

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Newsletter

Brag Bag

Congratulations to alumnus **Jeremy Kohm** (BA '97) on being named one of the 200 Best Ad Photographers Worldwide by *Luerzer's Magazine*. See article on page 4.

Congratulations to professor **Ronald Tetreault** for winning the Society of Digital Humanities' Outstanding Achievement Award, in recognition of his work on William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads: An Electronic Scholarly Edition*.

Congratulations to professor **Rohan Maitzen**, whose work on Victorian literature, and most recently her article on George Eliot's *Romola*, has been recognized by being linked to *The New Yorker's* "Page Turner."

Congratulations to professor **John Baxter** whose article, "Perilous Stuff: Poems of Religious Meditation," won the Joseph S. Schwartz Prize, awarded every other year to an essay of special excellence published in the journal *Renascence*. See article on page 3.

Congratulations to professor **Shashi Bhat**, whose short story "Why I Read Beowulf," originally published in *PRISM international* 50:1, was recently nominated for the Journey Prize.

Vile Passéist Theatre Dan Bray and Early Modern Theatre

A graduate of the honours programme in English at Dalhousie, **Dan Bray** was provoked to found a theatre company while working at the University of Toronto Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama in 2009. "I was introduced to the Futurist movement. I learned that one hundred years earlier, Filippo Tomaso Marinetti and his buddies had written a manifesto in which they condemned most traditional forms of theatre, particularly that of the early-modern era, as 'vile' and 'passéist.' However, the more I studied this radical movement, with all its fervour and noise and absurdity, the more I found myself missing the very practices he had ridiculed. Thus, VPT was born, embracing the works of early-modern dramatists who, like Shakespeare, helped to shape theatre as we know it today."

For Dan, the way to the future involves a return to the past, so he conspicuously avoids the work of Shakespeare in order to focus on the plays of his contemporaries, refuting the Futurists by turning their snub into the theatre company's name and, ironically, its mission.

After Dan moved his company to Halifax, it gathered momentum year by year with productions of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (2010) followed by *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *A Chaste*

Maid in Cheapside, and *Bartholomew Fair* (2011). 2012 began with two plays by Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II* and *The Jew of Malta*, and continued with *A Yorkshire Tragedy* by Thomas Middleton. Three more plays are announced for 2013: *The Roaring Girl* and *The Maid's Tragedy*, both to be directed by Dan (Founder and Artistic Director of VPT) and John Fletcher's *The Tamer Tamed*, to be directed by Colleen MacIsaac (Executive Director of VPT).



The Jew of Malta, produced in the winter of 2012, was a striking illustration of the company's prowess and its achievements. Jesse Robb, in the central role, handled the sardonic asides of Barabas with considerable finesse, portraying both the sinister Machiavel of Marlowe's effronteries

and the more complex cultural victim of Marlowe's deeper sympathies. The problems depicted in this play and their on-going relevance are both nicely highlighted in the account that Dan gives of some of his choices or strategies as its Director:

Although *The Jew of Malta* gives us a fascinating window into Elizabethan perceptions of the Other, we have decided to set our play in the 19th century. Not only does this allow us to explore

Editorial Greetings



I've been teaching at Dalhousie for a long time, and that's one reason why I was asked to take on

the position of Alumni Relations Officer for the Department of English at the beginning of 2012. Yes, I know a great number of alumni; it's hardly a surprise (though it's very gratifying) to have a fellow dog-walker at Point Pleasant Park stop me by saying: "Do you teach English at Dalhousie?" That's when the conversation and the fun begins.

Conversation with alumni and fun: I hope that these will be principal elements of the Department of English *Newsletter*, of which I'll be editor for the next three issues or so. The current issue includes a number of stories about the achievements and activities of people who studied English at Dalhousie, four of whom, I'm very happy to say, are former students of mine. I'll mention them in the order in which I met them, though I

won't say just how far back in time I need to go.

Susan Irene Brown was a student of mine in an honours seminar in seventeenth-century poetry and prose. I knew at the time that she was someone special, and I'm happy indeed to see that she will be the next scholar to speak in our Distinguished Speakers series. Her talk is announced in the calendar of events on the last page of this *Newsletter*. I urge you to come out on this occasion, to participate in the intellectual life of Dalhousie, and to enjoy some nostalgic conversation.

Lyn Bennett did three degrees at Dalhousie, and she was a member of a graduate seminar I taught on early modern privacy. Lyn has been a colleague of mine for some years now, and just recently she has been enjoying the many pleasures of Oxford.

Dan Bray was a member of a large undergraduate Shakespeare class of mine, after which he studied at the University of Toronto and decided to start a theatre company dedicated to

producing plays by all of Shakespeare's competitors and rivals. I find his company's productions always enjoyable, thoughtful, moving, and exciting. I encourage you to attend his shows whenever you can.

Peter Chiykowski was a member of my graduate seminar in the theory and practice of literary pleasure. His talents are literary, but also unexpected, as you'll learn from Shashi Bhat's description of his recent activities, and from the image reproduced at the bottom of this page.

I've left out **Jeremy Kohm**, also an alumnus, because I didn't have the good fortune to be his teacher but he's also featured here in the *Newsletter* as the star attraction in the story by Kelly Larkin Conway on page 4. And there are achievements by colleagues (Ronald Tetreault, Rohan Maitzen, John Baxter, Shashi Bhat) that I'm delighted to draw some attention to, even if briefly.

Let's agree that the study of English can lead to an ongoing conversation, and let's hope that it will be fun.

- Ronald Huebert

Be sure to
Mark Your Calendar
with help from page 6

8 November 2012
Dr. Susan Brown

as part of Dalhousie's
**Distinguished Speaker
Series**

Victorian writing, women's
writing and feminist theory,
and digital humanities





John Baxter's "Perilous Stuff"

John Baxter has won the most recent Joseph M. Schwartz Memorial Essay Prize for his article, "Perilous Stuff: Poems of Religious Meditation," published in *Renascence* 62.2 (Winter 2010): 89-115. The article had a previous life as a series of four talks John presented at St. George's Round Church in Halifax, partly in response to the question: "What,

in our time, do the church and the academy have to offer one another?" Rather a lot, to judge by the intellectually subtle and beautifully articulated meditations that Baxter offers his readers in the award winning essay. Some of the poems are deservedly famous:

Donne's Holy Sonnet 14 and "Good Friday 1613: Riding Westward," for example. Others, such as Helen Pinkerton's

"It would surely be an addition to heaven's many attractions if it allowed for a good argument now and again."

"Visible and Invisible" may be more of a surprise. But every sentence of this essay is a joy to read, partly because Baxter has managed to get all of it down in a way that captures very precisely his own distinctive voice. I'll give you one example of what I mean, namely Baxter's claim that "it

would surely be an addition to heaven's many attractions if it allowed for a good argument now and again." Current and former students of his will understand at once what he means.

The judges for the contest liked the article as much as I did. One of them called it "terrific, indeed a great essay The essay is dynamic: it keeps on moving not only to the next poet and poem but to the meaning of all the poetry discussed. Baxter never forgets or lets us forget that his subject is poetry and how best to understand it."

Read the article [here](#); I'm sure you will enjoy it.

- Ronald Huebert

Dal English Alum Achieves Writing Success

Dalhousie English alumnus Peter Chiykowski was at a friend's house checking his email when he received his first literary journal acceptance, from *Grain* magazine. He says (very humbly), "I was expecting another rejection...and totally flipped out when I actually opened the email. For the longest time I was convinced the editors were playing a trick on a gullible first-time writer. It wasn't until the cheque came in the mail that I accepted it was for real."

Chiykowski graduated from Dal in 2011, after completing both his BA and MA in English. Since that first publication, he has published prolifically, with his fiction and poetry appearing in sev-

eral journals and anthologies across North America, including *Best Canadian Poetry*, *Best Canadian Speculative Writing*, *The New Quarterly*, *On Spec*, and *PRISM International*.

While still a full-time student, he also created the online comic *Rock, Paper, Cynic*, which he describes as "the inevitable result of having a stimulating academic life and a short attention span." On where he finds inspiration, he says, "The things I was reading and learning in school, things that always seemed very serious, fed themselves naturally into jokes." The webcomic has been shared by legend George Takei and tweeted by actor Nathan Fillion. *FCWebcomics* called

"the inevitable result of having a stimulating academic life and a short attention span."



it "amazingly entertaining and insightful." He now represents his comic at conventions, so that he can have "idea-spawning conversations with interesting people and get quick and widespread exposure to a huge variety of artists and authors." Creating a single

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comic strip, including drawing and writing, can take him as long as four or five hours, and even before that, his brainstorming process involves shrewd observation and a lot of trial and error. "Sometimes this yields comic ideas. Sometimes I end up with a pile of garbage. I don't have a muse, just a notepad and a notion to struggle with it," he says.

Next on Chiykowski's list of projects is to complete a short fiction or poetry collection, in particular, what he calls "a kind of grimoire of unhelpful spells and hexes." The working title is *The Petty Spellbook*, and it will include poems such as "A Fertil-

ity Charm for Your Point-Seventeen Remington" and "A Charm for Communing with Dead Pets During Surgery."

He credits his experience in the Dalhousie English and Creative Writing programs with furthering his development as a writer, saying without it he wouldn't have pursued a career as a writer. In particular, he learned from the collaborative and critical creative writing workshops, and advises every writer to take one, in order to "learn the skills of writing with other people in mind." According to Chiykowski, before the workshop process, his writing was "reeeeeeeeally self-indulgent

and not at all fit for public consumption." Clearly, this is no longer the case.

On his list of department thank-yous, he includes mentors Carole Langille, Darryl Whetter, and Melanie Little for "[doing] so much to propel [him] as a creative writer." He says, "Prof's like Melissa Furrow, Ron Huebert, and Jason Haslam (to name a small few) challenged me as an analytical thinker and exposed me to new styles of writing.

"Honestly, I felt like I had the English and Creative Writing Department behind me the whole time."

- Shashi Bhat

Dal Grad Named in Top 200 Ad Photographers

Dalhousie graduate Jeremy Kohm never imagined he'd one day have a photography career, let alone be named one of *Luerzer Magazine's* Best 200 Ad Photographers worldwide. This award is one of eleven he has received in the past five years.

After graduating with an English and History degree in 1997, Kohm moved to Japan to teach English. As one of only four English speakers in a town of 20,000, he spent most of his free time surfing, an activity that didn't require much Japanese. Surfing ultimately introduced him to photography. "I didn't know what I was doing at the time, I just wanted to take pictures of what my friends and I were doing," says Kohm.

When he wasn't surfing, or teaching English, he was writing for *The Mainichi Shimbun* a national publication. And, it was writing for this newspaper that first allowed Kohm to showcase his photos. "They wanted me to supply photos with my articles so I thought, perfect, I'll be a travel writer! Visit interesting places, write, and take pictures." Shortly

after, Kohm moved to Sydney, Australia where he studied at the Australian Centre for Photography, hoping to pair well-crafted travel writing with smart photographs; instead, Kohm's photography career took off. He now boasts clients such as Travel+, CAMH, the Toronto Star, Advil, and the United Nations.

After several years in the business, Kohm began to notice recurring challenges for photographers working individually. Recently, Kohm founded GrasshopperReps.com, a Canadian boutique photo agency that breaks the traditional mold. GrasshopperReps.com offers top emerging photographers in Canada a chance to serve the advertising, architectural, design, editorial, and record industry's needs in an innovative way — through open dialogue, shared resources, and an exchange of knowledge.

Kohm credits his Dalhousie English degree with helping him develop the critical thinking skills he uses every day, from brainstorming with clients, to taking award winning photographs. "I have to think about where I want



the viewer's eye, what I want to communicate. Every good photo tells a story. These days it seems like anyone with a word program is a writer and anyone with a camera is photographer. But, a camera is just a tool. It takes a person to tell a story." And it takes a special person to tell the kinds of stories Jeremy Kohm tells.

- Kelly Larkin Conway



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how perceptions of the Other evolved in Europe, the 1800s were significant as it marked the first time that Christian Europe began to recognize its Jewish population as equal. The Jews suddenly became hard to recognize, their integration such that they were no longer situated on the fringe of society (ghettos, for example) or forced into traditional professions (namely usury).

As these remarks suggest, the Director focuses not on what is passé but on what is current and of lasting interest.

Also of interest are the Shakespearean analogies and comparisons made possible by these independent and full-scale productions. The opportunity to see a vigorous and well-produced *Jew of Malta* prepares the way for a more informed (if all but inescapable) comparison with *The Merchant of Venice*, while the forthcoming *Tamer Tamed* is sure to provoke comment on the play it was originally designed to comment on, the perennially popular if politically incorrect *Taming of the Shrew*.

And a rather less obvious set of comparisons is elicited by the recent production of *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, directed by Dorian Lang and produced by Dan Bray. Only recently attributed to Thomas Middleton, the play was long included among the Shakespeare apocrypha, so it invites speculation about what exactly is thought to be Shakespearean (and why, and when) and what is Middletonian. Published in 1608 but acted somewhat earlier "by his Majesties players at the Globe," the play alludes to the case of Walter Calverley, "gentleman," who was executed for murder on August 5, 1605. The story of a man who murders his own children and attempts to murder his wife is certainly vile enough, though hardly passé, and Middleton's exploration of his motives highlights both a Jacobean object lesson on the dangers of squandering one's patrimony and on the derangements of madness and despair. The powerful production of this infrequently performed play illustrates beautifully what Dan Bray's company has to offer and why it's important. With VPT we get theatre that is both Modern and Early Modern. And not a moment too soon, whatever the Futurists thought they were looking for.

For more information visit Vilepasseist.com and see especially Dan's own interesting account of its formation in *The Charlebois Post* (reproduced on the VPT site).

- John Baxter

To find out more about English at Dalhousie check out our website at <http://english.dal.ca>, email us at englwww@dal.ca or phone us (902) 494-3384.



Ashley Marie Pike as Abigail, and Jesse Robb as Barabas in *The Jew Of Malta*



Ona Archibald as Ursula in *Bartholomew Fair*



LYN BENNETT IN HER OWN WORDS

We asked professor and alumna Lyn Bennett for a description of the travels and adventures related to her current research. Here's what she had to say.

I have spent the summer researching, writing, and disseminating the results of my SSHRC-funded monograph in progress, tentatively titled "Professing Healing: Rhetoric, Medicine, and the Early Modern Writer." Focusing largely on the 17th-century professionalizing treatises of the learned physicians, I also take up the work of literary figures such as John Donne, Thomas Browne, Anne Bradstreet, and Jane Barker, all of whom wrote about illness and healing. My research has so far made visible some telling connections among different professions, classes, and genders that, in turn, show how even non-medical writers participated in rhetorically constructing the profession that came to dominate medicine by the century's end.

My SSHRC grant has funded an international, interdisciplinary conference on "The Patient" in Prague, Czech Republic, where in May I presented a paper titled "Treating Patients with Fear in 17th-Century Medical Practice," which is forthcoming in a collection on the conference proceedings; in June, I attended the biannual conference of the Swiss Association of Medieval and Early Modern Studies (SAMEMES) in Lausanne, Switzerland, this year titled "Literature, Science and Medicine in the Medieval and Early Modern English Periods," where I presented "Women Writers and the 17th-Century Rhetoric of Healing."

These two conferences were followed by "Rhetoric in the Twenty-First Century: An Interactive Symposium," held at the Centre of Medieval & Renaissance Studies (CMRS), Oxford from 3-7 July 2012. Participants were limited to 20, and represented scholars from four continents; daily priming speakers were Sir Brian Vickers, Peter Mack, James J. Murphy, and Jennifer Richards. In affording like-minded scholars the opportunity to engage closely and intensively in discussing their research, the Symposium was an especially rewarding experience.

I returned to Oxford in mid-July, where I held a fellowship at CMRS and spent a fruitful four weeks conducting manuscript research at the Bodleian Library. Reading a range of 17th-century commonplace books, medical receipts, and hand-written treatises has added much to my understanding of the extent to which the physicians' rhetorical self-fashioning permeated early modern culture.

It's certainly been a rewarding and exciting summer, thanks to which I'm well on my way to completing the book within the next year.

Mark Your Calendar

17 September — 30 November

Harry Thurston Writer in Residence

Thurston is a widely published environmental journalist and poet. He is the winner of the Sigurd Olsen Nature Writing Award and will be available for individual consultation.

8 November 2012

Dr. Susan Brown

as part of Dalhousie's

Distinguished Speaker Series

Dr. Brown teaches at the University of Guelph. Her areas of interest are Victorian writing, women's writing and feminist theory, and digital humanities.

19—29 February 2013

Vile Passéist Theatre

Presents

The Roaring Girl

by Thomas Middleton and others, at the Neptune Studio Theatre.
Directed by Dan Bray

Visit www.english.dal.ca
for more information



**DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY**

Inspiring Minds

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