

Fall/Winter 2011-12

The English Broadside

English Department Newsletter

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Collaborative Connections on a Global Scale Cross-Curricular Interpretations Through Literature

—Contributed by Omar Cherif Diop

The English Department's Dr. Omar Diop and Dr. Viakinnou-Brinson of the Department of Foreign Languages, co-taught Claire de Duras's *Ourika* in their respective classes last semester. Students from Dr. Diop's class presented on the French revolution in Dr. Viakinnou's class and students from Dr. Viakinnou-Brinson's class presented on the 18th century Ursuline movement in Dr. Diop's class. These joint sessions culminated in a global simulation during which students from both classes explained from different perspectives what may have caused the death of Ourika, the eponymous character of the novel. Students in Dr. Viakinnou-Brinson's class also served as French/English interpreters during the debate.

The purpose of the simulation was to give our students a platform to explore in an innovative and unique way the 18th and early 19th century French society and culture, the French Revolution, and the 1791 slave rebellion in Saint Domingue. In their evaluation of the simulation, a student stated: "The global simulation helped me review my knowledge about the French revolution in France and outside in countries like Saint Domingue also the violence that accompanied the revolution... I also learned about trauma and how it can devastate someone's life."

Another student wrote: "The global simulation challenged me to think because I had to know my part well and play it ... It pushed me a little more to perform my role because there was another



Marie-Guillemine Benoist's painting, *Portrait d'une negresse*, is housed at the Louvre. The artwork is often used to represent Duras's heroine in her novel

class involvedthe global simulation project was thought-provoking and educational at best. Working with Dr. Diop's class was fun, and loved hearing their opinion about the book and how their perspectives were similar or different from ours."



Expressing *Diversity* in English Dimensions

—By Christi Williams

Paradigm shifts are often challenging, and part of the process requires not only a willingness to consider new ways of thinking, but also redefining language that facilitates the imminent shifts. To that end, the English Department's newly formed Diversity Committee has taken on the challenge of developing English Department diversity initiatives that compliment and support KSU's commitment to global awareness.

The committee is in the process of forming the general framework of its diversity plan, which includes codifying some of the following:

- creating definitions of diversity
- practicing diversity
- spreading diversity
- researching and theorizing diversity issues
- mobilizing resources
- assessing and reporting on accomplishments in diversity

The committee hopes to address classroom issues that relate to diversity. KSU English faculty members have shared the need for a "safe space" to discuss these situations. The committee intends to build a support system for newly hired faculty, particularly those who may be members of marginalized or minority groups. In addition, the committee plans to facilitate discussions that will assist instructors who may need help addressing potential problems. Accordingly, the committee has developed a "Difficult Dialogues" agenda that will be devoted to discussing delicate and/or complex situations in order to seek solutions or offer guidance to colleagues.

Although statistics show that a majority of American universities continue to underrepresent ethnic and gender groups in general, developing diversity in English studies is an even more unique task. Since most English literature is largely a product of white-dominated societies, English studies often cultivates not only English language and literary legacies but also English cultural heritage, which is inherently promoted in the canons British and American traditional literature.

Cornell English Professor Jonathan Cullers notes that over-politicization of diversity agendas can be subverted into a form of "institutionalizing dissent," which negates well-intentioned notions of diversity awareness. The risk of weakening diversity initiatives is especially complex in disciplines such as English, according to Cullers, because it was originally used to impress a "carefully chosen agenda ...to engender national pride" in order to instill a particular set of values chosen by the dominant [white] social class.

Author and social scholar bell hooks also cautions white and minority English instructors to thoroughly "interrogate" their roles in the university to examine whether their scholarship actually serves to fight oppression or simply critiques, re-enacts and reconstitutes the same old traditional practices and social orders. All instructors, warns hooks, regardless of ethnicity or background, must question their "location" or place within the dominate culture. This is particularly the case for



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academics working within predominately white institutions. The politically correct diversity agenda can quickly lose its “oppositional identity” and become subsumed into mainstream institutionalized theory that basically reifies the status quo, says epistemologist Henry Giroux.

Defining *diversity* in English—both in the scholarly discipline and in

the language itself—has a multitude of dimensions when considering the “location” of English situated within complex global proportions. Such is the important and yet daunting task for the English Department’s Diversity Committee.



Take the Time for “Twenty-minute Talks”

At beginning of last Fall’s 2010-11 academic year, the English Department faculty organized a “Peer Group Bartering Program” to serve as a forum for addressing issues such as teaching circles, mentoring, student learning, and collaborative efforts between faculty members both in and outside the English Department.

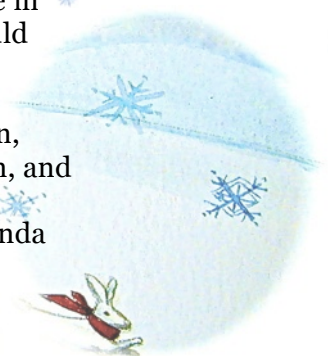
The Peer Group Committee has continued its efforts this year to foster a collaborate spirit of expertise within the English Department. The committee orchestrates informal, brief informative sessions on various topics in the world of English academics. Members of the English department offer unique insights in areas of their expertise designed as a forum for sharing new knowledge and thought on numerous sub-disciplines of English studies.

The topics of the “Twenty-minute Talks” that are scheduled can be found under the “Faculty” link on the English Department’s Web page. The talks are arranged through the Peer Group Committee, but all faculty are welcomed and encouraged to submit ideas, suggestions, or offer presentations. Some of the topics that have been offered or proposed include

specific genres of English literature, such as historical fiction, British Romanticism, Gothic Fiction, Murder Mysteries and Detective Fiction, Irish Literature, Southern American writers, Postcolonial Literature, Religious Texts, Environmental Writing and Ecocriticism, Transnational Literature, Biographies, Gender and Women’s Studies, and Visual Rhetoric.

The Twenty-minute Talks also cover teaching strategies and methods of mentoring student writing and revision strategies, motivating and retaining online students, integrating and using classroom technology, designing successful performance-based and collaborative student assessments, and innovative models for encouraging student discussions and responses. All of the topics are ultimately aimed at sharing “best practices” that expand instructional methodologies.

If you would like to participate in the “Twenty-Minute Talks” or would like to discuss some of your ideas, contact one of the Peer Group Committee Members: Drs. Bowden, Dabundo, Davis, Giddens, Sheldon, and Walters; or Mr. Jeff Cebulski, Ms. Michelle Goodsite, and Ms. Linda Stewart.



ΣΤΔ Adopts Southern Poet, Members, and New Projects for 2012

—Contributed by Julie Fowkes



Julie Fowkes (above right with author Natahsha Trethewey) is the current president of the KSU chapter of Sigma Tau Delta and a senior in the English program.

The English Honor Society adopted Mississippi born Natasha Trethewey's *Bellocq's Ophelia* as the Fall 2011 common reader and organized two poetry readings based on the author's work. A comprehensive list of ideas regarding ways in which readers can respond to Trethewey's work, both critically and creatively, was provided in time for members to submit their papers for the Sigma Tau Delta Common Reader Award. Trethewey will be a featured speaker and author at the International Convention coming up in February 2012.

The study of Natasha Trethewey's work concluded with a visit to Emory University to meet the author in person as part of Emory's Creative Writing Program Reading Series. Members were privileged enough to hear Trethewey read from her work and opportunities were given for book signing afterwards.

Projects and Volunteerism

The English Honor Society has been involved with in-house volunteer experiences. In particular, it helped spread the word and drum up support for the English Department Faculty Award. Also, a couple of its members are volunteering their time in KSU's Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth.

Presently, the English Honor Society is running a Better World Books Campus Book Drive to raise

funds for their program Books for Africa." The staff of the Howard W. Sturgis Library graciously donated over 500 books to the program.

New Growth in Membership

Faculty sponsors, Dr. David King and Dr. Cindy Bowers, are particularly pleased with the increase in membership since last semester. The English Honor Society will be welcoming 26 new members at the Fall Induction Ceremony to be held on Wednesday, 30th November at 7:00pm in the Leadership Room of the Student Center. All faculty members are invited to attend. Dr Khalil Elayan is the Society's guest speaker.

Chapter Plans KSU Conference Series

The English Honor Society is also planning a call for papers in conjunction with a series of literature conferences sponsored by the KSU chapter in 2012. Entries will be open to all KSU students. Students will be invited to submit papers and take advantage of the opportunity to gain experience in presenting papers. Faculty members are encouraged to promote this event to their students at the start of next semester. A date and place will be announced shortly.



English Owls Flying High, Far, and Abroad!



Left:
Dr. Cindy Bowers and Dr. David King (right), welcomed 26 new members at the chapter's induction ceremony in November.



Right:
Dr. Khalil Elayan served as the featured speaker for the new members' event this past Fall semester.

Below: *A group of Study Abroad students went to Ireland last summer with Dr. Dabundo to study Irish literature and history. On the final night of their experience, they attended a formal Irish banquet in Dungaire. See page seven for more detail about the trip.*



Above: *Professor Tony Grooms stands with 85-year-old Arthur Harris, who graduated in December with his MAPW degree. Harris, founder of Atlanta's popular Spa Sydell, wrote his Capstone based on a collection of love letters he wrote to his wife after he first met her at fifteen. His wife, Sydell, is the namesake of his successful business. Harris plans to continue his education by pursuing his PhD!*



Above: *Dr. Dabundo (front right) and her ENGL 4470 class attended Theater Emory's recent adaptation of Jane Austen's novel Persuasion. Students then had the opportunity to have their reviews of the play published in the Jane Austen Society's journal.*

The Shrinking English Major

—By Bill Rice

“There are many, many ways in which an English major prepares students to be employed and to be successful in life—even if the students in question do not choose to teach or edit or write for a living.”



In a recent issue of *The American Scholar*, former English professor and university president, William Chace bemoaned the decline of the English major. Over the last forty years the percentage of undergraduates majoring in English has declined from 7.6 percent to 3.9 percent. Similar trends appear in other liberal arts areas, such as history and philosophy. On the other hand, during the same time period, the business major has grown from 13.7 percent to 21.9 percent.

It is easy enough to explain such trends, particularly in the gloom and doom economy of the last few years. What parent is not going to be reluctant to invest in increasingly steep tuition payments for a major that appears not to promise immediate employment? But Chase cites another problem that contributes to the decline: our inability or unwillingness to explain what the English major is. Though Chase chastises the profession for an array of sins that I have no wish either to agree with or enumerate, I do think we as professors have done a poor job of connecting the dots.

There are many, many ways in which an English major prepares students to be employed and to be successful in life—even if the students in question do not choose to teach or edit or write for a living. This is an argument that we need to make every day—even though the actual number of English majors at Kennesaw has not declined. An item from a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* gives us somewhere to start.

A recent survey of employers commissioned by the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS) revealed a pronounced gap between what employers expected and what they got in areas they considered vital. The gap was largest in these areas: interpersonal skills, problem solving skills, teamwork, and written communication skills. An English major can help students in at least three of these areas, probably all four.

We in the English Department at Kennesaw do much better than the average English Department in recognizing the centrality of written communication skills to our discipline. We offer a graduate degree in professional writing and an undergraduate minor in writing. Thanks to the support of our dean, we have a thriving writing across the curriculum program. We also have a first rate writing center that supports writing throughout the university community. But I wonder if all of us, even those of us who do not regularly teach writing courses, emphasize to our students the value of writing skills for what they do outside of college, whether that is accounting or engineering or even computer science.

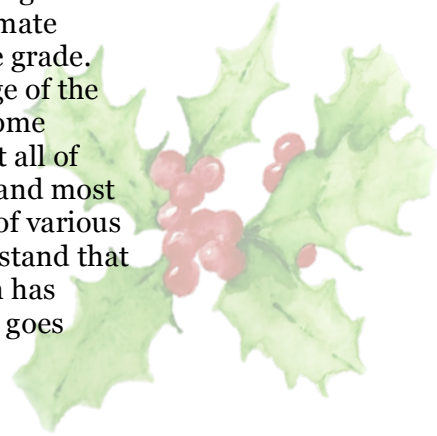
And secondly, I wonder if we make the mistake of assuming that literature is not valuable except for itself, except for what we do with it in the profession. This is a mistake I often make unwittingly. I become so involved in teaching a novel—in the mystery and power of the literature itself—that I forget that it is the written transcript of a man or a woman's attempt to solve a

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problem. And that in attempting to understand that novel or poem or play, my students and I are involved in an intense analysis of that problem and the array of interpersonal interactions that the author uses to dramatize it. Who can teach *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* without probing into interpersonal relations of the most intense kind, without examining the problems that plague ambition and power whether within a nation or a business or within a family? Unfortunately, students will not connect what they do in class to the outside world unless we show them how. American education has

established disciplinary walls that encourage students to compartmentalize courses. What they learn in English class has nothing to do with business or psychology or political science or management—let alone what might be happening right now or tomorrow in Washington or Atlanta. For them, the ultimate horizon of the course is the grade.

Only a small percentage of the students we teach will become professors or teachers. But all of them will become citizens and most will become professionals of various kinds. They need to understand that what we have to offer them has broad applications to what goes on in real life.



Faculty Accolades and Accomplishments

Laura Dabundo

Dr. Dabundo has two articles accepted in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia Of Romanticism* (volume on Prose), edited by Frederick Burwick and Diane L. Hoeveler. The articles are entitled "Domestic Realism" and "Sidney Owenson."

"The Feminist Critique and Five Styles of Women's Roles in *Pride And Prejudice*" will appear in *In Pride And Prejudice: Critical Insights*, edited by Laurence W. Mazzeno.

Along with History Professor Bryan McGovern, Dr. Dabundo hosted a group of students to Ireland for two weeks for credit in either an English or History Irish literature or history course. The students spent about four or five days in Dublin and the same amount of time in Galway. One of the highlights was seeing the Queen of England, also known to the Irish as "Betty" or "Mrs. Windsor." It was the first visit of an English monarch to the what is now the Republic of Ireland in a century.

The students saw Kilmainham Gaol and the Book of Kells and St. Patrick's Cathedral with Jonathan Swift's tomb and the Aran Islands and the ancient

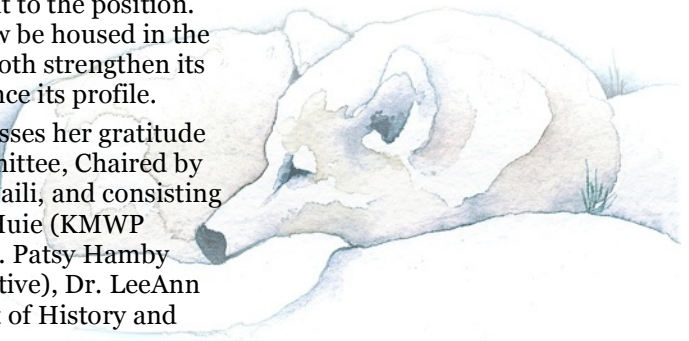
monastic villages of Glendalough and Clonmacnoise, among much else. The students learned Irish dancing, Irish sports, and how to make St. Bridget's crosses.

This Maymester, she plans to take a group of students to London, Bath, and Oxford for a trip tied to English literature. In future years, Dr. Dabundo hopes to rotate the English and Irish trips and perhaps include another English professor to broaden what is being offered!

Jennifer Dail

Dr. Jennifer Dail has been named as the new Director of the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project (KMWP). Dr. Dail brings vision, solid experience, and a collaborative spirit to the position. The Project will now be housed in the Writing Center to both strengthen its activities and enhance its profile.

Dr. Dail expresses her gratitude to the Search Committee, Chaired by Associate Dean Ismaili, and consisting of Ms. Mary Lynn Huie (KMWP representative), Ms. Patsy Hamby (KMWP representative), Dr. LeeAnn Lands (Department of History and



Philosophy), Dr. Laura McGrath (Department of English), and Ms. Rachel Greil (Writing Center representative), for their service to the College.

Omar Diop

Dr. Diop's article "Reclaiming Agency: How to Walk out of the Dark in Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* and *In the Fog of the Season's End*" will appear in the publication *Safara: Revue Internationale De Langues, Littératures Et Cultures*.

Two of Dr. Diop's other essays will be published as chapters in new publications: "Traumatics: The Representation of Trauma in Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name*" will appear in *Managing Conflicts in Africa's Democratic Transitions*, a book of essays edited by KSU's Dr. Akanmu Adebayo and to be published by Lexington. The second of his articles is entitled, "Teaching about Africa: Violence and Conflict Management," and was co-authored with KSU's Dr. Linda Johnson. This piece will be a part of the book *Teaching Africa: A Guide for the 21st Century Classroom*, edited by Brandon Lundy and Solomon Negash and published by Indiana University Press.

Dr. Diop's "Tansi's *La Vie et Demie*," another recent essay, will be published by *The Journal of Third World Studies*.

Jim Elledge

After publishing books of poetry, anthologies, and critical books, Dr. Elledge adds to his list a biography. *Throw-Away Boy: A Life Of Henry Darger* will be published by Overlook Press.

Katrina Gephardt

Dr. Gephardt was recently elected to a five-year seat on the MLA Discussion Group Executive Committee on Travel Literature. Her essay

Elizabeth Giddens

Dr. Beth Giddens's essay "Encountering Social-Constructivist Rhetoric: Teaching John McPhee's *Classic in an Environmental Writing and Literature Course*" is a chapter in the new book *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan).

David King

Dr. King will be delivering the annual Flannery O'Connor lecture in February. Sponsored by the Flannery

O'Connor Foundation, this lecture will take place at Andalusia, the farm near Milledgeville where O'Connor spent most of her writing years. This honor was extended to King based on a paper he delivered in April at the Flannery O'Connor Conference. The subject was the similar legacies of Flannery O'Connor and Alfred Hitchcock. His paper, "Hitched: The Similar Legacies of Alfred Hitchcock and Flannery O'Connor," is now being revised for publication. Dr. King is especially pleased that these accomplishments developed as a result of his teaching O'Connor in his English 4620 Senior Seminar.

Dr. King is a contributing literature and film columnist for the *Georgia Bulletin*, the newspaper of the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta. Recently, he learned that the Catholic News Service—the International Catholic Press—has begun syndicating his articles for a world-wide audience.

Jenny Sabre Orafai

Two of her chapbook manuscripts have been accepted for publication by two separate publishers. H_NGM_N Books will publish "What Her Hair Says About Her" this spring and Finishing Line Press will publish "Dressing the Throat Plate" later this year.

Bill Rice

Dr. Rice's story "The Falconer" appeared in the November issue of *Gray's Sporting Journal*. His article "Teaching Wilfred Owen to Soldiers" appeared in *Inside Higher Education* on Veteran's Day. He presented a paper entitled "N. Scott Momaday and the Problem of Belief" at the School of Visual Art's *Liberal Arts and the Education of Artists Conference* in New York City in October.

Margaret Walters

Dr. Walters was honored as the recipient of the KSU Distinguished Graduate Teaching Award.

Her long-awaited biography of A. L. Burruss was published. Entitled *A. L. Burruss: The Life of a Georgia Politician and a Man to Trust*, the book includes on the cover these words from President Jimmy Carter: "This book is a genuine contribution to Georgia History."

