

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH NEWSLETTER

Winter 2017



St. Thomas
UNIVERSITY



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR ISABELLE AGNEW

On 5 November 2016, prospective students visited the St. Thomas University Open House in order to find out about academic and student life on campus. As part of the Open House, professors and students from various departments were available in the Dr. Daniel O'Brien Study Hall to answer questions during the Faculty Fair.

This was my second year attending an Open House Faculty Fair for the English Department, and I noticed some significant differences in how students and parents approached the opportunity to ask questions.

Last year, as a third-year Honours student, I attended the spring Open House. At this point in the school year, it was quite obvious that the majority of the students attending the Open House had already decided to attend

STU, or, at the very least, had decided it was one of their top contenders. As a result, the majority of the questions I recall fielding, from prospective students and parents alike, focused primarily on what kinds of jobs are available to English majors. I talked about my own experience working in the field of communications as being a potential career path, but I also highlighted the plethora of other options including, but not limited to, any career that requires graduate school education (e.g. lawyer, doctor, dentist, etc.).

This year, however, I joined Dr. Dawn Morgan, Dr. Robin Whittaker, Dr. Kathleen McConnell, and Dr. Andrea Schutz for the fall Open House. This time around, I found that the majority of the prospective students who attended were still in the midst of researching which universities they might like to attend, which meant that most of the students and parents I spoke to were looking more for a general overview of the English program, and they rarely had specific questions. As a result,

I found myself focusing on how our English program contains three streams (English, English with a Concentration in Creative Writing, and English with a Concentration in Drama), and what each of these streams tends to focus on, as well as on the variety of classes offered within the department.

Both Open Houses were successful in that we managed to answer as many questions as possible, and hopefully we will see some of those prospective students on campus next fall!



Dr. Robin Whittaker, Dr. Dawn Morgan, and Dr. Kathleen McConnell at the Open House.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

The newsletter will provide information about the Department, including recent events and notices about events to come. We will also include book reviews and other articles of interest to our readers.

We would be delighted to receive contributions from faculty, students, and alumni. They may be sent to Isabelle Agnew (hjbnh@stu.ca).

EDITOR 2016-2017
FACULTY ADVISOR

| Isabelle Agnew (BA Hons. 2017)
| Dr. Elizabeth McKim

WHAT ARE YOU READING?

DR. DAWN MORGAN



In Atwood's version of *The Tempest*, recast as a novel, Prospero is the washed-up Felix Phillips, formerly Artistic Director of the Stratford Festival in present-day southern Ontario. Felix is usurped by the ambitious and unscrupulous upstart, Tony, a version of Shakespeare's villain Antonio. Forcibly retired early without a financial plan, and still haunted by the death of his infant daughter Miranda some years before, Felix seethes with grief and desire for revenge. He takes a job teaching Shakespeare to inmates — by definition bad actors — at a nearby prison. For one term each year he introduces a Shakespeare play to his class of inmate-students in the "Literacy Through Literature" program, whose funding is considered by Tony, now a Member of Parliament and Minister of Justice, to be a waste of time and unworthy of continued public funding.

In an unexpected and funny bonus feature for teachers of English, Atwood delivers up Felix's teaching plan, including the writing assignments and their value towards the overall course grade. Because swearing in class has to be

explicitly forbidden, Felix allows the use of only those curse words that occur in the play they are studying. So the first assignment is to find them all. The student-inmates eagerly make an expert inventory, er, vocabulary, of curse words to hand in for a grade—10 % or so. Sticking to those words when the need to swear arises livens up the dialogue no end, and handily justifies the use of Shakespearean English far from any theatre, library, or university, even if it is "Hag-seed," "Malignant thing," or "Most scurvy monster."

Just now—where I am in the book so far—casting for the production of *The Tempest* is complete and rehearsals are underway. The prisoners surprise Felix by identifying with Caliban. They readily see themselves as "hag-seed" and monstrous. They sympathize with his rebellion and rancor and meanness. Fully fifteen convicts volunteer for the role. Fewer want to be Ariel because he's a fairy. So another assignment invites the inmates to reimagine the characters, even to add or change lines into words they can conceive of saying. It's not so far from actual theatre practice, by all accounts, especially in Shakespeare's time. Some of the songs from Shakespeare's original are rewritten as rap songs in Atwood, to good effect.

As indicated by the title, *Hag-seed* is firmly grounded in Caliban, with Ariel in his service. The villains (Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian) are cartoonishly sketched only enough to justify Felix's suggestive enlistment of society's criminally convicted to regain the kingdom of literature and theatre arts. And while there is revenge involved, not to mention omnipresent closed-circuit video surveillance and generous dollops of political cynicism and critique, the tone overall is mischievous and light, like Shakespeare's in the original play, and in contrast to Atwood's in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

In September of 1610, when *The Tempest* was being written, reports reached England of the miraculous deliverance of the crew and passengers of a ship sailing south from the Virginias that

went missing the year before in a storm off the Bermudas. Robert Langbaum, in his Introduction to *The Tempest* in my old *Complete Signet Shakespeare*, writes that the stories circulating in "the Bermuda pamphlets" prompted the reference to the island in the play as "the still-vexed Bermoothes" (1537-38). What had been believed a West Indies island inhabited by devils was found to be actually an island paradise we now call Bermuda, where the survivors thrived until making their way back to the North American mainland to tell the tale.

In the twentieth century, this New World setting invited the appropriation of Caliban and Ariel by literatures of South America to symbolize competing forces not of nature and art, as Shakespeare perhaps had in mind, but of "barbarism" and "civilization," usually opposing indigenous peoples to the European settlers to the Americas.

Atwood's *Hag-seed* combines the Shakespearean paradox of nature and art with the colonial-postcolonial-neo-colonial debates, not least in placing Caliban at centre stage in the characters of the prison convicts. *Hag-seed's* fictional Stratford Festival bears the indigenous-sounding name of the "Makeshiweg Festival," though Felix tries to resist the by now routine casting of Caliban as African American or Native American. His list of the *dramatis personae* has Caliban as the inmate who calls himself "Leggs. About thirty. Mixed background, Irish and black. Red hair, freckles, heavy build, works out a lot. A vet, was in Afghanistan. Conviction: Break-and-enter, assault. Drugs- and booze-related. Was in addiction treatment but the program's been cancelled. Played Brutus, Second Witch, Clarence. Excellent actor but touchy" (138).

WHAT ARE YOU READING?

The English Department Newsletter invites reviews from faculty, students, and alumni. Tell us about what you're reading, what you think of it, and why. Submissions may be sent to Isabelle Agnew (hjbnh@stu.ca).

FACULTY NEWS



Dr. Andrea Schutz

Schutz, Andrea. "The Monster at the Centre of the Universe: Christ as Spectacle in Mass and English Civic Drama." *Literature and Theology*, 2016. DOI: 10.1093/litthe/frw013

The medieval construction of Christ's monstrosity and the spectacle he presents are radically different from modern ones which create and maintain a space between viewer and viewed. The eucharist and civic plays minimise the distance between viewer and monstrous Other by drawing the monstrous self into the Other, and the Other into the self.



Dr. Kathy Mac

Mac, Kathy [Kathleen McConnell]. *Human Misunderstanding*. Roseway Press, 2017.

Human Misunderstanding is the latest work by award-winning poet Kathy Mac. The first of the book's three long poems compares a fictional child soldier (a hero) with a real child soldier (a victim). The second juxtaposes eighteenth century philosophy with one person's search for another in downtown Halifax. The final poem explores two court cases in which an immigrant faces deportation, and torture, if found guilty of assault in a Canadian court.



Dr. Elizabeth McKim

Schiff, Brian, A. Elizabeth McKim, and Sylvie Patron, Eds., *Life and Narrative: The Risks and Responsibilities of Storying Experience*. Oxford UP, 2017

The problem of life and narrative is the central mystery of how persons encounter, manage, and inhabit a self and a world of their own—and others'—creation. *Life and Narrative* includes chapters by prominent scholars in the social sciences and humanities who are driving forward the study of narrative in their respective disciplines and beyond.



Dr. Matte Robinson

Robinson, Matte. "'You Know Ezra Pound, Don't You?' Ezra Pound's return in H.D.'s Late Work." Ezra Pound Society Panel. MLA Annual Convention, Philadelphia, Jan. 6, 2017.

Ezra Pound was the one H.D. credited with her "first awakening." The last person to hold such a position was her analyst, Erich Heydt. In one of their first meetings, he jabbed her with a hypodermic needle and opened with, "You know Ezra Pound, don't you?" She asked herself in response, "Is this White Magic, Black Magic, psychiatry, psycho-analysis, psycho-therapy, thought-reading—or what?" Drawing material from H.D.'s late prose and correspondence, this paper traces enigmatic echoes of Pound in H.D.'s late writing.



Dr. Tony Tremblay

Tremblay, Tony, Ed. *New Brunswick at the Crossroads: Literary Ferment and Social Change in the East*. WLU Press, 2017.

What is the relationship between literature and the society in which it incubates? Are there common political, social, and economic factors that predominate during periods of heightened literary activity? *New Brunswick at the Crossroads: Literary Ferment and Social Change in the East* considers these questions and explores the relationships between periods of creative ferment in New Brunswick and the socio-cultural conditions of those times.

Faculty in the English Department are invited to submit notice of their publications and presentations (along with a brief description) to Isabelle Agnew (hjbnh@stu.ca).

UPCOMING EVENTS

ON FEBRUARY 27 AND 28, the English Department's Drama Concentration will host Edmonton theatre artist **Mieko Ouchi**. Ouchi is known for her playwriting, directing, and acting work for Theatre for Young Audiences as well as adult theatre that has earned her, among dozens of awards, a Governor General's Award nomination for *The Red Priest (Eight Ways to Say Goodbye)*.



Often exploring issues around diversity and the artist's process, Ouchi has had her plays translated into French, Japanese, Czech, and Russian. She was last in Fredericton as visiting dramaturg with the Notable Acts Summer Theatre Festival in 2013. Ouchi's visit is made possible in collaboration with Mount Allison University, a grant from the Canada Council, and funding from the STU English Department.

The Annual Atlantic Undergraduate English Conference (AAUEC) will be taking place from **MARCH 3-5**. This year's conference is being hosted by the University of Prince Edward Island. Each year the English Department sends several students to present their academic essays and creative works. A full list of the students selected to attend this year's conference will be made available in February.

As part of Congress 2017, the **Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE)** will be hosting its annual conference from **MAY 27-30**. The conference features nationally and internationally recognized scholars, and papers from across the range of periods, topics and methodologies of English studies. This year's plenary speakers include Canada's Parliamentary Poet Laureat and pioneer in the study of African-Canadian literature, George Elliott Clarke, and Sherryl Vint, director of the Speculative Fictions and Cultures of Science program at the University of California, Riverside. For more information, contact STU's ACCUTE campus representative, Dr. Dawn Morgan.



NEW BURSARY FOR CREATIVE WRITING STUDENTS

Students in third or fourth year who are majoring or honouring in English with a Concentration in Creative Writing have the opportunity to apply for a new bursary. The Kay Smith Memorial Bursary, valued at \$500, will be awarded annually. Bursary application forms are available in the Registrar's Office. The deadline for application is March 1.

Kay Smith (1911-2004) was a well-known Saint John drama teacher and poet. Her books include *Footnote to the Lord's Prayer* (1951), *At the Bottom of the Dark* (1971), *When a Girl Looks Down* (1978), and *The Bright Particulars* (1987). In 1988, Smith was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from the University of New Brunswick (Saint John).



Saint John drama teacher and poet
Kay Smith (1911-2004)



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