The Unicorn Newsletter Fall 2014

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Welcome to the revived Unicorn.

When I arrived at Cleveland State in 1975, joining thirty-three other full time English Department faculty, the English Department's newsletter, The Unicorn, was well known on campus. Begun in February, 1970 by Lou Milic, the new Chair of the Department, it was edited for more than twenty years by a series of dedicated faculty members. The Unicorn was one of the first (perhaps the very first) departmental newsletters at Cleveland State. Through it, the English Department informed the rest of the University of its students’ and faculty’s accomplishments, and it published articles and interviews on various matters of interest to students of literature and linguistics.

The original Unicorn inspired other Departments to start their own newsletters, thus helping CSU's departments keep in touch with each other. Some of these are still published. Unfortunately, The Unicorn itself gradually faded and finally vanished. As the English Department’s discretionary budget dwindled, and the numbers of its full time faculty shrank even as their service obligations increased, publication of the newsletter became too burdensome to maintain.

Thanks to the talents and work of Stephanie Nunley, the English Department's current secretary, The Unicorn, has been reborn. (Perhaps we should have renamed it The Phoenix, but we decided to stick with its traditional name.) The Department still does not have the budget for a print version, so our newsletter is being recreated as an electronic publication. Under Stephanie's skillful editing, the newsletter will appear approximately once a semester. It will share the activities and accomplishments of the Department's students and faculty with our current and former colleagues, with alumni, and with the Cleveland State community. If retired colleagues (faculty and staff) and former students let Stephanie know what they are doing, we will gladly share that information as well. Stephanie's email is: s.nunley@csuohio.edu. Please send her news about life after CSU. (Continued on p.4)
Merging Transmedia Awareness and Successful Composition Instruction

by Maria Alberto, GA in First-Year Writing

Coming in to the Fall 2014 semester as a first-time graduate instructor after six semesters as an undergard English SLA leader and Writing Center tutor, I felt fairly secure in my knowledge of the “big four” that my ENG 101 class would be writing: the summary, the critique, the rhetorical analysis, and the argument synthesis capstone. Beyond this technical knowledge, though, I was also heartened by the practical methodologies I’d been fortunate to gain from serving as an SLA leader for some of the First-Year Writing Program’s strongest hitters, including Jessica Schantz and Emilie Zickel, and from working with Writing Center director Mary McDonald.

At the same time, I also had a self-appointed task stemming from my own research interests. As a graduate student, I am interested in studying the literary ramifications of intertextuality and the transmedia narrative – or in practical terms, the ways in which new forms of digital technologies change the reproduction and dissemination of traditional narratives. When I learned in June that I had received an assistantship to teach ENG 101, the challenge then became a question of how to successfully merge two such seemingly-different things: a graduate-level awareness of transmedia narratives in literary studies, and the first-hand knowledge of what a successful ENG 101 class accomplished for its students without overwhelming them. Despite the added complexity, though, I knew the effort would be worthwhile because incoming students’ understanding of both composition and rhetoric has been shaped by their constant access to information online, as much if not more so than through their formal educational experiences. With this in mind, I have worked to have my students recognize, explain, and replicate ENG 101’s “big four” types of academic writing in digital as well as traditional forms.

Since the traditional forms are tangible through paper copies of drafts, comments, grades, and revisions of the four formal assignments, I had to find a similarly measurable means of comparing the digital. I have had considerable success with a free educator’s account on Weebly.com, a website editor where my students have been creating their own group websites over the course of the semester. This endeavor involves far more than actually putting their papers online, though. Instead of uploading their formal work, students consider what a summary, critique, rhetorical analysis, or argument looks like online and then work to replicate digital forms they already recognize with the help of their newly-formalized knowledge.

Each day one of the “big four” papers is due, my class meets in one of the library labs instead of our regular classroom. After turning in their assignments and taking notes on a brief introductory lecture from me, students reconvene in groups formed the very first day of class, brainstorm how the processes of the papers they just turned in can also be found online, and decide how they want to reproduce their own versions on their websites. My SLA leader and I remain mobile to answer potential questions, and lab days usually end with groups summarizing, critiquing, or analyzing other groups’ websites.

Students have been very receptive to these forays into the digital, and several have noted that they can both visualize and use the strategies and processes from the formal assignments better now that they have seen these features in use online. Early during the semester, some did complain about the extra workload that came from turning in a paper and working on a practical demonstration of its concepts all on the same day, but these complaints have decreased with every lab day as students begin to recognize and delineate the ways they can, and already do, use concepts from ENG 101 beyond the classroom.

Letter from First-Year Writing

by Dr. William Breeze, First-Year Writing Director

Fall 2014 has been an exciting semester in First-Year Writing. A number of new instructors have joined our ranks, including College Lecturer Emilie Zickel. Emilie, a long-time adjunct instructor in the program, brings with her a wealth of knowledge and experience, as well as a much-deserved reputation for excellence. In her short time in the position she has already contributed significantly to the continuing successes of FYW.

And among those successes is a first for College Lecturers in FYW: Emilie will join John Brentar, Melanie Gagich, and Jessica Schantz in presenting “High-Tech, Low-Tech, No-Tech: Divergent Implementations of Technology and the Risks and Rewards for Student Writing” at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Tampa, Florida this March. The panel turns a critical eye toward the role technology now plays in the first-year writing classroom. The group, which is currently gathering data from its students, will address the reflexive view that technology is necessarily a curative to the challenges student writers face.

This semester- has also seen the publishing of a FYW-produced common text: The (Continued on p.4)
Bringing Henrietta to Life: Creating Dialogue on Disparities across Disciplines
by Adrienne Gosselin, Assoc. Prof. & Chair of CLASS Dean’s Diversity Council

The primary charge of the Deans Diversity Council is to incorporate awareness and understanding of diversity and inclusion across the university. Each Dean works with a council to create strategies and actions appropriate to the disciplines. One objective of the CLASS Dean’s Diversity Council is to create curricular / co-curricular opportunities that contribute to research on the potential of the arts in the medical humanities and health education.

Our second project was to produce Bringing Henrietta to Life, an interdisciplinary collaboration using music, dance, theatre and film, and then present the film in an academic venue that could engage dialogue on health disparities across disciplines, using the half-hour film as a means to focus and facilitate dialogue.

From the start, Bringing Henrietta to Life has been a lesson in creative problem solving. For me, the project documents the evolution of an idea, born and nurtured by faculty collaboration at every level. I begin with Holly Holsinger’s statement on the Henrietta webpage.

In 2011, I was asked to create an event in connection with the Freshman Common reading selection, The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks. My impulse was to bring Henrietta’s story to life through different performance mediums, so that students might experience the different ways performance can communicate meaning and initiate conversation.

As educators the faculty who collaborated on this project recognize The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks to be not only important, but also unique in its ability to introduce readers to such a broad range of topics in medical humanities. Once the film was complete, partnerships with the Dean’s Diversity Councils for CLASS, Law, Nursing, and College of Sciences and Health Professions expanded the forum for venue and community outreach. The collaboration crossed four colleges and received an award from the Provost. A second conference in November co-sponsored by CLASS, Nursing, and College of Education and Health Sciences and included a greater focus on research and participation by NEOMED faculty.
We Practiced for It
by Ted Lardner, Professor and Poet

Tomorrow, the world ends.
Today, I’m driving my son
To Mayfield Middle School.
At the stoplight, we picture
Where the zombies will come
“From China,” he says.
“An experiment went wrong.”
“Shipping containers. Washing up.
Zombies, climbing out on the rocks.”
The light stays red.
...Good friends lost/ along the way...
Rockets falling in Gaza...
I hate myself, I would never do that
to you...
The light changes.
I miss most of what he says.

We swing left, toward school.
The test in language arts this
morning
Is to write a story using Freytag’s structure
And paragraph indentation.
We practice, making up two guys.
(James and Paul.)
They’re going to break out of prison.
(Why were they in? Moonshining.)
(Why were they escaping? Paul
wants to be home for Christmas.
His old Maw will be too lonesome.
James knows Paul
Will never make it on his own.)
Think of the resolution, I say.
Under new names, the part
Where they live out their days, in West Virginia.
We are almost there.
The shooting last week in Connecticut...
Do we need, I had wondered, to
discuss it?
The buses, sealed at their emergency exits
With iridium reflective tape, float, rectangles
Lumbering past in winter murk.
I’d dreamed I’d caught an enormous fish.
It took the whole dream, struggling it
up the rocks.
To free it to the water again.
The whole time, someone waving
goodbye.
For sensory details, we thought
Of the sounds of the prison.
The guard’s soft-soled shoes,
Squeaking down the hall.
Under our hands and knees,
The grit of cold cement.
We smelled the air outside.
Damp earth in the cold night.

(Letter from the Chair continued)

This new, electronic version of The Unicorn may be less ambitious in scope than its predecessor, but it will allow the English Department to spread the word of its current work to former faculty, staff, students, and the CSU community. Through email its recipients can in turn share their news with those of us who are still in the Department. Keeping in touch with each other, creating and maintaining a sense of community—I think those are worthy goals.

Again—welcome to the new incarnation of The Unicorn.

David Larson
Interim Chair

(First-Year Writing continued)

Engaged Reader. Designed by the program and published by Van-Griner, the text is being used by all instructors in the program. The creation of this textbook has allowed the program to shape its content more deliberately and more meaningfully. Students in our courses will find that the reader provides multiple entry-points into a number of topics crucial to being engaged with CSU, Cleveland, and the world communities.

Award Winning Collaborations
CLASS Dean’s Diversity Council lead by Adrienne Gosselin was awarded the President’s Award for Excellence in Diversity for 2013-2014, for the one day conference Bringing Henrietta to Life (article on page 3).

TED LARDNER
READING FROM HIS CHAPBOOK “WE PRACTICED FOR IT” DURING A POETRY READING AT SUNKEN GARDEN POETRY FESTIVAL

WINNER OF THE SUNKEN GARDEN POETRY PRIZE
Ted Lardner is the author of two previous chapbooks, Tornado (Wick Poetry Series, 2008) and Passing by a Home Place (Leaping Mountain Press, 1987). His chapbook We Practice for It was chosen by poet and essayist Mark Doty as winner of the 2014 Sunken Garden Poetry Prize, sponsored by Hill-Stead Museum and Tupelo Press.

Ted Lardner
We Practiced for It
We are almost there.
Tear It Off – Finding escape, excitement and possibility in your writing
by Michael Geither, Assoc. Prof and Director NEOMFA

Romance literature has been a revelation to me. To be clear: I’ve read a good number of novels in the past few years that I take from the shelves of the Lakewood Public Library simply because I see on their covers men and women embracing, couples in various states of undress, bare midriffs, cowboy hats, etc. How I got started in this habit is a mystery to me but, nevertheless, here I am under a spell.

Part of what’s drawn me to these books is the eagerness of their authors to embrace the tropes of the genre. In what I read, there is no shortage of adults catching one another’s gaze across a crowded room, of heavenly abs, men or women washing cars in the hot sun. There are scorned lovers, sick lovers, surprise lovers, redemption lovers, revenge lovers, runaway lovers, reunited lovers, secret lovers, sudden lovers, royal lovers, scarred lovers, jilted lovers, disguised lovers, fling lovers, and, every now and then, lovers with amnesia. And there are no apologies. Ironically, there’s a kind of pride a number of authors show by delving into something so innocent and arbitrary as character names. You may have a character named Brock who has ten brothers, none of whom have anything to do with the story, but who are all named anyway in a tour-de-force naming ritual – Dagan, Cyrenise, Alastor, Auborn, Hoyt, Cruz, Rogan, Saber, Treadwell, Cheg.

I find the freedom that many of these authors give themselves incredibly refreshing. Indeed, Tear It Off was written mostly because I wondered what taking this sort of permission in my own writing would lead to. Like a lot of folk literature, romance stories break many of the rules we associate with good writing and the principle of “Show me. Don’t tell me,” is often the first casualty. Hearing the voices of instructors from my MFA years, I wouldn’t ever feel comfortable writing that a character was evil. Instead, I’d create several brief impressions over a number of pages that might create the impression that a character had bad intentions and, of course, I’d have to give them some sort of paradox as well, maybe a reason to be dark or an affinity for puppies to balance things out. Romance literature has no such problem. If someone is evil in romance literature, you can almost always listen to them plot a murder in the first few pages.

I’d never describe this kind of writing as simply ‘bad.’ The prose may be wooden. The characters may be little more than blue jeans and a moustache but most of the stories being told are fulfilling some very basic needs. In the end, I hope my play is as uninhibited as the books I’ve been reading because I think I’m after some of the very same things – escape, excitement, possibility. Tear It Off premiers at Converge Continuum in Tremont in August 2015, and I hope you can find a way to attend.

NEOMFA – VISITING WRITERS SERIES

In 2014 has been responsible for bringing some of the most prolific creative writers to CSU’s campus.

For more information about the Visiting Writers series contact
Michael Geither, Director of NEOMFA at CSU
Unicorns @ Work - Department Publications and engaging activities

Dr. Adam Sonstegard - Taking Liberties
In 2014 Adam Sonstegard published his first book Artistic Liberties: American Literary Realism and Graphic Illustration, 1880-1905. In this text Sonstegard examines the key role that the appointed artists played in visually shaping narratives—among them Mark Twain’s Pudd’nhead Wilson, Stephen Crane’s The Monster, and Edith Wharton’s The House of Mirth—as audiences tended to accept their illustrations as guides for understanding the texts. In viewing these works as originally published, received, and interpreted, Sonstegard offers a deeper knowledge not only of the works, but also of the realities surrounding publication during this formative period in American literature.

Dr. Rachel Carnell - Secret Histories
In the last few years, Prof. Rachel Carnell has begun a new area of research, the political secret history. This controversial literary genre, offering gossip and scandal about public figures, was hugely popular with the reading public from the late seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century. Secret histories both shocked readers and rewrote familiar narratives of history. As Carnell demonstrates in her new research, the rhetorical and narratological techniques deployed by early modern secret historians greatly influenced the narratological structure of the emerging British novel. Last February, Prof. Carnell gave an invited talk on this topic at CWRU: “Slipping from Secret History to Novel.”

She has also published two recent articles on secret history: “Reading Austeri’s Lady Susan as Tory Secret History,” Lumen, 32 (2013), and “Eliza Haywood and the Narratological Tropes of Secret History,” Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies, 14.4 (2014).

Dr. Mary McDonald - Talk of the town
Conference Talk
Invited Participant
Virtual Writing Retreat Participant (15 people selected nationally to receive feedback on writing center research). Writing Center Journal, July 2014. Feedback: discuss student progress and convergence of resources along with the role of tutorials.
Invited Panelist

ENG-GRADS: Students Unite
This Year also saw the establishment of the first student organization dedicated to English Graduate students. ENG-GRADS (English Graduate Resource And Development Society) is an organization of graduate students in the English department committed to advancing student success in the English MA program and professional development within the field.

2014-15 Officers are:
President: Eileen Horansky, MA Lit.
Vice President: Michael Putnam, MFA
Secretary /Historian: Bill Burris, MA Lit
Budget Officer: Maria Alberto, MA Lit
Advisor’s Name: Jane Dugan, English Department

Dr. Jennifer Jeffers - Editing Beckett
Dr. Jeffers continues to serve as editor for Palgrave MacMillan’s New Interpretations of Beckett in the Twenty-First Century. This series’ goal is to stimulate new approaches and develop fresh perspectives on Beckett, his text, and his legacy. This will provide a forum for original and interdisciplinary interpretations concerning any aspect of Beckett’s work or his influence upon subsequent writers, artists, and thinkers.

D.E.S.S.E.R.T. – Better than Cake!
Dr. Julie Burrell, Assistant Professor of English, has created a new summer reading newsletter called Department of English Suggested Summer Engaged Reading Titles also known as D.E.S.S.E.R.T. This reading newsletter is a compilation of recommended readings from members of the English Department at Cleveland State University. Look for the second edition of the reading series in May 2015.

LevyFest 2014: Renegade Flowers
by Alex Nielsen, MA English Student, CSU

Events for LevyFest 2014: Renegade Flowers, a poetry festival and conference celebrating the life, work, and influence of Cleveland poet and activist d.a. levy (b. Darryl A. Levey, 1942, d. 1968), were held throughout the Cleveland area from October 24th through October 26th. An active founder of the Midwestern Mimeograph Revolution and perhaps most famously known for his arrest and trial in Cleveland in 1967 for distributing “obscene” poetry to minors, levy was also a small press operator responsible for the printing and distribution of hundreds of texts. levy is perhaps best known for his works Cleveland Undercovers, Suburban Monastery Death Poem, and The North American Book of the Dead. His work has inspired thousands of active poets and publishers worldwide.

In celebration of his contributions to Cleveland’s small press heritage and reputation as a cultural center for poetry and publishing, LevyFest was co-hosted this year by Cleveland State University’s English Department, the CSU Poetry Center, The Michael Schwartz Library, and community organizations including the Guide to Kulchur Cooperative Print Workshop in Gordon Square.

Events included a book launch for a LevyFest anthology (Renegade Flowers, eds. D.R. Wagner and John Dorsey, Hydeout Press), a publishers’ mixer and reading at the Spotted Owl Tavern, community readings at The Literary Café and Lava Lounge, a memorial service at Edgewater Park, and a conference-style event series at the Schwartz Library including a keynote address by levy’s friend, co-author, and roommate, Russell Salamon, a curated tour of CSU’s levy print archives, a showing of the documentary film if i scratch, if i write (dir. Kon Petrochuk), and several panels and workshops. Panel presenters included English department professor Joshua Gage (“Mysticism in the Mimeograph Revolution”), Pace University’s George Wallace (“Self-publishing and the radical impulse in American poetry”), and several members of the Cleveland poetry publishing community hosting roundtable discussions regarding topics such as publishing activist texts, public outreach, and educational programming in the arts.