

PRESENCES

Newsletter of the Department of English and Literary Arts // MAY 2021



Scholarly Fragments

by Alex Toy



If it was more than two years ago that you were last in tune with the activities of the English department's graduate program, you may not yet be aware of *Scholarly Fragments*, a department community resource initiated and facilitated by Literary Studies graduates Zeeshan Reshamwala and Olivia Tracy. *Scholarly Fragments* is a monthly gathering in which students in both Literary Studies and Creative Writing are invited to discuss their works in progress. *Scholarly Fragments* arose from a necessity for "a recurring, low-stakes event focused on serving the needs of...all graduate students who are working on critical or scholarly work." This aim has evolved to include students no longer in the coursework portion of the PhD as well as alumni. The group, rather than examining one another's texts on the page, as in a more formal workshop setting, represents an opportunity for writers to pool their experiences in order to support, as Olivia puts it, a collective "literacy about guiding a process to completion."

When they first formed the group, Zeeshan was in his 4th year, looking for momentum to finish his dissertation—which can be difficult to come by with the changes in structure the 4th year might entail—while Olivia, in her 2nd year, was working on her prospectus. In their discussions of what they envisioned for *Scholarly*

Fragments, they found that the binding element most important to them was less that writers share topics or genres in common and more that they share the value of building community. Another vital aspect of the character of *Scholarly Fragments* is that it represents an intergenerational space where multiple cohorts can discuss their experiences and ask questions. Zeeshan and Olivia encourage participants to bring forward and engage with "'ugly' aspects of scholarship"—the difficult circumstances and feelings to which those who work within academic institutions may be subject. Graduate students in early stages of the program might attend *Scholarly Fragments* in order to receive guidance from those further along in the process. Segues from discussions of works in progress into questions and explanations of nuanced or finer points related to program navigation are as welcome as those related more specifically to written scholarship. In addition to seminar papers and other course-related projects students are required to produce during their time in the program, it is not uncommon for writers to also present articles, essays and conference papers unrelated to academic work.

Regardless of genre, *Scholarly Fragments* is a space attuned to the reality of the "stages" into which the PhD program is universally divided:

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Retiring Faculty



Eleanor McNees is Professor of English specializing in 19th and 20th century British literature with an emphasis on Virginia Woolf and her Victorian

predecessors. She received her BA from Colgate University, her MA from Northwestern University and her PhD from the University of Colorado, Boulder. In addition to her book, *Eucharistic Poetry*, she has edited collections of essays on the history of the novel, the Brontë sisters and Virginia Woolf, as well as an annotated edition of Virginia Woolf's penultimate novel, *The Years*. Her essays have appeared in a variety of journals from *Victorian Periodicals Review* to the *Dickens Quarterly*.

McNees taught multiple versions of the undergraduate period requirement English III (Wordsworth to Present); T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land"; Dante to Baudelaire; Bibliography & Research Methods (team-taught with Library faculty to a combined audience of senior undergraduate honors majors, MA and PhD students). She also founded and directed the DU London Program four times, teaching 14-week courses on site in London, ones that covered Renaissance to modern British history, art and literature.

comprehensive exams, the prospectus, the dissertation, the defense, and the job market. Through discussions of process and intention, the gathering is able to engage and springboard off of shared deadlines and other program touchstones in order to serve as a forum equally concerned with the enduring occupation of scholarship. Olivia describes *Scholarly Fragments*, in one sense, as a “space to bring small ideas,” with the notion that supportive and compassionate discussion with others will help sustain writers’ capacities to test, develop, and progress those ideas into larger dynamic projects. With more of an emphasis on verbal exchange than on direct critical response to presented texts in progress, for example, the group is able to focus on building community through conversation, and to contextualize research topics within concerns more generally pertaining to lifelong pursuits of writing and research.

As important as it is to provide a resource for feedback and department-related questions, yet another object of importance to Olivia and Zeeshan is the maintenance of the social element as part of the nature of *Scholarly Fragments*. For those who have continuously attended meetings, one aspect that’s sorely missing in the transition to Zoom is time spent hanging out before and after the meetings. To give a better idea of its origins: the first meeting of *Scholarly Fragments* was in part a potluck (primarily wine and snacks), and this spirit is something that at least for now remains preserved in the informal albeit online atmosphere, with the hopes that it will one day return as a more evident factor in how the gatherings operate as a social space.

The emphasis on a conversationalist approach is of particular importance to Olivia and Zeeshan as they seek to offer a resource to which writers return with regularity in a way that is independent of imminent deadlines and urgent concerns—that is, to offer a space in which participants can treat *Scholarly Fragments* as not just a lifeline, but as an environment that is both parts social and educational, which when thriving has the potential to enhance one’s experience of the program overall. When I asked Olivia and Zeeshan to share their thoughts on the importance of casual, consistent peer feedback to writing and research projects, they offered responses that demonstrate how the activity of *Scholarly Fragments* has the potential to reverberate in the following ways conducive to the benefits of both academic rigor and social ease:

- It offers ways to expand one’s discourse community—because others in the group have read other scholars and other texts.
- It allows everyone in the group to build literacies about managing writing projects.
- It reminds us that we are writing within and for a community.
- It provides for opportunities to offer each other encouragement to motivate each other through years of work.

It can be intimidating to approach established community networks, and in some ways the transition to Zoom can make this feel potentially more

difficult. If you have not yet attended a *Scholarly Fragments* gathering and are interested, here are, according to Zeeshan and Olivia, a few things you can expect about the general atmosphere and procedure: “We generally start a typical gathering by making introductions, becoming acquainted with each other’s academic interests and stage in the writing process.” In their approach to offering feedback on writing, “we try to serve as a particularly generous academic conference audience. We try to help the writer sharpen and develop their ideas by asking questions, and perhaps making suggestions.” If you are interested in guidance more related to the daily activity of being a graduate student, you can expect a multivalent or holistic response, as even shared experiences can at times vary among those present in terms of how they frame and encounter the challenges of the program.

Presentation of work, by design, should “require only minimal preparation.” There is no single query most appropriate to the *Scholarly Fragments* setting; in their 2020 newsletter, Zeeshan and Olivia suggest the following approaches one might take in order to receive feedback:

- Read a short, cohesive fragment of a scholarly work-in-progress
- Discuss a primary text or theoretical concept you are working to read or analyze, or would appreciate new insights about
- Discuss an idea that you are trying to integrate into your dissertation or thesis
- Discuss strategies for organizing and tracking sources and reading
- Invite a conversation on any subject you consider to be vital for graduate students working on scholarly writing to be aware of or discuss.

In addition to closing gaps and providing transparency between cohorts, *Scholarly Fragments* presents a potentially important link between the creative and critical fields within the department as well. With Zeeshan and Olivia both on the tail-end of their requirements to complete their degrees, they have been considering the future of *Scholarly Fragments* and imagining how it might continue to serve the department community after they are no longer organizing the gatherings. This transition has already begun in some ways; for example Ben Caldwell, a graduate student in Literary Studies, has begun sharing the responsibility of organization. “In the near future,” write Olivia and Zeeshan, “we hope that *Scholarly Fragments* will continue to be organized by those who take our place in the department. We hope that it will remain an informal and casual gathering that can continue to provide an opportunity to create a supportive community of scholars.” As in most cases from the vantage of 2021, the longer-term situation is more difficult to foresee. Though “it is hard to envision what being a graduate student will be like more than a decade from today,” they remain hopeful that gatherings of *Scholarly Fragments* “will persist in some form in order to support the needs of the graduate students of the time.” ■

COIL: THE DU-UWA EXAMPLE

In Fall 2020, two classes—one at the University of Denver (Contemporary Literature, taught by Dr. Maik Nwosu) and the other at the University of Western Australia (Honors Creative Writing, taught by Dr. Catherine Noske)—participated in a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project. For three weeks, October 5–23, students in the two classes participated in student-led discussions of shared content in an asynchronous delivery. The discussions were framed by a set of interactive tasks which allowed the students to engage with one another's perspectives. As part of the project, students in the USA were required to read a story by an Australian author chosen by students in Australia ("A Refreshing Sleep" by Kim Scott); students in Australia read a short story by an American author chosen by American students ("Face Time" by Lorrie Moore). At the end of the cross-cultural interaction, students produced a written analysis of the text chosen by the collaborating institution and a reflection paper on the cultural contexts surrounding their own reading practice and whether or not their awareness of this has changed over the course of the interaction.

The outline of the course was clearly articulated at the outset:

MODULE OUTLINE

Follow the structure below and complete the relevant tasks by the Friday of each week.

PRE-COMMENCEMENT (SEPTEMBER 21–OCTOBER 2)

- Set up your registration and access the COIL through Blackboard CourseSites
- Read the two stories set as shared readings for the COIL

WEEK ONE (OCTOBER 5–9) INTRODUCTIONS

- **Task One:** Record a two-minute video for sharing with the group which introduces yourself and offers a brief initial response to the writing set from your own home nation/institution.
- **Task Two:** Read the piece from the opposite nation/institution and offer an initial response in the discussion board, articulating your instinctive response to the writing.

WEEK TWO (OCTOBER 12–16) DISCUSSIONS

- **Task Three:** Watch the videos offered by students from the other institution and note elements of their readings/response to the texts which are unexpected to you. Discuss these points by asking questions or commenting in reply to their video post within the Discussion Board.
- **Task Four:** Read the comments and respond to at least one point regarding the text set by your own institution, engaging in and continuing the conversation.

WEEK THREE (OCTOBER 19–23) ANALYSIS!

- **Task Five:** Based on conversations within the Discussion Board around the set texts, discuss in your own normal class tutorials a point of interpretation which surprised you in either piece, and why. Consider how this signals the cultural specificity of reading as an act.
- **Task Six:** Based on the conversations shared in the Discussion Board, produce a short written analysis (500 words) of the text set by the opposite institution. This should offer some elements of close reading and reflect on the cultural context surrounding both the text and your approach to it as a reader.

POST-COMPLETION

Engage with your university's student surveys to let us know what you thought about the COIL.

Students' assessments at the end of the collaboration paint a picture of their progression from skepticism at the beginning to appreciation at the end of the interactions. The COIL engagement obviously made a difference in their learning experience. Here are some representative assessments by DU students:

When I was younger, I always wanted to have a pen pal. I wanted to speak with someone from a different country or even another state, so being able to participate in discussions with various students from UWA was compelling. In my experience, there were common interests and backgrounds that allowed us to relate and communicate with one another in both an academic and a personal way.

Honestly, I was a bit skeptical of the execution of this platform at first. However, when I found myself getting replies and engaging in discussion further, I found this experience to be really enjoyable and very eye-opening!

Honestly speaking, I was nervous to see how the COIL process would go with the time differences and, for me personally, the new platform for discussions. However, I was pleasantly surprised with how it went and found it to be an eye-opening and interesting experience.

Whilst we can clearly see from these past few weeks that reading is an act thoroughly enmeshed within the gears of culture this does not mean that attempts at translation are fruitless. Rather, I believe the efforts of these past few weeks demonstrate the importance and significance of these attempts and the necessity of their continuance into the future. This has been an enriching experience, and it has been a great joy to interact with such insightful interlocutors in this international space.

The COIL project was a rewarding experience overall. In fostering an international interactive space for learning that did not require visas and travel, it expanded the conventional classroom and enriched the curriculum in instructive ways. The project has generated discussions for further or other collaborations. ■

Interview with Prof. Brian Kiteley

by Adriana Socoksi



Why have you decided to retire this year, after 28 years at DU?

I just want to be a writer now. Writing these two most recent books, *Emily's Book* and *Jack's Book*, has changed my outlook. My outlook also changed a lot when I wrote two books of fiction exercises, *The 3 A.M. Epiphany* and *The 4 A.M. Breakthrough*. I wrote *The 3 A.M. Epiphany* over fifteen years. The second book was entirely new; I did that in about a year and a half. It turned me into a kind of journalist. I used to think of myself as being impossibly slow—and I still am, really. I started *Emily's Book* twelve years ago, so all five of my novels have averaged five to seven years each. These two novels are bigger. But I started *Emily's Book* in this blank book that my wife bought me in Italy twenty years ago and I decided—on my very first page—the rules: no revision, no going back, notes on progress permissible, general notes permissible, no transcription to laptop until the end of a whole draft of a novel in one go. And I kind of managed that—it's got about two hundred pages (my handwriting is small). *The 4 A.M. Breakthrough* and these two novels have made me into something of a traditional straight-ahead narrative writer. I was a writer of fragments, a writer of irregularly shaped pieces. I love *The River Gods*, but it's seventy-six very short stories. They're all one, two, or three pages. I think one of them is four pages long. And they're not connected. That's what I used to do. I liked those books but this has been a revelation to me, to my agent. I loved writing both books by hand and I

just feel like I'm ready now to write a few more novels like this and investigate some things, seriously investigate.

You genuinely care about your students—about who we are as people—which is perhaps one reason why your exercises are so effective. How do you develop your writing exercises?

Thank you very much. Over the years, when I first started teaching, I didn't have any real creative writing teaching experience. So I decided I should have something to describe what I intended to do as a teacher. I came up with ten of these exercises. I wrote them in December of 1991 and then when I started teaching at Ohio University, I used them and made more of them. For *The 4 A.M. Epiphany*, I had to come up with 200 of them. I would collect a sentence or a paragraph that interested me from various sources, usually online, and oftentimes reviews of books, but I'd also go through my own books, and read the things that I'd marked and loved. With *The 3 A.M. Epiphany*, I was very much dissatisfied with how I'd been taught—Grace Paley and Donald Barthelme were brilliant teachers, and I had four other teachers that were really wonderful over the years, but all of them, except for Grace—Grace had us do a few writing exercises—but all the rest said, "Just bring in a piece of writing and we'll talk about it, we'll read it." Don wouldn't let us read it ahead of time, wouldn't even let us have a copy in front of us. Oftentimes, people rebelled and kept a copy in their laps, and if he found it, he'd lecture them but not do anything else. I just thought that was not as interesting as it could be. It basically meant that fiction workshops were about revision and not about composition. And I know that's what I wanted to do. I had in mind a kind of idea for what I, myself, did. I also had the experience of my very first successful short story. I wrote two sort-of imitations of different writers, one of Thomas Pynchon and one of Evelyn Waugh, and they were both set in this little village in Spain. I wrote them over many months but, as it turned out when I wrote the first one, I left the next two pages of that journal blank by accident, and when I wrote the second one I opened to those two pages thinking that was the end and I wrote another story—a different set of characters but the same location. Once I'd realized what I'd done, that these were back-to-back, it just seemed like a bizarre piece of luck and I typed them both up.

And that just worked. I made a really successful story. When that happened, I thought: this makes me a better writer, a different writer, this level of accident—I didn't think about it as a constraint. I got to know Harry Matthews in the late nineties. He was the only American member of the Oulipo writers group, and Harry and I talked a lot about the Oulipo method of almost mathematical exercises and restraints for poetry and prose. I've never varied much from the method I developed within about two or three years of teaching workshops. I have undergraduates write six or eight exercises during the first half of the term. That's what I'm doing right now, teaching an intermediate fiction workshop. We're now in the second set of exercises and they are coming together—and we keep talking about, "Where is the story? What is the story? What *might* the story be?" and at first they're puzzled—graduate students in fiction workshops are a bit irritated when I assign this, but I do it anyway. And a few graduate students and some undergraduates have written stories and books based on a handful of the exercises they've done in my classes. I like to talk about something other than what the normal workshop is usually about. It forces me to be playful with them and this current class is good, they're seeing what's possible and what they can find. They seem excited.

What have you enjoyed most about teaching at DU?

I've had some amazing young undergraduate writers over the years, as well as the somewhat older and more sophisticated graduate students. The poetry program here was always really good and strong; it was harder to convince prospective doctoral student fiction writers in my first years at DU to take comprehensive exams and to do all the literary studies course work. It's not a workshop-oriented program, like an MFA program. A few years after I arrived here, Bin Ramke and I turned the program into just a PhD program—before, there was also an M.A. in Creative Writing. Especially in the last fifteen years or so, the fiction program has become successful. We're bringing in fiction writers who've published several books already, people who have an M.F.A. (or more than one), sometimes also an M.A., and I love that range of experience. ■

DENVER SCHOOL OF FORMS AND POETICS (2021)

The Critical Imagination and the Global World | June 14–26, 2021

SEMINARS



The Poetics of Stillness with Dr. Clark Davis

6 hours (2 hours daily, TWR)

This seminar will be grounded in materials from the antebellum American period, 1820–1860. It will investigate artistic and literary expressions of quiet in the context of a society ostensibly devoted to action. What does it signify to seek silence or stillness in the midst of industrialized modernity? Is non-action necessarily a form of quiescence, withdrawal; or can it be a form of resistance or engagement? How did poems, paintings, essays, and fiction of the period confront this question, and what can their responses tell us about our own hyperactive age and our attempts to counteract the constant demands for our attention?



Writing with Birds with Dr. Donna Beth Ellard

6 hours (2 hours daily, TWR)

This hands-on seminar attends to a simple, but consequential, premise: for over a millennium, almost all writing done in Europe and much of the Mediterranean was penned with feathers from geese, ravens, swans, and turkeys, to name a few species. For 1000 years, scribes, artists, and authors of the Euro-Mediterranean region have literally been writing with birds. Participants of this seminar will meditate upon this premise by learning the basics of writing with a quill pen as they engage in a robust discussion about motor, cognitive, and metaphorical impacts of prolonged tool use on human perceptions of their bodies and their immediate environments. Participants will also read and copy early medieval texts produced during the initial rise of quill use that evidence the tremendous impact (both explicit and unthought) of quills, feathers, and birds on the writings of scribes and poets.



The Poetics of Myth with Dr. Eric Gould

6 hours (2 hours daily, TWR)

Myth means several different things, but in the end it is only one thing: a shareable, cultural narrative that we consider to be important for some reason. It can be a genre of anonymous folklore tales or traditional stories, often supernatural, that attempt to explain the world and the beginnings, middles, and ends of human experience. Native American mythology and the Australian Aboriginal Dreamtime are examples of this. It can also be a narrative that talks about how particular products or people are “awesome” in terms of their reputation. The word “myth” can also have a pejorative meaning when it is a story that is deemed to be untrue and non-factual, a story whose importance to us is determined by how wrong it is. Political chatter perhaps? Or any stories that are not worth believing in. This is one of the paradoxes of myth: that it is at once a fantasy that contains an important truth for broadly symbolic reasons. Or it can be a story that is patently untrue and needs to be repudiated. But in every instance, myth is a narrative: it is language in action telling a story. When we talk about the poetics of myth, we are talking about how those narratives work as *language*, how they and we readers make meaning, how they try to link nature and culture, such as the story of how the jaguar brought fire

to the Baroro Indians of South America. As stories, traditional myths can themselves often be considered literary since they get reused and rewritten in later literary texts. They can be narratives that have anthropological and cultural significance. Literature in turn can intend to be mythic by reusing these stories or even by pushing the limits of language to explore a human mystery. The boundary lines between myth and literature in other words are quite porous. That is what we will explore in this seminar, as we read stories that have been told in order to understand the way the world and even language itself works.



The Migrant Muse and the New Diasporas with Dr. Maik Nwosu

6 hours (2 hours daily, TWR)

In the beginning there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry.

— Ben Okri, *The Famished Road*

This seminar examines the movement of people from one locality to another, especially across borders, as well as consequent experiences—including reception and dis/integration in receiving countries. Referencing different regions of the world such as Africa and the African Diaspora, Europe, Asia, and America, we will discuss the nature and effects of migration from different perspectives, such as historical, socioeconomic, and literary/artistic. Because the movement of people is related to the movement of history and the transformative character of the imagination, we will explore migration and diaspora narratives, which provide insights into a contemporary phenomenon that traces a path back to the earliest history of humanity.



Fragments, Ruins, and Things Left Unwritten with Dr. R.D. Perry

6 hours (2 hours daily, TWR)

Incomplete literary works are ubiquitous, although there are various causes for their incompleteness. Sometimes, history and the vagaries of transmission cause us to lose texts, either completely or in part. Such is often the case with older works, like the fragments left to us by Sappho, or the Old English poem “The Ruin,” which is about ruins but is also itself ruined. Other times, authors leave their own works unfinished, either by choice or due to forces beyond their control. Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston never brought their play, *Mule Bone*, to a conclusion due to their personal conflicts and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s opium-addled memory prevented him from writing any more of “Kubla Khan.” What’s more, incomplete literary works have a variety of effects. These works can present something of a challenge to scholarship: our assumptions about works of art tend to favor those that are finished, allowing us to understand how their different parts relate to the whole. Works without that clear sense of completion—like Franz Kafka’s novels and their relationship to some of his shorter prose pieces—lead to uncertainty about the boundaries of the work and even—as in Kafka’s case—lawsuits. These same works of art, though, have also served as inspiration: different authors will often attempt to bring the works to completion, creating new works out of the old. Geoffrey Chaucer’s

The *Canterbury Tales* gave rise to a veritable industry of continuations, from the fifteenth century to the last decade. This seminar will work to make something out of fragmentary, ruined, or incomplete works. We will discuss strategies for understanding them aesthetically and what opportunities they may afford us creatively. Rather than see these works as a cause for lamentation, we will them use them as a source for our own creative and critical explorations.



Form & Function: An Introduction to Narrative Theory with Dr. Adam Rovner

6 hours (2 hours daily, TWR)

This seminar presents an introduction to critical methods associated with classical narrative theory. We will trace the development of narrative theory from Russian Formalism through to Structuralism and Narratology. Our focus will be on defining and understanding “literariness”—that which makes a given work a work of literature. Students will read seminal work from thinkers identified with these varied yet interwoven critical approaches, and will consider the diachronic development of narrative theory. Through lectures, discussion, and “laboratory” work, participants will learn to apply the tools of these methodologies to the interpretation of literary texts. Influential theorists we will consider include: Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, Boris Eikhenbaum, Jan Mukarovsky, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan.



Creative Criticism with Dr. Billy J. Stratton

6 hours (2 hours daily, TWR)

This seminar explores the dynamic interplay between creativity and modes of literary analysis with critical modes of interpretation. Considering acts of strategic disruption and decolonization, along with the dance of meaning that stems from the play of language as a fertile starting point, we will explore the possibilities of forms of literary criticism that seeks engagement with texts in more authentic, responsive, and reflective ways. Discussions and short readings will be drawn from a wide range of sources in which native/indigenous writers, scholars, poets, and storiers including Gerald Vizenor, Gordon Henry, Stephen Graham Jones, and Layli Long Soldier will be placed in critical conversation with theorists and philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Frantz Fanon, Umberto Eco, Jean-François Lyotard, and Slavoj Žižek among others. The anticipated result will be to invigorate an exploration of the constraints and limitations imposed by western/conventional modes of thinking and being as a means of facilitating a lively consideration of the ways in which we might challenge and overcome the tyranny implicit in dominant regimes of knowledge and meaning-making as they relate to the creation, presence, and interpretation of literary artifacts.



How to Do Things with Prosody with Dr. Lindsay Turner

6 hours (2 hours daily, TWR)

Prosody—the system of classifying and studying poetic meter—has a terribly unfortunate reputation as the stuff of old-school sticklers and chalk-dusty professors. But this is unfair! In this session, we’ll start with the basics of prosody, learning the complicated but not impossible system of scansion for accentual-syllabic verse in English. From here, we’ll think together about the subtle metrical tricks—the flipped feet, shortened lines, and triple-meter skips, for example—that leave us breathless in poems, that make us weep or smile, and that give each poem its unique music. We’ll read poems by poets from Emily Dickinson and John Keats to Edgar Allen Poe and Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss) to a diverse selection of contemporary poets who experiment with form and rhythm. Students will have a chance to write poems of their own as well.

MINI SEMINARS



Negative Capability with Dr. Rachel Feder

4 hours (2 hours per session, F)

The Romantic poet John Keats only mentions negative capability once, in a letter written to his brothers in 1817. There, he describes negative capability as the quality of being “capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.” In this seminar, we’ll explore how the concept of negative capability might help us understand Keats’s work and consider both contemporary responses to Keats and very recent works of poetry. What are the creative, personal, and political potentials of this potent concept?



3 AM Epiphanies in the Afternoon with Brian Kiteley

4 hours (2 hours per session, F)

This four-hour seminar will be a *generative* workshop, using Brian Kiteley’s book of fiction exercises, *The 3 A.M. Epiphany*, as a resource and prod for building future fictions. The seminar will not be a regular workshop. The seminar will not read and discuss their own fiction, but students will build ideas, fragments, and components of fiction. Students should have read or seriously browsed the book by the time the seminar meets and perhaps have done a few of the exercises as practice.

Here’s a sample exercise from *The 3 A.M. Epiphany*:

The Reluctant “I.” Write a 500-word first-person story in which you use the first person pronoun (“I” or “me” or “my”) *only two times*—but keep the “I” somehow important to the narrative you’re constructing. The point of this exercise is to imagine a narrator who is less interested in herself than in what she is observing. You can make your narrator someone who sees a very interesting event in which he is not necessarily a participant. Or you can make her self-effacing yet a major participant in the events related. The people we tend to like most are those who are much more interested in other people than in themselves, whose conversation is not a stream of self-involved remarks (like the guy who, after speaking about himself to a woman at a party for half an hour, says, “Enough about me, what do you think of me?”). Another lesson you might learn from this exercise is how important it is to let things and events speak for themselves, beyond the ego of the narration.

And here’s a link to a handful of the exercises on Kiteley’s web page: <http://mysite.du.edu/~bkiteley/exercises.html>



Writing the Impossible: A Generative Writing Seminar with Selah Saterstrom

4 hours (2 hours per session, F)

In and through our writing, how can we enter difficult or complex subject matter when the task seems overwhelming? Where do we begin and how do we keep going? How do we move into the space of writing “big themes”—loss, recovery, transformation—when the largeness of such themes can feel intimidating? In this four-hour generative writing seminar, we will work with several creative writing strategies that help harness the energy of material that might otherwise feel impossible. Additionally, we will explore ways to uncover those narratives we feel compelled to articulate in and through our writing. All genres and experience levels welcome.



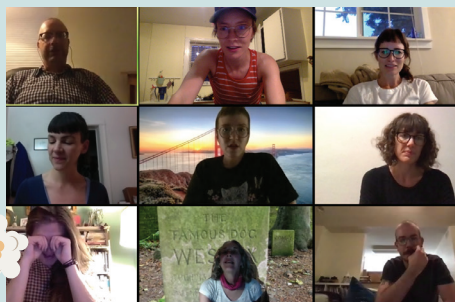
Necropolitics and Latinidad with Dr. Kristy L. Ulibarri

4 hours (2 hours per session, F)

This four-hour seminar will consider the economies of death, social death, and slow death within performances and texts of *latinidad*. The historical mythos and cultural celebrations around death hailing from Mexico and Latin America have entered the U.S. marketplace of ideas through *la calavera catrina* images, *La Llorona*/White Lady folklore, and fetishizations of *día de los muertos*. Simultaneously, these cultural forms of death have come up against discourses and practices of imperial, racial, and economic violence against Latinos in the U.S., violences that Achille Mbembe argues make certain populations into the “living dead.” The uneven and contradictory formation of “death” here will lead us to investigate select contemporary U.S. literary and visual forms – such as comic books, migrant narratives, literary-musical hybrid, and adaptations – that employ figures of the dead and reveal these problematic cultural and social circulations. We will address the following questions: How do these literary forms and narratives construct “death”? Why must figurations of the dead or the living dead encode/decode social inequality and the violence of late capitalism? What sorts of imagination does the dead destroy or create?

A QUARTER AT THE MOVIES: The Faculty and Graduate Students Film Club

By Stella Corso



At the end of a long September, graduate students and professors from the English Department met over Zoom for the first installment of the Faculty and Graduate Student Film Club, a recurring event organized by Professors Graham Foust and Lindsay Turner, to share popcorn and conversation in a time where socializing with friends and colleagues requires some extra creativity. If options for spending a Friday night in the time of COVID are limited, why not create a space where we can be alone, together?

The first film of the Fall quarter, selected by Professor Foust, was *The Fits*—a 2015 feature debut by Anna Rose Holmer. The film opens to the haunting sound of a young girl counting, as if playing hide-and-go-seek in the dark and waiting to be found, but when an image appears on the screen we see that she is actually in her school gymnasium, counting reps

of abdominal curls. Nearby a group of girls can be heard chanting, *I ain't scared, of no lions, tigers, and bears* on repeat, while another group of girls are engaged in a highly energetic dance-off. Our protagonist, revealed to be a young and promising boxer, observes the dancing girls through a tiny window, rubbing gold dust between her fingers. Already it is hard to determine the film's genre; will it be a coming-of-age journey where she must overcome ordinary obstacles of fitting in, while enduring the trials of training to be an athlete (in a typically male sport)? Or, as suggested by the menacing score and mysterious ‘fits’ that befall members of the school dance team (the team our protagonist really longs to join) is there an element of horror at play?

These were some of the questions and observations that came up in our group chat after the movie, where Dr. R.D. and Dr. Eleanor McNees were in attendance along with several Creative Writing PhD students, both new and seasoned. Other conversations revolved around the historical depiction of Black narratives in American cinema, the Flint water crisis (was it contaminated water giving these girls the ‘fits’?), and shared recommendations for other films we had currently seen and enjoyed. By the end of the

talk, the group had unanimously agreed to being fans of actress Parker Posey, and before signing off Dr. Foust even declared, “I love Party Girl.”

The second installation of Film Club had us viewing *Diamond Island*, a 2016 Cambodian film by Davy Chou, as selected by Lindsay Turner. This time we were joined by at least one husband and a couple of cute pups, in addition to recent DU alum Alicia Mountain ('20).

This film exposed some of the ongoing conflicts of rebuilding the city of Phnom Penh, the desire for progress and the personal and collective costs of erecting such an island, as well as the dangers of leaving the rural population in its dust and in this case, irreparably dividing a family of brothers. Turnout for this film was a bit less this time, considering we were now deep into the quarter, but conversation was still rich and everyone appeared to be enjoying their wine.

The final film for this quarter will be *Queen of Diamonds*, a 1991 film by Nina Menkes, as selected by student vote, which will take place on Friday, November 13th. Considering two out of three film titles include *diamonds*, I think it's fair to say that the Faculty and Graduate Student Film Club has been a bright jewel in the midst of these rough times. ■

HIGHLIGHTING GRADUATE STUDENTS' DISSERTATIONS

By Elijah Null

I've asked third- and fourth-year students to share about their projects and what they're thinking about at the moment. The variety of topics and approaches in these projects is striking. The interplay between the creative and the critical, so important to our department's ethos, is also abundantly represented.

Ben Caldwell (3rd Year, Literary Studies)

ben.caldwell@du.edu

I'm working with Appalachian authors whose work engages with the long and complicated history of land ownership in the region. Extractive industries like coal and timber have dominated Appalachia's economy since the late 19th Century, and these industries require vast tracts of land to sustain themselves.

Ella Longpre (3rd Year, Creative Writing)

ella.longpre@du.edu

The Shutter Inside explores the long-term effects of chronic illness and spiritual abuse on one's creative agency and on the act of writing. A lyric hybrid autofiction of demon possession, epilepsy, and photography, the photographic image and convulsive seizure conflate to bridge a new definition of the creative vision.

Lucien Darjeun Meadows (3rd Year)

Lucien.Meadows@du.edu

I'm studying the queer ecology of clouds across nineteenth-century British poetry, with attention to lesser-known and laboring-class poets. I want to find out how poets like John Clare, Thomas Cooper, and Gerard Manley Hopkins related to and identified with clouds, especially in their persistent use of clouds to disrupt or question (or "queer") socioeconomic or poetic convention.

Eric Mills (3rd Year, Literary Studies)

I'm drawn to the decline of the Great House in transatlantic literature. I begin affectively: why do we experience the destruction of the great house as lamentation instead of celebration? Given the prevalence of *schadenfreude*, why do we experience the downfall of our "social betters" as negative instead of positive?

Elijah Null (3rd Year, Literary Studies)

elijah.null@du.edu

I'm working on the post-WWII American picaresque. Specifically, I'm thinking about how Ralph Ellison, Saul Bellow, John Kennedy Toole, and Flannery O'Connor adapted the conventions of the picaresque in order to address the connected questions of American identity and fundamental anthropology.

Sara Sheiner (3rd year, Creative Writing)

sara.sheiner@du.edu

My poetic dissertation project is titled *The Field*, invoking a space of openness and unknowability. *The Field* acts as an "anti-epic" or *contraepic*, centering themes of transgenerational trauma and an intensely felt lack of lineage (which also makes the project a very American one).

Eszter Takacs (3rd Year, Creative Writing)

eszter.takacs@du.edu

Scholar Walter Benn Michaels writes of how we receive the pitfalls of capitalism: "to feel the beauty of the problem is precisely not to feel the pathos of the suffering produced by the problem; it's instead to feel the structure that makes the problem." I will compose poetry which travels the biosphere of the popstar as icon, myth, product and hostage of capitalism.

Elizabeth Adams (4th Year, Literary Studies)

elizabeth.adams@du.edu

My dissertation examines Herman Melville's interest in visual art in order to better understand his aesthetics—and their philosophical underpinnings.

Kelly Krumrie (4th Year, Creative Writing)

kelly.krumrie@du.edu

My dissertation has three parts that each operate at the intersection of literature, mathematics, and science. First, there is a short novel called *Math Class* where a group of teenage girls, after a commuter rail accident, try to make sense of their world and are somehow always stuck in math class. Second, a book-length series of prose poems called *No Measure* imagines desertification remediation efforts via an impossibly documented erotics. And third, my critical apparatus is an article on numbers and counting in Gertrude Stein's writing that questions critics' use of the adjective "mathematical" to describe her work.

Erinrose Mager (4th Year, Creative Writing)

erinrose.mager@gmail.com

The creative component of my dissertation—titled *Hot Fruit*—is a collection of hybrid short prose works that explores familial loss, parental estrangement, transracial adoptee identity, immigration, contemporary diaspora, lineage and tradition, fractured Asian American-ness, and the incomprehension of memory.

Olivia Tracy (4th year, Literary Studies)

My dissertation claims that early modern women writers present embodied constructions of the sensory-domestic—the bodily practices of herbal and culinary labor, shared between medical and scientific practices—to locate an ethos at the intersection of these discourse communities.

Book Review:

Birth Chart by Dr. Rachel Feder

Review by Natalie Earnhart



A birth chart is a map that marks every timeline at once. Where you begin, what challenges or help you will receive along the way, at what time you'll come into true adulthood—the metamorphic rite known as the Saturn Return (around the ages of 27–30). Astrology can also map probable personality traits, detriments that can indicate challenges,

or oppositions that do not permanently fix an individual in a paradigm of lack and downfall but can exact or offer prescriptions about how one might work with or transcend such challenging aspects. Rachel Feder's *Birth Chart* asserts and questions the complicated, patterning lines of an individual's life as they might be transposed into the language of a birth chart. With her pen she marks the places where this or that happened, when someone was being "basically a Scorpio", or "Charlotte Brontë was a Taurus which explains the invention of Emily (such a Leo) as well as of Jane herself."

Feder has a magical way of weaving in theoretical and philosophical mentions as if it's something common and natural to all conversations. She mentions Silvia Dobson and Latour with a beautiful simplicity, though not astrological, is nevertheless doing a kind of astrological work, in that Feder is constellating more than just the signs, but also everything that comes to her attention, everything that has the potential to be a sign.

The book contains three titled sections with title-less poems: I. Slippage II. Lunar Fragments for the Scorpion Child III. Other People's Scorpions. Just as H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* was broken into three sections with no individual titles, Feder's book also constellates in this way H.D. is a recurrent theme and figure of which it is no doubt she is a continuous presence for the writer in and outside of this book full of stars and scorpions. The book begins with slippage, beyond stilling time and its slippage, not just as a section but the tracing of the dragon shape from the tail down. Nearing the end of the first section, Feder writes a statement with a question in it, "There is no dragon in this poem unless, the dragon is form itself." Is the dragon the shape? The praxis? The unseen myth permeating the poems? North and South nodes in astrology are known as the Dragon, with the head being North and tail South. As the dragon makes its way through different opposing sign combinations, it reflects where needs and desires conflict. At the time of *Birth Chart*'s publication, the nodes were in the opposite signs of Cancer and Capricorn, focusing on nesting, exploration in the security of home and the past, and the effortful progression towards the future. The themes of Feder's book also seem to mirror this condition, giving the work such pulse as she worked with this energy in the writing of the pieces. Feder

uses this astrological knowledge and references to characterize people, note what the moon is doing to the mood of place or moody disposition of person, and a system of both poetics and fluctuating sense making of the world—a poem, like a birth chart, is a time capsule/and every time capsule requires a miscalculation. Maybe, that miscalculation is a hermeneutic statement questioning the manifold ways of reading charts and those readings become the writing.

The placements in a birth chart might describe how you relate, how you love and want to be loved, how you war. How do we love? How do we war? How do we tell the difference? How can the cartography of a chart indicate our relationships to motherhood? To relating to both prescribed mothers and the way we mother? With these points of meditative focus combined with quirky and quick-witted humor, Feder, in addition to astrological references, constellates the soul of the work with 90's music references, non-astrological theory, H.D., and motherhood. The text becomes its own living being with its own birth chart. Natalie Merchant's *Tigerlily* playing in a Discman is a kind of sign; so is H.D.'s *The Gift*; here we see the ancient collide with the late 20th century:

*Sheera's moon is in Libra
unless she's getting her time of birth wrong
which is totally possible. This explains
why she tries to be everything
to everyone as in the 1997 jam
by alternative rock band Everclear*

The humorous, energetic language carries us forward and there are many moments of, "wait, I need to read that part again." What carries forward, peering down at the scorpions?

Which is another way of saying, and every miscalculation requires someone who understands a story based on nothing can be true anyway.



IN MEMORIAM: PROFESSOR GERALD ("JERRY") CHAPMAN 1927–2020

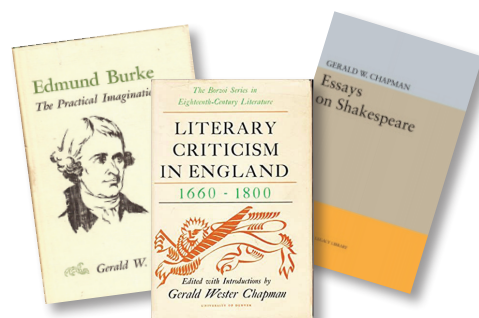


Hired to chair the Department in 1962 after receiving his PhD from Harvard and teaching elsewhere for several years, Jerry managed to double the size of the Department. Together with U.S. National Book Award Winner and DU professor, John Williams, he founded the *Denver Quarterly* in 1966. During the '60s Jerry published several important books: *Essays on Shakespeare* (Princeton UP, 1965); *Literary Criticism in England, 1660–1800* (Knopf, 1966); and *Edmund Burke: The Practical Imagination* (Harvard UP, 1967). Over the next three and a half decades he worked tirelessly as a dedicated teacher and generous colleague, purchasing (and actually reading) most of his colleagues' books and articles and mentoring younger faculty as they joined the Department. In 1976, he received the Distinguished Teaching Award from the University of Denver. He was the primary Shakespearean in the Department and also taught courses in 18th century British literature as well as a key course in the History of Literary Criticism from Plato to the present. His scholarship was wide and vast, and his lectures were minutely

researched and conveyed his passionate devotion to each writer about whom he spoke. He delivered his retirement lecture—a model of modest erudition—to an appropriately large and appreciative audience in 2003.

Jerry graciously decided to donate the bulk of his large library to the Department which (together with Special Collections in the Library) will house his books and papers in the Gerald Chapman Memorial Collection. His spirit will pervade that collection as future students and faculty cull information and inspiration from the books they pluck from the shelves.

— Eleanor McNees



IN MEMORIAM: PROFESSOR ROBERT D. RICHARDSON, JR. 1934–2020



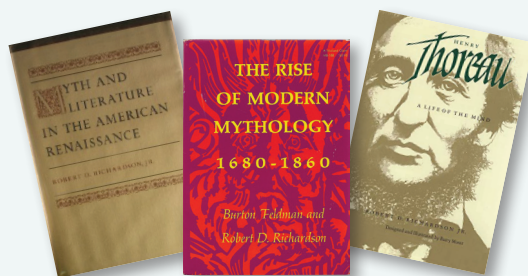
Bob was a Professor of English from 1972 till 1987 before going on to an equally distinguished career as an independent scholar and one of America's best known and honored intellectual biographers. He was chair of English from 1968-1973, president of the Faculty Senate from 1972-73, acting dean of graduate studies for the College of Arts and Sciences in 1975-76, and

Phipps Professor of the Humanities from 1979-1982. While in the English Department, he published *Literature and Film, Myth and Literature in the American Renaissance* and, with Professor Burton Feldman (also of the English Department at DU), *The Rise of Modern Mythology* (1972 and a second edition in 2000). Following these works, he turned, as it were, to a second career as an independent scholar with time spent also at the University of Colorado, Yale, Wesleyan, and the University of North Carolina. His new focus was an extension of the old, which had long been centered on the study of myth. He turned mainly to intellectual biography, publishing a set of major studies of American thinkers (Thoreau, Emerson, and William James). These began right at the end of his career at DU with *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* (1986), and with the addition of the

studies of Emerson and William James, he produced a much praised trilogy that won prizes and drew close attention from important reviewers and scholars. As the distinguished Irish novelist John Banville put it, the trilogy is "one of the glories of contemporary American literature."

Bob will be remembered by those who knew him as a man of great empathy and perception, remarkable erudition, and a passion for making the complex understandable. In recognition of this, the University bestowed on him the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters in 2008.

— Eric Gould

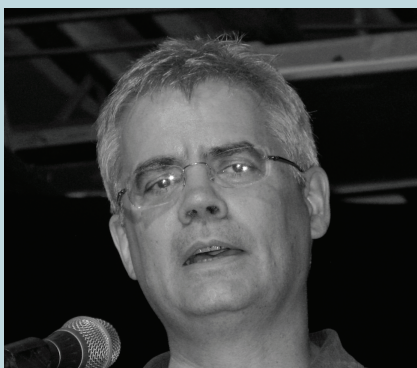
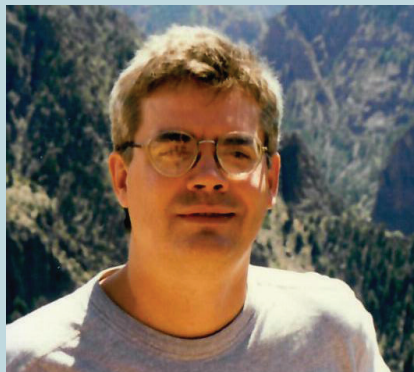


Retiring Faculty

Brian Kiteley is the author of *The River Gods*, *I Know Many Songs, But I Cannot Sing*, and *Still Life with Insects*, and two books about fiction writing, *The 3 AM Epiphany* and *The 4 AM Breakthrough*. His work has been translated into Arabic, Spanish, French, and Persian. He recently finished two linked novels set in Greece and Egypt, *Emily's Book* and *Jack's Book*. Kiteley received Whiting, Guggenheim, and NEA writing fellowships, and two Professional Research Opportunities for Faculty grants from DU to travel to Greece. *The River Gods* was on the long list for the National Book Awards in 2009. Kiteley also taught at the American University in Cairo, City College of New York, and Ohio University, and he arrived at the University of Denver in 1994.

Kiteley taught travel writing, spy fiction, historical fiction, and postcolonial fiction classes. About half his courses were fiction workshops. He did not like the usual workshop method, but he used it, in a limited form, imposing a wide variety of exercises on the process. Brian Kiteley is a reader (and writer) who enjoys organic innovations in the form and content of fiction, explorations that develop out of the relationship between content and point of view.

Then and Now



Student Awards

FOURTH-YEAR GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS/FELLOWSHIPS

Denver Quarterly Editorial Fellowship
LUCIEN MEADOWS

Copywriting Graduate Teaching Assistantship
SARA SHEINER AND ESZTER TAKACS

Clemens Fellowship
BEN CALDWELL, GRETCHEN SCHRAFFT,
ELLA LONGPRE, AND CASS EDDINGTON

Carlson Fellowship
ELIJAH NULL

CAHSS Dean's Dissertation Fellowship
EVELYN HAMPTON

Evan Frankel Foundation Fellowship
EMILY ALTMAN AND ERIC MILLS

UNDERGRADUATE AWARDS

Deatt Hudson Scholarship
CINDY PHAN

Virginia Case Scholarship
SYDNEY PINE

Olna Fant Cook Award
GEORGE HARDY

Mary Cass Award
TALIA RIZZO (CREATIVE WRITING)
ERIN MACRITCHIE (LITERARY STUDIES)

THIS YEAR IN FLYERS

BEOWULF

2017 GOODREADS
CHOICE AWARD WINNER


MARIA DARVORA HEADLEY

"Translation & Innovation:
Maria Headley's
Radical New
Beowulf"

with Maria Headley

Friday, March 19
1 to 2 PM
Virtual Event
RSVP: bit.ly/maria-headley


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 **A Conversation with
Renee Gladman
and Danielle Vogel**

**Tuesday, February 9
4 to 5:30 PM MST
Virtual Webinar**

Please join the Department of English & Literary Arts for a fascinating conversation about writing, art making and being a body in a repeating world with the internationally celebrated writers, artists and intellectuals, Renee Gladman and Danielle Vogel.

Moderated by University of Denver professor, Dr. Joanna Howell. A live! Q&A will follow the event.

 *Renee Gladman*

 *Danielle Vogel*

RSVP: bit.ly/gladmanvogel

Pbi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar Lecture

Black Graphics:
Text, Image and the Politics
of 'Colorblindness' in
Natasha Trethewe's Poetry

Dr. Evie Shockley
Professor of English, Rutgers University

Thursday, 15 April 2021, 6pm
via Zoom: RZVP link at doi.edu/pbihetalecture

Sponsored by the DBK Campus Chapter of Colorado (U), OIK Alpha Association of Colorado,
and the EU Department of English and Liberal Arts.

Dr Shockley is the author of three books of poetry, a novel and Carolina White Street, 2003; the new book of poems (Welewe's), 2018, winner of the marjorie kinnan guggenheim award in poetry, and semiotext(e) Welewe's, 2019, which won the Norton/brent spencer award and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for the Fullerton Prize and the A.M. Tuckman Book Prize. Her publications also include critical studies, keynote addresses, essays, reviews, and anthologies in African American Poetry, Young Black Women, and the African Diaspora. She has been honored as the Morgan Library Award, Stephen Heisler Award, the National Naturalistic Poet Prize, and fellowships from the backpack institute for Advanced Study, the Ashmolean Center for Research in The Classics, Culture, and the American Council of Learned Societies.

Natasha Trethewe won USPRF lecture prize 2018-19 and 2021-24.

pbi beta kappa (DBK) is the nation's oldest literary honors society. Founded in 1926, it provides each chapter a checkbook and a budget for sponsoring the study circle and other activities. It sponsors speakers who are invited to give lectures on literature-related and social issues through its affiliated club. DBK's 26 chapters at colleges and universities across the United States have provided over 700 students with opportunities to attend lectures and seminars on literature and education and experience the work of Dr. Evie Shockley (Colorado) member who presented in 1997. The member association of DBK nationally was reformed and renamed pbi in 1981.

www.doi.edu/liberalarts facebook.com/dbsbk

OUTGOING STAFF



Joel T. Lewis is an English department alumnus who wrote his MA thesis on Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*. He has moved on to a senior payments analyst position in DU's Shared Services Department after 2.5 years as the department's assistant to the chair. Joel is an aspiring novelist and sometime poet whose comic book and film review work can be found on NerdsThatGeek.com. In his free time, Joel produces, edits, and sometimes co-hosts two podcasts (Movie Mumble and the Motor Mouth Podcast) and freelance edits other people's podcasts through his website MotorMouthPodcasting.com.