



NOTE FROM THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

Welcome once more from the Department of English. This issue of the newsletter focuses on departmental alumni and visiting speakers. Blake Brandes (2006) checks in with a rap in honor of the department and some of his fondly remembered professors. Ashley Gedritis (2011) reports on the unexpected turns an English student can take after graduation, and the advantages of a liberal arts major as general training for the world outside college walls.

Other articles focus on programs and speakers hosted by the Journalism and Creative Writing Programs, and on lecturers by visiting scholars Michelle Stephens (Rutgers) and Marjorie Perloff (Emerita, Stanford), who spoke on the work of the avant-garde composer and writer John Cage as part of the College's interdisciplinary Cagefest. Finally, we report on the residency of Wake MA graduate Ana Manzanar, currently Associate Professor at the University of Salamanca, who joined us for the month of October, 2012. Professor Manzanar offered a number of lectures and seminars on her main current subject of academic inquiry, border studies.

We are lucky to have such a vibrant set of alumni and visitors, who enhance in their various ways the experiences of the current students of the department. May you enjoy reading about them!

Best Wishes,

Scott L. Klein
Associate Professor and Chair

SCHOOL YEAR BRINGS CROP OF ACCLAIMED WRITERS TO INSPIRE STUDENTS

Allison Cacich | Class of 2013

Associate Professor of English Dr. John McNally is a creative writing enthusiast who enjoys sharing his passion for the written word with his students. Entrusted with selecting writers and poets for The Dillion Johnston Writers Reading Series, he has consistently tough decisions to make about whom to bring each year. McNally offered some insight into what the selection process is like and what students and faculty can expect from this year's crop of speakers.

How many speakers are you responsible for bringing to campus each year?

The number varies from year to year, depending upon how many writers I can afford. The fees writers charge range from free to several thousand dollars. I have a modest budget, so the process is a bit of a puzzle.

How do you go about selecting speakers?

I bring in writers I think will appeal to creative writing students since they are the ones who primarily attend the events. I have a long list of writers I'd love to bring to campus, and during the summer I begin to see who might work well for a given semester, if they're available, and what their fee is.

This year's speakers include New York Times best-selling author Gillian Flynn, poet Steve Kistulentz, novelist and North Carolinian Wiley Cash, and award-winning writer Andre Dubus III. Do you have any personal connections to speakers you select?

Usually, no. Last year, I brought to campus Madison Smartt Bell, who's one of the best and most prolific writers working today. I was lucky enough to have studied under him 25 years ago, but hadn't seen him since then. I've met a few of the writers I'm bringing this year, but wouldn't say that I know them.

Why did you pick these specific speakers to come to campus?

I choose writers who may be accessible in terms of meeting with classes or doing an afternoon Q&A in the lounge. I also try to balance, as best as I can, the well-established (Andre Dubus III) with the newcomer (Wiley Cash). I was fortunate to be able to throw a #1 bestseller into the mix this year too (Gillian Flynn).

How was Gillian Flynn received on September 7? Did she read from her "New York Times" bestselling novel Gone Girl?

We were lucky to get Gillian Flynn because she was in town for BookMarks [a non-profit organization in Winston-Salem]. She read from *Gone Girl* and then answered

questions. I think what struck the people asking questions was how accessible she was, and some of my students who attended have continued to quote some of the things she said during her talk, which is what I hope happens, namely that something about these talks will resonate with the creative writers and hopefully help them with their own work.

Does your decision to bring Wiley Cash in the spring have anything to do with his being a native of North Carolina?

Wiley Cash is on a book tour and approached me. I took a look at his book and thought he would be a good fit with the series. His being a native North Carolinian is a bonus.



John McNally

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Do you receive any input from students when you make these decisions?

Students are welcome to make suggestions, but most of my first-year students don't know about the series. Once they go to a reading, they're often surprised by how much they enjoy it, and they sometimes buy the author's books to get them signed.

Do you expect a large student turn-out at these events?

I would love a large student turn-out, but I also realize that I'm in competition with a few dozen other things on campus. I've been involved with readings, in one form or another, for almost 30 years, and there's no way to predict attendance. A well-publicized event may yield a handful of people whereas an event with

good word-of-mouth may pack the room.

Who are you most excited to see speak?

I'm excited to see all of them, of course. But I have to be honest that I'm very excited to see Andre Dubus III, who's one of my favorite writers. I spent some time with him many years ago as his media escort when he was promoting *House of Sand and Fog*, and he couldn't have been a nicer, more down-to-earth guy. It's about being empathetic as a writer and as a person. It's about being generous. And that's someone I want to spend time with on the page as well as in real life.

Allison Cacich is a Communications major from Libertyville, Illinois.



Ashley Gedraitis

FROM TEACHING TO CONSULTING: AN ENGLISH ALUMNA REFLECTS

Ashley Gedraitis | Class of 2011

In 2011, I graduated with an English major and minors in Sociology and Women and Gender Studies: the poster-child for Liberal Arts. It belongs on a bumper sticker or t-shirts. It was easily the best decision I made at Wake. And here's why.

With my degree in English, I found my way into two editorial internships with Simon & Schuster publishing, experiences that not only enriched my understanding of my major but also my understanding of business. Because, yes, publishing – more than a literary lover's playground – is an actual business. I ran profit and loss analyses, researched market trends, and...read submissions and edited manuscripts. It required critical analysis, a logical thought process, and, of course, my treasured literary training.

However, my major took me beyond publishing – it took me to diplomacy. After graduation, I found myself interning at the US Consulate in Belfast, Northern Ireland, with the State Department. According to the Foreign Service Officer who selected me for the role, my application stood out "because I could write." In a job that requires writing countless memos, white papers, and diplomatic cables – writing was a key component. Communication is really

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Deloitte.

a skill acquired, not simply taught; and as you slave away at your essays for Shakespeare and 18th Century British Literature, you're developing a highly coveted skill set.

After Belfast, I journeyed to Poznan, Poland, on a Fulbright Scholarship, teaching English writing at a university. Following my four-year stint as a tutor at the Writing Center coupled with the year spent writing my thesis, I felt very prepared to help my students through the writing process; only months before, I, too, sat exhausted, staring at my laptop, cursing the English language for its deficiencies and lack of synonyms for the word "family." I understood my students' plight because I'd experienced it firsthand. And it helped that they at least tolerated the Don DeLillo and Joyce Carol Oates I forced them to ingest.

And now, a year and half after graduation, the top line of my resume reads "Deloitte Human Capital Analyst, Federal Practice." That's right, this English major went from publishing to diplomacy to teaching to consulting.

And why not? English doesn't give you a business vocabulary or a step-by-step process; any on-the-job training gives you that. English gives you a very unique lens through which to view problems and to develop solutions. It gives you an ability to communicate an idea in various ways and the toolkit to break that idea apart. It really isn't Humanities propaganda. I can say it truthfully, reporting to you from the field. You're not reading *Sense and Sensibility* only because it's a fantastic novel; you're reading it because it's going to make you an awesome consultant, or teacher, or editor, or writer, or whatever else you want to be. And plus, it gives you superior dinner conversation compared to people who read business case studies all day.

Ashley Gedraitis graduated from Wake Forest in 2011 with a degree in English and minors in Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies. She served as the Student Trustee while at Wake Forest and studied abroad in London, England. She received the Fulbright Scholarship following graduation to teach English in Poland and now works at Deloitte in Washington, DC.

STUDENTS GO BEHIND THE SCENES

Emily Seibel | Class of 2013

Wake Forest students, faculty, and staff gathered in September to hear from Pulitzer Center grantee and Emmy Award-winning, journalist Steve Sapienza, who gave a stimulating lecture entitled "The True Cost of Gold." Also featured on the program was Wake



Steve Sapienza

senior, Yasmin Banderas, who won a Pulitzer Fellowship to film her own documentary about face tattooing in Algeria. Sapienza also spoke in journalism classes, discussing his career and his thoughts on the future of the journalism profession.

Sapienza, who considers himself to be a "global ambulance chaser," has spent the last 15 years travelling around the world to shoot and produce award-winning stories for broadcast television and internet distribution.

He has covered a range of human security stories, including the HIV crisis in Haiti and the Dominican Republic; child soldiers in Sierra Leone; climate refugees in Bangladesh; landmine survivors in Cambodia; and many more.

"The thing that drives me is people who say to me, 'No one else talks to me about these issues.' How else is anyone gonna hear about this thing if I don't go and videotape this?"

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Gold Mining in Peru

Much of Sapienza's work is funded by the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, including his project for PBS News Hour, "Peru's Gold Rush: Wealth and Woes," which he discussed during his talk at Wake Forest. Sapienza talked about the impact of the global consumption of goods on local environments in Peru, Thailand, and Bangladesh. His story focused on both small and large-scale gold-mining operations, which have caused such problems as habitat-loss for native species and mercury contamination in the Madre de Dios region of Peru, originally home to lush rainforests.

Sapienza spoke at great length about the intensity of compiling a story of this type.

"I only have about two weeks on the ground to find characters and do interviews," he explains. "There's so much pressure – you have to parachute in, have your translator ready, and you better get that story." But Sapienza seemed to relish the pressure. A self-professed lover of travel, he explains that despite working in dangerous conditions and facing the unknown, his "desire to expose social injustice" and "always being curious" are both part of his motivation.

The actual people he meets while filming and producing pieces also motivate Sapienza. He sees his work as storytelling and strives to produce pieces with interesting characters. "I like characters that are moving and doing things," he explains. "I want to

make you feel the actual person."

Sapienza is passionate about the field of journalism itself, as he explained when he visited Professor Mary Martin Niepold's Niche Feature Writing journalism class. The field has changed over Sapienza's 15 years as a video-journalist, he explains.

"There are not as many opportunities for reporters to get out there," he says, "and the sad thing is, you only get as much time as there is money."

Sapienza explained that opportunities to receive funding, such as from the Pulitzer Center, are valuable for many journalists. Sapienza thinks that now is an important time for journalists of different mediums to "be willing to collaborate."

For a recent piece in West Africa, Sapienza worked with the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting to expose water quality issues in Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and on the Ivory Coast by collaborating with local journalists.

The Pulitzer Center held a contest for West African journalists from any medium in which they awarded grants for completing their water quality stories, and the three winners worked closely with Sapienza during his time in their cities.

To Sapienza, the best part of the project was collaborating with journalists from different disciplines to make their story known.

"The most important part is being open-minded," he explained to eager Wake Forest journalism students. "We're trying to tell stories through combinations of different media. We're trying to figure out different ways to get the story out there."

Students and audience members were inspired by Sapienza and Banderas. Getting the story right – and interesting – was a theme in both their presentations.

Emily Seibel is an English major from Bethesda, MD.

A VERSE FROM BLAKE FOR THE FOREST OF WAKE

Dr. Blake Brandes | Class of 2006

Blake, son of Rand, returned to the land
Where his father once taught Muggsy Bogues
And while at Wake, he decided to stake
A claim to the English abode

For the department was home, and often he'd roam
From Irish to Renaissance lit
All while rapping with canonical trappings
For Richard enjoyed rhyme just a bit

From the hills of Hans and Holdridge's haunts
Across the moats of Moss and Maine
Bonding with Boyle and the valiant Valbuena
With Wilson and Overing acclaimed

Like our great alma mater of poetic fodder
Which I need no hatch to escape
And to all of my profs and peers not forgot
Much love for the Forest of Wake

Blake Brandes graduated from Wake Forest in 2006 with double majors in English and French.

He received one of 43 Marshall Scholarships, grants awarded to American students pursuing graduate studies at British universities. Brandes went on to receive his Masters and PhD in Postcolonial Studies at the University of Kent in the United Kingdom.

While at Wake, Brandes was known throughout the English Department to opt for a rap over a five-paragraph essay to analyze the language of Beowulf or to trace the motifs in Shakespeare.

Brandes is now the owner of Decrypt Productions, a music production and strategic consulting company. He uses his music company and hip-hop skills to connect with urban youth and is "committed to mediating the gap between the academy and the streets."

RADICAL HISTORY: TRANSFORMING PERSPECTIVES

Emily Snow | Class of 2013

Michelle Stephens, Associate Professor at Rutgers University, is a changer. She transforms, alters, and revolutionizes.

"I see her as moving the edge of new scholarship at the intersection of African American studies and Caribbean cultural production," says Dr. Judith Madera, Assistant Professor of English who sponsored Dr. Stephens's visit in November.

Stephens is part of the Radical History Review, an editorial collective at Duke University Press that is composed of a broad network of scholars. These scholars are dedicated to the promotion of "new, progressive ways of thinking about history and its intersection of various modes of knowing," Madera says.

Stephens served as a co-editor for a special issue of the Radical History Review, entitled "Reconceptualizations of the African Diaspora," published in January of 2009. Stephens has not limited herself to literature. "She is very well-versed in gender studies and in gender art as well," Madera explains.

With research specialties in race, Caribbean literature, literature of the Americas, and colonialism, Madera shares many academic interests with Stephens. The Jamaican-born, Yale-educated Rutgers professor has a Ph.D. in American Studies and teaches courses in African American, American, Caribbean, and Black Diaspora Literature.

These kindred academics spoke on a panel together in November at the American Studies Association

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conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Their topic: archipelagic studies of the Americas. Madera explains that she and Stephens addressed how “the perspective of islands poses questions about insularity and narratives of travel and migration.”

Stephens returned to her more usual subject matter for her lecture at Wake Forest, entitled “Escaping the Frame-Up: Matching Eyelines and Black Relation in Paul Robeson’s *Big Fella*.”

Continuing to transform perspectives on history, Stephens has current projects including *Skin Acts*:

New World Black Male Performance and the Desire for Difference, examining twentieth century black actors and singers through the lenses of psychoanalysis and race, and “*Women in Worlds of Color*,” an exploration of sexuality, race, and labor in the New World.

Stephens’s visit to Wake provided valuable insight into her perspective on race and history and allowed her to share her views with a new audience.

Emily Snow is an English major from Greenville, South Carolina.

CAGEFEST: CONCEPTUAL POETRY REFOCUSSED, REVEALED

Drew Thies | Class of 2013

In the seventh installment of the Cagefest series, Dr. Marjorie Perloff, Scholar-in-Residence at the University of Southern California and Professor Emerita of English at Stanford University, discussed John Cage’s conceptual poetry, which incited the increase in conceptual poets in the years to come.

Drawing upon her extensive background in modernist and contemporary poetry and poetics, Perloff



Marjorie Perloff

focused on a variety of Cage’s rewritings of various writers’ and artists’ work, notably Samuel Beckett, Allen Ginsberg, and Arnold Schoenberg. Her contention is that this simultaneous celebration and criticism present a side of

poetry that is radically democratic in its intent and scope, paving the way for new interpretation and understanding.

Beckett’s poem, “They Come,” was the first subject of Perloff’s discussion and one of the first of Cage’s rewriting. Cage rewrites Beckett’s “poem in praise of love” using mesostic form, that is to say, a poem wherein a vertical phrase intersects the middle of the lines of text. Cage takes this process a step further, using only words from the original and in their respective order. This task, a highly mechanical one given the meager 33 distinct words which make up Beckett’s poem, produces what Perloff explains is a radical break from the succinct and simple style of Beckett, instead emphasizing fragmentation, ellipsis, and incompleteness. Cage’s emphasis on words selected from Beckett’s poetry, “it,” “is,” and “the”—indeed, the poem concludes with “the”—not only recasts the abstraction of Beckett’s later work, but, ironically, creates a poem in its own right, emphasizing and illuminating the silence within Beckett’s original, as produced by the line breaks and omissions of Cage’s.

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Cage applies a similar technique to Ginsberg's famous "Howl," wherein the quintessential beat poem's excessive energy is refigured into Cage's mesostic form. His rewriting of Ginsberg's poem, on the occasion of the poet's sixtieth birthday, celebrates Ginsberg himself—the vertical line of text which interrupts the poem spelling "Allen Ginsberg"—but also lays bare the exuberant nature of "Howl," serving as a critique of the hyperbole of Ginsberg's seminal work.

In both these works, Perloff argues, Cage creates more than a poem about a poem, but sets the two into conversation with each other, revealing nuances and creating new meanings for both "They Come" and "Howl."

This emphasis on the "chance" word selection and application to a new form relates greatly to the way in which Cage himself was influenced by Zen Buddhism, particularly I Ching. The trend toward random selection, enhanced through the computing technology for which Cage became well-known, is foregrounded in his rewritings of letters by Schoenberg, his musical mentor, to himself and others. Perloff quipped that for even someone as aware of Cage's seeming randomness as herself, finding the source of these reappropriations was an enormously tedious task.

Cage's rewritings of Schoenberg's letters both showcase and satirize the composer's notorious reticence to take on new students and humbly respond

to criticism while also maintaining Cage's clear veneration of his mentor. Perloff notes the ambiguity between the nondistinction of computerized I Ching as well as, in parts, Cage's clearly calculated decision to lift from specific sections of the letters.

She contends that this ambiguity foregrounds the act of choosing while generating doubt surrounding mimetic modes of history that rely upon empiricism and contextualization. By setting Schoenberg the man into dialogue with Cage's rewriting in a manner similar to that of his mesostic poetry, Perloff sees a radically democratic aspect within Cage's work: The uncertainty between chance and determinacy creates a stage where even the most neglected of text is elevated to a key role in discussion.

Perloff shared a story about a colleague who was opposed to including Cage in a contemporary survey of English language poets, because Cage, categorically, was not poetic. Regardless of Cage's substantial influence on conceptual poets to follow, Perloff espoused a distinctly poetic function in Cage's creation of a "democratic circus": His redistribution of original texts at the unit level to form entirely new works creates a "plurality of centers" rather than a singular, domineering purpose—thus, "They Come" of Beckett's, and, indeed, Ginsberg's and Schoenberg's works, are transformed into a "here comes everybody."

Drew Thies is an English major from Martinsville, Virginia.

BORDER AESTHETICS: MANZANAS RE-CROSSES BORDERS

Emily Snow | Class of 2013

Ana Manzanás, then a graduate student interested in English and American Studies, traveled from the University of Salamanca in Spain to Wake Forest University in the late 1980s on an exchange program.

Now an Associate Professor at the University of

Salamanca, Dr. Manzanás returned to Wake Forest in October, when she was hosted by her former professor, Dr. Mary DeShazer. Manzanás recalled her experience as a student at Wake Forest: "I was an avid reader but not an avid writer," she explains. "My professors – Professor DeShazer, Professor Boyle, Professor Hans – made me work nonstop."

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Upon her return to Spain, Manzanas began working on her Ph.D., researching African American literature. Manzanas had discovered a new academic passion: border studies. She began reading works from various disciplines, such as philosophy, geography, and cultural theory.

During her visit on campus, Manzanas was quick to explain that literature and culture are not critical components of the canon of border studies. “The field needs to incorporate literature and culture,” she says, “but I am not sure it’s going to.”

However, Manzanas is not out to revolutionize the face of border studies, she says with a shrug. Her lecture series at Wake Forest reflected her ability to work within a field that, while highly interdisciplinary, still neglects some disciplines.

In four lectures, Manzanas targeted different audiences with varying academic interests. Her talks were also open to the public.

Her first lecture, “Border Aesthetics and Spatial Considerations,” conceptualized the “border” for laypersons of the field. Geopolitical borders, Manzanas explained, have punctuated history.

“People long for a time when borders were in place, but it is a nostalgia for something that never existed,” she says, referencing the disintegration of borders in regions such as the European Union. Borders both separate and join, Manzanas noted, creating a complex merging of the lines on a map.

Other lectures narrowed in scope and reference. “Lines on the Land: Divisible Borders” addressed the border as a spatial and conceptual object in Courtney Hunt’s

film *Frozen River*, linking the oneness of the border with the oneness of the self. Manzanas continued the theme of liquid borders in her third lecture, “Lines on the Water: Sea as Palimpsest,” in which she discussed the intersection of trajectories in the Atlantic Ocean.

For her final lecture, “Logic of Detention in Spielberg’s *The Terminal* and McCarthy’s *The Visitor*,” Manzanas incorporated film studies, the theme of alienation and political anxieties for a resounding finish to her series.

Manzanas praised the evolution of the Department of English in the years since she was a student in the rooms of Tribble.

“It’s a department I would have only dreamed of,” she says. “There is a lot of interconnectedness, such as the Humanities Department. I wish we had that interdisciplinarity [in Salamanca].”

Manzanas’s visit was part of the Salamanca Faculty Development Collaborative, a new program in the Office of Global Affairs.

Associate Provost Dr. Kline Harrison describes this innovative faculty program as a “natural extension of our strong relation with the University of Salamanca.”

Dr. Harrison, Dr. Dean Franco, Dr. Judith Madera, Dr. Wanda Balzano, Dr. David Phillips, Dr. Woody Hood, and Dr. Candelas Gala assisted in developing Dr. Manzanas’s visit.

Emily Snow is an English major from Greenville, South Carolina.