

Message from the Chair

When I entered academia, I thought my life would always be full of literature, teasing out interpretations with smart people, analyzing the rich meanings of images, sounds, and style.

And because I dwell in community with you— oh ye UH English majors and grad. students, alums and



friends of English—literature still remains central to me. Yet, as chair, it's not all analyzing Hamlet; it's enrollment reports (up this year even during COVID!), meetings (zoomy!), course scheduling (spreadsheets—bleary!), and so on. So, I cherish the truly literary opportunities I do get when reading my colleague's work (see below), teaching with new audiences and methodologies, and attending readings and lectures. In the past few weeks alone, for instance, our friends at [Brazos Bookstore](#) hosted virtual book launches for two of our faculty members and one graduate student. Our talented incoming class of CWP students read fresh work at the end of September in the UH Library's 20-years and running [Poetry & Prose Series](#). The most recent installment in our [Unsung Masters Series](#) poetry publishing project was cited by *Ms. Magazine* as a "hidden gem of 2019." I love how Houston and UH are so open to collaborations like this. We've collaborated most recently with the CAMH, Lawndale Arts Center, and Project Row house, for example. Our alums founded [defunkt](#) magazine that features some of our students, alums, and faculty. We house two student-run literary journals, [Gulf Coast](#) and [Glass Mountain](#).

The exciting work that we do as humanists and linguists, writers and critics—the sudden surprises that come of collaboration—this has mostly moved online for now, but by Spring 2022 it will happen in and around the beautifully renovated historic Roy G. Cullen Building. (Drawings to come in the next issue of Forum.)

The Roy G. Cullen Building was one of the first buildings on campus, a 1939 Art Deco gem that holds memories for decades of faculty and alumni. The renovation is carrying the building into the 21st century with great care and attention to its original design, with a newly accessible third floor, upgraded classrooms, seminar and conference rooms, a sweet little “Wellness Room,” and other areas where future students will study and drink coffee, as their forebears once did. If you are one such forbear or friend, I hope you will consider making a gift or even naming a space in our new collaborative Roy Cullen Building devoted to the study of the humanities, writing, and the literary arts. Please email me at achrist@uh.edu for more information; you can also dedicate the English Chair’s Excellence Fund through the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences by selecting it from the pulldown menu on the online giving form: <https://giving.uh.edu/class/>

Meanwhile, check out this [interview](#) with our beloved alum, Jericho Brown, about his Pulitzer-Prize winning poetry collection *The Tradition*.

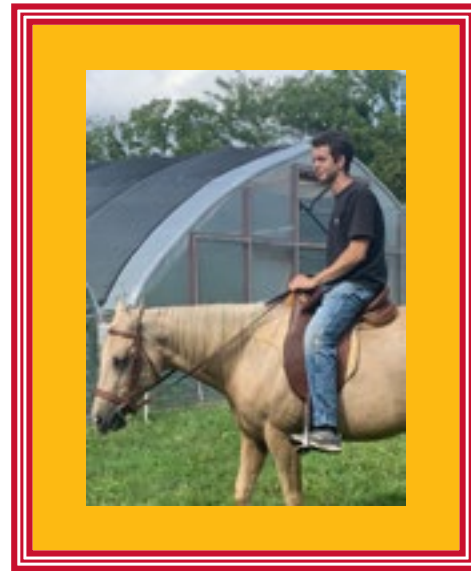
-Ann Christensen

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH WELCOMES DISTINGUISHED NEW ASSISTANT PROFESSORS

Eunjeong Lee received her Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from Pennsylvania State University. Her research centers around literacy practices of multilingual writers, the politics of language, language ideologies and equity issues in teaching of literacy and literacy teacher education, and decolonial language and literacy education. Her work has appeared in *Composition Forum*, *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, *World Englishes*, and *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, and in edited collections such as *Crossing Divides* and *Translinguistics*. She is also a regular contributor at *The Korea Times*.

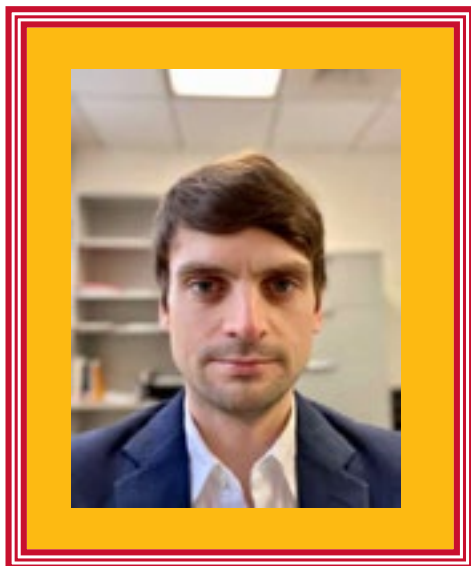


David A.P. Womble received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, and his B.A. from Duke University on a Benjamin N. Duke Scholarship. His research brings together the history of science and political theory to explore how concepts such as climate, bio-physiology, and thermodynamic energy shaped intellectual history. At the University of Houston, he will teach in the areas of empire studies and ecocriticism, focusing on literature of the 18th and 19th centuries across Europe and the British Empire. He is currently leading a course on immigration and border-crossing in the Romantic era.



THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH WELCOMES

DISTINGUISHED NEW VISITING ASSISTANT PROFESSORS



Daniel Davies joins the University of Houston from the University of Pennsylvania, where he recently completed a dissertation on the relationship between late-medieval literature and war. His research centers on transnationalism, theories of nation and empire, and the representation of war from antiquity to today. Originally from Manchester, England, Daniel studied at the University of Edinburgh and Freie Universität Berlin before coming to the U.S. for graduate school. His work has appeared in *New Medieval Literatures*, *Medium Ævum*, and *n+1*. Currently, he is co-editing *The Hundred Years War and European Literary History* with R.D. Perry of the University of Denver for Manchester University Press.

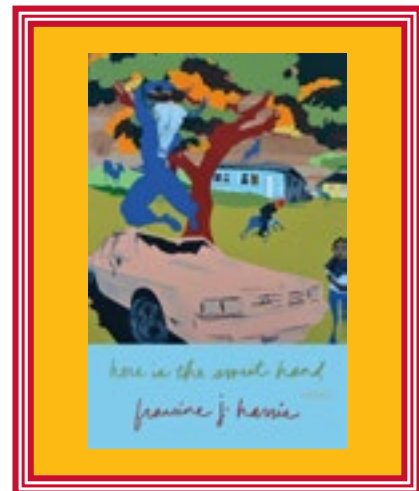
Brenda Peynado's short story collection, *THE ROCK EATERS*, featuring Latinas, angels, aliens, and virtual reality, is forthcoming from Penguin Books in May 2021. Her stories have won an O. Henry Prize, a Pushcart Prize, the Chicago Tribune's Nelson Algren Award, inclusion in *The Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy*, a Dana Award, a Fulbright Grant to the Dominican Republic, and other awards. Over fifty short stories and essays have appeared in places such as *The Georgia Review*, *The Sun*, *The Southern Review*, *The Kenyon Review Online*, *The Threepenny Review*, and Tor.com. She received her MFA at Florida State University and her PhD at the University of Cincinnati. She's currently finishing a novel about the 1965 civil war in the Dominican Republic and a girl who can tell all possible futures, as well as a craft book on the fiction techniques of the unreal.



New Books from Our Faculty

Here is the Sweet Hand (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2020) is the third collection of poetry from Associate Professor francine j.harris. As in her acclaimed previous collections, harris' skillful use of imagery and experimentation with the boundaries of language set the stage for unorthodox election commemoration, subway panic, zoomorphism, and linguistic battlefields. From poems in dialogue with the artistry of Toni Morrison and Charles Burnett to poems that wrestle with the moods of Frank Stanford and Ty Dolla \$ign, the speakers in this book signal a turn at once inward and opening.

—“With poems that pant, keen, and rumble, harris (*play dead*) offers a fresh and dazzling third collection.” -*Publisher's Weekly*



Have News?

We'd love to hear from you.

Please reach out to us at: englnews@central.uh.edu

New Books from Our Faculty

In *Xenocitizens* (Fordham University Press 2020), Associate Professor Jason Berger returns to the antebellum United States in order to challenge a scholarly tradition based on liberal-humanist perspectives. Through the concept of the xenocitizen, a synthesis of the terms “xeno,” which connotes alien or stranger, and “citizen,” which signals a naturalized subject of a state, Berger uncovers realities and possibilities that have been foreclosed by dominant paradigms. Innovatively re-orienting our thinking about traditional nineteenth-century figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau as well as formative writers such as William Wells Brown, Martin R. Delany, Margaret Fuller, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Xenocitizens* glimpses how antebellum thinkers formulated, in response to varying forms of oppression and crisis, startlingly unique ontological and social models as well as unfamiliar ways to exist and to leverage change. In doing so, Berger offers us a different nineteenth century—pushing our imaginative and critical thinking toward new terrain.



—“Jason Berger’s *Xenocitizens* displays both a burning concern about the present and a patient curiosity about the past.” - Caleb Smith, Yale University

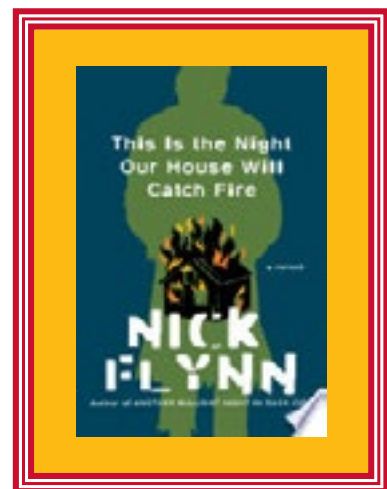


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Professor Nick Flynn’s Memoir *This Is the Night Our House Will Catch Fire* (Norton, 2020) takes us on the journey of a man struggling to hold himself together in prose that is raw and moving, sharp-edged and wry. When Nick Flynn was seven years old, his mother set fire to their house. The event loomed large in his imagination for years, but it’s only after having a child of his own that he understands why. Alternating literary analysis and philosophy with intimate memoir, Flynn probes his deepest ethical dilemmas.



—“A remarkable and daring work, a song of both family and self.” -Kirkus

New Books from Our Faculty

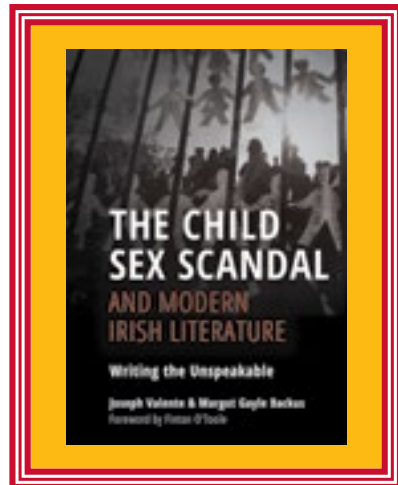
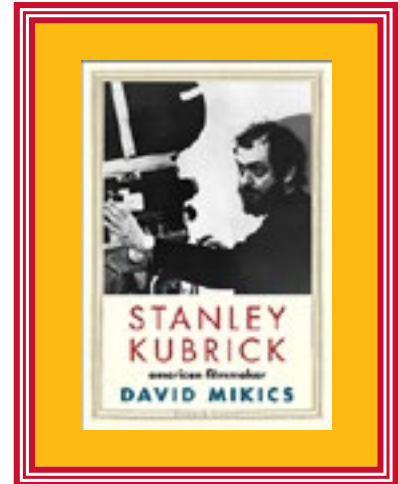
Moore's Distinguished Professor in the English Department and Honors College David Mikics' new biography *Stanley Kubrick: American Filmmaker* was published by Yale University Press in 2020. Drawing on interviews and new archival material, Mikics for the first time explores the personal side of Kubrick's films. Kubrick's Jewishness played a crucial role in his idea of himself as an outsider. Obsessed with rebellion against authority, war, and male violence, Kubrick was himself a calm, coolly masterful creator and a talkative, ever-curious polymath immersed in friends and family.

—“David Mikics’s *Stanley Kubrick: American Filmmaker*” is a cool, cerebral book about a cool, cerebral talent.”
-*The New York Times*



In *The Child Sex Scandal and Modern Irish Literature* (Indiana University Press 2020), Joseph Valente (University of Buffalo) and Margot Gayle Backus (University of Houston) examine modern cultural responses to child sex abuse in Ireland. Using descriptions of these scandals found in newspapers, historiographical analysis, and 20th- and 21st-century literature, Valente and Backus expose a public sphere ardently committed to Irish children's souls and piously oblivious to their physical welfare. They offer historically contextualized and psycho-analytically informed readings of scandal narratives by nine notable modern Irish authors who actively, pointedly, and persistently question Ireland's responsibilities regarding its children. Through close, critical readings, a more nuanced and troubling account emerges of how Ireland's postcolonial heritage has served to enable such abuse. *The Child Sex Scandal and Modern Irish Literature* refines the debates on why so many Irish children were lost by offering insight into the lived experience of both the children and those who failed them.

— “..Establishes for the field of Irish Studies a vital theoretical and representational framework for thinking of and through the ethical functions and potentialities of Irish literature.” -Claire Bracken, Union College



New Books from Our Faculty

Professor Martha Serpas's *Double Effect* (LSU Press 2020) reimagines a principle first outlined by St. Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologica*, which considers whether an action is morally permissible if it causes harm while bringing about a good result. In resonant verse pointed by Cajun language, these poems measure the good that can come from destructive situations: maternal deprivation, spiritual poverty, mania, ecological devastation. Serpas shows that compromised marshes and the Gulf of Mexico offer surprising sustenance and clarity. Time is marked by feast days, hurricanes, celebrations, accidents, and rescues along southern Louisiana's eroding coasts. *Double Effect* ultimately finds joy in survival, in love, and in spiritual fulfillment.



—“Artfully evokes the beauty and power of the Louisiana bayou, building a case for the survival of a landscape and culture in danger of being exterminated, not only by nature’s forces, but by human carelessness and greed.” -Rattle



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A Spanish language translation of Professor Kevin Prufer's fourth collection of poetry *National Anthem* is forthcoming in 2020 from Bartleby Editores in Spain. *Himno Nacional* is translated by Luis Ingelmo and Pablo Luque Pinilla. Set in an apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic world that is disturbing because it is uncannily familiar, *National Anthem* (Four Way Books) chronicles the aftermath of the failure of imperial vision. Allowing Rome and America to bleed into one another, Prufer masterfully weaves the threads of history into an anthem that is as intimate as it is far-reaching.



—“Kevin Prufer’s terrific fourth collection exposes a nightmare straight from the head of Walt Whitman...”
-Ploughshares