



English Matters

With the 2009-2009 academic year finish line in sight, we're sending out the last newsletter of the semester. You can see from our choice of artwork this month—every issue of *English Matters* will have a unique banner, by the way—it's about this time of year that we're all thinking about catching that train, jumping those tracks, heading on down to the next destination. While this fleeting snapshot of a vintage tag on the Paris Metro reminds us that most of us will be physically absent from our Lit classes this summer, we can't forget that the life of the mind thrives in the wide-open metropolis, where art and ideas grow in the most unlikely places.

This issue of *English Matters* is dedicated to all the amazing journeys that the John Jay English community has planned, whether it's a research trip to a medieval cathedral town or an expedition to the perfect park bench in the company of a great book. Below you'll hear what books faculty and students are tossing into their beach bags, as well as a little bit about our faculty's award-winning research projects, in our "Life in Books" section. And you won't want to miss one recent John Jay student's helpful tips for making it into grad school. She speaks her mind in "The Road From Here." But before all that we offer you some sage and timely advice from the English Major Advisor Allison Pease about how to stay on track in the major as you chart your own, individualized path to your degree.

One last thing: wherever you're headed this summer, think about stopping in to the department luncheon this Friday for a little celebrating before you check out until September. So read on! And enjoy!

Major Notes



Prof. Allison Pease
English Major Advisor

The end of the academic year is a natural time for taking stock and looking ahead, and you may find yourself wondering: Is there an ideal order to the courses you should take in the English major? Yes there is. We know that everyone has different scheduling needs, but there are some guidelines you should consider as you sign up for courses each semester.

If you are a **sophomore**, you should concentrate on completing your general education literature requirements (two courses from the LIT 230-233 sequence) and begin the major by taking LIT 260, *Introduction to Literary Study*. If there is room in your schedule, you might consider taking one of the Historical Topics courses.

In your **junior** year, you should focus on completing the requirement to take four Historical Topics courses (LIT 370-375). In addition, you should take LIT 300, *Text and Context* and LIT 305, *Foundations in Literature and the Law*, one per semester. Depending on your schedule and interests, I would recommend that you take one additional elective during your junior year.

In your **senior** year, with so many foundational courses behind you, you will be able to take 3-4 electives that interest you. Now is the time to select a concentration: Literature or Literature and the Law. If you are concentrating in Literature and the Law, you must take at least two L & L electives and the Senior Seminar in Literature and the Law. If you are concentrating in Literature (even if you have taken L & L electives—there is no limit) you must take the Senior Seminar in Literature.

As always, your faculty advisors and I are here to help you make these choices and we look forward to working with you.

Department News

Free food! Stimulating conversation! Praise where praise is due! The English Department cordially invites all English Majors to join us at the first annual English Major Luncheon and Awards ceremony on Friday, May 15 at 12:30 p.m. Have lunch on lunch us, meet fellow English majors and chat with your professors, past and future. We'll be holding the event in the English Department Conference Room, 619, W. 54th Street, 7th Floor. For more information, contact Prof. Allison Pease, apease@jjay.cuny.edu.

The Quill Journal is a new literary magazine sponsored by the Fiction Writers Association at John Jay College. Students can share their creative work, whether it is short fiction, poetry, or artwork, including all genres and media. Submissions or inquiries can be sent to thequill.cuny@gmail.com. Get published, and foster a greater appreciation for writing and art! For the Fall 2009 issue, all submissions must be sent by May 15, 2009.

If you are interested in going to law school, consider this: John Jay's Pre-Law Institute is sponsoring a free summer boot camp to help students prepare for law school. Applications are due May 12th, so there is still time to apply. Boot Camp I runs from June 1 to June 4, and is open to all Freshmen and Sophomores. Boot Camp II is open to all Juniors and Seniors and runs June 8-11. Interested BA and MA students with a minimum 2.5 GPA should get in touch with Prof. Pease ASAP.

Attention writers! John Jay is now offering an exciting new minor: **The Writing Minor**. Students can choose their focus, whether it's fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction or advanced argumentative writing. This six-course program allows students to practice the craft of writing, so that they can express themselves creatively, precisely and persuasively—skills that lead to success in undergrad courses, graduate programs and the workplace. For more information contact Prof. Marny Tabb, mtabb@jjay.cuny.edu.

Life in Books

Our continuing feature, "Life in Books," asks the hard questions about what makes us tick. Sometimes. This time, we're polling folks about the books they're tossing in their beachbag. We also checked in with all 13 members of our faculty who won research awards for next year and asked them to say a few words about the projects they are working on.

What's on your summer reading list?



Prof. Chris Suggs

This summer I want to catch up on delayed gratifications, so I am finally going to get to read books by two of our colleagues. I am going to start with John Matteson's prize winner on Alcott pere et fille and then do Baz Dreisinger's study of reverse passing. If I have time left over, I need to do some work-related browsing in African-American fiction since the 1980s. And if I'm disciplined, I'll actually be reading drafts of my novel as I write it, which I would love to finish before the end of the year.



Rachel Ramirez

As for my reading selection over the summer, I'm enthusiastic about starting Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, *A Room of One's Own*, and Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall*. For me, it will be a summer entirely made up of Woolf and Waugh. After reading *Mrs. Dalloway*, I am fascinated by how Virginia Woolf captures a fragmentary consciousness, and, for Evelyn Waugh, I've gone "Waugh-crazy" since I've read *Brideshead Revisited*, so I can't wait to start his first novel.



Prof. Alexander Long

My summer reading list includes the biographies of Hart Crane, John Berryman, William Carlos Williams, Robert Lowell, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, all written by Paul Mariani. I've also got our colleague John Matteson's *Eden's Outcasts* on my list. In addition to these, I'll be working my way through the voluminous correspondence between the poets Philip Levine and Larry Lewis as part of my research that will result in a biography of Larry Lewis.



Prof. Jay Gates

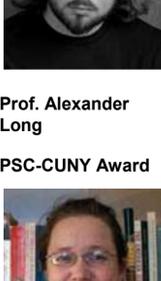
This summer I will be warming up to Porfirio Rubiosa, in the biographical novel called *The Last Playboy* by Shawn Levy. As the title of the book states, Rubiosa is a legendary womanizer who used his charm to marry heiresses after heiresses and show just how fascinating life was in the 50's for the rich and famous. I almost can't wait for the semester to end so that I can finally focus on this interesting character that is unfamiliar to my generation.



Prof. Nivedita Majumdar

I'll be working my way through the summer reading list of a Leftist-Medievalist: Jan Svallin, *Out of the Night* (the memoir of a Communist organizer whom Stalin betrayed); Dick Ringer, *Bard of Iceland: Jonas Hallgrimsson, Poet and Scientist* (18th-century Icelandic poet who joined his interests in the natural world with poetry); Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin* (by the prolific Canadian novelist); Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (by the major activist referred to by the Indian Supreme Court simply as "that woman"); Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (a foundational text for modern sociology and Marxist perspective); and Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*. All of this in addition to the regular, on-going research of a medieval scholar (poetic syntax, mutilation law, and the poetic deployment of physical, human, and religious geography).

Award-Winning Research



Prof. Valerie Allen

My PSC-CUNY research award will support work on a book project, *The Nation and its Discontents: Critiques of Nationalism in South Asian Literature*. The book analyzes critiques of the nationalist paradigm emerging from the literature by and about marginalized groups in South Asia like under-castes, women, religious minorities and immigrants. My first book, *The Other Side of Terror: Writings on Terrorism in South Asia*, was recently published by Oxford University Press. This anthology of literary representations of terrorism is the first of its kind pertaining to any part of the globe.



Prof. John Matteson

My award will subsidize a research trip to York, England, where I'm working on some of the thousands of medieval wills stored in the archives there. Medieval wills give a fascinating insight into the personal lives of York's inhabitants in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—their possessions, relationships, religious faith (medieval wills itemized all funeral instructions), and priorities. Here's one because I rather like: "Also I bequeath to Alice Stede, if she wait and continue a virgin, honest and of good repute, until she have a husband, that then she shall have for her marriage five marks; but, in case she shall inordinately or negligently be corrupted or commit adultery, then she shall have only two marks and 6s 8d."



Prof. Helen Kapstein

Professor John Matteson has been awarded a 2009-10 fellowship by the Leon Levy Center for Biography at the CUNY Graduate Center, which is supported by a grant from the Andrew Mellon Foundation. Professor Matteson reports that he will be using the fellowship to complete his biography of Margaret Fuller, to be titled *The Lives of Margaret Fuller* and published by W. W. Norton, Inc. He is also working on an annotated edition of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, also for Norton.



Prof. Olivera Jokic

My project investigates the relationships between British writers of history and writers of literature in the late eighteenth century. It focuses specifically on documents from the British colonial archive, some of which are curiously similar to texts from the same period that we take to be fiction. I want to find out how writers of texts that now appear to be historical documents of imperialism learned to write facts about regions that would become the British Empire in South Asia: the people and places most Britons would never get to see first-hand and could only visit in "fiction."



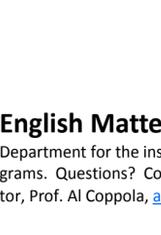
Prof. Erica Burleigh

You know how you're always supposed to revise, revise, revise? Well, professors do it too. I'll be using my PSC-CUNY grant to revise an essay in two different directions—one for publication in a journal and one for inclusion in a book-length project on tourism in postcolonial literature and culture which is now nearing completion. The essay argues that, contrary to conventional readings of Defoe's 1719 novel as a celebration of the colonial enterprise, *Robinson Crusoe* thematizes the failure of the economics of empire. I link this thesis to a consideration of JM Coetzee's *Foe*, arguing that Coetzee's thematics of failure is highlighted and extended in Defoe's 1986 rewrite of the canonical text.



Prof. JoEllen Delucia

I'll be using my grant to write up the results of the data that I collected when I videotaped 20 parole board hearings in the state of Washington. This is a criminal justice/forensic linguistics study of the total language (both verbal and non-verbal) that prospective parolees use when they appear before their parole boards and its effect on the final outcome of the hearing. I will analyze rhetorical and persuasive strategies as well as body language (gesticulations, facial expressions, etc.) that affect inmates' interactive patterns, which in turn may affect parole board members' reactions. This summer, I also will be taking a group of students to Greece as part of a special topics Lit 290 course centered around *Salonica: City of Ghosts*, Martin Mazower's award winning historical account of the religious and cultural co-existence of Muslims, Jews, and Christians over the span of five centuries in "The Hometown of Thessaloniki."



Prof. John Staines

I'll be working on "The Rhetoric of Violence in Early-Modern Religious Polemic: Foxe to Marprelate," looking at violent physical actions and violent speech acts in popular religious texts of the late 16th century. These writings play a formative role in the development of the modern public sphere and modern English prose style, and I'm interested in the interconnection between violent style and violent effects upon audiences. I'll be looking at John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* and other lurid accounts of the executions of religious martyrs, as well as the Martin Marprelate tracts, a series of violent attacks upon the bishops of England that brought the full investigative and punitive power of the church and state out to search for the subversive writers and their secret, illegal printing presses. The research is part of a larger project on representations of violence in early modern literature.

Prof. Alexander Long

I'm using my award to work on a biography of the poet Larry Lewis, 1946-1996. Lewis was the greatest teacher I never met, and this biography is an attempt to meet him. This June, I'll be visiting poetry faculty member at the [Rosemont Writer's Conference](#). My second book of poems, [Light Here, Light There](#), was published this spring by C & R Press.

Prof. Jean Mills

I don't know quite what the noun should be to describe this (a fellowship, maybe?), but my application to participate in the Mellon-funded 2009-10 interdisciplinary faculty seminar on "the family" at the CUNY Grad Center's Center for the Humanities was accepted. Participation comes with a course release for each semester, the better to focus on seminar- and ongoing-project-related research.

Prof. Melinda Powers

My project, "Other Times, Other Enlightenment: Scottish Hystorography and Eighteenth-Century Women's Writing" takes issue with recent accounts of women writers and the British Enlightenment that see women as appropriating or challenging the Enlightenment ideals of their male counterparts. I instead uncover how women writers worked with Scottish Enlightenment literati to make the study of feeling, what many Scots historians called "the progress of manners," central to our understanding of historical progress and commercial and imperial expansion. In my project, these Scottish histories of the changing relationship between sentiment and commercial development emerge as key texts for the study of Enlightenment feminism.

Prof. Al Coppola

I was awarded the grant to work on my book project, with University of Iowa Press, entitled *The (W)hole Story of Athenian Performance*. Taking a historical/archaeological approach to the reconstruction of a performance of Euripides' 405 BCE *Bakkhai*, I highlight the holes or gaps in the historical record and examine the ways that scholars make the limited extant sources, from the fifth-century, into evidence for arguments about Athenian performance practices such as gesture, costume, performance style, choreography, etc.

Prof. Al Coppola

I'm using my award to work on my book project, which analyzes the way that science and scientists were depicted (and more often than not satirized) when they appeared in 18c plays. Produced at a time when what we recognize as modern science was just getting its start, these plays were actively engaged in a contentious debate over the value and influence that science (then called natural philosophy) was to command in society. They also tend to show the vexed role that spectacle played in the manufacture and dissemination of supposedly "objective" scientific truth.

Prof. Jean Mills

My PSC-CUNY grant for 2009 is an extension of a grant I received in 2008, which generously allowed me to travel to archaeological sites and archives in Greece and Sicily in connection with Classical Anthropologist Jane Ellen Harrison. Harrison was an important influence on Virginia Woolf. The current grant will fund a return trip to Cambridge to the Harrison Papers at Newham College, the Bloomsbury archives at Kings, and the Leonard and Virginia Woolf Papers at Sussex.

The Road From Here

With the end of another academic year come the inevitable questions: Just what the heck am I going to do with this English degree when I get out of this place? And, can't I just keep reading books for the rest of my life? Turns out, the answers are 1) a whole hell of a lot; and 2) of course you can! "The Road From Here" is a continuing feature of this newsletter, where we explore just some of the many career options that await graduates with English degrees.

What about doctoral programs?

Tabitha N. Berry

This month, *ENGLISH MATTERS* caught up with *Tabitha Berry*, a John Jay grad who is now in her second year of English graduate school at Rutgers-New Brunswick. We asked *Tabitha* what she wished she had known about the graduate school process when she was still an undergraduate. Here are her tips for up-and-coming English graduate students:

Tabitha N. Berry

As an undergraduate, I majored in Justice Studies and English through the CUNY BA Program in an effort to acquire the critical thinking, writing, and researching skills I'd need for advanced study in English literature. The good news is that John Jay offers the English major now, so you will not have to go through the bureaucratic hurdles I had to go through to become an English grad student! Here are some practical things you can do to prep for grad school:

Tabitha N. Berry

First, throughout your time as an English major, think seriously about what periods of literature (e.g. medieval, 16th- or 17th-century, etc.) and/or fields of specialization (e.g., critical theories of race, gender studies, etc.) you like best. You can always change your period and/or field of specialization once you get into grad school, but in your personal statement you'll need to demonstrate to admissions committees that you are focused.

Tabitha N. Berry

Second, plan to polish one of your best seminar papers in *this proposed period or field of specialty* into a stellar writing sample to submit as part of your application. Aside from strong letters of recommendation, a strong personal statement, and (to a lesser to degree) great GRE scores (especially in the Verbal section), the writing sample (usually 20pp in length) is by far the most important part of your application.

Tabitha N. Berry

Third, establish relationships with faculty members, especially in your proposed period or field of specialization. These faculty members know what schools have the best faculty in your area of interest. Finally, visit websites of the graduate programs you become interested in and, if possible, set up meetings with faculty members of these programs and plan to visit. Eventually, you will have to advertise yourself on the job market, so you will really "wow" graduate school faculty if you show them that you can do that prior to being admitted!

English Matters is a more-or-less regular publication of the John Jay English Department for the instruction and delight of students in our major and minor programs. Questions? Comments? Complaints? Want to get involved? Contact the editor, Prof. Al Coppola, acoppola@jjay.cuny.edu.