In Memory

A reprint of an article first published in UST Newsroom about the death of Dr. Robert Foy

Worlds of Wonder

An overview of our common context theme “wonder” and an excerpt of a lecture from ACTC visiting poet, Aimee Nezhukumatathil, on this theme

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Young Scholars

Summer Program

Reflections from two English majors who participated in the UST Young Scholars summer program

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In celebration of the M.A. in English program’s 20th anniversary, an update on three alumni who were among the program’s first graduates

Current Happenings

Recent department events and news from faculty, current students, and alumni

Save the Date!

Coming in Spring 2014: Anthony Doerr’s Sacred Arts Festival Reading, the Emily Dickinson Marathon Reading, and the graduate English and Art History Interdisciplinary Conference

Co-editors:

Andy Leet
Joyce Poley

In Memory

Editor’s Note: Shortly after our Spring 2013 issue of Writing in the Margins was published, we received news that retired English professor Rob Foy had passed away. The article that follows was written by Tom Coulliard ’75 and published in the St. Thomas Newsroom on May 15; it is reprinted here with permission of the Newsroom.

Dr. Rob Foy, 78, a native of Georgia and described by English Department chair Dr. Andrew Scheiber as “the epitome of the Southern gentleman – scholar, full of manners, wit, and charming eccentricities – and a heart and soul as big as the outdoors,” died May 1.

During his 1973-2001 tenure at St. Thomas, Foy taught British literature and was best known for teaching Shakespeare. He also served as chair of the English Department from 1973-1976, and as the founding director of the Center for Faculty Development from 1981-1987.

After graduating in 1955 from Emory University in Atlanta, he served as a navigator/radar observer in the U.S. Air Force, 1956-1959, and in the Minnesota Air National Guard, 1959-1961. He went on to earn a Ph.D. in English (Latin minor) at the University of Minnesota in 1973.

He is survived by daughters Malinda Foy and Elizabeth Foy Bergman, and grandchildren Helena and William Bergman. His wife of 42 years, Nancy Burkitt Foy, died in 2002.

Elizabeth remembers her father having two great passions for things (other than people) in his life – his garden and drama – specifically Shakespeare: “While his passions wandered and expanded – at the end those two things remained core to who he was.

“As to his garden, there were many hand-drawn plans for the garden floating around the house. He was a quasi-trained landscape architect as he dropped out of college for a semester to study the subject, reflecting an interest in plants and design he had had since childhood. But after one semester he clearly knew that his greatest satisfaction was in academia. His garden plans all featured ‘the grass circle,’ which was the centerpiece of the garden. As a child it really frustrated me that we were not allowed to walk on it. I mean – it was just grass! Only as an adult have I really come to understand the beautiful geometric simplicity it represented. The best time to talk with him was when he was gardening. His hands were busy – but his mind free. I can remember long talks, mostly about politics and government with him while he planted.”

“Over the years, he had many young helpers beyond me and my sister – they came away knowing a lot more about Shakespeare, gardening, and landscape architecture, and I think they always knew they had found a friend and mentor,” Malinda commented.

“Drama was his other consistent passion,” Elizabeth continued. “We went to the theater a lot. I might have been six when I sat through my first Shakespearean play. I am not sure when exactly I started to understand them or more importantly appreciate them – but I remain an active and appreciative theater goer. There would always be a lecture before the show. First, explaining the plot and then detailing how the play should really be done. Phrases such as ‘if the director really understands Shakespeare …’ were common. Most memorable was his discussion of the levels. He would say, ‘On one level this is a play about love, but on another level – which meant a deeper one – it is about loss of identity.’ There were always three levels.
“My sister and I would jokingly ask him to tell us about the levels before he started on this topic, and he would be delighted we were so interested. It took him a while to realize that his sweet girls had become snotty teenagers. I sometimes find myself talking about the levels after I see a play.”

“But more than anything, my father and mother encouraged me and my sister to find our potential, believe in ourselves, and serve our communities,” Malinda summarized.

Dr. Michael Jordan, English Department, describes Foy as “an engaged teacher with far-reaching intellectual interests that rendered him well suited to be the founding director of the Faculty Development program at St. Thomas, a position he first held the year I arrived here in 1982. He was also one of the collaborators for a program at St. Thomas called ‘Texts and Traditions’ that for a short while brought together core courses in English and theology in an integrated sequence. Rob brought intellectual spark and wit to every conversation, and was especially renowned for his Shakespeare course.

“I regarded Rob as something of a mentor during my first years at St. Thomas, and he graciously introduced me to the complex reality of the institution while assuring me that there were good opportunities here for true interdisciplinary learning. The sound of his laughter during hallway conversations was a regular feature of life in the English Department. In the years following his retirement, I would encounter him from time to time at the theater or at a classical music concert or in the hardware store, and it was evident that he never lost the endless love of learning that seemed always to be brimming in him.”

Being a student of Foy also made for interesting experiences. Brian Brown ’98 M.A., Executive Director of Media and Publications in University Relations, recalls taking a couple of master’s in English classes with him in the 1990s, including an independent study one summer on the influence of jazz on the Beat poets:

“Once a week I would bike over to Rob’s house near Macalester and we would talk for hours — rarely on topic, unless I forced the issue. Rob was passionate about so many things — Shakespeare, gardening, travel. Eventually, his beloved wife, Nancy, would step out onto the porch with homemade iced tea and cookies. Rob would turn to me — often mid-sentence — and say, ‘Well, that’s enough of that. Let’s eat something.’ Rob frequently embodied the ‘absent-minded professor’ stereotype. I remember stopping by his office at 44 North Cleveland once when he was particularly distracted. I asked him what was wrong, and he said he rode his brand-new bike to campus and someone stole it. ‘I leaned it up against the tree outside and when I went back out a few hours later it was gone!'”

Although Foy was particularly fond of Shakespeare, it wasn’t all Shakespeare all the time in class. Kelly Engebretson ’99 M.A., a writer and editor in University Relations, recalls this unique Shakespeare class break: “Dr. Foy unwittingly introduced me to yoga during his Shakespeare class when I was a graduate student in 1997. He asked a friend of his — an instructor at a nearby yoga studio — to lead a 15-minute yoga session during the break in our three-hour evening class. Every week she showed up to lead us through a series of sun salutations and the like. Those of us who didn’t smoke would participate, and we loved it. I can still picture Dr. Foy, barefoot and jolly, easing into ‘Downward Dog’ like it was no trouble at all.”

Foy was among 25 noted and popular professors whose faces were featured in caricatures drawn by John Kasch ‘83 on the cover of the 1981 Aquinas yearbook, along with caricatures of the university’s president, provost, and Vice President Walter Mondale.

A colleague, Dr. Lon Otto, describes Foy as a “brilliant scholar, working always on a book about Shakespeare and the biblical David story, a book that never was finished but is very real and powerful to those of us who knew Rob, a book in the oral tradition, always his most natural medium, along with soil and brick and plants. He was one of the most complicated and interesting people I’ve ever known — funny and generous and deeply intelligent, passionate about what he loved, absolutely unforgettable.”

Foy was the chair of the English Department when Otto was hired at St. Thomas. “He and Nancy made me feel like a part of their family those first few years, and I will be forever grateful to have been included in that loving and intellectual and often chaotic household. Among his many other talents, Rob was a formidable landscape gardener. It was an honor and an education to scavenge brick and stone with him on demolition sites in the evenings after the workers had quit for the day, to build fences with him, to follow the ever-evolving intricacies of his richly folded city garden.”

Nancy shared Rob’s passion for gardening. Their garden was written about in both the Minneapolis and St. Paul daily newspapers, and in Highland Park’s The Villager. Titled “Healing Words,” The Villager story was reprinted in the fall 2005 edition of Writing in the Margins (Page 12), a publication of the English Department.

Carol Nigrelli, the author, wrote: “It’s a great way for a mental guy to get his hands dirty,” Foy said. The division of labor was simple: He did the work; his wife nodded her approval. ‘My wife loved the garden,’ Foy said. ‘She loved to buy plants for it. She loved to show it off. She loved to be on garden tours. But she didn’t want to get her hands dirty.’”

Their love of gardening and their advocacy for the Center for Victims of Torture resulted in the 2005 publication of Landskips, a 46-page book of Rob’s poetry about nature and gardens. He dedicated the book to his late wife: “Lover of gardens and the Center for Victims of Torture.” Proceeds from sales of the book were donated to the center.
Worlds of Wonder

The English Department’s common context theme for its ENGL 121 introductory English courses this academic year was “wonder.” As faculty member Dr. Todd Lawrence writes, “It’s useful to think of wonder as both an action and an emotion. For example, to wonder is to ponder, be curious, explore, consider, and ruminant. To wonder is to fathom ideas and concepts that require time and contemplation to comprehend; wonder is the motivation that pushes us to examine and explore the world we live in. . . . To experience ‘wonder,’ then, as an emotion or state of being, is to be struck by the rare or unexpected, the vast and unexplained – to be enamored by the workings of that which we strive and struggle to understand.”

To more actively engage students with this year’s theme, common context events were focused around the three Tupelo Press poetry collections of Aimee Nezhukumatathil, who visited St. Thomas in mid-October as part of the ACTC (Associated Colleges of the Twin Cities) Visiting Writer program. Described in early 2013 as a “Young Poet to Watch” by former U.S. Poet Laureate, Rita Dove, Nezhukumatathil not only gave a public reading to a packed audience as well as a separate craft lecture, but she also participated in numerous Q & A sessions with students and sat in on our creative writing classes.

In her introduction to Nezhukumatathil’s public reading, Dr. Leslie Adrienne Miller notes: “In a short essay you’ll find on the Academy of American Poetry website, ‘The Poetry of Superstition and Supposition,’ Nezhukumatathil writes that ‘superstition is an integral and constantly shifting part of the richness of culture in an increasingly secular world. New technologies and new relationships to nature often breed new superstitions as we grapple with changes and advancements.’ [T]his statement is key to understanding Aimee’s poetics, her ability to render ‘wonder’ in action: the action of the mind in the process of negotiating the mystery that lies between sensory experience and belief, science, and ritual.”

Since Nezhukumatathil’s understanding and recognition of wonder in poetry was the subject of her craft lecture, we are pleased to provide a few excerpts of it below with her kind permission.

You should have seen the look of confusion and even disgust on my friends’ faces when I told them we would be having fish for breakfast. Fried fish: the size of our pinky fingers
and with heads and eyeballs still intact! This was the morning after a slumber party during my junior high years—weren’t there supposed to be ‘fun’ foods like jelly-filled donuts or fresh baked muffins? Clean, sweet foods. Nothing with eyeballs. It was hard for me to explain to my friends that this was considered normal in the Philippines (where my mother is from) and in fact, a sign of great respect for your guests to be served hot crispy fish and rice for breakfast. Seeing my friends’ faces twisted in disappointment made me, at first, disappointed that they wouldn’t try something new, but second, mad at myself for not describing the delicious fish in such a way as to make it more appetizing and exciting.

Poetry is like one of those bullion/chicken broth cubes that you use to make a giant pot of soup. If you’ve ever unwrapped the cube and tasted it, you know that it is extremely concentrated with flavor and salt. These pungent cubes can color and flavor the description of something ordinary (water) into the most vibrant and alive way of communicating (a tasty soup). Poetry writing fills in the gaps of understanding an event, a place, a person. Poetry writing fills in the gaps of understanding an event, a place, a person. I find, thankfully, that I can directly trace my poetry is research-based, I do find myself latching on to words that burble and singe my cheeks. I often find that I can’t help it — I confess I fall in love with words, the sound and color and flavor of words every day, or at least the days I get to spend reading and researching. How can you come across words like okapi, kakamora, dousing, and wentletrap and not fall madly, hopelessly in love?

A fire-eater named Mannix opens his mouth wide as he can and inserts a flaming torch at an angle of seventy-five degrees — the flame rushing out of his open mouth instead of going down into his lungs. The trick is to keep a steady current of air coming out of his mouth that prevents the torch flame from hitting his lips and yet doesn’t make the fire jump around and singe his cheeks. Since so much of my poetry is research-based, I do find myself latching on to words that burble and singe my cheeks. I often find that I can’t help it — I confess I fall in love with words, the sound and color and flavor of words every day, or at least the days I get to spend reading and researching. How can you come across words like okapi, kakamora, dousing, and wentletrap and not fall madly, hopelessly in love?

How can you not ache to write them, let your speech be infused with them like herbs in a delicate oil? Of course, like the fire-eaters, too much flame and burst of light can be a bad thing, especially if your everyday speech becomes a cacophony of phony, like you sound like you have been reading your father’s old encyclopedias again. But I find, thankfully, that I can directly trace back to my reading of say – pirate dictionaries, or south Pacific shell identification guides; these are just the things to spice up everyday conversation without delving into a big mess of explanation. I am often not even aware of how my researching/writing crosses over into everyday conversations when I unconsciously pepper my speech with a newly learned (or written) phrase or metaphor that I had originally meant for a poem. But more often than not, I am grateful, eager for the burn.

I mentioned at my reading yesterday a mantra from poet Mary Oliver that I include on all of my syllabi: Pay attention. / Be astonished. / Tell about it.

One of my other favorite quotes from Mary Oliver is: “Still, what I want in my life is to be willing to be dazzled – to cast aside the weight of facts and maybe even to float a little above this difficult world. I want to believe I am looking into the white fire of a great mystery.” Oliver does not denigrate facts. Her poetry is filled with precise observations of the natural world that match in their exactitude those of any scientist; this is one reason I find her work so attractive. Her exact knowledge of nature is the springboard from which she dives into the white fire of mystery. She asks to be willing to be dazzled. She asks for more than the weight of facts.

Growing up as one of the only Asian-Americans in most of my schools always set me a little apart, always observing. But my parents fostered a sense of being grateful and amazed and wanting to always be curious about the world and its inhabitants so I never truly felt alone. I can remember my father taking me and my younger sister on a hike in the mountains around the Phoenix suburbs, pointing out the names of each of the various cacti and desert flowers we encountered. We’d stop and find bits of quartz crystals or geodes hidden on the trails: such treasures! Saguaro, ocotillo, yellowbell, shrubby bulbines, chuparosa – just try to say those names out loud without smiling. So there was never a light bulb moment for me in terms of figuring out who I was, but rather, it was in college at Ohio State, where I learned there was a whole craft and study of how to clearly and musically communicate and record the world around me. I hope I never ever stop being curious and feeling like a student on this planet. There are always insect wings and jellyfish bells to marvel over, [and] I still need to learn the color names of glaciers – so much bounty and life that I want to record on the page.
We’re Still Looking for Some Great Books!

Have you read a great book that you think other alumni readers would enjoy? If so, we encourage you to submit a short (160-175 words) review for the next issue of Writing in the Margins, which will be published in May 2014. Submissions can be sent to english@stthomas.edu and will be accepted through April 1. We look forward to seeing your recommendations!

James McBride, The Good Lord Bird

Henry Shackleford is a 12-year-old, black, Huck Finn-like first-person narrator and picaresque anti-hero who journeys around having rip-roaring adventures in the mid-19th century with John Brown (yes, that John Brown). When he finally fetches up with Brown at the end of the novel at Harpers Ferry in 1859, Henry has seen his pa killed, been forced to masquerade as a girl to survive, seen his best friend and son of John Brown shot down, participated in a failed slave insurrection, witnessed the public hanging of nine black slaves, and met Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman. Then, he escapes Harpers Ferry just before Brown is captured and lives to be over 101 years old. Young Henry is as disrespectful, illiterate, innocent, and sound-hearted as Huck, and belongs to a cadre of thoroughly likable rascals and scamps in American literature – from Rip Van Winkle and Huck, to Dean Moriarty, Holden Caulfield, Augie March, and even Bart Simpson. A kind of Huck Finn meets Billy the Kid and Billy Sunday at Harpers Ferry. With humor. This potential classic was honored in mid-November as a 2013 National Book Award winner in the fiction category.

John Williams, Stoner
Viking, 1965

Republished by New York Review Books in 2006, John Williams’ 1965 novel is a lost classic that deserves to be read by anyone interested in a certain kind of quiet, Howellsian, American realism in which the son of a dirt-poor Missouri farm family makes good as a college English professor and scholar but lives a frustrated life. His marriage becomes empty, his academic and teaching career not particularly distinguished, his daughter, wife, and family alienated. William Stoner lives a restrained, self-effacing, nearly invisible life told in a clear, plain style detailing his personal and professional vicissitudes. Yet his late-life love affair and fierce devotion to his calling and students are powerfully told and deeply moving. The characters are engaging, honest, and recognizably human. Stoner himself is an archetypal American with a touch of existential hero, quietly eloquent in his marginality, who endures in a career he loves uncomplainingly, but ultimately suffers in undeservedly. He creates a life worth living out of disappointments and sacrifices, and finds some degree of warmth and meaning in his literature and himself in a cold world.

Ron Rash, Serena
Harpercollins, 2008

Evoking timeless themes of greed and betrayal, Rash’s Pen/Faulkner Award finalist tells the story of George and Serena Pemberton’s timber dynasty in North Carolina in 1929. Just as the forests are razed, so too are many of the folks standing in the way of the Pemberton’s rise to power likewise cut down. Despite the constraints imposed on women in 1929, it is Serena who is fully at the helm in this novel. While Rash consciously channels Macbeth, he indicates in an interview that he sees his novel “more in the tradition of Marlowe’s plays and the will to power.” We all know how that worked out for the Thane of Cawdor! For those in the mood for a book that includes a touch of evil and mayhem, this novel is worth your time. For movie buffs, a film version of Serena – starring Jennifer Lawrence and Bradley Cooper – is in the works and scheduled to be released in early 2014.

–Marla Borer, M.A. ’01

We extend our thanks to alumnus Bill Cosgrove ’61 for submitting the following two reviews:
“The Revision of a Middle Grade Novel”
Melissa Seymour

The focus of my Young Scholars Grant was working on a full revision of my middle grade fantasy novel, *The Matchers*. Dr. Heather Bouwman was my faculty mentor and her insight was extremely helpful throughout the revision process.

I’m currently majoring in English with a Writing Emphasis, Justice and Peace Studies, and Women’s Studies. Since the specific focus and goal of my research was to learn how to create and write strong female characters in my fantasy novel, this project gave me the opportunity to incorporate aspects of all three of my majors into one work. Some of the resources I examined included Sheryl Klein’s *Second Sight*, Maria Nikolajeva’s research on the effects of protagonists’ choices in children’s literature, and E.M. Forster’s round and flat characters.

I began writing this manuscript several years ago but didn’t start working on it seriously until last year. Thanks to the acceptance of my Young Scholars Grant proposal, I was able to use the time last summer to delve into my manuscript and make some big changes. With Dr. Bouwman’s assistance, I focused on plot, voice, and character development. While I still have a lot of work to do before submitting it for publication, this revision changed my manuscript drastically. My character’s voices became more believable and I was also able to tackle more issues in my manuscript’s plot and sub-plots.

I am continuing to work on *The Matchers* and will be doing another extensive revision next semester (and hopefully even more in grad school). I encourage other English majors and minors to apply for this incredible summer program, as it gave me the focus I needed to dedicate my whole summer to my novel.
Where Are They Now?

Twenty years ago this fall, 36 students entered our brand new Master of Arts in English program at the University of St. Thomas. The program was the brainchild of Dr. Michael Mikolajczak, who served as its first director. Three classes were offered that first semester in 1993 and six students made up the first graduating class. As a special focus in this anniversary year, we present this first of a two-part feature about those students from our first graduating class, highlighting their journey while here at St. Thomas and beyond. Students profiled in this issue are Jenni Runte, Mary (Anderson) Dupont, and Adam Lee.

What dreams did you have when you entered the program and what happened after graduation?

JENN: I was hoping to teach at the college level. The program was challenging, invigorating, and inspiring. After UST, I prepared for and attended more graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, then taught at a private college in Milwaukee for two very rewarding years. After returning to the Twin Cities, I worked at Metropolitan State University, coordinating the Writing Center, and continued teaching.

MARY: When I entered the program, I considered going on to apply to a Ph.D. program. The month before I started, I became engaged to my husband; we were married in July of 1994 and I finished the Master of Arts that December. Soon after, I got a job managing the office for the budding Hungry Mind Press, a small publishing company that grew out of the St. Paul bookstore. While I worked there, I also taught at Inver Hills Community College and Minneapolis Technical and Community College, primarily composition intro courses that helped returning students “catch up” on grammar and essay-writing tools before taking English 101.

ADAM: While at St. Thomas my dominant dream was to use my M.A. in English to teach abroad and see the world. The year after graduating I took a university job in South Korea. I had planned to spend a year or two there and then move on to a new country and continue to teach in cities around the world. I quickly learned Korean and fell in love with the culture, and my job quickly turned into a full-time visiting professor position with 20-weeks of paid vacation to travel around Asia.

Tell us about what you are presently doing.

JENN: I am still working at Metropolitan State University, now directing the Center for Academic Excellence. I expect to retire before long and enjoy some long-deferred traveling and gardening. I also hope to resume studying, devoting more time to reading and writing. My two sons are grown, and I’m active in our local lake association and my faith community where I live in Lindström, MN.

MARY: My current interests include Minnesota history and other U.S. and world history that relates to family research. I am hoping to develop book projects from combining local and immigration history with real stories. I spend a fair amount of time at libraries, the Minnesota Historical Society, and dusty corners with microfilm machines and rooms full of tattered files and fascinating secrets.

“I remember field trips in my Hemingway and Fitzgerald class; I have a photo on the wall of my office of my class standing outside the Fitzgerald row house on Summit Avenue — one of the many stops on our tour of Fitzgerald’s St. Paul haunts.”

Dr. Kelli Larson, about a spring 1995 seminar

“In my Novel and Film class, I remember that I was around the same age as my students. Several people from my classes work here at UST and another few are Facebook friends.”

Dr. Catherine Craft-Fairchild, memories of spring 1994
ADAM: I am presently in the midst of my first sabbatical, which I’m using to backpack around the world and finish a textbook on travel writing. So far this year, I went from Istanbul to Italy through the Balkans, to China via Qatar and the Seychelles, and am now in southern Africa backpacking, writing, and making new study abroad contacts, safari-ing and reading heaps of African novels.

What is a favorite book you have read in the past year and what makes it a favorite?

JENN: I loved *Cutting for Stone*. It’s a book I’ll return to for its many levels of learning – places, disciplines, and cultures, to name a few – as well as its fascinating, diverse characters.

MARY: I still treasure Morrison, Atwood, and writers like Kingsolver, Byatt, and even (gasp!) several male writers. I watch websites for their new books and buy them hardcover on the publication date.

ADAM: I have been reading heaps of African novels lately—I just finished reading *The Heart of Redness, Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, *Zebra Crossing*, *Thirteen Cents* and Coetzee’s new *The Childhood of Jesus*.

In what ways have you found your graduate English degree helpful?

JENN: I use it all the time, if not explicitly in my teaching and in the Writing Center, then in the recall of works we studied. I’m especially grateful to Dr. Bob Miller and his Composition Theory class. That experience shaped my professional life and sustains it to this day.

MARY: I might still be in the research phase of my next creations – but my master’s degree laid the groundwork, and I can’t wait to see what happens!

ADAM: My education at St. Thomas not only prepared me perfectly for a life abroad of teaching literature and language while doing ministry and service, but also for the vocation of being a professor at a Christian liberal arts university.

What advice would you give to students graduating from the program now?

JENN: Any old job can pay the bills, but a job where you can work with wonderful, challenging people, where you can grow beyond your scholar self to engage with others and know them, and where the hollow spaces in your heart become full is rare, but well worth working toward.

MARY: I would tell the person that the program at St. Thomas was one of the most significant privileges of my life, and I am extremely grateful to have been on that campus among the English faculty for even that short time.

ADAM: If you aren’t ready to start a career or Ph.D. program after graduation, take a gap year and teach abroad. Your M.A. in English from St. Thomas could get you an instructor position in almost any country around the world.

Read more about these student journeys in the News section of our English Department web page at www.stthomas.edu/english/graduate
Children’s book author ANNE URSU recently visited Dr. Heather Bouwman’s ENGL 326 Writing for Children & Young Adults class and shared advice and wisdom about writing books for children. Ursu is the author of several books for young readers and is the 2013 recipient of the McKnight Fellowship in Children’s Literature. Her latest book, *The Real Boy*, is an Indie Next pick and was on the 2013 longlist for the National Book Award.

CONNOR RYAN ’07, the 2005-2006 English major recipient of the Hague Award for Excellence and now a Ph.D. candidate in English at Michigan State University presented “Culture Class Comedies: Nigerian Popular Cinema, Urbanism, and Cultural Incongruity” on campus in early November. With the generous support of the Fulbright Fellowship, he recently completed a year of dissertation research in Nigeria where he explored the relationship between Nigerian popular cinema, commonly called Nollywood, and the city of Lagos, the nation’s largest metropolis. His presentation spotlighted a specific genre of Nigerian films which he terms “culture clash comedies,” films in which popular notions of cultural difference form the basis for provocative humor.

At a colloquium event in mid-November, Emily James presented “Adolescent Modernism: Virginia Woolf’s Letter to a Young Poet.” In 1931, the Hogarth Press published the first of three volumes of poetry by Joan Easdale, an eccentric child prodigy who would become acclaimed in London’s literary circles. Virginia Woolf first noticed Easdale’s “strange” and “phosphorescent” poems in 1930, and the pair corresponded for nearly a decade. In examining Easdale’s gothic verses alongside Woolf’s diaries and letters, James’ talk uncovered how the young poet became – for Woolf as well as a wider readership – an emblem of a style both nostalgic and inventive.

The English Department recently approved a NEW SUMMER STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM for undergraduate students at the University of Greenwich. In this six-week “Literature of London” course, students see a play at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, visit art galleries and museums, and take literary and historical walking tours of London as part of their coursework.

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Connor Ryan

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Emily James gave two presentations in late August at the Modernist Studies Association conference at the University of Sussex in Brighton, UK. One was an untitled demonstration as part of a “Roundtable on Digital Pedagogies” and the other was “A Portrait of the Artist’s Heart Disease,” which was part of a panel that she organized.

Amy Muse presented “Byron and the Maids of Athens” at the International Byron Conference, King’s College London, July 1-6.

Adjunct faculty member DOUG PHILLIPS presented “Tarrying with the Negative: Beckett, Boredom, and Hanging Ourselves Tomorrow” at the Comparative Drama Conference in Baltimore, MD, last April. His review of Mark Edmundson’s Why Teach? In Defense of a Real Education for The Key Reporter was a cover-feature for the month of September. Finally, his article “Noose Allure: Little Suicides and Singularity in Beckett’s Godot” will be published in the 2013 volume of Text & Presentation.

Adjunct faculty member LUCAS PINGEL co-authored a chapbook of poetry with fellow poet BJ Love. Released last summer by Strange Cage Press, it’s titled *Yes, I’m Sure This Was a Beautiful Place*.

Adjunct faculty member LIZ ROLFSMEIER has been writing weekly Arts & Leisure stories for the Star Tribune newspaper. In the last few months she’s interviewed William Kent Krueger (author), Stephanie Molstre-Kotz (artist) and musicians like Bruce Hornsby and Ricky Skaggs. She’s also done other fun features, including a story on Conductor Bud’s miniature railway garden in Eagan and the Vintage Band Festival in Hastings.

Samantha Schwab ‘13, received a Program Assistant/Pre-Law intern position at Legal Rights Center, a Minneapolis nonprofit.

KELLY KRAEMER ‘10, the 2008-2009 English major recipient of the Hague Award for Excellence, completed her M. S. in Library Science degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison this past spring and is now working as a Business Information and Outreach Librarian at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University.

Save the Date! Upcoming Spring 2014 Events

Wednesday, March 12, 2014
Sacred Arts Festival Reading: Anthony Doerr
7:30 p.m., O’Shaughnessy Educational Center Auditorium

Anthony Doerr is the author of two short story collections, the novel About Grace, and a memoir titled Four Seasons in Rome. His new novel, All the Light We Cannot See, is scheduled to be released by Scribner in May 2014.

Friday, April 25, 2014
Emily Dickinson Marathon Reading:
All Dickinson, All Day!
8 a.m.-10 p.m., O’Shaughnessy-Frey Library Center – O’Shaughnessy Room

At this event co-sponsored by UST Libraries and the Luann Dummer Center for Women, the English Department will host a marathon reading of Emily Dickinson’s poetry to celebrate National Poetry Month.

The goal: To read aloud all of Dickinson’s poems — from #1 to #1,789 — between 8 a.m. and about 10 p.m. Readers may come and go as they please, staying for a half-hour or making a day of it. Participants will sit in a circle and take turns reading; listeners are welcome too.

Readers will use Ralph W. Franklin’s The Poems of Emily Dickinson. If you don’t have this version, loaner copies generously donated by Common Good Books will be on hand. This event is free and open to the public.

Friday, April 25, 2014
Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference
Noon-6 p.m., McNeely Hall

This year’s spring conference will be co-hosted by the English and Art History graduate programs. Students from St. Thomas and other regional schools will present papers related to the conference theme: Visualizing the Past/Imagining the Future.

The conference will include a light lunch at 1 p.m. and a keynote address from artist Harriet Bart at 2 p.m. If alumni would like to attend the lunch, please RSVP to Nathan Wunrow at njwunrow@stthomas.edu. Additional information about the conference will be released on the St. Thomas graduate English website (www.stthomas.edu/gradenglish) in early April.

JESSICA ALGOO’S short story, “A Green Umbrella,” won the Annual Fiction Award for Teen Ink magazine this past summer. “Bite the Hand,” formerly on the Flash Fiction World website, was selected for inclusion in the print anthology Flash Fiction World - Volume 4 (ed. Vic Errington).

BRYTON ALTÉMOSE, who studied at the University of Edinburgh this past summer, recently learned that her poem “for snake bites” was accepted by Northern Light, a biannual journal of creative writing published by SUISS (Scotish Universities’ International Summer School program).

English major RACHEL BUSSE is the 2013-2014 recipient of the Hague Award for Excellence, which was established by a generous donation from the James A. Kurpius ’60 family in honor of Paul Hague, a faculty member in the English Department from 1955-1990 and an advisor to the Aquinas yearbook from 1957-1961.

SHANNON HEITKAMP participated in the Excel! Research Scholars Program this past summer and completed a research paper titled “Writing Across Cultures: International Students’ Literacy Narratives,” which she presented at an August symposium.

TIMOTHY DECELLE presented “Girard, Vattimo, and Taylor: Institutional Sacrifice, the ‘Victim Church,’ and the Ecclesial Good” at the 9th Annual Religion, Literature, and the Arts Conference at the University of Iowa in late September. He also presented “Moll Flanders, Capitalist Converst: Crime and the Rise of Capitalism” at the 111th Annual Conference of the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association in San Diego, CA, in early November.

LESLY GÁMEZ had a baby girl on July 29. Her name is Lourdes Mercedes. Lesly further writes that Lourdes “completed almost two full semesters of the program last year in utero and is [her] little study buddy this semester!”

BETSY HOWARD presented “‘Like the House of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah’: The Ruth-Narrative and the Redemption of the Role of Kinsman-Redeemer” at the Red River Valley Women’s Studies Conference held in Grand Forks, ND, in early October.

MERCEDES SHELDON and her husband welcomed a future English major into the family January 2013. Albert M. Sheldon V is currently in love with his large collection of board books, which he regularly reads aloud to himself.

TRACY YOUNGBLOM’S, M.A. ’96, poetry collection Growing Big was published this past September by North Star Press.

ALUMNI

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LOVE IN THE ORANGERY

By Aimee Nezhukumatathil

When you see a seventy-pound octopus squeeze through a hole the size of a half-dollar coin, you finally understand that everything you learn about the sea will only make people you love say You lie.

There are land truths that scare me: a purple orchid that only blooms underground. A German poet buried in the heart of an oak tree. The lighthouse man who used to walk around the streets at night with a lighted candle stuck into his skull. But winters in Florida—all the street corners have sad fruit tucked into the curb—fallen from orangery truckers who take corners too fast. The air is sick with citrus you love the small spots of orange in walls of leafy green as we drive. Your love is a concrete canoe that floats in the lake like a lead balloon, improbable as a steel wool cloud, a metal feather. This is the truth:

I once believed nothing on earth could make me say Magic. You believe in the orange blossom tucked behind my ear.

Selected for a 2009 Pushcart Prize and reprinted with permission of the author from her book At the Drive-In Volcano, published by Tupelo Press in 2007.