

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH NEWSLETTER

Winter 2015



Daniel Crawford with the Decadence art exhibit at the 2014 DAGSE conference. (Photo by Danen Poley)

DECADENCE: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY GRADUATE CONFERENCE

From August 15-17th, the Dalhousie Association of Graduate Students in English (DAGSE) hosted its third annual interdisciplinary graduate student conference. This year's theme was decadence, and over the course of the three-day conference, participants representing ten unique programs of study from over fifteen different universities throughout North America examined the symptoms and effects of decadence as a literary, artistic, historical, and socio-cultural phenomenon.

Friday's festivities included an art exhibit—organized by Danen Poley—featuring paintings, drawings, and sculptures by Daniel Crawford and other local artists. Following Dr. David Howard's (Nova Scotia College of Art & Design) keynote presentation, entitled "Gnawing on Skulls: Allegorical Poetics and Decadence in the Twenty-first Century," conference attendees continued to enjoy

the exhibit during a reception catered by Dalhousie's Grad House Social Club.

On Saturday, a keynote by Dr. Julia M. Wright (Dalhousie University) served as the exclamation point to a full day of lively concurrent panels. Her inspiring talk, "Mene, Mene?: The Humanities in a Time of War," was followed afterwards by the conference supper downtown. The day of decadence was brought to an appropriate close with the DecaDANCE, a late-night party-boat cruise in the Halifax harbor (special thanks to Gillian Massel and Geordie Miller). The next morning, another spate of engaging panels on topics ranging from Arthurian lore to Vico, and from Beowulf to Djuna Barnes, marked the end of another dynamic, invigorating conference.

—*Graham Jensen (DAGSE Vice President)*

DAGSE would like to extend heartfelt thanks to Mary Beth MacIsaac and Adria Young for their extensive advice and administrative insight, to Dr. Carrie Dawson and the Graduate Committee, as well as to Trevor Ross, David McNeil, and the Department of English. DAGSE also gratefully acknowledges the support and assistance of the following sponsors, without which this event would not have been possible: Dalhousie President's Office, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, the Department of English, and the Departments of History, Classics, Philosophy, German, and Psychology. Finally, we extend our warmest thanks to our keynote speakers, Dr. Julia M. Wright and Dr. David Howard.

GOTHIC GOODIES: CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION CELEBRATES THE MACABRE



Varma prize winner Helen Pinsent. (Bruce Bottomley photo)

“Rumour has it, he saw ghosts,” said Herman Varma of his father, Devendra Varma, this Halloween as the Department of English hosted its annual Varma celebration.

Herman was thrilled to see how Dalhousie continues to honour his father’s memory. Dr. Varma was a faculty member in the Dalhousie Department of English for 31 years, retiring in 1991. In his honour, William Blakeney, a student of Dr. Varma’s, established the Varma Prizes in Gothic Literature — a now much-loved annual tradition in which students pen their own tales of horror and the Gothic.

Dr. Varma had a similarly inspiring impact on David McNeil, the department’s current chair. In an amusing introduction to the afternoon’s festivities, which included readings by competitors and presentation of the prizes, Dr. McNeil told some stories of his time working with Dr. Varma.

Dr. McNeil was set to teach Dr. Varma’s class on Gothic literature and romanticism while the latter went on sabbatical. Upon requesting that Dr. Varma show him his

previous syllabi for reference, he was told, according to the dramatic retelling: “When the wind blows and the leaves whirl around the clock tower, I teach Shelley’s Ode to the West Wind. When the snows come, I teach Mont Blanc — or Frankenstein. I deal in the spiritual world, Dr. McNeil; there are no syllabi.”

“I took this last comment as a hint that I should leave,” Dr. McNeil told the rapt crowd, “which I did, thinking that I’d have to consult the Farmer’s Almanac if I wanted to plan the rest of the year.”

Halloween spirit was joyfully shared by all for the rest of the event. Many students and faculty members came in costume to enjoy the abundant Romanian wine and snacks, and one of the student writers, to the fright of all, arranged to have fake blood begin to drip from his mouth in the middle of his reading.

In this year’s Varma competition, Helen Pinsent came in first place and received a \$500 prize for her story, “Transaction.”

“It kind of started with the first line,” she says. “I knew I wanted it to be a really tight scope” — the contest has a 250-word limit — “so before I even know where the story was going to go, I had the line ‘I remember the ink blotted when I signed,’ and it just kind of flowed from there.”

Helen wore an impressive Poe-inspired cape, made to look like a raven’s feathered back, with the word “Nevermore” inscribed on it.

“I do really like Edgar Allan Poe and I had actually been reading a lot of Poe when I wrote [‘Transaction’],” she

says. “I wanted to get away from the gory end of Gothic and get a little bit more psychological. There’s so much more room there, I think, for good characterization and for a lot more creativity than if you just go straight gore.”

Lysle Hood came in second place (\$150) with her story “Fragments,” and Mitchel Brinton came in third (\$100) with his “Qu’Appelle! – Who calls?” The runners-up were Karl Fritze for his “Forerunners” and Sage Beatson for her “Formaldehyde Kisses.”

—*Emma Skagen (originally published in Dal News)*

CONFERENCE IN HONOUR OF GEORGE WHALLEY: QUEEN’S UNIVERSITY



Portrait of George R. Whalley (1955) by Elizabeth Harrison. Photo by Alicia Boutiller

A conference in honour of the centenary of the birth of George Whalley (25 July 1915 – 27 May 1983), the eminent Canadian man of letters, will be held at Queen’s University, 24-26 July 2015. The author of *Poetic Process* (1953) and *The Legend of John Hornby* (1962), and a frequent contributor to CBC radio (1953-71), Whalley served in the Royal Navy and the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (1940-1956) and taught at Queen’s (1950-80). An introduction to his life, a timeline of its significant events, samples of his writings, a selection of photographs, and a full bibliography of his works are available at <http://georgewhalley.ca>.

The event has been organized so that each of the three days is devoted to a different element of Whalley’s wide-ranging interests. The first day will focus on Romanticism and Aesthetics and feature plenary talks by John Baxter (Dalhousie University), the co-editor of Whalley’s translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and Werner Nell (Martin Luther University, Halle-Wittenberg), who has published widely in Enlightenment and Romantic aesthetics. The second day of the event is devoted to Whalley and his works. There will be papers on his poems and criticism, Coleridge scholarship, the writings on John Hornby and Edgar Christian, and other topics. Michael Ondaatje and Elizabeth Hay will participate in a panel discussion on Whalley’s life and influence. The 60th anniversary of the Canadian Writers’ Conference at Queen’s, 28-31 July 1955, for which Whalley edited the proceedings entitled *Writing in Canada* (1956), will be the focus of the third day. Its purpose is to bring together writers and readers, publishers and critics to revisit and ask anew questions about writing in Canada.

On Friday afternoon the Principal of Queen’s will host a reception. The participants will gather Saturday afternoon at the HMCS *Catarauqui*, in recognition of Whalley’s heroic wartime service. That evening they will

Hear a performance of chamber music in the Bader Centre, in a tribute to Whalley's profound love of music and his contributions to the Kingston community. A selection of bronze sculptures by George's younger brother Peter Whalley, the accomplished artist and political cartoonist, will be exhibited in the Bader Centre. Queen's Archives will prepare an exhibition of materials selected from the Whalley fonds. Some of the sessions will take place in the Whalley room in Watson Hall, in the presence of Elizabeth Harrison's fine portrait of Whalley in his naval officer uniform.

Michael John DiSanto (Algoma), Shelley King (Queen's), and Steve Lukits (RMC) are organizing the event. They are receiving assistance from Alana Fletcher (PhD Candidate, Queen's) and Jaspreet Tambar (PhD Candidate, Queen's). The event is funded by Queen's and Algoma and affiliated with *Editing Modernism in Canada*. Established and emerging scholars, Whalley's former colleagues and students, his family and friends, and the general public are welcome to attend. A page dedicated to the conference is available on the Whalley website: <http://georgewhalley.ca/gwp/node/3873>. The proceedings will be published in an open-access digital edition on the website.

—*Michael John DiSanto, Associate Professor and Chair of English at Algoma University. He completed his MA (2000) under John Baxter and his PhD (2005) under Roban Maitzen. John's great admiration for and scholarly work on George Whalley inspired Michael to edit Whalley's collected poems and write his biography. His work is funded by a SSHRC Insight Grant and is pursued in collaboration with Editing Modernism in Canada.*



ALUMNA PROFILE: MEAGAN TIMNEY



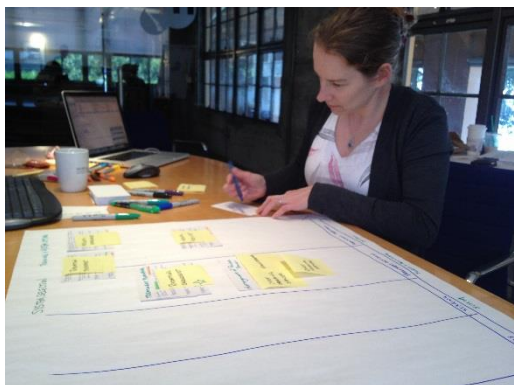
Meagan Timney (MA 2005, PhD 2010). Photo by Scott Abbott.

In 2011, I made the trek from Victoria, BC to California, the home of Silicon Valley and some of the most innovative companies in the world. Three years later, I am leading the research team at Inkling (<http://www.inkling.com>), a digital publishing startup in San Francisco, which was recently named by Inc. Magazine as one of the fastest growing companies of 2014.

The transition from academia to the private sector was in some ways a natural progression. I began designing faculty websites for a number of Canadian universities in the 1990s, and had always been interested in the ways in which information can be represented in electronic forms. In my first semester of my MA at Dal, I was fortunate to take a course with Dr. Dean Irvine, a serendipitous event that would impact my career path years later. When Dr. Irvine asked his students to create a mini scholarly edition for their final project in his Canadian Editions graduate seminar, I jumped at the chance to use my web-development skills to create a digital version of Pauline Johnson/Tekahionwake's poems. The project made visible a whole new world; it was a first foray into the burgeoning field of digital humanities, and a new way of thinking about the texts that I was studying.

A few years later, as I sat in a small local archive in the basement of a church in the north of England, researching Victorian working-class women's poetry for my doctoral thesis, a spark ignited. With the annals of Vic-

torian history literally crumbling at my fingertips, I realized that unless this literature was preserved, it would be lost to future generations. I embarked upon a small digital edition project, a decision that led me deeper down the rabbit hole into the world of editorial theory and publishing practices. Wanting to ensure the preservation of these texts, I began *The Working-Class Women Poet's Project*, an online edition of nineteenth-century poetry written by working-class women, and a supplement to my doctoral dissertation, which I completed under the supervision of Dr. Marjorie Stone. After finishing my PhD, I was awarded a postdoctoral fellowship with Editing Modernism in Canada (EMiC), which took me to the Electronic Textual Cultures Laboratory at the University of Victoria. As a postdoc in the field of digital humanities, I researched and taught digital literary studies, human-computer interaction, and interface design for digital publishing platforms, and worked as the lead design technician for EMiC. I discovered my love of interaction design during my time as an EMiC postdoc and assistant professor at UViC. When my contract neared completion, I made the decision to leave academia and take a job in the private sector, setting my sights on interactive design agencies, and later, digital publishing.



Meagan Timney at Inking. Photo by Dana Mandoles.

I gained much needed experience working at two digital agencies—one in Victoria, and one in San Francisco—and learned the necessary practical skills for my role while on the job. I knew, inevitably, that I wanted to return to the world of editing and publishing. When the opportunity to work at Inking presented itself, I leapt at the chance. Now, after a year and a half at Inking, I run the company's product research division. I spend

my days speaking with customers, gathering and synthesizing qualitative and quantitative data about Inking's product offerings, mentoring junior members of my team, and helping to determine the product strategy and roadmap.

I remember my time at Dalhousie fondly and credit my doctoral research in the humanities with teaching me the skills that are critical for user-experience designers: research, clear communication, and the analysis and synthesis of large amounts of information. Through teaching and interacting with students I learned how to work with clients, how to run customer interviews, and how to articulate complex systems in a way that is both simple and meaningful. The practical experience that I gained through working with Dr. Irvine and EMiC, and the research skills I learned under the support and tutelage of Dr. Stone provided the necessary groundwork for success in my leadership role at Inking.

I now live in Sausalito, California with my husband and two parrots, and when I'm not hard at work helping people create content that matters, I spend my time hiking, cycling, swimming, and lifting weights.

—Meagan Timney



ALUMNA PROFILE: MELISSA DALGLEISH



Melissa Dalglish (MA, 2007). Photo by Selina Whittaker, Selina Whittaker Photography.

I'm Melissa Dalglish, Dalhousie English MA., Class of 2007. After graduating from Dal, I began my PhD at York University in 2008. Despite the assumption within my program, and across the university, that all doctoral candidates would be pursuing tenure-track jobs, I realized about midway through my degree that I really wasn't sure that I wanted to be a professor—I wanted to stay in Toronto, where there were almost never jobs in my field, and I realized that there were many aspects of the professorial life that just didn't suit me.

In trying to figure out how to market myself as something other than an academic, I gathered as much information as I could get my hands on about graduate reform, career development for PhDs, professionalization, and transferable skills. In the process, I figured out that *those* issues-- which are fundamentally about the failure to best support graduate students during and after their degrees -- were what I was really passionate about. I then started looking for opportunities that would let me tackle the challenges facing graduate education, and graduate students, in real and meaningful ways.

I soon found a research assistantship in the Faculty of Graduate Studies at York; I was hired to research professional development programs and graduate reform initiatives being implemented at York, across Canada, and elsewhere in the world. It was a phenomenal opportunity—I got to find out just what York was doing to address the reality of the academic job market and help its graduates negotiate a variety of post-degree pathways, and I got to make recommendations about what we should be doing to better serve graduate students that had a good chance of being implemented. What power! During this process, I also learned how to identify and talk about the valuable skills I had honed as a graduate student, skills that we all develop—project management, research, analysis, synthesis, community engagement, teamwork, critical thinking, writing, public speaking, time management.

When a permanent job came open in the Faculty of Graduate Studies, one that would let me keep working on graduate professional development, and also represent the needs of graduate students at the administrative level, I jumped at it. I'm now a Research Officer, one of about a dozen at York, and I support graduate students and postdoctoral fellows in research-related activities. I manage all of the university's graduate scholarship and fellowship competitions, develop applications for major grants and awards, oversee graduate research that requires ethics approval



Faculty of Graduate Studies, York University. Photo by Christopher Douris, Faculty of Graduate Studies, York University

or intellectual property agreements, and coordinate graduate research and professional development events

and programs, including the Three Minute Thesis competition and our Graduate Professional Skills (GPS) program. I just launched GPS—the same program I advocated for when I was working as a research assistant—this past September.

This job is a perfect fit for me. I work with an extraordinarily awesome team (that’s them in the goofy photo), I support outstanding graduate students, I have a voice, from the local level to the international, in how graduate education is being reshaped, and I live exactly where I want to. I’m grateful that the education I got at Dalhousie and at York put me in precisely the right position to figure out what I wanted to do and let me start doing it, and taught me to value, and fight for the value of, graduate education.

—*Melissa Dalgleish*



HONOURS COLLOQUIUM



Honours Class of 2014/15, Department of English. Left to right, as you descend: Meghan Carlson, Madeleine Braun, David Fleming, Melanie Higgins, Karl Fritze, Jenna Herdman, Carrie MacDonald, Brynn Staples, Alexandra Eaton, Sarah Newman, Mark Bhol, Sarah-Jane Hasenauer-Kinsley, Emma Skagen, Mairead Murphy. Photo by William Barker.

Shrews in Shakespeare, lawyers in Dickens and Collins, Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Wharton’s *Age of Innocence*, *Django Unchained*, *Sarah’s Key*, Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-four*, *écriture féminine* in Sharon Olds, Williams and Eliot, *Lolita* and *Death in Venice*, Kafka—those were the literature topics in this year’s two-day Honours colloquium, which was held on November 27-28th, 2014.

And to celebrate the merger of Creative Writing and English, we also heard about creating characters in fiction, problems of depicting in words someone close to you, the anxiety of influence, and the uses of failure.

Now and then you get a class that will NOT SETTLE DOWN. This was an unruly group that liked to travel in all directions at once. We would be going in one direction, the wind would shift with a single comment, and we were suddenly moving in another. I found it exhilarating.

This capstone course has come to be a kind of wrap-up of what had gone before (I asked the students to write an essay on “What I Learned in English” with the most charming results), as well as a preparation of what is to come, with workshops on writing a personal statement, looking at the SSHRC application, and how to polish up a presentation and deliver it effectively. We had a field trip to Gaspereau Press for the annual Wayzgoose. We had a dinner over at my house. And the grand finale was the colloquium, in which the students delivered their papers to the faculty, graduate students, and friends.

The group was very comfortable in saying anything to anyone, and seemed to be able to do this with kindness. The boldness and energy in the class made one feel that our English program had been for them a liberation. Even one student who admitted to no longer liking English thought our program had been worthwhile. She will be going into design. Others are heading to law, one to health administration, some to graduate school in creative writing, even a few into English, and some of course to a future still to be decided.

—*William Barker*



FRIDAY SPEAKER SERIES

January 9 – “The Poet of the Pulp: Ray Bradbury and the Struggle for Prestige in Postwar Science Fiction” presented by Anthony Enns (Dalhousie).

January 16 – “Let’s All Do Heroin: Samuel Delany, Lou Reed, and Utopia’s Queer End” presented by Jason Haslam (Dalhousie).

January 23 – A Reading from our creative writing instructors: Shandi Mitchell, Carole Langille, Donna Morrissey, Sue Goyette, Charlotte Mendel, and El Jones.

January 30 – “Zombies and the Viral Web” presented by Karen Macfarlane (MSVU).

February 13 – Valentine’s Sonnet Competition

February 27 – “What Happens in Berlevaag, Stays in Berlevaag: Dinesen, Desire, and Adam Phillips” presented by David Heckerl (SMU).

March 6 – PhD Colloquium, featuring Graham Jensen and Brea Marks (Dalhousie).

March 13 – “The Ironic Shine” presented by Leonard Diepeveen (Dalhousie).

March 20 – “The Faults in Ourselves, or Our Stars, or Whatever: Shakespeare Misquotation Online” presented by Yolana Wassersug (University of Birmingham).

March 27 – “Monstrous Maternity in post-World War II American Gothic Fiction” presented by Lynne Evans (Dalhousie).

We invite our alumni to join us at one of our Friday talks at 3:45pm in room 1198 of the McCain building. Stay after for a chat over the wine and cheese that follows.



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