

English News

FALL 2024



**DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF ARTS AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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CHAIR'S REMARKS

The Fall term has been a swift and complex one. Together we are navigating the opacity of the current hiring freeze and austerity measures at the university. I want to acknowledge the added stress this brings to everyone, and commend the good work and good spirit in which people in the Department are supporting one another.

This Fall is full of change, and some of that change is the addition of wonderful new people to our midst. As a Department we are fortunate to welcome Norma Ranieri, our new office administrator. Norma has a great deal of experience at Dalhousie, including in the Dean's office and as administrator for the Multidisciplinary Centre. Norma joins graduate administrator Angie Morash in the front office. Thank you to Norma and to Angie for all they do!

In addition to our new administrator we're delighted to welcome our new colleague Dr. Eric Schmaltz to the department! Dr. Schmaltz is an expert in Canadian literatures and his most recent publications include *Borderblur Poetics: Intermedia and Avant-Gardism in Canada 1963-1988* and *Another Order: Judith Copithorne the Selected Works*.

I am also delighted to welcome Dr. Ben Fried to the Department. Dr. Fried is here on a Killam Postdoctoral Fellowship under the supervision of Dr. Alice Brittan. He comes to Dalhousie after his position as a British Academy Newton International Fellow at the Institute of English Studies at the University of London.

We have had another successful Varma Prize celebration thanks to the generosity of our donor William Blakeney and the continued commitment of our students to Gothic Literature.

This Fall our Department was able to offer support to the AfterWords Literary Festival which is such an incredible addition to the city's literary and cultural community.

We'll wrap up the term with two PhD defences as well as the Honours Colloquium, the finale of the Fall Speaker Series.

Many thanks to everyone for their work and care. May your holidays be restful and the New Year filled with intention and peace.

Erin Wunker, Chair

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Jen Andrews hosted the SSHRC-funded conference, “Making Exceptions, Taking Refuge: Canadian and American Border Crossings,” at Dalhousie University (25-26 October 2024). For more details, please see the “Conference Report” later in this newsletter.

Kathy Cawsey and Elizabeth Edwards co-edited the *Broadview Anthology of Medieval Arthurian Literature*, and it was just named one of the ten “[Best Medieval Books of 2024](#)” by the Medieval Podcast.

Jason Haslam was recently awarded a SSHRC Insight Grant for his project, “New and Old Worlds: The Horrors and Hopes of Popular Futurities.” He delivered part of this work, “Zombie Mine: Gothic Energies and the Bothersome Land” as the Virginia Rock Plenary Address in Montreal at the annual meeting of the Canadian Association for American Studies. With colleagues from Dalhousie and MSVU, he also presented work at Hal-Con.

Asha Jeffers was promoted to associate professor with tenure, as of 1 July 2024. This semester, she had a launch for her edited collection, *The Daughters of Immigrants: A Multidisciplinary Study*, that came out in winter 2023. The event was held on November 8th as a part of the Feminist Seminar Series. She is also pleased to announce that her monograph, *Against! Rebellious Daughters in Black Immigrant Fiction* in the United States, will be published in January 2025 with [Ohio State University Press](#).

Julia M. Wright, FRSC, published two essays this Fall, one in *European Romantic Review* and the other (co-authored) in [BMC Medicine](#). She also presented with colleagues on the panel “Gothic TV” at Hal-Con in November and co-authored an article on pandemic safety in higher education for *The Conversation* in December. She is currently shepherding her new book on Irish poet Thomas Moore through production at Edinburgh University Press; it is expected to appear in 2025.

NEW FACES IN THE DEPARTMENT

ERIC SCHMALTZ

Any new research or projects underway?

I’m so pleased and grateful that this new position affords me the opportunity to develop and expand my research, which I’ve been doing with enthusiasm. I’m in the early stages of research for a second monograph that focuses on sound-based literary practices in what is known as Canada. I’m fascinated by poets such as Wayde Compton, Jordan Scott, M. NourbeSe Philip, Gerry Shikatani, and others who have set performance and sound at the forefront of their practices. This work extends to my editorial practice, and I’m currently working on a selected edition of Shikatani’s poetry. Alongside these projects, I have a new poetry book slated for release with Coach House Books.

Any texts that you’re teaching that you’re excited about?

This fall, I taught *The Memory Police* by Yoko Ogawa for the first time in ENGL 1005, and I loved teaching it. It explores loss, memory, and power through a story about island inhabitants whose memories are gradually erased by a mysterious authoritarian government. For me, it’s the perfect blend of strange, sad, and teachable. The students seemed to enjoy it too.

Which book, series, or movie keeps you cozy in the colder months?

Outside of reading for research and my teaching, it is music, actually, that tends to keep me cozy in the colder months. Last winter, I found warmth in Alice Coltrane, Sun Ra, Gia Margaret, Julius Eastman, and many others.



Alongside that course of listening, I dove into musical biographies. This winter, I might try to listen with and through David Toop’s idiosyncratic book *Ocean of Sound*.

What’s your favorite part of living in Halifax?

There’s so much I love about living in Halifax so far. If I had to identify one thing, it’s the people -- truly! I am grateful to have joined a community of truly welcoming and supportive folks inside and outside of our department.

CONFERENCE REPORT: “MAKING EXCEPTIONS, TAKING REFUGE: CANADIAN AND AMERICAN BORDER CROSSINGS”

Jen Andrews hosted a SSHRC Connection grant-funded conference on October 25 and 26, 2024 at Dalhousie University. Titled “Making Exceptions, Taking Refuge: Canadian and American Border Crossings Conference,” this event brought together 20 participants from across Canada and the US, including graduate students, post-docs, and faculty members. The group included a number of Dal folks, among them Killam Post-Doc in the Department of English Billy Johnson, whose paper was titled, “From Halifax to Harlem: Arthur Huff Fauset’s Folklore from Nova Scotia,” and Dal English PhD graduate Brenna Duperron who presented the paper, “To Owe Your Soul to the Company Store: The Canadian Promised Land in Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*.” Likewise, we had faculty presenters and participants from other FASS Departments, such as SOSA and Political Science, and three visitors from Augusta University in Georgia. The conference was supported by a fantastic SOSA graduate student, Melanie Smith, and two FASS undergraduates who staffed the conference, Kriti Maini and Pratik Wani.

The first day’s schedule began with a Mentorship Breakfast that paired graduate mentees with professors in related fields of research for an hour-long shared meal; it was informally repeated on Day Two. The breakfast was followed by three panels of four presenters on the first day of our



Dr. Jan Raska (Pier 21) presents one of the plenary addresses.

meeting, clustered around three main themes: “Reconstructing Canada-US Relations;” “Disputing Canada as a Place of Refuge;” and “When Exceptionalism Meets Exceptions.” In addition, Dr. Tanis MacDonald from Wilfrid Laurier University delivered her creative-critical plenary address, “Boundary Omissions: Flouting the Official at the Manitoba Border,” which explored “a rich history of flouting the Manitoban prairie border’s officialdom.” The day finished with a group dinner at a restaurant on the waterfront, so folks could see the ocean!

Day Two began with a Podcasting workshop run by actor and award-winning podcaster, Marco Timpano, who was brought in to give us an overview on creating a podcast to accompany the essay collection

planned based on the papers delivered on Day One. The second plenary address was given by Dr. Jan Raska, from the Canadian Museum of Immigration, called “A History of Refugees in Canada” and it was followed by an afternoon workshop during which participants shared and critiqued each other’s papers with an eye to possible publication and the creation of the accompanying podcasting episode.

The follow-up podcasting workshop with Marco Timpano was held on Friday, December 6, 2024, with 8 participants, and plans regarding the essay collection are now in progress.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

ALUMNUS BRYCE MORRISON REMEMBERS PROFESSOR JOHN FRASER, FRSC (1928-2023)

In a long academic career, I have never known a greater or more eloquent teacher. He could be intimidating, but there was a heart of gold beneath the sometime severe surface and my weekly visits to his flat return to me with a mix of happiness and trepidation (I recall his, “I will not tolerate undergraduate standards in this class!”).

There, we offered papers on a wide variety of novelists and sociological writers (the class was “English Literature and Society”) for his intimidating scrutiny. Though an Oxford graduate and an exhibitor of Balliol College, Dr. Fraser had little time for what he saw as academic nicety and I recall his mischievous delight in the index to F.R. Leavis’s periodical “Scrutiny,” with characteristic headings, such as “C.S. Lewis, found to be inadequate.” He always took the wider view, looking beyond a text to larger and, above all, humanitarian concerns.

To name but one unforgettable evening, there was his class on three of Henry James’s late short stories, “Lady Barbara,” “The Middle Years” and “The Beast in the Jungle,” where he elucidated three initially baffling and morally complex works with a passion and lucidity that has stayed with me ever since.

I should add that Dr Fraser’s flat was decorated with his wife’s superb paintings. Even today I can see her bowl of daffodils with an added quotation from Yeats.

I have written at greater length about my time with that rarest of beings, an inspirational teacher in my forthcoming autobiography. I would count my time with Dr Fraser as among the most powerful influences in my life.

Editor’s note: Please see our department’s Spring Newsletter for the sad news of Professor Fraser’s passing and some details of his many contributions to Dalhousie and literary scholarship. You can also read [George Elliott Clarke’s memorial](#).

VARMA PRIZE WINNERS FOR 2024

As we do every year, thanks to the generosity of donor Bill Blakeney, the department gathered together (some in costume!) on October 31st to hear our students read their poems and short fiction for the Varma Prizes. The prizes are offered every year around Halloween in memory of renowned Gothic scholar Devendra Varma who worked in our department from 1963 to 1991.

This year’s winners are listed below—congratulations to all!

1ST PRIZE – \$500

Cinnamon Maki
Columbidae

2ND PRIZE – \$250

Tessie Doyle
Please Feed Your At-Risk Youths

3RD PRIZE – \$100

Sol Boden
The Sad Fate of Innocent Dogs
in Belleville, Ontario

HONOURABLE MENTIONS
– \$50 EACH

Avery Tidgwell
Untitled

Liv Mazerolle
The Descending

James Herron
Attic Storms

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Do you have an interesting story to share?
Know of a former classmate who is doing
something exciting and newsworthy?

E-mail [FASS Alumni Relations](#) or submit a
[Class Note](#).

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH SPEAKER SERIES (FALL 2024)

Organized by Lili Johnson and Eric Schmaltz

SEPTEMBER 19

Ben Fried
“Migrant Editors: How Postwar Newcomers Remade
Literary London”

SEPTEMBER 27

Zoe Lambrinakos-Raymond
“A Seemingly Incongruous and Poetic Spark: Modernist
Poet-Collagist Duos and Collagist Poets” (PhD Prospectus)

OCTOBER 4

Rohan Maitzen
“‘Feeble Twaddle’: Failure, Form, and Purpose in Virginia
Woolf’s *The Years*”

OCTOBER 18

Julia M. Wright
“The ‘Poorly Known Horizon’: Cultural Analysis and the
Interdisciplinary Imperative”

OCTOBER 25

Helen Pinsent
“Safe as Houses: (Im)Mobility and Patriarchy in Shirley
Jackson and *Supernatural*”

OCTOBER 31

VARMANIA!

NOVEMBER 21

Pedagogy Discussion

NOVEMBER 29

Erin Wunker
“Reproductive Bodies and Poetic Matterings:
Thinking with M. NourbeSe Philip, Dana Ward,
and Joyelle McSweeney”

DECEMBER 5

UNDERGRADUATE HONOURS COLLOQUIUM

9:50AM – Chair’s Opening Remarks (Erin Wunker)

10:00-11:15AM – Contemporary Women,
Contemporary Feminisms

- Olivia Ellsworth, “Through the Kaleidoscope: Binary
Categorization and Slow Violence in Maggie Nelson’s
The Argonauts”
- Esmé Gurnsey, “Femininity, Fragments, and Mother-
Daughter Relationships in Elena Ferrante’s *My Brilliant
Friend* and *The Days of Abandonment*”
- Grace Edwards, “Fuck Your Patriarchy”

11:30AM-12:45PM – Shaping Identities I: Text and Film

- Johanna Gibson, “Time Flies like a Banana: Queer
Temporality in Contemporary Science Fiction”
- Zoe MacGillivray, “‘I harboured in my belly a destructive
energy’: Motherhood, Embodiment, and Creativity in
Elena Ferrante’s *The Lost Daughter* and *The Days of
Abandonment*”
- Olivia MacDonald, “How to be (Post)human: Situating
Humanity in Embodied Posthumanism in 21st-Century
Science Fiction”

2:00-3:15PM – De/historicizing Literature

- William Hydorn, “Fred Vincy’s Horses: Work, Money, and
Morality in *Middlemarch*”
- Fin Taylor, “Holden vs. Hobbes: *Leviathan* through the
Lens of Manifest Destiny in *Blood Meridian*”
- Meagan Tremblay, “The Modern *Mankind*”

3:30-4:45PM – Shaping Identities II: (Graphic) Novels

- Jewel Pirie, “Decision Making and the Healing Process in
Ellen Forney’s *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo,
& Me*”
- Nick Rodrigues, “Sound and Silence in *Jimmy Corrigan:
The Smartest Boy on Earth*”
- Max Woodward, “Narcissism in *The Crying of Lot 49*:
Investigating Pathology in the Postmodern”

4:45PM – Closing Remarks (Jason Haslam)

HONOURS ENGLISH STUDENTS REVIEW RECENT PUBLIC LECTURES

“‘FEEBLE TWADDLE’: FAILURE, FORM, AND PURPOSE IN VIRGINIA WOOLF’S *THE YEARS*” BY ROHAN MAITZEN (DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH SPEAKER SERIES, DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY, OCTOBER 4TH).

Reviewed by Esmé Gurnsey

What constitutes a literary failure? This is the question taken up by Dr. Rohan Maitzen in her recent lecture on Virginia Woolf’s *The Years*. In her biographical writings, Woolf describes falling into “complete despair” over this 1937 novel and its apparent failure. Was *The Years* truly a failure and what was it meant to accomplish?

Dr. Maitzen’s lecture highlighted two types of literary failure – extrinsic and intrinsic. The former is a more quantitative evaluation, while the latter deals with a work’s actual quality. *The Years*, though now much less popular than Woolf’s other works, was at the top of the 1937 New York Times Bestseller list. Despite its good extrinsic performance, critics claim the novel lacks depth and subtlety. Judging a novel’s intrinsic qualities is a more difficult pursuit, as this kind of literary evaluation can tend to be more subjective. Dr. Maitzen avoided categorizing *The Years* as a failure based on subjective evaluations and turned instead to describe its failure in terms of a failure of form.

What can a writer do in one form that they cannot achieve through another? *The Years* was intended to be a “novel of purpose” – a novel that was meant to politically mobilize its readers. This would have been a departure from Woolf’s typical, modernist prose. As discussed in ENGL 3255, Woolf wrote “stream of consciousness” novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), often committed to characters and interiority rather than plot.

Winifred Holtby, a contemporary of Woolf’s, wrote the first critical memoir of Woolf in English. She wrote with an acute awareness that she and Woolf were very different writers, though they shared similar political beliefs and appeared to have a certain level of respect for one another. Woolf was very defensive about the criticism of her books and doubted her writing – she wanted to write something more politically meaningful.

The Years unfortunately did not achieve this goal. Often elusive and unclear, its means did not serve its ends. “No one has yet seen the point – my point,” Woolf remarked shortly after its publication. Though she strived to create a politically mobilizing project, it essentially did the opposite – it was too obscure to succeed on such terms.

In the ensuing question and answer period, Dr. Maitzen addressed questions such as “What is *The Years* even about?” and “If it were possible to separate *The Years* from Woolf’s biographical account of its publication, does it still come off as a failure?” Dr. Maitzen described *The Years* as a “Woolf novel masquerading as a family epic,” following the Pargiter family throughout their lives. It is a “maddening” and “bewildering” novel – especially if one were trying to read it without any background knowledge. Often with novels, Dr. Maitzen asserted, we must intuit their purpose. Yet, with *The Years* we have an unusually explicit idea from Woolf’s biographical record what it was meant to accomplish. Though failure is difficult to categorize, it was clear that Woolf was tired of readers not getting her point – and *The Years* certainly did not succeed in changing this.

“CONSCIENCE AND CONSCIOUSNESS: A CRAFT TALK FOR THE PEOPLE AND THE PERSON” BY ZADIE SMITH (11TH ALEX FOUNTAIN MEMORIAL LECTURE, UNIVERSITY OF KING’S COLLEGE, NOVEMBER 6TH).

Reviewed by Olivia MacDonald

Working at the campus bookstore, I have attended my fair share of lectures, talks, and book launches, but nothing quite prepared me for Zadie Smith. While Wanda Taylor introduced her, I watched from only a few seats down, as she made edits in the margins of her script. She took the stage in an overfull Alumni Hall, reached the podium, cracked open the bottle of sparkling water next to her, and poured it into the glass. Then with a sigh she declared, “I can’t lie, this has been a *really* shit day.” The U.S. election results had just been announced, so the audience murmured in solidarity; we were all feeling the weight of the day. In the same spirit, Smith’s talk, “Conscience and Consciousness: A Craft Talk for the People and the Person,” was less a lecture and more a candid meditation, as she seemed to be working out her own feelings on what writing means in the current moment. She spoke with a resigned reverence about language’s limitations, both worshipping and cursing it as her only tool. She questions how a common language like English, shared by so many – “used for everything from ordering a hamburger to ordering airstrikes” – could possibly convey our most delicate, ephemeral experiences.

The power of creative writing, she decides, lies in its dual ability to connect with both the collective “people” and the individual “person.” She notes how political movements can sometimes rely on slogans and chants. Still, real change – real transformation – is often more subtle, embedded in the personal narratives and unique perspectives that only literature can offer. “Creative writing,” she explained, asking us to excuse the metaphor, “is a way to let the software of your consciousness wash over the hardware of someone else’s mind.” Words become software, programming new ways of thinking in the reader’s mind.

Smith offered James Baldwin as a model of how a writer’s distinct subjectivity becomes a “powerful tool of understanding.” Other activists in his sphere criticized Baldwin for his “queerness,” both in his sexuality and in the sense that they found his writing strangely removed from their aims. Yet, his work and the messages he conveyed have remained relevant while his contemporaries are now relatively obscure. Through this, she argues that writing can be an act of resistance for those who see the world differently or feel disconnected from dominant narratives. Putting creative writing into the world is a way to make their own consciousness “inhabitable” and allows readers to “think alongside them,” challenging their assumptions without issuing commands. To her, literature should not be directive or dogmatic but an open-ended invitation to question, reflect, and evolve.

Afterwards, from behind the bookseller’s table, the stretching line for signed copies buzzed with an energy that defied the earlier grim mood. Smith’s words were aimed squarely at the writer, the reader, and even the revolutionary in all of us. On a day when headlines could make you feel like one small voice lost in the crowd and many search for clarity in a world that seems to offer none, her talk did not provide easy answers. She left us instead with a renewed faith in the possibilities of perspective by letting us briefly into hers, reminding us that each consciousness holds its own truth and transformative power.