poetry with the poet himself during her two years as a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University.

Excerpted from *Grief and Meter: Elegies for Poets After Auden:*

W. H. Auden set sail for America on the steamship Champlain on January 19, 1939. As his traveling companion Christopher Isherwood recounts in his diary, when they arrived seven days later into the biting cold of New York Harbor, after weathering blizzards in the Atlantic, the snow-crusted ship looked "like a wedding cake." 1 Yet the first poem Auden wrote to inaugurate his new life in the New World was not an epithalamion in celebration of a marriage, but an elegy on the occasion of a death. W. B. Yeats died on the French Riviera two days after Auden's arrival in New York, and this spurred him to write the elegy "In Memory of W. B. Yeats."

This book makes the case that Auden's elegy is one of the most significant and powerful examples of elegy in English since John Milton's "Lycidas" (1638) was published some three hundred years previously. The influence of "Lycidas," however—a poem that initiates the pastoral tradition in English elegy traced later in this introduction—was generic rather than formal. By contrast, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" offers elegists after Auden a poetic form that directly treats the death of a poet.

There are, of course, other instances of formally influential elegies. For example, the heroic quatrains of "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751) came to be known as elegiac quatrains after Thomas Gray, while Lord Alfred Tennyson's In Memoriam (1850) went on to lend its name to the abba envelope quatrains in which it is couched. The significance and specificity of the formal influence of "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," however, is quite distinct from these examples. The trochaic tetrameter quatrains of the third section of Auden's elegy become shorthand not only for elegy per se but for elegies for poets in particular. Not only the form but also the structure of Auden's tripartite elegy for Yeats becomes a model for elegies for poets after 1939, and we can find examples (such as Joseph Brodsky's "Verses on the Death of T. S. Eliot" [1965]) that are wholly patterned after "In Memory of W. B. Yeats."

Contrary to Auden's assertion in his elegy for Yeats that "poetry makes nothing happen" (36), this book argues that elegies—especially for poets—do indeed make something happen. The very word "poetry" is taken from the Greek poïesis, a derivation from an ancient form of the verb "to make," so one can turn Auden's line on its head by glossing it as "making makes nothing happen": that is, the creation of poetry generates something out of nothing. This is why some of the earliest words we have for poets in English, such as scop (shaper) and makar, place the onus on poetry as an action and a craft. It is my central contention that these poems are not just catalysts for change within the genre of elegy; what is being crafted most vigorously in these poems for poets is a poetic tradition itself.

Coming Stories!

Next issue, we look forward to sharing Zachary Turpin's experience and excerpts from upcoming publications from Karen Fang and Ann Christensen.

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