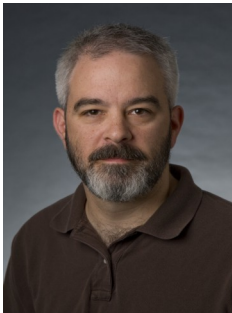


ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
NEWS

FEBRUARY 2010

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Clark Davis

Chair

Before I tell you what's new in the English Department, I should introduce myself. My name is Clark Davis, and I am the new chair of the department, replacing Ann Dobyns, who, after six years of service, is currently enjoying a well-earned sabbatical. Serving as chair is never an easy job, and Ann filled the role for two consecutive terms with such grace and commitment that we owe her a heartfelt thanks for all of her time and energy.

A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

My term began in June, and I look forward to working with faculty, students, and alumni to move the department through the challenging but promising months and years ahead.

In addition to a change in department administration, we've seen a number of faculty move into new positions within the university administration this year. Barbara Wilcots—who previously served as Associate Dean for Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences—is now the Associate Provost for Graduate Studies and oversees graduate-level policy and development at the University. Eric Gould is currently serving as Vice Provost for Internationalization, and Sidra Wahalere, who was our lecturer in African-American literature, has become the division's Assistant Dean for Curriculum and Advising.

Though our faculty is somewhat diminished by these appointments, our undergraduate and graduate programs are going strong. Currently, we have over 170 undergraduate English majors, and we are in the process of revising the tracks within the major to increase both the depth and the flexibility of the concentrations. At the graduate level, our students continue their high rate of publication and professional activity. Most notably, one of our creative writing PhD students, Arda Collins, received the 2008 Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize. Arda's collection, *It*

is Daylight, was chosen by Louise Glück for one of the country's most prestigious awards for young writers.

As usual our faculty have been quite busy with research and publication. This year brought several important books from the creative writing faculty, including Eleni Sikelianos' *Body Clock*, Brian Kiteley's *The River Gods*, Laird Hunt's *Ray of the Star*, and Bin Ramke's *Theory of Mind: New and Selected Poems, 1978-2008*. I should also mention that Brian's novel was nominated for the National Book Award, and that Eleni was given the extraordinary honor this fall of being named one of 12 invited American writers to be honored as *Les Belles Étrangères* by the *Centre national du livre* in Paris.

Finally, I want to draw your attention to a new feature of our newsletter, the EGSA Faculty Interview. In order to communicate more fully the intellectual background and current interests of our faculty, we have begun a series of interviews conducted by our own graduate assistants. For this inaugural entry, Seth Landman and Sam Knights have delved into the life and work of Jan Gorak. I hope you enjoy it.

As always we love to hear from our alumni. Please feel free to email, call, or drop by.

GRADUATE NEWS



Scott Howard

Graduate Director

2009 was a banner year for our Graduate Program! Ten students graduated in Spring Quarter (eight PhD, two MA) and eleven entered the program in Fall, 2009. We now have a total of seventy students (sixty in the PhD track, ten in the MA) working in our three concentrations of study: Creative Writing (32), Rhetoric & Theory (3), and Literary Studies (35). Several students were recipients of awards during 2009, including: Katie Ahearn (Cornell School of Theory & Criticism Fellowship), Anne Greenfield (AHSS Dissertation Fellowship), Jennie MacDonald (Editorial Fellowship, *Law & Policy*), Shannon Mullally (Frankel Dissertation Fellowship), and Andrea Rexilius (Editorial Fellowship, *Denver Quarterly*). The Portfolio site, <http://portfolio.du.edu/egg>, was launched where students, faculty and visitors may find detailed information about our graduate program, including the *Word and Image Archive*, which offers selected recordings from recent readings and lectures.

INTERVIEW WITH JAN GORAK BY SETH LANDMAN AND SAMUEL KNIGHTS

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“Q: Do you have a favorite fictional character? A: Yeah, Mr. Toad. Definitely.”

Q: When did you decide you wanted to study literature, and what is your earliest memory of enjoying literature?

A: It was, I think, pretty early on, although I wouldn't have known what studying consisted of. But I do remember that on the BBC in those days, rather than having Jonathan Ross, they had serializations of old novels. I remember they had lots of Victorian classics like Thackeray's *Pendennis*, *Doctor Thorne* by Trollope. They were all very good; because they were dramatizations, they interested you in the voices as well, because they weren't just like you'd have now, a celebrity recording this thing; you had a full cast of actors. From then I went to reading things like Charles Kingsley and Walter de la Mare and such.

Q: Have you been interested in drama all through—

A: Yeah, I think so. Although in the provinces in England there were correspondingly fewer opportunities to see it in those days, because the music hall had died off, and the actual drama companies rarely ventured into the provinces. So, basically, a lot of it was by hearsay. Local productions tended to be things like, *Murder at the Gallop* or *Sailor Beware*, that kind of thing; British comedy of a really rather fatuous kind.

Q: Where did you go to college?

A: I went to the University of Warwick, which was a new university. It had only been open since the middle of the 1960s and I went at the start of the 1970s. Big, ugly building with lots of white tile that was all falling off. In *Changing Places*, David Lodge makes fun of that. But the “Plate Glass Universities” as they called them, as distinct from red brick, as distinct from Oxbridge and London which

were very adventurous in their curricula, so they didn't do the same kind of—it was explained to me years later that it was an opportunity for faculty to experiment with different curricula. Essex was well known for its Marxist bent; Sussex was well known for a certain philosophical and religious bent, so they all had their various ways of skewing.

Q: What was Warwick known for?

A: Warwick was known for actually being very interested in Europe. The History department had a man called Jack Hale, who was knighted, and he had a great interest in Italian history. The professor who founded the English department was also interested in the Renaissance, and his book list, as I recall, had things like Burkhart and Huizinga rather than the standard English classics.

Q: Now, you called it a “Plate Glass University”? Is that because of its architecture?

A: Yeah, because it was all sort of airport lounge architecture. There's a famous story about George Steiner, the rather snobby and very traditionalist literary critic, being at one of them giving a lecture, and they say apologetically to him, “Well, you know, of course it can't compete architecturally. I mean, you must have heard it is an airport lounge.” And Steiner says, “I guess, but in an airport at least fun is going somewhere else!”

Q: Do you think those universities were built in response to the loss of architecture and heritage through the bombings?

A: No, I think that the story is that they were built because of the swelling in post-war demographics.

You know, many more people

being born after the baby boom. Whereas the civic—what I call the “Red Brick Universities”—were built in the great industrial centers, Leeds, Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol, Leicester, Nottingham, these were built around some kind of nice county town where they could safely install students away from the life of the community. The idea wasn't that they should indulge in, but they did indulge in much more of the Sixties type culture. They were York, Kent, which is in Kent Canterbury, the cathedral city; York is another cathedral city. Warwick is, although it's really outside Coventry. Essex would be the exception to that.

Q: Are there particular professors from Warwick that you recall fondly?

A: Yeah! I was friends with George Hunter and Claude Rawson for years. George just died recently. Both were at Yale in their latter years. Harold Beaver, who taught somewhat reluctantly at DU for a time and taught at Amsterdam, and had a great booming voice and a huge—he must have been about 6'6"—he must have been one of the best lecturers. Coe, in the French department. Because being in Europe, when we did a course called “The European Novel” the French department took over the French half of it, and so you weren't getting an English graduate's cooked up idea of what a French novel was, the French department took over that half of it, and a guy called Richard Coe lectured on French and Russian novels. He could speak Russian, Bulgarian, French and a few others, and he was a memorable lecturer, always very clear, always great to hear.

Q: Any other prominent figures that you worked with?

A: Yeah, well, Hunter and Rawson I suppose; they were my



Jan Gorak
Professor

teachers when I was there. Gay Clifford, who was a very clever, beautiful and impossible woman, who died unfortunately—had a car accident in Virginia and never really recovered from that—she was pretty prominent. Germaine Greer didn't do much for me, but she was a prominent figure in the way that when I came she was on her way out—I think had resigned—and gone off to be a media figure. Richard Coe must have been as prominent as anybody, and ended up at Davis. Strangely enough, he wrote books on Ionesco, Beckett, Genet. He didn't write anything about French Realism; that was one of the funny things about that system, that often people's areas and what they lectured on were quite different.

Q: And where did you go after Warwick?

A: I went to Leeds after Warwick, which was not a happy business. The man who was assigned to my supervisor was a man called Jack Morpurgo, whose qualifications for being a professor of American literature seemed to have been to have met influential people in America in the war. It wouldn't have been bad because these things happen, but he was really one of those guys who—well, just to quote from one of his—he married Alan Lane's daughter, the person

INTERVIEW WITH JAN GORAK (CONTINUED)

who founded Penguin, so this was not a bad way of connecting oneself to the literate world. He had also been in the army and he had been at Christ's Hospital, the school where Coleridge and Lamb went to, and he had all the love of the English establishment, so in one of his quotations, a quotation from his biography, he comments that "Alan Lane was unable to muster the kind of emotion that one finds in a good regiment or a good public school." I think that says enough for how he and I would not be really on the same page.

Q: What years were you at Leeds?

A: '75 to '77.

Q: So, would The Who have played there?

A: Yeah. The Byrds played there.

Q: You know, they have the famous album—

A: Live at Leeds, yeah, and then John Martyn, who I like much more than The Who, has his counter-album called *John Martyn Live at Leeds*, where he probably had about a third of the audience. Yeah, they would be; big rock bands played at all the British universities in those days, and I saw Fairport Convention at Warwick when Sandy Denny was playing for them, and of course The Byrds played at Leeds. I went to see them as I was more interested in American rock bands than British rock bands. Ry Cooder I went to see at Manchester Free Trade Hall, which has been knocked down now. That's part of Manchester's contribu-

tion to the European architecture movement, they went to knock the Free Trade Hall down. Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers played there too.

Q: So, you talk about Punk music in class a lot; when did that start for you?

A: Right from the start, actually. I remember, one of the things about being a graduate student, it's quite a lonely endeavor because there are no classes in anything, so you play on the radio all those things that are sort of built up; festering bitterness felt for Jack Morpurgo was transferred into "London Calling." Another band I liked was Joy Division—such waiflike lads.

Q: Two music references you've made (in class) are The Smiths and The Clash. Have you ever seen either band live?

A: No but I have all The Smith's records.

Q: Which Smith's album do you put on the top?

A: *Hatful of Hollow* is very good isn't it? I mean that has to be because it has so much on. But I'm not even averse to *Strangeways, Here We Come*.

Q: And how did you end up here at DU?

A: Well, I went to work on the railway for awhile. I've had periodic bouts away from academe to sort of enjoy life outside, but I've never been much good at them, and I wasn't much good at that. But I was at London Euston which meant that you could see two or three films a day when you weren't working. At that time England

had a great range I don't think they still have to this degree, but they had a great range of cinemas like The Electric, the ICA, the Notting Hill Gate Cinema whose name I forget, the Everyman in Hampstead, which had been a theater but then became a revival house, so you could see films from way back to 1920 out to 1970 there, and that was always very exciting.

Then I went to USC in Los Angeles and stayed there about four years to finish the doctorate off. There were people like Peter Manning who came through recently. Marjorie Perloff was there at the time. But one of the great things about that was that we lived near UCLA and there was a huge research library with, as well, a cinema. You could go every night to the cinema there, and there it was even better than in London because it was free and they'd just been processing all the films. There were two guys there who I can remember very well who used to introduce themselves, like, "I'm Jeff Gilmore and this is my colleague Charles Hopkins and we are the restorers of the UCLA Film Archive," and they had a special series called "Melnitz Movies," which was in the Melnitz Theater. Once that started, really, you didn't even need to go off campus for anything, although there were also those cinema houses like The New Art, a very good one on Wilshire Blvd. — the Vagabond — which showed old Hollywood films.

Q: Do you still go to the cinema?

A: No, the DVD means now that you can watch most of it in your basement, which is in some ways good but in some ways bad, isn't it? There's nothing like going to the old, ratty cinema and having the toffee paper under your chair and that ghastly coffee some of them make. I miss that, but don't you think it's nicer? You can play them back and watch the extras?

Q: Do you have any films that stand out for you from when you were going to the movies in London and at USC?

A: There's one called *Moonrise* that I've always liked, I think it's Frank Borzage. A guy's father is hanged, and the opening shot shows the guy's father being taken out, and you see his feet, and it's very dark. Really, you never see the guy's face. I remember that as a particularly good opening sequence that lasts. No speaking done in that by people in the audience or people on screen. And then the rest of it is too really rather good—Dane Clark is one of the actors who never became very famous. He's not a terribly good actor but he has to play a fresh faced but doomed American youth, which I think he does very well.



INTERVIEW WITH JAN GORAK (CONTINUED)

Tod Browning's *Freaks*; really, any Tod Browning, *The Unknown*, the one with Lon Chaney as the knife-thrower who has no arms, the usual plotline for a Tod Browning. I used to quite like Werner Herzog in those days but I think he probably went a bit over the top. One of the things I should have mentioned is that growing up we had three cinemas that changed twice a week, so what you failed to get from the performed drama you got from the cinema, which was only a few pennies to go to.

Q: Who are the directors today that you watch?

A: I like Eric Rohmer a lot. There's a Frenchman, Andre Dumont is he called? He does very depressing films, and they usually have sort of theological twists. Those two I like a lot. Also Robert Bresson: *Au hasard Balthazar* and *Lancelot du Lac*.

Q: And where did you teach after USC?

A: I taught in South Africa for four years. I still have some good friends there, not really among the faculty, but among the students. One of them, he's a lawyer, but he was the trainer for the South African distance running team, and he's written and just brought out a book on black distance runners, which of course was one of the few outlets in the Apartheid era where black runners were very famous. He's called Richard Mayer, and I remember teaching him right in his first year as an undergraduate. That was at the University of the Witwatersrand which is in the Transvaal Province. It always considered itself the liberal university, and indeed, looking at the New York Times, there's an article about the University of the Orange Free State. It does seem that it would be the liberal university, because it was more liberal in 1984 than the Orange Free State seems to be in 2009.

Q: And from there?

A: It was to DU.

(To read the rest of Jan's interview, visit <http://www.du.edu/ahss/schools/english/gorak-interview.>)



Linda Bensel-Meyers
Undergraduate Director

A recession may be problematic for most industries, but surprisingly it has proved to be encouraging for the Undergraduate English Program at DU. As one entering student explained to me, since he felt that job opportunities were scarce anywhere, he might as well major in something that he loved while maximizing his options for later employment. A major in English at DU can prepare a student for many options besides graduate school or teaching. Many of our majors participate in internships for academic credit that give them a foothold in publishing and professional writing careers. Others use English as a stepping stone towards professional schools, such as law school or MBA programs. Whatever the reason, the number of our majors continues to grow. In 2008-09, we had grown to 141 total majors and have so far seen 165 declare English their major as of Fall 2009.

Of these majors, the majority are choosing Textual Studies as their concentration. Dubbed the

"Self-Design" option, this concentration allows students to take English courses that best prepare them for specific professions and fit best with a second major. Our Creative Writing concentration, too, continued to flourish, with many of those students choosing to participate in the flourishing Writers in the Schools program. This program, similar to our internships, was developed by Prof. Eleni Sikelianos, and matches interested students with local primary and secondary schools. These majors help local students develop literary journals and creative writing skills, an increasingly popular addition to crowded public schools where students feel anonymous and retention is difficult. Because creative writing enables students to discover their voice, it is becoming a popular addition to the public school curriculum nationally. Similarly, our English Education concentration continues to grow with more and more of our majors choosing teaching as their career choice. The numbers choosing Literary Studies as their concentration, though, continues to decline as graduate programs in English become smaller throughout the country, making that option less attractive.

In 2008-09, we also saw our local chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the international English Honor Society, become increasingly vital under the proactive direction of President Michelle Matlock. During the year, they collected over 1000 books to send to the "Books for Africa" program, and their efforts were singled out in an article in the society's international newsletter. Ten of our Sigma Tau Deltas graduated in the Spring, while nine new members were inducted. Those qualifying included both undergraduate and graduate English majors: Richard Anderson, Clinton Blair, Elisabeth Booze, Lindsay Christopher, Margaret Crabb, Peter Gietl, Sarah Hyde, Casie Kolbeck, and Gabrielle Reed. Elected to re-

UNDERGRADUATE NEWS

place Michelle Matlock as President for the upcoming year was Hannah Gonzales. Jeff Moser accepted the position as graduate student sponsor from the graduating Denis Illige-Saucier.

Throughout the year, a total of 38 of our majors were approved for graduation, and eight of these received a Distinction in English (formerly Honors in English): Chelsea P. Aaron, Daniel B. Catalano, Alaina J. Ferris, Rachel A. Howard, Emily A. Kolm, Christopher A. Newton, Leanna M. Oen, Jorgen C. Sanner, Charity L. Stebbins, and Matthew R. Watson. At our Spring 2009 Honors Ceremony, the following students received special honors:

Deatt Hudson Scholarship for rising junior or senior focusing on Creative Writing:
Elisabeth Booze

Olna Fant Cook Award for outstanding achievement by a junior in English:
Lindsay Levine

Virginia Case Award for an outstanding junior in textual studies:
Clinton Blair

Arlene Gavrilis Memorial Scholarship Financial Award for Outstanding English Major:
Hannah Gonzales

Mary Cass Award for outstanding achievement in writing by an English major:
Daniel Catalano and Matthew R. Watson

We also cited nine as Outstanding English Majors who had maintained a 4.0 GPA in English: Margaret Crabb, Meseret Hailu, Chen-Hsu Hsia, Thomas Kuhn, Miles Lauchli, Lindsay Levine, Michelle Matlock, Emily Morton, and Kelsi Vanada.

As the Undergraduate Program begins its work for this year, we look forward to seeing our first results from the newly devised

CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM NEWS

assessment program thanks to Prof. Bill Zaranka. We look forward to having better data as to what our majors learn during their time with us as well as where they are now. The Undergraduate Committee, too, is looking forward to adapting the new university requirements to our English major, while undergoing a close revision of the English major at DU to better serve our growing population.



Eleni Sikelianos

Director

Creative Writing

It has been another highly productive and successful year for our Creative Writing faculty, students, and alumni.

On the faculty front, Bin Ramke's *Theory of Mind: New & Selected Poems* was published by Omnidawn, and received a starred review in *Publisher's Weekly*. Brian Kiteley's *The 4 AM Breakthrough* was published with Writer's Digest Books, and *The River Gods*, which was recently reviewed on NPR's *All Things Considered*, came out with FC2 in August. He and Laird Hunt both had pieces in the anthology *Not Normal, Illinois*, published by Indiana University Press. This year Laird also saw his second novel, *Indiana, Indiana*, adapted for the stage, to widespread acclaim, by Denver's

Buntport Theater Company. His fourth novel, *Ray of the Star*, was published by Coffee House Press in the fall to excellent reviews in *Bookforum*, *Time Out Chicago* and *Time Out New York*, among other places. Laird's first book, *The Paris Stories*, has been slated for a reprint by Marick Press in the Fall of 2010.

Selah Saterstrom just returned from a research trip in Cambodia, where she studied, with a botanist, the flora now growing on the sites of the killing fields. We're all anxious to see what comes of that research. It can now also be said that two of our poetry faculty members are in the Norton Anthology (*American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry*).

Our Creative Writing graduate students' accomplishments are many. These writers continue to publish widely in print and online journals and anthologies, perform their work, and present at conferences. Our PhD students have recently published in the *Boston Review*, the *New Yorker*, and *Action, Yes*, among other places. Listed below are just a few of the many recent or forthcoming books and chapbooks by our current students.

Joanna Ruocco's novel, *The Mothering Covenant*, was published by Ellipsis Press in October. Her collection of short fictions, *Man's Companions*, is forthcoming from Tarpaulin Sky Press this Spring, and she won the 2009 Noemi Press Fiction Chapbook Contest. Arda Collins' book *It is Daylight*, which won the Yale Series of Younger Poets prize, came out to great fanfare and reviews. Julia Cohen's chapbook, *For the H in Ghost*, was released, and her collaborative chapbook with Brandon Shioda, *Ship-on-Land*, has just

been accepted for publication. Danielle Vogel chapbook *lit* was published, and Jennifer Denrow's first book of poetry was accepted for publication. Off the page, Joan Dickinson performed a site-specific piece called "She Listens in Caves" here in Colorado.

Our alums continue to rock the world beyond DU's borders. Joshua Marie Wilkinson is now an assistant professor of English at Loyola University Chicago. His fifth book of poems, *Selenography*, is due out in 2010, along with an anthology he has edited of 99 essays on teaching poetry. Christina Mengert has been asked to act as an editor for *Fence's Constant Critic* series, which begins this January. Rosmarie Waldrop chose her work to be featured in the Emerging Poets issue of "American Poet," released just a few weeks ago. She is currently teaching for Bard College's Prison Initiative Program in New York. Danielle Dutton is working as book designer at Dalkey Archive Press and teaching in the low-residency MFA at Naropa. Her book, *S P R A W L*, will be published by Siglio Press in August 2010. She recently began a press called Dorothy, with the first two books slated to come out in November 2010. Erik Anderson's first book, *The Poetics of Trespass*, a collection of lyric essays, is forthcoming from Otis Books/Seismicity Editions in Spring 2010. He is an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Writing & Poetics at Naropa. This year, Duncan Barlow (who is teaching at the University of North Florida) founded Astrophil Press, and Richard Greenfield's second book, *Tracer*, was published by Omnidawn.

Our undergraduate alums continue to be accepted into

the best writing programs in the country, with Rachel Cole now in Brown's fiction program, Charity Stebbins at the Iowa Writer's Workshop, and Paul Ketchum heading off to study with Mac Wellman at Brooklyn College.

Our Writers in the Schools Program has grown, as has our partnership with Colorado Humanities. This year will be our first to offer residencies to already trained writers for full stipends. Between those residencies and ones conducted by this year's new group of writers-in-residence, we'll be reaching 24 public school classrooms this year — close to 500 children.

We've also had a great line-up of guest readers and writers in residence. Alice Notley was our writer-in-residence last fall, and Brian Evenson is serving that function this year. Percival Everett braved a huge snowstorm and gave a fabulous reading last spring, to an intimate and appreciative audience. Tomaz Salamun and Joanna Howard (a DU alum) read for us this fall, as did Evenson. As a major sponsor for AWP this year, we're hosting Gary Snyder's and Anne Waldman's readings in April. We're looking forward to our role at AWP, and to another fabulous, productive year.

For a list of additional publications and presentations by graduate students, go to <http://www.du.edu/ahss/schools/english/grad-pubs>.

