

The Brag Bag

Adam Hutka, Dalhousie PhD student working with Dr. Melissa Furrow, is the winner of the Student Presentation Award from the Canadian Society of Medievalists. Hutka presented his paper "Fleshly Fault and the Promise of Bodily Resurrection in *Cleanness*" at the 2009 CSM conference.

Julia Wright, Canada Research Chair in European Studies, just published her two-volume *Companion to Irish Literature* with Blackwell Publishing.

Melissa Furrow, Professor of English, recently published *Expectations of Romance* with D. S. Brewer.

Send us your brags!
We can't brag about it if we don't know about it.

Dalhousie hosts renowned writer-in-residence

Rebecca Schneider

With the Nova Scotian winter comes snow, slush, and general feelings of "get me out of here." But Dalhousie's pen-and-ink set shouldn't flee to the tropics just yet: January marks the arrival of Dal's new writer-in-residence Anne Simpson, who will spend the months from January to March imparting literary wisdom to Dalhousie citizens.

"This is really a great thing to have here at Dal," Ms. Simpson says, on her first day on the job.

"As far as I know, there is no other residency in the province."

Ms. Simpson is more than up to the post—she is something of a veteran, in fact.

"I shouldn't say I go from one residency to another, but I have done a series of them," she says.

Anne Simpson has lived in Nova Scotia for the last two decades; she began writing prose and poetry shortly after her arrival.

"I was in a small town," she says. "There wasn't a whole lot of

work for me. . . it was like being pushed into it, in a sense. . . it became the thing I did."

Her first book, *Light Falls Through You*, was a volume of poetry, the assemblage of which Ms. Simpson describes as "kind of like, 'let's throw everything together and see what happens!'"

Ms. Simpson's first novel, *Canterbury Beach*, was a re-imagining of Chaucer's *Canterbury*

Tales set against a Nova Scotian seascape.

Ms. Simpson's collection of poetry, *Loop*, won the Griffin prize and was short-listed for the Governor-General's Award in 2004.

Nowadays, Ms. Simpson remains prolific: her fourth book of poetry will be released this spring, and she's working on a third novel, a project she feels confident about.

"It's like you learn how to fly," she says. "The third novel is when you really run with something."

The novel will revolve around the misadventures of a journalist in

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Dalhousie professor awarded prestigious fellowship at National Humanities Centre

Marjorie Stone, McCulloch Chair in English, Cross-listed as Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at Dalhousie University, is the only Canadian to be awarded a Fellowship by the National Humanities Centre in North Carolina for the 2010-11 academic year. She is one of 36 Fellows chosen from 442 applicants in more than 20 fields of humanistic study and seven countries. This year's fellows come from the United States and five other nations aside from Canada: Brazil, Germany, Greece, Portugal, and the United Kingdom.

Professor Stone will spend most of her January-June 2011 half-sabbatical at the Centre in North Carolina's Research Triangle, working on a book project with the working title Citizenship Formations and Nineteenth-Century Transnationalist Networks.

Jessica Chisholm interviewed Dr. Stone for the newsletter.

JC: First, congratulations on your Fellowship award. What an honor to represent Canada!

MS: Thank you, I'm very excited about it.

JC: Was it premeditated that your graduate seminar on "Race, Religion, Gender and Nation in the Nineteenth Century," would expand into the formation of your new book *Citizenship Formations and Nineteenth-Century Transnationalist Networks*?

MS: No, it wasn't. I was teaching the grad seminar, which grew out of



my scholarship on Elizabeth Barrett Browning and other 19th century writers. The seminar explored a lot of transnational movements and connections in the 19th century through literature. I was very interested in the anti-slavery movement and the Italian liberation movement, which led the formation of Italy in mid 19th century, called *Risorgimento* or the "rebirth." I became interested in that through my research on Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, then other authors, and then various other movements.

In the grad seminar I was linking texts from American literature and British literature, so for example, I was linking a novel by George Eliot that reflected a sort of Zionist movement, and we began studying that against a long poem written by an African-American woman writer, Frances Harper, called "Moses." Though the text dealt with the biblical figure, it was

really Harper's writing on the situation of African-Americans after the civil war under slavery in the reconstruction period that drew my attention.

I was just looking at texts I was interested in. The project I want to work on at the NHC comes partly out of the grad seminar and the British and American texts, as well as writers and activists in the nineteenth century.

JC: The premise for the book seems to cover a great deal of issues: from women's rights and abolitionism to anti-trafficking and Zionism. What was your inspiration for taking on this project?

MS: It partly comes out of the teaching and part of it comes from my work on EBB who was a very trans-national writer. The project was also influenced by my work for the Atlantic Metropolis Centre, working with the government and learning about issues of citizenship within Canada. I got interested in citizenship theory in that work, and this research project ties together these sets of interests.

But whether I can carry it off I don't know—it is more wide ranging than anything I've ever done before.

JC: I understand that you will be traveling to the Centre in North Carolina's Research Triangle. What exactly will you be doing during your time there?

MS: I haven't seen the centre, but it is well known. I'm given office

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English inaugurates Honours conference

Kathy Cawsey

Dalhousie English hosted its first-ever Honours conference last December.

Designed for students taking Honours English degrees, the conference was the culmination of the Research Methods class, taught by Professor Bill Barker. Students worked throughout the term on an essay they had previously written, developing and polishing it into a paper ready to be presented to their peers and professors.

“The Honours English Conference was an invaluable experience,” says Adrien Robertson, who gave a paper on the video game *Zelda*. “It gave me the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to be

able to confidently present my own work, which has already proven useful and opened the doors to other opportunities.”

“It felt good to be the one giving the lecture for once!” said Mitchell Cohen, who devel-

oped a paper on Isaac Asimov from the science fiction class on Isaac Asimov.

“The whole experience even got me thinking seriously about a future in academia.”

The conference was designed to give the students, many of whom will be going on to graduate work, some practice in presenting academic-style papers, as well as to

provide them with concrete subjects of investigation for the research methods class.

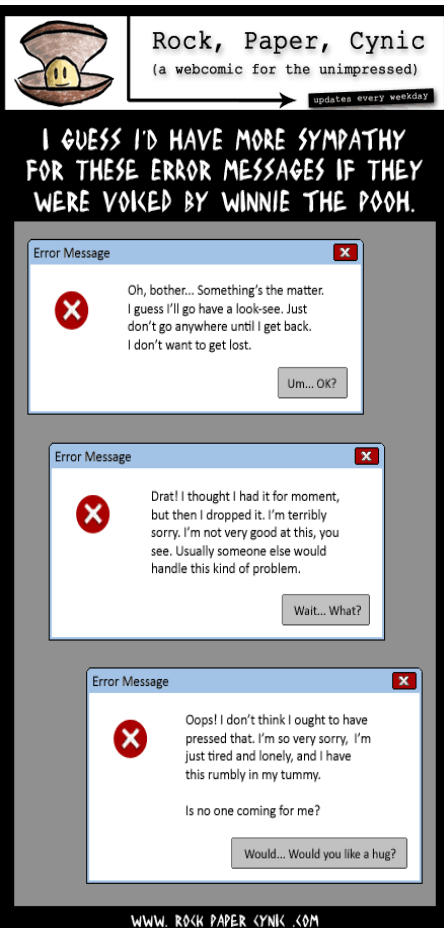
Eight concurrent sessions were held, with each session featuring three papers. Topics ranged from medieval to post-modern: from Chaucer to comic books.

Most students found the experience worthwhile, even enjoyable.

“The support offered by other students and the English faculty leading up to the conference really helped with nerves, too,” commented Robertson.

After the conference Dr. Barker hosted a sumptuous dinner for everyone involved.

“The support offered by other students and the English faculty leading up to the conference really helped with nerves.”



See more Peter Chiykowski comics at rockpapercynic.com

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space, I become a member of the community of scholars, which is very appealing; some are working on projects of similar interest, and I can see our work and interests intersecting. It is a humanities centre, so people are coming from all different disciplines: history, philosophy, etc. So it is a opportunity to have a nice space to work in with a community of scholars, whom you participate in activities with. And the centre also brings in guest speakers.

JC: What does this opportunity mean to you, and how do you plan to take full advantage of this opportunity?

MS: I feel incredibly fortunate. If I had known how tough the competition was, I never would have applied. So it's better I didn't know! I wouldn't have troubled referees for reference letters as part of the project proposal. It's a wonderful opportunity to meet scholars from all over the world and different disci-

plines. The possibility of linking connections to other disciplines is very exciting to me, especially with new concepts emerging in other disciplines all the time.

I think if you are there for a whole year you can actually sit and write a book, but I am only there for a half a year, so I probably won't finish the book. I actually have another project to finish up! But I will most likely use the time at the centre to do research and finish up my last project.

JC: I noticed the Centre concentrates on providing seminars, lectures and conferences for Fellow winners. As a writer, how important is it to share your ideas with other scholars? Do you find it aids or hinders your ideas when creating a piece of writing?

MS: I always find it aids, that's why I love to go to conferences, there's just so much to learn. My challenge is that I am so interested in learning that I will have to discipline myself to focus on actually writing!

Verso rescues essays from bottom-drawer pit of obscurity

Rebecca Schneider

The essay-writing process eventually develops a rhythm. Step one: receive assignment. Step two: ignore assignment until due date hangs over your head like sword of Damocles. Step three: start frenzied research (ingest two litres of coffee). Step four: begin essay. Step five: re-read, erase all progress, start again from scratch. Step six: finish essay fifteen minutes before deadline: race to hand in. Step seven: receive graded essay. Step eight: allow essay to languish in cardboard box under bed for all eternity, completely forgetting entire ordeal.

If you hate step eight, good: Leslie Gallagher and the intrepid staff of *Verso* are here to help Dalhousie's English students rise above it.

"Sometimes once students get a mark back, there's a sense of anticlimax," Ms. Gallagher says. "After all the research, writing, and revision that go into it, the paper gets tossed in a drawer and forgotten. *Verso*... places the paper and its author in a wider discourse and forum for discussion."

Verso (the full title of which is *Verso: an Undergraduate Journal of Literary Criticism*) publishes, in Ms. Gallagher's words, excellently-written academic papers by (undergraduate) English students at Dalhousie."

Leslie Gallagher is *Verso*'s editor-in-chief. She is joined on the journal's staff by copy editor Rosie Jacobs, design editor Jenna Harvie, and reviewers Sunjay Mathuria, Alia Mohammad, Naomi Cooperman, Kate Barss, and Alicia Montoya-Hidalgo.

Producing an academic journal is always an undertaking, but this year's *Verso* crew has especially big plans for the periodical.

"Often when people think of the study of English, the first (and possibly only) thing that comes to mind is students toiling away in dark libraries with dusty old tomes, doing work that is for the most part irrelevant to society," says Ms. Gallagher.

"I want a journal that presents English as more current and relevant, while showcasing the diverse interests of the students."

To that end, this year's edition of *Verso* seeks "essays from a variety of genres and time periods", a forward-thinking orientation reflected in Ms. Gallagher's own work.

"I'm very excited about the way that digitization is affecting the humanities," says Ms. Gallagher, who adds that her fascination with the bookmaking process was partly what led her to run for the role of editor-in-chief of *Verso* at the English Society's AGM.

Verso has already received several submissions, and Ms. Gallagher says that "the quality of work has been impressive."

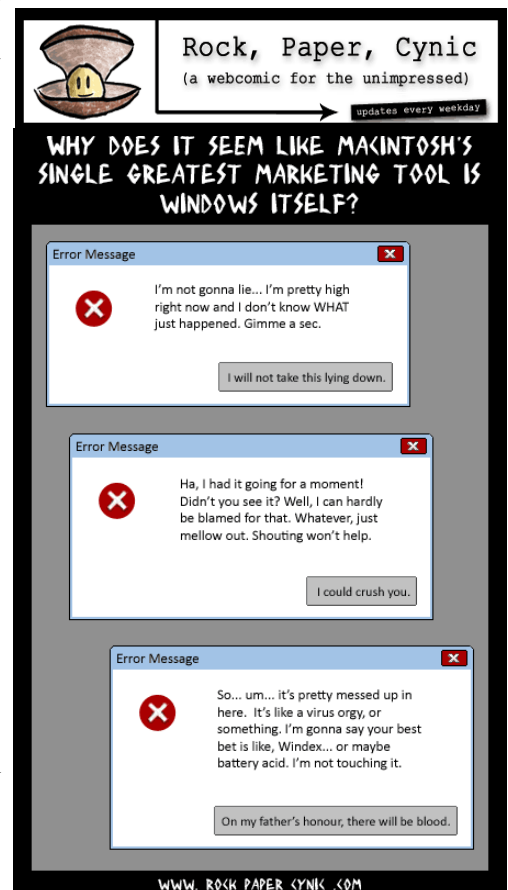
Once the final papers are selected for publication and the journal is laid out by the design editor, *Verso*'s staff will organize a print run of 100 copies – to be released (free!) at a launch party at the Grad House in April.

The literary shindig will mark an occasion for English students to hobnob with their peers (one cannot have too much hobnobbing), and of course, those who made it into the journal can use the oppor-

tunity to toast their success.

"Academia can be very solitary," says Ms. Gallagher, "and it's great to have the opportunity to really engage with other people in the program."

Verso will accept submissions until January 28, 2011 (its sister publication, the creative writing journal *Fathom*, will maintain a slush pile at fathom@dal.ca until the 19th). *Verso* papers should run 2000-2500 words; a 300-word abstract should also be included. Submissions may be directed to verso.english0@gmail.com. (Rejoice. The stack of essays under your bed need not get any taller.)



See more Peter Chiykowski comics at rockpapercynic.com

Varma Contest for Gothic Literature

1st Prize: Tessa Eisenberg - "Face and a Half"

“Staring goes both ways,
I can see
your face, resting on my face.”
It whispers, cruel intent,
casts its faithful shadow,
shallow at my nape of neck.
Before the glass, I see my own:
one eye I know, one that I don’t.
A night-fool came from ‘neath the bed,
its feet unclean, found me
in my head.
And in the hours, perpetually waking,
I know that it’s watching
me still from within.
When I wonder about why it came, what it found,
it’s listening.
A pet to the night, by the name of a mare
got ahold of my height, takin’ half
of my air.
The fear, it came with fingers,
takes my turns to blink, my sights to stare. Sticking
like fur to the back of night,
a warning warmed, it’s always there:
where nothing feels like a feeling
after dark.
It violates me in, me out, ‘til I am numb
to my own longing
heart.
And sleep isn’t kind
to our kind of person,
brim-filled with black and blue intention.
It finds me so much, don’t know which thoughts are mine,
crept in so many times, I don’t know who is right.
It sings “half of me wants me dead,”
the half of me with half-wings.
It nibbles, ear to ear.
“Half of me has my head.”
Once-me used to have
a lot.
Tonight, asleep instead,
a spreading stain, I drip
beneath the bed.
I guess
the other half forgot.

2nd Prize:
Robin Spittal
"My Funny Frankenstein"

3rd Prize
Emma Stewart
"Synthesis"

Valentine's Day sonnet contest deadline: February 3

English Speakers' Series

January 7: Anne Simpson (Dal) and Nicole Dixon (Dal)
Readings

January 14: Lesley Newhook,
“Insanity, Medical Jurisprudence, and the Case of Léonce Miranda in
Browning’s Red Cotton Night-Cap Country”

January 21: Kathy Cawsey (Dal)
“New (old) Medieval Poems
and Early Modern Readings of the Middle Ages”

January 28: Karen Macfarlane (Mount St Vincent)
“Fag Hags and Icons”

March 4: Travis Mason & Erin Wunker
“Caesura: Archiving Public Poetics in Canada”

March 11: Joel Faflak (University of Western Ontario)
“Romantic Psychiatry and the Psychopathology of Happiness”

March 18: PhD Colloquium

March 25: Jason Haslam (Dal)
TBA

April 1: Matt Huculak (Dal)
“The Book War in Modern Memory:
Periodicals and Modernist Anxiety”

Talks begin at 3:45 in McCain 1198.

Everyone Welcome!

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Nigeria—a far-flung locale where Ms. Simpson once taught English and literature.

So what advice does Ms. Simpson have for would-be writers battling the eponymous block? Mostly, she says, the secret of writing is simply to keep writing: “We shouldn’t put so much stock in having to know it all before we start writing... it’s a case of not just abandoning it, but revising it and revising it... it’s a really interesting journey if you stay with it.”

Where to look for the inspiration for such fortitude? “It’s different for each person, because it has to do with your obsessions. . . It comes out of obsessions that you find yourself circling around, and you can’t let it go, you can’t let it go.”

Of her own obsessions, Ms. Simpson says “I draw from history; history would be a big thing for me. Visual art would be another. You can’t write poetry without bringing yourself into it, but it’s not confessional poetry.

“My interest has to do with experimentation, but I think there has to be depth and complexity to it.”

Besides offering Monday-night workshops in fiction and poetry (now waitlisted), Ms. Simpson is available for one-on-one consultations in her office in the McCain. She’ll be available on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons until March 25th. Appointments may be arranged by emailing her at asimpson@stfx.ca. Fiction samples of 10-12 pages or 5-6 pages of poetry are preferred.

English Newsletter Editor: Kathy Cawsey.

Contributors: Jessica Chisholm, Rebecca Schneidereit. With thanks to Marjorie Stone, Mary Beth MacIsaac, Carole Poirier. Photo credit: Adam Bowes.

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

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