CORNELL UNIVERSITY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

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INSIDE ENGLISH: A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

When I set out to fill this space last year, it was hard to focus on anything but the growing diversity of our departmental community and its activities. This time I want to say something about language. English continues to be our stock in trade, and it is clear that our students' respect for the discipline of verbal form has not only survived the senescence of the New Criticism, but is if anything stronger than ever.

Much of the impulse is performative. Learning to speak 40 lines of blank verse properly can be the high point of a Shakespeare class, and Carol Kaske's students produce their own Spenserian stanzas as part of studying the Faerie Queene. More and more students are supplementing their freshman seminar experience with one or more of a growing and increasingly specialized range of upper-level expository writing courses. And at a time when the author exists in theory only as the random focal point of a melée of cultural forces, the impulse to be one is growing: every creative writing course we offer begins the term with a long and tenacious wait-list. The young man who wants to write about a young man who Wants to Write is still around, but he really does have to want to write. When Stephanie Vaughn was promoted last year, what the letters on her teaching praised repeatedly were her toughness and honesty in whipping her students' fiction into shape, and Bob Morgan challenges young poets to attempt risky forms like the Villanelle and the Pantoum.

Meanwhile diversification continues: our appointments for 1992-93 are an Asian Americanist (Sunn Shelley Wong, from Berkeley), and an African Americanist (Lois Brown, from Boston College). With the American Indian Program we are working on what would be our first appointment in the area of Native American literature. All of this is good for the Department and for Cornell, and a recent signal from the great world suggests our excellence is recognized: U.S. News and World Report has pronounced our grad program in English one of the top half-dozen in the country. I hope we are doing as well by our undergraduates, too, and I invite you all to come and decide for yourselves.

Winthrop Wetherbee

MELLON FELLOWSHIPS IN THE HUMANITIES

Drawing up rank lists has always been fun for students of English. We agree that Milton is No. 2 (well, don't we?). But is Donne No. 6 or No. 7, Keats No. 8 or No. 9? And what about Shelley, cries a passionate voice from the back of the class? So it is easy to move to a ranking of colleges, of the sort the *US News and World Report* publishes annually. In these rankings Cornell University stands consistently high—in the top 10 or 12. But recently we found a way to measure the popularity (one index of true rank) of graduate departments of English across the country. Over the past 10 years, Region I of the Mellon Fellowships in the Humanities program has been chaired at Cornell—by Dean Seznec, Dean Randel, and Prof. Stephen Parrish. Region I is the most selective in the nation: stretching across New England and Western Canada, it includes such powerhouses as Harvard and Amherst, Brown and Williams, Dartmouth, Smith, Wellesley, McGill—and Cornell. Each Mellon applicant is required to list three to five graduate departments s/he is applying to, and to indicate the first choice. Informal tabulation of the choices of applicants in English in the past two years puts Cornell at the very top.

1990			**1991**		
Listed		*1st choice*	*Listed*		*1st choice*
Berkeley	36	13	Cornell	30	5
Cornell	35	12	Berkeley	29	14
			Harvard	27	9
Yale	27	8	Stanford	24	8
Stanford	24	8			
Harvard	24	7	Brown	18	3
			Yale	17	2
Duke	19	4			
Princeton	19	2	Duke	14	4
Virginia	19	1			

1990			1991		
Listed		*1st choice*	*Listed*		*1st choice*
			Hopkins	11	1
Brown	15	2	Michigan	11	0
			Virginia	10	1
Columbia	12	3	Princeton	9	5
Hopkins	12	2			
Penn	11	1	Penn	7	1
Chicago	11	1	UCLA	7	1
Michigan	10	2	Chicago	6	0
			Columbia	6	0

Departments of English tend to flourish and wane and there are various ways of reading these figures. But they do encourage us to suppose that we must be doing something right.

Steve Parrish

AMERICAN STUDIES AT CORNELL

When Cushing Strout retired in 1989 I inherited both his chair (the Ernest I. White Professorship of American Studies and Humane Letters) and the directorship of the American Studies Program. Cush promptly delivered his files to me and I discovered that I was in charge of an interdisciplinary undergraduate major that had been in existence since the early 1970's. Students were required essentially to take courses in American history and American literature as well as to dabble some in other disciplines and cultures. So far so good.

What I did not find was evidence of any course designed to introduce students to the field itself—not surprising, since the nature of the "field" has for some time been a hotly contested question. After consulting with some members of the American Studies Committee, I rashly decided to plunge in and offer a "pro-seminar" in American Studies that would function at least to bring students in the major together and, perhaps, to give them a handle on the course of study they had chosen. That first version of English/American Studies 465, offered in the spring of '90, began with a presentation on the intent and purpose of cultural studies in the American context, and then proceeded through a smorgasbord of topics—including Puritanism, nineteenth-century slave narratives, marriage and divorce (focussing on Kate Chopin's The Awakening), religious experience in America (with particular attention to young people, from Jonathan Edwards' prodigious five-year old disciple Phoebe Bartlett to John Updike's David in "Pigeon Feathers"), and on to the history and literature of immigration, the sociology of suburbia, and "Casablanca" as American cult film. I also got a little help from my friends: Isaac Kramnick conducted a session on Liberalism in America; Dan McCall led students through Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," including a discussion of his own book The Silence of Bartleby; and Laura Meixner, from the History of Art Department, offered a presentation on nineteenth-century American painting.

The following year I decided to focus on technology in America. In addition to some of the original topics, we had sessions on Leo Marx's The Machine in the Garden, Twain's Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, and Brooklyn Bridge as artifact and cultural symbol. I also persuaded Steve Shiffrin, from the Law School, to conduct a class on the first amendment. It was a great success and probably helped nudge some students toward a legal career.

This year I am fortunate in having a co-conspirator in the course. Glenn Altschuler, already Dean of the Summer School, was recently named Professor of American Studies (he is a well-respected and active historian), and has entered the program with enthusiasm. He will conduct sessions in the pro-seminar on sports and movies, among other topics. I myself have worked up a presentation on the semiotics of American cereal boxes (not as "flaky" as it sounds; I am following in the distinguished footsteps of Leo Spitzer and Roland Barthes). We shall conclude the term by rediscovering Columbus—our contribution to the quincentenary observations.

With modest financial support from Dean Don Randel, about twenty-five loyal undergraduate majors, and a revitalized faculty committee, the American Studies program appears to be flourishing. We invite comments and suggestions from English Department alumnae and alumni that might help us to strengthen the program even further.

Joel Porte

FACULTY NOTES

Archie Ammons has published a volume called *Poems* in Roumania, translated by Petronela Negosanu. **Jean Blackall** has joined the editorial board of *Henry James Review*, and has articles forthcoming in *Woman's Studies*, *Edith Wharton Review*, *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia*, and *A Companion to James Studies*. **Rick Bogel**, who served in the fall of 1991 as Acting Chair of the English Department, has a number of articles on 18th Century literature forthcoming, and also continues to play jazz trombone with The Greenhouse Effect and

the Lowdown Alligator Jass Band. **Laura Brown** gave a plenary address at the annual American Eighteenth-Century Studies Conference in 1991, entitled "Africans and Amazons: Gender, Race, and Empire in Daniel Defore." The essay will be published in a volume called *Race and Gender in the Early Modern Period.* **Cynthia Chase** is editing a book on Romanticism with Longman. Three of **Jonathan Culler's** books will be translated into Czech, Japanese and Turkish. **Don Eddy** has compiled *A Preliminary Handlist of Books to which Dr. Samuel Johnson was a Subscriber,* with J.D. Fleeman, for the Bibliographical Society of the U. of Virginia. Two poems by **Ep Fogel**, "Shipment to Maidanek" and "Icon," have been reprinted in *Blood to Remember: American Poets on the Holocaust* (Texas Tech). **Debra Fried's** essay "Bewhiskered examples in *Elements of Style*" recently appeared in *Western Humanities Review.* **Andy Galloway** has articles forthcoming in *Yearbook of Langland Studies* and *Studies in the Age of Chaucer.*

Katherine Gottschalk has been giving twice yearly workshops called "Prose Therapy" at the Chicago meetings of the American Academy of Disability Evaluating Physicians. Her article, "Annie Wilkes: Stephen King's Dark and Terrible Mother" will appear in *The Anna Book.* **Lamar Herrin's** novel *The Lies Boys Tell,* which won the AWP Novel Prize, was published by W.W. Norton in 1991. The paperback of his earlier novel, *The Unwritten Chronicles of Robert E. Lee,* was brought out in May. In the past year **Tom Hill** has published papers on Anglo-Saxon studies in *Philological Quarterly, Romania, Traditio, Neophilologus, French Bulletin Studies, NM,* and *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: A Trial Version.* A number of new articles are forthcoming in 1992. **Molly Hite's** new novel, *Breach of Immunity,* was published by St. Martin's Press in January 1992. Her essay "The Postmodern Novel" will appear in *The Columbia History of the American Novel.* **Mary Jacobus** gave the Alexander Lectures at Toronto, Fall 1991. She declined a Fellowship at Stanford's Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in favor the Visiting Overseas Fellowship at St. Johns College, Cambridge for 1992-93. **Phyllis Janowitz** has published poems in *Banyan, The Bridge, Radcliffe Quarterly, The Southwest Quarterly, Epoch,* and *The River Styx.* New work is also included in the anthologies *Writing Poems* and *The Place My Words Are Looking For.* Besides scholarly work on Marsilio Ficino for *Sixteenth Century Studies,* **Carol Kaske** has developed a new course for the Classics department called "Journeys to Other Worlds in Western Literature." **Alison Lurie** has published short stories in *Vogue* and *Entertainment Weekly* as well as lecturing on children's literature in England and America. **Dan McCall's** novels *Jack the Bear* and *Triphammer* are both being made into films this year. A new novel, about a doctor on an Apache Indian reservation, is forthcoming.

Essays by **Ken McClane** have appeared in *Speech and Power* (Ecco) and *Bearing Witness* (Pantheon). His new collection of essays will be published by Ecco in 1993. **Jim McConkey's** non-fiction book about a doctor in rural Kentucky, *Rowan's Progress,* was published by Pantheon in February to resounding critical acclaim. **Maureen McCoy's** third novel, *Divining Blood,* will be published by Poseiden Press/ Simon & Schuster in May 1992. **Scott McMillin's** study, *The Elizabethan Theatre and The Book of Sir Thomas More,* was named "Book of the Year" by *Year's Work in English Studies.* His *Shakespeare in Performance: 1 Henry IV* was published in 1991 and he has been awarded a NEH fellowship for 1992. **Dorothy Mermin's** book *Women of Letters in Victorian England 1830 to 1880* is forthcoming from Indiana. A new book of fiction by **Robert Morgan**, *The Mountains Won't Remember Us,* will be published in May 1992. A book of essays and interviews on poetry will appear in 1993. A Faculty Fellow at the Society for the Humanities, Fall 1992, he was awarded the James G. Hanes Poetry Prize and the North Carolina Award in Literature in 1991. **Tim Murray's** book *Like a Film: Ideological Fantasy on Screen, Camera, and Canvas* is forthcoming from Routledge. He is also editing collections on French theatre history and the relation of film to theatre. **Joel Porte** published *In Respect to Egotism: Studies in American Romantic Writing* in 1991. In May 1992 he will be one of the principal speakers at the first International Santayana Conference in Avila, Spain. He has been named Faculty Fellow at the Cornell Society for the Humanities for Spring 1993. **Shirley Samuels'** book, *Romances of the Republic* is forthcoming from OUP, as is the collection she edited, *The Culture of Sentiment.* **Dan Schwarz**, who has taught a record number of NEH summer seminars, will hold the Citizen's Chair at U. of Hawaii next year. His study of Wallace Stevens is forthcoming. In 1991 **Mark Seltzer** was a fellow at the National Humanities Center. His book on American culture and Technology, *Bodies and Machines,* will be published this spring by Routledge. **Gordon Teskey** was also a fellow at the National Humanities Center for 1990-91, and he will be a Faculty Fellow at the Cornell Society for the Humanities in 1992. He has a number of articles forthcoming in *The Spenser Encyclopedia.* **Stephanie Vaughn's** book of stories, *Sweet Talk,* will be published in Japan this year. After a study

leave, Fall 1991, **Pete Wetherbee** has resumed the chairmanship of the department. His translation of the medieval Latin poem *Architrenius* is forthcoming from Cambridge UP.

Arthur Mizener: Literary Critic with a Political Conscience, Extracts from a Private Anglo-American correspondence 1935-1985, was published in 1991 by Gorley Putt in England. Professor Putt, who first met Arthur Mizener at Yale in 1934, maintained a warm friendship with the noted Cornell professor, critic and biographer for over fifty years. The letters reflect not only the history of their friendship, but much of the literary, political, and intellectual life of the period. Those who studied with Arthur Mizener and knew him at Cornell will be interested in this affectionate memoir and selection of lively and informative letters. The pamphlet, which costs $10.00, may be ordered from the English Department, Goldwin Smith Hall, Cornell University.

THE MASTER OF FINE ARTS PROGRAM

The Master of Fine Arts Program in creative writing at Cornell is the smallest in the country. Typically between six and eight students are admitted each year, and the graduate workshops in fiction and poetry rarely have more than eight or ten participants. At a time when other programs have been mushrooming, Cornell has kept its MFA program trim and selective. This past year eight new students were chosen from about three hundred applications.

When Baxter Hathaway founded the MFA program in the 1960s his ideal was to combine work in writing with scholarly study of literature. He believed that the best writers know a great deal about the history and theory of literature and that the best teachers of both writing and literature are those who write themselves. *Epoch* magazine has provided an opportunity for young writers to gain practical experience in editing and production.

A large number of our graduates in the past two decades have distinguished themselves.

Diane Ackerman, 1974, has published five books of poetry, most recently *Jaguar of Sweet Laughter*, Random House, 1991. She is a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, contributing features on natural history and science to that magazine. Her nonfiction book, *A Natural History of the Senses*, has been a best seller in both hardcover and paperback.

Alice Fulton, 1982, has published three books of poetry, most recently *Powers of Congress*, Godine, 1991, and she has been awarded fellowships by the Guggenheim and MacArthur foundations, as well as the Provincetown Fine Arts Center and the Michigan Society of Fellows. Her first book won the Associated Writing Programs Poetry prize, and her second was chosen for the national Poetry Series. She is a professor of English at the University of Michigan.

Lorrie Moore, who also graduated in 1982, has published three books of fiction with Alfred A. Knopf, including *Anagrams*, a novel, and *Like Life*, stories, in 1990. Her stories have appeared in *The New Yorker* and been widely anthologized. She is a professor of English at the University of Wisconsin, and has received fellowships from the Guggenheim and Rockefeller foundations and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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