

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH NEWSLETTER

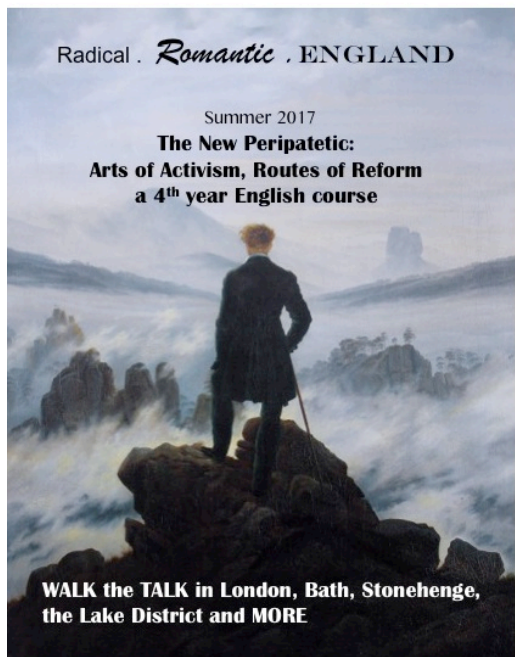
Fall 2016



WALKING THE TALK – AND TALKING THE WALK

Which would you rather do – sit in the same (probably windowless) classroom, day after day, reading poetry and novels about places in England you have never seen . . . or stride through the Lake District reciting parts of “The Prelude,” then follow in the footsteps of John Thelwall, comparing his London to the London of today? Which do you think would be a more enriching and memorable learning experience?

Two Dalhousie English professors think that question hardly needs to be asked. Next summer, they will be teaching a 4000-level seminar course in the actual locations the texts on the syllabus describe or were written.



“All the stories are in the land,” says Judith Thompson, who is launching the project with post-doctoral fellow Kate Scarth. “The landscape is described by stories, and stories are embedded in the landscape.”

Part of Dr. Thompson’s successful grant proposal to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the project aims to explore John Thelwall’s method of teaching, activism and learning, as described in his work “The Peripatetic.” Students will visit London, Salisbury, Bristol, Bath, the Midlands and the Lake District, reading and writing about Romantic and early Victorian poets, novelists, dramatists, activists, scientists, and artists.

However, this will not just be a passive ‘literary tourism’ experience. The class will explore peripatetic pedestrian travel – walking, wandering, hiking – in relation to activism.

Dr. Thompson’s work on Thelwall, who was an activist and radical around the turn of the 1800s, will combine with Dr. Scarth’s work on “green romanticism,” urbanization and

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suburbanization. The students will not just be speaking to academics but to activists, environmentalists, and artists, and will be exploring everything from the manuscripts Dorothy and William Wordsworth left in Dove Cottage to a soundscape walk (Ghosts in the Garden) put together by a professor in England that will take them through the sounds of a pleasure garden in Bath two hundred years ago.

“We want to convey the sense that literature and writing is *not* something you just do in a classroom or ivory tower,” Dr. Thompson says. “It is a way of putting beliefs and values into action.”

Dr. Scarth says that she has always had an interest in “publically-facing work.” That is part of the reason the class will meet with all different kinds of people, not just academics.

The assignments for the course will reflect that desire to get out of the ‘ivory tower’. The students will be working on a collaborative, creative, public project that can take written, oral, digital, visual or multi-platform forms. They will also create a portfolio of sketches along the way, in an update of the “Sketches of the Heart, Nature and Society” that Thelwall’s *Peripatetic* collected in 1793.

“We’re trying to get thinking outside the classroom, outside the historical documentation,” Dr. Thompson says. She talks

about the layering of landscape, the layering of history in places in England, that is much less obvious in Canada. “You can’t see it unless you’re actually in the space,” she continues. “One of the things that amazed me when I was retracing the steps of Thelwall in London was that so many of the places were still there. I was constantly doing a measuring of what it is now versus what it was then. Which was the same thing he himself was doing with earlier writers.

“The poetic foot is actually related to the rhythm of walking,” she adds. “This course brings the body and material culture back into [literature].”

The class is open to all students above first year, and you do not have to be a Dalhousie student (or a student at a Canadian University) to go. There is a limit of 15 people. The deadline to apply is February 17; financial support is available. To find out more go to <https://www.dal.ca/faculty/arts/english/news-events/thenew-peripatetic.html>.

-Kathy Cansey



KALENDA EATON FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR

“I love your pin!” Kalenda Eaton says as I sit down to interview her.

Dr. Kalenda Eaton is the Canada Fulbright scholar from Arcadia University in Pennsylvania who is at Dalhousie University’s Department of English for a term. It is her first long-term stay in Canada; her previous visit was limited to a quick trip to the Josiah Henson House near Windsor.

I am confused. “You mean my necklace?” I ask.

“Oh, well, I like that too,” she says. “But I mean the flower pin on your shirt.”

I look down, laugh, and proceed to provide her with her very own Remembrance Day poppy. I explain the significance of the poppy and its relation to the poem “In Flanders Fields,” which she knows.

“You don’t have Remembrance Day in the States?” I ask.

“We have Veterans’ Day,” Kalenda answers. “But there are flags everywhere, not poppies.”

This misunderstanding captures in miniature the experience Dr. Eaton has had so far in Nova Scotia. She is here as a Fulbright scholar, and one of her ‘jobs’ as such is to take on an “ambassadorial” role – so she was surprised at first at the lack of obvious differences between Canada and the States. But over time more subtle differences have become clear.

“It’s the subtle differences that make you feel like it’s really a different space,” she says. “There’s a very different mindset. I think there’s a healthy sense of optimism here – that the world is a good place and it can be made better.”

That interrelationship between space and identity – between people and place – is Dr. Eaton’s area of expertise. Her time in Nova Scotia will be spent doing



Credit: Janet Greenstreet

background research for a chapter of her book on how citizenship, land and identity politics came together at the turn of the 20th century, specifically as represented in historical fiction written by black women around the turn of the 21st century.

Her Canadian stay will be fleshing out the back-story for the black Canadian experience, as represented by authors such as novelist Esi Edugyan in the *Second Life of Samuel Tyne* and playwright Cheryl Foggo in her memoir *Pourin’ Down Rain*. These Canadians will be paralleled by Americans such as Toni Morrison, Jewell Parker Rhodes, and Maxine Clair. Together, Dr. Eaton says, these women are bringing to light and life the “forgotten” black prairie communities – then she laughs and qualifies, “though they have only been forgotten in the sense that *academics* haven’t known of their existence!”

The works she is looking at address pre-1960s immigration West, when blacks “bought into the North American dream or myth that as long as you have land you can be part of building a nation.” There was not much difference in overall black experience between Canada and the U.S. before 1960s; slavery was abolished earlier here, but there were still segregation laws and racism.

But it was a “pleasant surprise” coming here to find the Africadian – to use George Elliot Clarke’s term – sub-community, a black Nova Scotian community with an identity separate from the rest of black

Canadian identity. She says she knew a bit about the pre-1900s history, but was “fascinated” by the “hybrid culture” she found here.

“There’s a very deliberate connection to black *American* identity,” she says, citing quilting and U.S. folk songs as examples, although she qualifies that these North American traditions all have an African foundation. “But people call it *African* identity.”



WHAT IF....

THE DIVERSITY BURSARY OPPORTUNITY

In the summer of 2015, Dal English professors Leonard Diepeveen and Jason Haslam reached out to colleagues in their department asking “wouldn’t it be cool if...?” The “if” was the beginning of a grassroots bursary fund to provide financial aid to Aboriginal and Black Canadian students majoring in English. The first bursary will be awarded in the Fall 2016.



Dr. Eaton was expecting to come to Dalhousie and spend much of her time in the library. Instead, she says, she has been going to talks and events from various departments and on and off campus.

“There’s so much going on, on campus and off,” she says. “This has been the greatest intellectual experience in years.”

—Kathy Cansey

YOU'RE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS OPPORTUNITY

Wouldn't it be cool if... faculty and staff in your department established a similar bursary to help students in your discipline?

Imagine the impact across the University if we could create 10, 15 or even 25 similar bursaries.

“If you’re the first generation and you’re having financial difficulties getting to university, needs-based bursaries are incredibly important,”

says **DR. DIEPEVEEN**

MAKING A UNIVERSITY-WIDE IMPACT

- Currently Aboriginal and Black/African-Canadian students make up only 2 per cent of the Dalhousie student body. Well below the 4-5 per cent that is seen in Canadian society.
- Many Aboriginal and Black/African-Canadian students continue to face financial barriers to continued education and many are the first in the family to attend PSE.
- A Report from the Committee on Aboriginal and Black/African Canadian Student Access and Retention recommends a 6 per cent increase in scholarship/bursary support for these groups.

“Bursaries are essential to providing initial opportunities to students of marginalized groups and keeping them at the university to complete their degrees,”

says **DR. HASLAM**

For more information on how your department can set up a bursary please contact:

Debbie McIntosh

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IT'S ALRIGHT, MA (I'M ONLY WRITING POETRY)

Prominent media preachers believe that all true poets should be outraged by the awarding of the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature to Bob Dylan. Such a reaction has much to do, of course, with whether you're the kind of poet who reads only the kind of poetry you write (or, to put it another way, whether you prefer everything Kingsley Amis to anything Jack Kerouac). These elitists also promote a conspiracy theory that the prize was given to Dylan as part of a cult of "boomer nostalgia" in which all members of an empowered generation are incapable of reading and listening outside their own time zone and are helplessly enthralled by the simplistic, populist lyrics of Dylan and his cohorts. One CBC pontificator calls Dylan the boomers' "god-king," implying mindless worship rather than mindful appreciation.

Such people are entitled to their opinion, of course, but it's too bad they make clear their dismissal of Dylan is based on little if any knowledge of his work. Indeed, most of those offering objection to this year's top literary prize have done so with disingenuous and specious arguments. Personally, I prefer the response of a New York book reviewer who said the Nobel award to Dylan was a "victory for language."

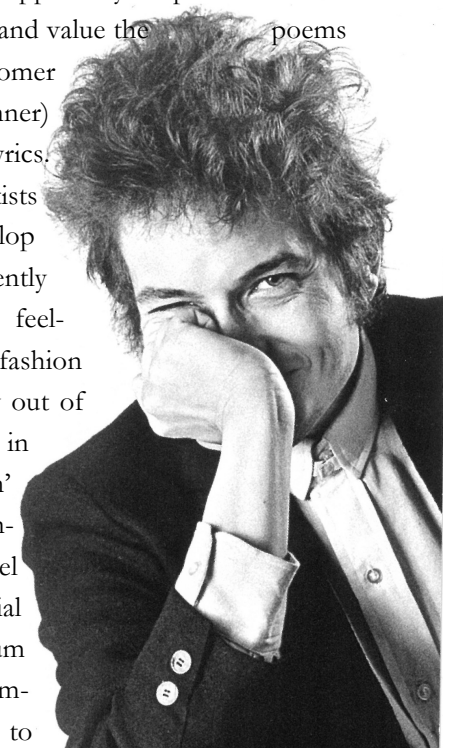
Without question Dylan writes poetry. It may be that the particular rhythmic repetitions, stanzaic structures, and dense allusive and symbolic imagery he employs in his best work (and there is *much* of that) do not satisfy certain formal tastes in literature, but you have to be utterly close-minded to dismiss categorically his facility with words whose creative combinations have made him one of the most significant figures in western culture over the last fifty years. I suspect part of the problem, as the same New York critic suggested, is a confusion for some between the world of literature and the world of books—literature defined by the *OED* as "written works" containing a beauty of language and a quality of form; books embedded in decisions made in and by a globally-entrenched publishing establishment that has attempted to codify

the rules for literary expression for a long time. You break these rules with no chance of redemption if you admit a singer-songwriter to the inner sanctum where 'reputable' publications are born and celebrated.

In this sanctum it is apparently impossible for a thinking person to read and value the poems of, say, Tomas Tranströmer (another Nobel winner) while praising Dylan's lyrics. Apparently, populist artists like Dylan never develop creatively but consistently express their ideas and feelings in the same limited fashion as they did when barely out of their teens. So "Blowin' in the Wind" or "Talkin' New York Blues" (an undisguised bit of doggerel with, nonetheless, a social bite) remain, for sanctum members, the best examples of Dylan's failure to write poetry, while more mature pieces such as "Desolation Row" or "Gates of Eden" or "Idiot Wind" are ignored.

Dylan's lyrics merge intrinsically with his music and are taught for good reason in the academy throughout North America and Europe alongside the work of sanctioned greats like Eliot, Yeats, Heaney, and others. Why? Because non-boomers inside and outside the classroom recognize intellectual and emotional depth in language when they encounter it. Dylan's enduring accomplishment is not in winning the Nobel Prize; it is in providing memorable and lasting lyrics that cut unplugged and electrically across false generational and genre divides.

Professor Emeritus Andy Wainwright taught a course called Bob Dylan and the Literature of the 60s. Photo credit Daniel Kramer.



SHAUNTAY GRANT COMBINES POETRY AND ART IN *STITCHED STORIES* - DALHOUSIE ART GALLERY EXHIBIT

will

when I die, wrap me
in a quilted shroud

carry the bundle
quick, and without ceremony
to the west of mudder's hill

don't mind the berries
there will be time
enough for burning

find the fullest mound
fruit thick like custom
beads, spilling from the bark –
black strokes of warrior masai

make sure the bush trembles
when you leap
or keep moderate time
your soles
tilling the rough side
of a fervent tenor
just
lay me down
and patch the earth

decorate the spot
with dandelions
and buttercups
sufficient gold
to call the sun

soak the ground
with rain boiled up
salted with birch
and hemlock, cleanse
for the journey

wait three days
then burn

and watch
the summer after next
i'll come
pruning
from deep inside
a berry bush



Summer Quilt, created by Shauntay Grant's great-grandmother
Annie Simmonds-Cain. Photo: Dalhousie Art Gallery

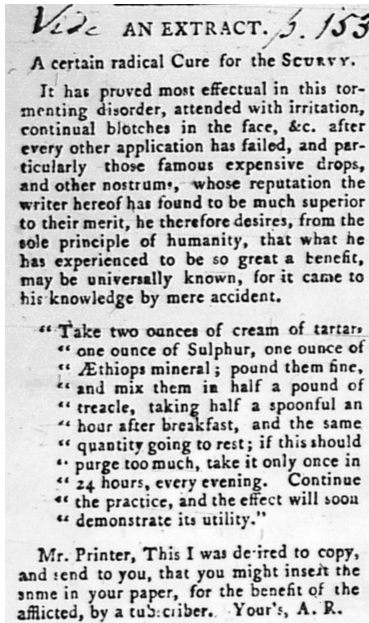
2016 Varma Prizes

1st prize: Hannah Ascough, "Alphabet Soup"

2nd prize: Tegan Samija, "The Close Reading Killer"

3rd prize: Helen Pinsent, "Lullaby"

A BRIEF SELECTION OF ENGLISH ACCOMPLISHMENTS



Lyn Bennett is the Principal Investigator on a SSHRC Insight Development Grant for “Early Modern Maritime Recipes,” which, with Co-Investigator Dr. Edith Snook (UNB), will examine and make public recipes circulating in the maritimes before 1800.

Shauntay Grant is the playwright in residence at 2b theatre in Halifax.

Jason Haslam received Honourable Mention for the Robert K. Martin Book Prize for *Gender, Race and American Science Fiction* (Routledge 2015)

El Jones took “gold” for “Best Activist” in *The Coast's* annual “Best of Halifax.”

Emily Pohl-Weary's collection *Ghost Sick* (Tightrope) won the Fred Cogswell Award for Excellence in Poetry.

Kayla Short took “gold” for “Best Blogger” in *The Coast's* annual “Best of Halifax.”

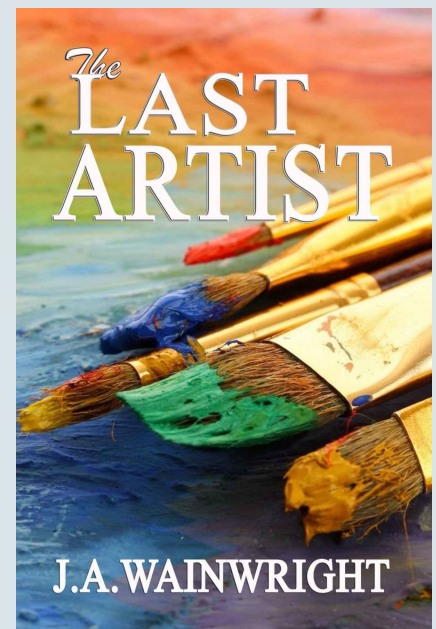
Erin Wunker launched *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy: Essays on Everyday Life* (Bookthug) at Art Bar (1873 Granville St) on November 15.

On Tuesday October 4 at 7:30pm, Andy Wainwright launched his new novel, *The Last Artist*, at a reading event in the Killam Library. Prof. Wainwright was introduced by Prof. Shao-Pin Luo. In her introduction, Prof. Luo spoke about Andy's extensive writing career, which spans almost 50 years, describing his poetry publications, his three previous novels, and his scholarly biographies of Charles Bruce and artist Robert Markle.

Andy Wainwright's new book is a meditation on art and mortality. His protagonist, Ben Sands, is troubled by his own mortality and that of his art. In order to confront his concerns head on, he reproduces several modern masterpieces on the walls of a French cave in the hope that they will last 20,000 years.

The novel is structured around stories inspired by the paintings that Sands reproduces, one of which is Goya's “The Third of May 1808.” This painting powerfully depicts the execution of Spanish resistance fighters by French troops on May 3 1808 during the Napoleonic Wars. Andy read from the section on Goya's masterpiece, a poignant and tragic story of goat herders passing through Madrid who become entangled in an uprising in which they have no involvement and no interest.

A Q&A session followed the reading. Andy's book is available at bookstores and online from Amazon.ca.



-- Ian Colford

WINTER SPEAKER SERIES

All events begin at 3:45 in McCain 1198, unless otherwise specified

Date	Speaker	Title
Jan 20	Nicole Slipp	TBD
Jan 27	Judith Thompson	Romantic Spoken Word
Feb 3	<i>Munro Day</i>	
Feb 10	Len Diepeveen	Shiny Things Project
Feb 17	Laura Bonhert Michael Fontaine	PhD Prospectuses
Feb 24	<i>Reading Week</i>	
March 3	Alice Brittan	TBD
March 10	Jennifer Bain	“The History of a Book: Hildegard of Bingen's <i>Riesencodex</i> and World War II.”
March 17	Sean Howard	The Photographer's Last Picture
March 24	Kate Scarth & Chris Shalom	Halifax's Literary Landmarks: Exploring Atlantic Canada's urban blue/green spaces
March 31	Geordie Miller	TBD
April 7	Shauntay Grant	TBD

Newsletter Editor: Kathy Cawsey

Contributors: Ian Colford, Shauntay Grant, Andy Wainwright

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