

FORUM

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE UH ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Message from the Department Chair:

Dear students, alums, donors and friends,

I'm titling my greetings to you, "[From across the pond...](#)," my little Anglo-American joke to reflect the fact that the English Department has moved across the fountain—from the venerable but moldy and warped halls of Roy G. Cullen to the bright, newly renovated "swing space" of Old Science on the other side. You may have noticed the building called "Old Science"; it is made of that same shell-pocked limestone as others on the main quad, and on one side sits a dear little greenhouse. We are here while Roy Cullen undergoes a full and fabulous renovation to become a modern showcase for the humanities and literary life on campus and in Houston. Thanks to an anonymous donor and the UH Masterplan vision, we have been working since last fall with the UH Facilities folks and Page Architects on the design. Here's a reveal—there is a 3rd floor up there and we are going to adapt the space for TA workstations, conferences, reading nooks, and meetings with students. We are so excited. We plan to invite you all to a 'housewarming' when the time comes.



I must tell you, though, the move was rocky with some security problems and a sprinkler that sprung a leak, thereby dashing our already lowered spirits, having survived two challenging post-Hurricane Harvey years in Roy Cullen when we took in water from the roof and through the limestone walls and the old windows. Some offices, many books, and a few classrooms were damaged, and we even had a fire in one classroom! — caused ironically by the giant fan intended to dry it out from the flood. We passed many a maudlin joke involving locusts and other plagues. But, in all seriousness, we suffered some hardships, especially last year when the entire front office staff had to relocate twice to the library, forcing us to conduct our business in a discombobulated way. Things are looking up now in part because we support each other and in part because of our fantastic staff. (Also, the doors now lock.)

As I wrote to the faculty back in September, “The move from Roy Cullen to Old Science was time consuming and stressful, as we all know. But it would have been far more confusing and even unbearable without the tireless work of the staff, especially Valeria Gonzalez and Jesus Perez, who added move coordination to their regularly assigned duties.”

In other news, two terrific new poets joined the CWP faculty this year, [francine harris](#) and [Erin Belieu](#) and we are hiring in four areas for next year!

- a medievalist to work with Dr. Lorraine Stock and fill in for the retired Dr. John McNamara
- a specialist in 19th-century British literature with an emphasis on eco-criticism to complement a growing interest in our department and in the field
- a CWP fiction writer to round out our strong fiction faculty
- a specialist in Rhetoric, Composition, and Pedagogy to enhance training for students in rhetorical history, writing pedagogy, community-based activism, and multilingual research.

English is committed to recruit and retain a diverse faculty who will advance the University’s goals for national competitiveness, student success, and community engagement.

Faculty and students were productive and enjoyed much success this year, as you will see throughout these pages.

In closing, I should introduce myself as the new chair. I joined the faculty in 1991 after having earned my PhD at the University of Illinois-Champaign-Urbana. (I like to joke that UH was my first job that did not require an apron.) I specialize in Shakespeare and early modern studies, served as the Lower Division Studies director, and the interim associate dean for graduate studies for the College; I am an affiliate with the Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program, and co-founder (with Dr. Laura Turchi) of “Teaching Shakespeare in Houston,” a project to support and learn from area teachers around Shakespeare’s works. This coming spring, for example, we will arrange a “field trip” to the UH School of Theatre’s production of *Romeo and Juliet*. My first book, [Separation Scenes: Domestic Drama in Early Modern England](#) came out in 2017, and my second book, a modernized edition of an anonymous play from 1599, *A Warning for Fair Women*, is due out next year.

Along with supporting the work of our growing faculty, graduate students and undergrads, my vision for the department includes community building both internally among us, on campus and outside with you, our alums, students and friends. I want all of you to feel that you belong to a department where serious critical and creative work is thriving and inviting. I meet people in town who are hungry for the chance to talk about literature and ideas and I want the English Department at UH to fill that need. To this end, I want to build more opportunities for meaningful intergenerational connections through cultural, intellectual, and social events. To get this started, we hope you will check our webpage now and again and check out events like the monthly [Poetry & Prose](#) readings featuring CWP graduate students (always on a Wednesday at 5:30 in the Honors Commons). And you’re all invited to meet me at the Miller Outdoor Theatre next summer for the annual Houston Shakespeare Festival. Details to follow.

Finally, I am honored to assume the chairship of the largest (and best) department in CLASS, having had the most generous predecessor and mentor, Dr. j. Kastely, who still answers my endless phone calls with the same good cheer as ever. Thanks, j.

I'd love to hear from you. Drop me a line achrist@uh.edu.

Ann Christensen

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Graduate Student Spotlight: Rachelle Joplin

PhD Candidate in Rhetoric, Composition, and Pedagogy



Rachelle Joplin is a third-year PhD student in Rhetoric, Composition and Pedagogy. Her interests are rooted in feminist rhetorics and cultural rhetorics, epistemologies she will be using as frameworks of consideration as she completes and defends her prospectus.

She has two forthcoming publications slated to appear in spring/summer 2020. One is a chapter in an edited collection, *Presumed Incompetent II: Race, Class, Power, and the Resistance of Women in Academia*. In the chapter, “Through a White Woman’s Tears: Fragility, Guilt, and the Journey towards Allyship,” Rachelle tells the narrative of her journey with allyship, framing it with stages of guilt and learning.

The second publication is a chapter in an edited collection, *The Pedagogy of Potter*. In “Composition Pedagogy as Defense Against the Dark Arts”, Rachelle analyzes the teaching styles of the Defense Against the Dark Arts teachers in the *Harry Potter* series, reading them as pedagogies of composition and exploring the ways in which these pedagogies can engage within rhetorical classrooms.

Rachelle recently completed her second semester teaching English Composition: 1 (EN 1303) as a hybrid (in-person/online) course. In March 2020, she will be attending the Conference on College Composition and Communication, where she will be presenting the ways in which she teaches analysis through music, arguing that her students receive empowerment through permission to write about topics they feel passionately about and which speak to their diversities. She will also serve as a co-chair for the feminist caucus workshop, for which she will focus on a variety of discussions surrounding coalitions through commonplaces, a major theme of the conference. In May 2020, will present two papers at the Rhetoric Society of America (RSA) Conference. In the first, she will consider how rhetoricians like Gloria Anzaldúa and Jacqueline Jones Royster utilize calls for allyship as forms of subversive hospitality, encouraging engagement while also holding more privileged bodies accountable. In the second, Rachelle will discuss her journey of self-care and acceptance in the midst of reconciling her scholarly identity with her passion for video games, as well as the awareness of the complex rhetorical situations surrounding them.

As she moves into the dissertation stage of her degree, she plans to examine the ways in which video games, in particular Japanese role-playing games (JRPG), rhetorically interact with players, characters, and world-spaces, especially through memory. According to Rachelle, the definition of rhetoric itself “has really exploded over the past decade or so, which has been exciting for people like me, who want to talk about video games as rhetorical. Beyond that, I’ve been really excited and thankful that feminist and cultural rhetorics are pushing us to grapple with various forms of privilege and oppression, moving towards responsible conversations about inclusion rather than tokenism.”

Rachelle is eager for the field to continue engaging with ideas of privilege and inclusion. She also hopes the UH English faculty will continue to encourage students to pursue projects that make both scholarly and personal impacts: “I hope we keep pushing the envelope about what writing a dissertation looks like.”

Currently, as she prepares to teach English Composition: 2 (EN 1304) completely online next semester, she is deciding how to approach teaching argumentative writing and research in a fully online space.

Professor Cedric Tolliver: On Productivity and the University of Houston’s Faculty Success Program

During the summer of 2018, through the generous support of the Provost’s office, I participated in UH’s FSP (Faculty Success Program), which combined participation in the NCFDD’s (National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity FSP with in-person small group sessions with UH’s Office of Faculty Engagement and Development (FED). Coming off the heels of a hard-fought tenure battle, which was followed up by being flooded out during Harvey, I was more than a little receptive to ideas on building a productive and sustainable academic career.



At the core of the NCFDD’s program is the idea that the two most important factors to success in the academy, writing and health/wellness, are also the two areas of life in which there is no externally imposed structure as with teaching and service. We know exactly when we have to show up for the classes we teach and for meetings, and those two things have a way of cannibalizing the time we must devote to our writing and health, if we have any hope of enjoying a long and productive scholarly career. To support developing a consistent, daily writing practice and exercise habit, FSP participants are assigned to a cohort of four professors with shared interests (based on survey responses) from across the country and a coach. For twelve weeks over the summer you take part in a weekly group call with your cohort and coach, where you discuss your progress (or lack thereof) on the week’s homework. Each week of the FSP program is devoted to a particular skill or exercise geared toward making explicit the often-implicit keys to academic success. The fundamental and most important element to faculty success is frequent, low stakes contact with your writing projects: “30 minutes a day keeps the anxiety away!” After having had a transformative experience in the program, I have since delved further into the world of productivity literature and podcasts, a dive that began innocently enough with my search to find task management software that would help me stay on top of my personal and professional responsibilities and make progress on several fledgling research and writing projects.

After my year of immersion in the world of productivity, last summer I decided to try my hand at forming a community of writers of primarily English faculty, but open to others as well, that would support one another to two goals of writing daily for 30 minutes and exercising several times a week. The idea grew from a practice during the academic year with a couple of colleagues of regular morning check-ins, where we emailed each other our writing goals or accomplishments for the day. The point was to establish a small amount of accountability and support to break down the isolation of showing up to write. Trying to scale this up during the summer proved challenging because it was hard to identify a software platform that would facilitate this type of peer-to-peer infrastructure. With the help of Lacey Schmidt at the FED, we settled on the Notebook feature in Office 365 to try and make it work. It's taken a lot of work and expertise to build group cohesiveness in an online environment, and it's also hard to maintain personal as well as group momentum over a span of several weeks. And finally, summers are just too short to get everything done, while we all try to decompress and recover from the preceding semester.

Write-A-Thon 2019: A Student-Run Fall Fundraiser for the Boldface Emerging Writers Conference

Write-A-Thon is an annual day of writing, food, prizes, and kinship that benefits the department's annual Boldface Emerging Writers Conference. Write-A-Thon is organized and hosted by the faculty and editors of the undergraduate literary journal *Glass Mountain*.

Mindy Mayden, Editor of *Glass Mountain*, answered some questions about the most recent fundraiser, which took place on October 26th, 2019, in the University of Houston Old Science Building. Her interview follows.



Forum: How long has Write-A-Thon been going on? Can you trace its development and your participation in it?

Mindy: Write-A-Thon has been going on since within a few years of the inception of the annual Boldface Conference. Write-A-Thon started as a way for us to fundraise for the conference while simultaneously enriching the literary community we are so proud to be a part of.

Throughout the years, it has included different craft talks, different ideas, and different people, but that goal has remained the same. I participated last year when it was still open to the public and walked away with a myriad of new story ideas and a newfound interest in nonfiction.

This year, while I spent most of the time facilitating, I also got to attend a couple of the amazing sessions and again found the same kind of inspiration—this time, new story ideas and a burgeoning interest in translation. That’s the kind of space we’ve created with Write-A-Thon.

Forum: What does Write-A-Thon offer emerging writers?

Mindy: Write-A-Thon offers emerging writers a community. It’s a place where they can focus on themselves as writers, especially since this year’s event focused on our very own *Glass Mountain* editors, whose own work often gets overshadowed in the wake of the magazine. Write-A-Thon offers companionship in its attendees, inspiration in its craft talks, and just plain, simple time to write, which can be difficult to find.

Forum: Can you walk us through the ways writers spend Write-A-Thon?

Mindy: Write-A-Thon is pretty “customizable” if you want to think of it that way. It’s a day-long event with a lunch break in the middle, but we generally have two craft talks going on at a time that writers have the option of attending. We always have one apiece for poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. The other craft talks vary from year-to-year, depending on what we feel is most fit for the group. This year, we were pleased to offer craft talks on editing, literary publishing, translation, and more. If writers don’t find a session during a block that they want to go to, we also have a revision room, where writers are encouraged to give feedback to their peers, as well as a submission café, where graduate students can help attendees submit their work to literary journals for publication. We also have open spaces to encourage writers to generate new work, and we top the day off with an open mic.

Forum: What made this year’s Write-a-Thon distinctive from previous years? What were you most excited about?

Mindy: This year’s Write-a-Thon was significantly different than it has been in the past. For the first time in its long history, our fundraising event shifted focus away from fundraising. While there’s certainly still an aspect there (we’ll always take donations!), we wanted to give back to the staff that works so hard all year long to product *Glass Mountain*’s biannual volumes and our bimonthly online magazine, *Shards*. This year, Write-A-Thon was an event specifically geared towards and only open to our associate and upper editors. Editors ingest a lot of amazing work and edit pieces galore, and their own creative endeavors tend to get pushed aside. We wanted our staff this year to feel seen, not just as editors, but as artists and writers. I was most excited to see the way this shift in focus would re-inspire the writers who I respect so much, and who are the heart and soul of this magazine.

The Department Welcomes New Creative Writing Faculty

francine j. harris is the author of *play dead*, winner of the Lambda Literary and Audre Lorde Awards and finalist for the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award. Her third collection, *Here is the Sweet Hand*, is forthcoming on Farrar, Straus & Giroux in 2020. Originally from Detroit, she has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Cave Canem, and MacDowell Colony. From 2015-2018, harris was Writer in Residence at Washington University at St. Louis and comes to University of Houston from New York, where she was the 2018/2019 Rona Jaffe Foundation Fellow at the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers at the New York Public Library.



Photo by Jennifer Croft

"When the Sea Says *Horses*, it Says *Horses*? O, I make *Horses*. "

She had horses who threw rocks at glass houses. - Joy Harjo

I make horses out of flotsam and horses of oily condoms and horses of engine spatter
so horses mostly nasty, horses all confused. dizzy, spinning, impaled carousel

horses. unpainted, untagged horses. horses no one can use. I make
warped horses and hobby horses missing little horse handles. I make

a good shore horse. a fine wobbling, drunken horse. But mostly horses
with no hooves and horses too heavy to move. I used to make horses that could spit,

horses that could buck. But o now, I make thin horses. gaunt and worn horses.
Horses full of silt and gill. ground up, dusty sand horses. awash in empty saloon horses.

I make horses too frail to stand upright, and horses stuck inside horses.
I make machines of horse, and horse of brine, and horse necks with missing hides.
I make headless horses, tailless horses, with no limbs to kick and comb.

Horses? O, I make horses that fit into skulls of other horses. Horses
who can't lead blind horses. I make horses out of dreams of horses.

I make a horse without a rider. with no one snug inside the dimple of
her back. She clomps off into ossuaries, among all the horse hissheads

and horse haints. She's a banshee horse who nays at shore. a heavy
heaving horse torso who stomps and drags and tangles the shore

among the distended torsos of birds.

(Originally published in *Sou'wester* and later featured on the National Endowment for the Arts website)

Erin Belieu was born and raised in Omaha Nebraska. She received her graduate degrees in poetry and literature from The Ohio State University and Boston University. She is the author of five poetry collections, including the forthcoming *Come Hither Honeycomb* (January 2021), all published by Copper Canyon Press. Her acknowledgements and prizes include being selected for the National Poetry Series for her first collection, *Infanta*, a Rona Jaffe Foundation Fellowship, and her collection, *Black Box*, was finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. Belieu is co founder (with UH



Photo by Gesi Schilling

alum Cate Marvin) of VIDA: Women In Literary Arts, for which she won the Barnes and Nobel Writers For Writers Award, and founded Writers Resist, for which she received the George Garrett Outstanding Literary Citizen Prize from AWP. Her poems have appeared in places such as *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *American Poetry Review*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *the New York Times*, Academy of American Poets *Poem-A-Day*, *Kenyon Review*, *AGNI*, *Granta*, and *Tin House*.

Pity The Doctor, Not The Disease

Science in its tedium reveals
that each spirit we spirit

ganks a solid half hour from
our life spans.

Or so says my doctor, a watery,

Jesus-eyed man, and hard to suffer
with his well intended scrips for yoga

and neti pots, notably stingy with the better

drugs, *in situ* here amongst the disinfected
toys dreadful in their plastic baskets.

Above his head, the flayed men of medical
illustration are nailed for something like

décor. The eyeball scheme is best,

with its wondrous Canal of Schlemm,
first favorite of all weirdly named

eponymous body parts. It's just a splotch
of violet on the diagram, but without which

our aqueous humours would burst
their meshy dams and overflow. *Tears,*

idle tears...so sad and fresh the days
that are no more...is what I quote to him

as he thumps my back with his tiny
doctors' tomahawk. But he's used to me.

We have an understanding. What he
means to miser, I've come to spend

most lavishly. And I feel fortunate again,

to be historically shaky in the maths,
enough to avoid making an easy sum

of my truly happy hours, or nights curled

sulfurous on my side, a priced-to-sell
shrimp boiling in anxious sleep.

If we're lucky, it's always a terrible time

to die. Better the privilege of booze
than the whim of one more shambolic

butcher shelling peasants in a wood,
our world's long spree of Caesars

starting wars to pay their bills
in any given era's Rome. Turns out,

Lord Alfred's stomach did for him,
and he died thirsty, calling for more opium.

Free of the exam room now, I spot the same

tattered goldfish in his smeary bowl
beside the door where he's plugged along

for years, a mostly failed distraction

for poxed or broken children. I raise my fin
to him, celebrate the poison we're all

swimming in, remembering the way
you say cheers in Hungarian:

Isten, Isten, meaning, in translation,
"I'm a god. You're a god."

(Originally published in the Academy of American Poets *Poem-A-Day*)

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Have news to share? Please email Theodora Ziolkowski, our graduate student editorial assistant, at
uhenglishforum1@gmail.com.

Inaugural Media and Moving Image Student Prize Competition Award Ceremony

The inaugural Media and Moving Image Student Prize Competition was held on May 16, 2019. [The Moving and Moving Image \(MMI\) Initiative](#), chaired by the department's own Professor Karen Fang, aims to coordinate and enhance the University of Houston's rich creative and critical programs in visual, literary, and media arts. The initiative is driven by faculty from the Jack Valenti School of Communications, the College of Arts, the College of Technology, and the Creative Writing Program.

The 2019 prize was juried by Rick Ferguson (Executive Director and Vice President of the Houston Film Commission); Kristian Salinas (Executive and Artistic Director of QFest: The Houston International LGBTQ Film Festival); Tish Springer (Lecturer in film production and the Film Program Manager in the Department of Visual and Dramatic Arts at Rice University); Tracy Stephenson (Coordinator and Assistant Programmer for the Film Department at the Museum of Fine Arts), and Neal Verma (President and co-founder of Nova Asset Management).

The celebration featured a reception in the beautiful A.D. Bruce Religion Center lobby and a keynote by documentary writer, producer, and director Jenny Waldo. Awards were divided into recognizing student award entries in the categories for critical, creative, and applied technology.



Congratulations to the 2019 Winners:

Critical Studies.....Shannon Duncan, *Modern Day Slavery*

Creative Work.....Taylor Andreozzi, *The Lemon of Pink*

Applied Technology.....Walter Barta, *Digital Monology*

View a montage of some of the student entries [here](#)

On the Boldface Emerging Writers Conference, 2019

Audrey Colombe, Faculty Adviser for *Glass Mountain Magazine*, the undergraduate literary magazine at the University of Houston: “The Boldface Conference took place this past May (20th-24th) and included visitors from across the U.S. This year's newness included our first *Glass Mountain* undergrad joining us as a featured reader: Bryan Washington, whose book *Lot* came out earlier in 2019 to national acclaim. From CWP we had MFA Jessica Wilbanks (non-fiction—her book, *When I Spoke in Tongues*, came out in 2018) and Ph.D-er Jason Koo (poet, who teaches at Quinnipiac University and is the founder of Brooklyn Poets, author of several books of poetry, literary citizen extraordinaire). This year's the conference also offered a new workshop for bilingual Spanish-English writers. *Glass Mountain* funded all the participants of the bilingual workshop with Nelson Scholarships. Thank you Nelson Family! That workshop group, with their workshop leader Mauricio Patrón Rivera (a Ph.D candidate at Concentración en Escritura Creativa en Español-PhD/ECE, Department of Hispanic Studies), put together a chapbook and sold copies during our community-oriented "Professionalism Friday" in order to fund a scholarship for next year's bilingual workshop—and they surpassed their funding goal. Many of the graduating editors (and a few who are still at UH) from *Glass Mountain's* 2018-2019 staff have gone on to start their own online journal, *DeFunk*, which premiered this fall. Boldface 2020 will be May 18-22 and we will be announcing Featured Writers in the next couple of weeks—stand by!”

An Interview with Cait Weiss Orcutt, 2018-2019 Graduate Adviser for *Glass Mountain Magazine*, the undergraduate literary magazine at the University of Houston:



A publishing panel in the Rockwell Pavilion at Boldface, with featured writers, (left to right), Cait Weiss Orcutt (Conference Organizer), Bryan Washington, Jessica Wilbanks, and Jason Koo.

Forum: What was your favorite part of serving as the Boldface Conference Coordinator for Boldface 2019?

Cait: I've taught for several years in the greater Houston community, so when I took on the position of Boldface Conference Coordinator, I was excited to know several writers I worked with outside of academia would be enrolling as participants in Boldface. I loved seeing their writing and their relationship to their writing evolve over the years.

To give you a sense of why I care so much: I took eight years between my undergraduate and my MFA, and in those years, I found support, resilience, purpose and validation in the community

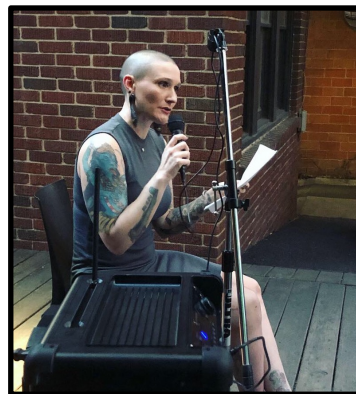
writing workshops and retreats I attended. Without those extra-academic spaces, I don't know if I would have kept nurturing my identity as a writer. Most of the "real" world devalues creative projects, especially those disconnected from an immediate income stream. Most of the "real" world can make itself pretty miserable because of this. So, yes, I believe the work that Boldface does is important. Not everyone is looking to move across the country for a graduate degree in creative writing. Boldface provides a space, a community and a team of dedicated, inventive, engaging faculty for the writer who knows they have to write but isn't interested (some yet, some ever) in everything a 2- or 3-year academic program requires.



Boldface Glass Mountain Staff, (left to right), Elaine Naong, Miranda Ramirez, Tamara Coleman, Christian Su, and Vinh Hoang



Bryan Washington at his craft talk in the Rockwell Pavilion



Eryn O'Neal, a professor at a local college who came to the conference as an attendee to study nonfiction, won the annual Robertson Award, named after Lillie Robertson.

Forum: What role do you see Boldface playing as part of the UH and greater Houston communities?

Cait: Boldface is a natural fit for Houston, and we reflect the best the city and UH has to offer in our creativity, our exuberance, our iconoclasm and our polyglossia. Houston is the most diverse city in America, meaning we can't foreground one version of the American story—we learn from our earliest moments here that every single narrative has complications, interactions, and counter-narratives. Houston is a high-traffic, multilingual city of a million recipes and family stories all put in a pressure cooker of voice-nurturing humidity, unparalleled arts funding, innovative scholarship, flourishing business, terrifying ecology, immense Texas sky, and flowers the size of your face. If you're looking for a landscape full of mythic potential, full of expanse and minutiae, of hard work and big dreams, of political tension and icehouse ease, you'd have a tough time finding one better than Houston. Boldface is a Houston-born, Houston-raised program, and proud to be a site of conversation and creation between all who want to reinvent the mundanities of everyday life into something precise, startling and connecting on the page.

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Have news to share? Please email Theodora Ziolkowski, our graduate student editorial assistant, at uhenglishforum1@gmail.com.

The English Department Congratulations Literature Faculty Professor Sarah Ehlers and Professor Cedric Tolliver on Their Recent Book Publications

On October 17, 2019, Dr. Cedric R. Tolliver and Dr. Sarah Ehlers, alongside special guest Cheryl Higashida (University of Colorado, Boulder), celebrated the publication of their recent books. The Department of English and African American Studies hosted the conversation and reception

**A Q&A with Professor Sarah Ehlers,
Author of *Left of Poetry: Depression America
and the Formation of Modern Poetics*,
(University of North Carolina Press, 2019)**

Forum: What was the impetus for your book?

Professor Ehlers: From the start, I was pursuing two interrelated questions. First, I was interested in the processes by which poetry has come to be idealized as a privileged site for literary resistance and, paradoxically, an art form that transcends history and politics. Second, I was asking why a vast body of socially committed poetry that emerged on the Depression-era left had gone unread—or mis-read—and therefore remained unknown.



Left of Poetry was first a dissertation project, and these questions evolved from a convergence of personal and professional experiences. In 2007, the same year I started my Ph.D. program, my father lost the union coal mining job he had worked my entire life. It was at this moment—when I was confronting the class politics of higher education—that I began to discover the poetry and the archival materials of the literary and cultural left. Through my research, I started to find a language for various forms of anger and began to take a different political view of academia. The poets I was studying provided moving historical records of the revolutionary imagination and, consequently, a means to scramble the logics of the present.

Forum: Can you describe how your research evolved?

Professor Ehlers: My research evolved in numerous ways in relation to my changing understanding of my field and the project itself. The years I spent writing the book coincided with the financial crises of the Great Recession, mass mobilizations such as Occupy and #BlackLivesMatter, and, more recently, Trump's election. These political changes have inevitably shaped the investments and agendas of many scholars. I think it's fair to say that during the past decade, the fields within English—and American Studies in particular—have found scholars reevaluating their work's relation to the charged horizon in the present. Although my particular approach to Depression poetry included a core set of interventions that remained relatively constant, my thinking about how to frame and develop these interventions has most definitely changed over the years.

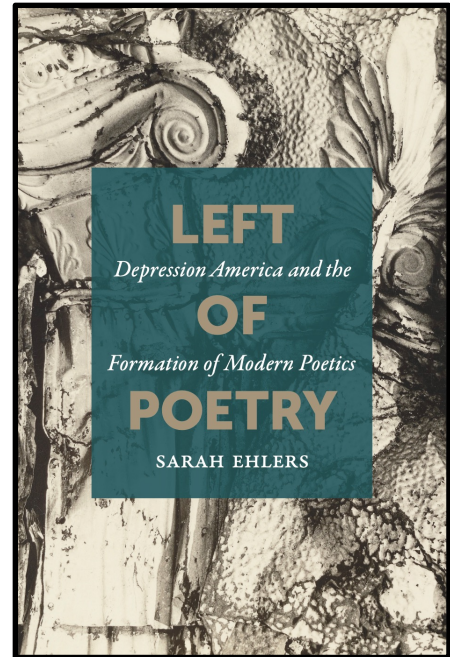
Forum: What do you hope readers take away from *Left of Poetry: Depression America and the Formation of Modern Poetics*?

Professor Ehlers: The last line of my book is: “It’s high time we used poetry to get over poetry.” And that line, for me, gets to the heart of how I want the ideas in the book to be received. Here, I mean to suggest that the Depression poets I discuss may allow us to move forward dialectically beyond the current parameters for thinking about art and its social uses. In other words, the wager of my book is that returning to the poetry of the 1930s may allow us to move past contemporary literary and sociopolitical paradigms that continue to limit our ability to form not only the poetry to come, but the world to come.

Forum: What is your next project?

Professor Ehlers: I am currently working on two book projects. The first, *Black Mountain Modernity*, generates an original literary history of Black Mountain College that disrupts predominant narratives about modernity. Black Mountain still looms in the modernist imaginary as a model of progressive education as well as an early proving ground for major avant-garde figures. I seek to recontextualize Black Mountain in relation to the geopolitical landscape of 1930s-1950s—thinking, for example, about how the experiments long associated with the college were influenced by theories of antifascist art and education developed within the Jewish refugee community there. I also think that the college’s economic and ecological base in Appalachia has been underexplored, as has Black Mountain artists’ interests in Mexican art and culture. So, in *Black Mountain Modernity*, I want to sketch the complex relations among the development of modernist avant-gardes, grassroots art and commerce, and forms of U.S. imperialism. Doing so also, I think, forces new thinking about the dynamics of state power that sustain scholarly discourse in the humanities.

I am also at work on a second project, *The Poetics of Other Archives*, that examines how poets writing in the wake of the 2008 stock market crash redeploy and reconstruct archives in order to offer competing arrangements of historical materiality. The book theorizes the archive as a contested site in contemporary poetics, where the relationships among creative work, lived historical experience, and political activism are continually negotiated. And, I have a few essays—on W.E.B. DuBois, Robert Duncan, and Martha Millet—that shore up some of the work of *Left of Poetry* and that I am wrapping up right now!



A Q&A with Professor Cedric Tolliver,
Author of *Of Vagabonds and Fellow Travelers:*
African Diaspora Literary Culture
and the Cultural Cold War,
(University of Michigan Press, 2019)



Forum: What was the impetus for your book?

Professor Tolliver: Practically speaking, the book, like many academic first books, is my “dissertation” or “tenure” book, when you turn your dissertation into a book with the hopes of earning tenure at the conclusion of your first tenure-track appointment. Intellectually, the impetus was my attempt to understand the world of the African American expatriate writers who gravitated to Paris in the years after World War II. I could never summon the courage to actually follow in their footsteps, so being a professor and writing an academic book seemed like a safer alternative than trying to survive on my wits and writing in a foreign country.

Forum: Can you describe how your research evolved?

Professor Tolliver: The research began by looking at these expatriate writers and the racism in the United States that many of them were attempting to escape. It involved into a wider consideration of the geopolitics of the Cold War and the place of culture and African Americans in that struggle. Then I got into cheery topics like covert government funding, blacklisting, and all the things that made the McCarthy years such a great period in American history that a sizeable portion of the electorate would like to relive it again.

Forum: Was there a turning point in your investigations that surprised you?

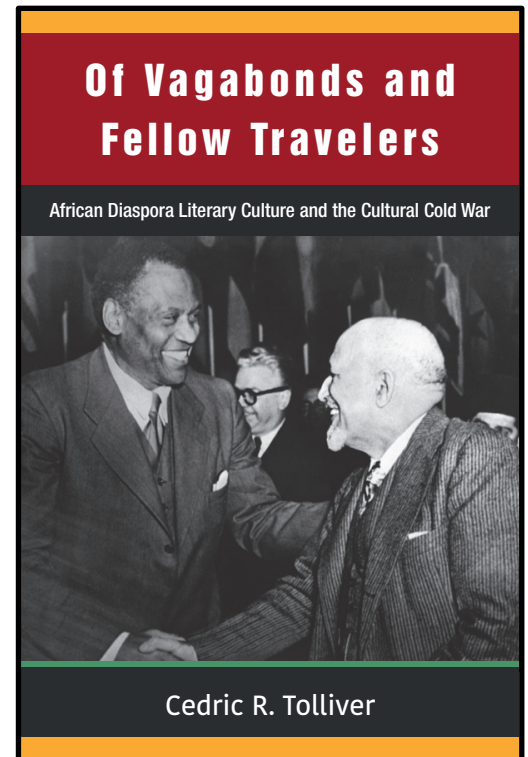
Professor Tolliver: I guess the point when it all came together for me was when I can literally connect the dots between strategy and personnel between the Good Neighbor Policy, which developed following the end of the US occupation of Haiti in 1934, and the cultural Cold War. At that moment, I came to understand the material foundation justifying my concern with both the African diaspora and empire.

Forum: What do you hope readers take away from *Of Vagabonds and Fellow Travelers: African Diaspora Literary Culture and the Cultural Cold War*?

Professor Tolliver: That both culture and African Americans were the crucial, if overlooked, elements of the Cold War conflict. That the excesses we associate with McCarthyism were not aberrations, but something like a recurring pattern built into the functioning of our present social order.

Forum: What is your next project?

Professor Tolliver: I haven't settled on a next project as of yet, but I'm toying around with several ideas at the moment: a biography of Mercer Cook, a figure who appears in *Of Vagabonds and Fellow Travelers*; the conjoined history of race and commodity fetishism in Western culture; and a historical/personal exploration of black people and swimming.



Fall 2019 Highlights

The Critical Studies of the Americas Collective

Professor Sarah Ehlers: *The Critical Studies of the Americas collective* consolidates exciting scholarly work that has been happening in the English department for quite some time. The group seeks to encapsulate the hemispheric, internationalist, and multilingual work of many of our collective members and, with an emphasis on critical studies, also hopefully invoke faculty work in critical race studies, renewed commitments to activist scholarship, and other scholarly efforts aimed at reimagining the socio-political realities of the Americas. We hope to continue bringing innovative scholars to campus, as well as provide other opportunities for intellectual exchange and community building among faculty and graduate students.

On September 26th, **Maria Josefina Saldana-Portillo** (Professor of Social and Cultural Analysis at NYU) delivered a talk on Alfonso Cuarón's Academy Award-winning film *Roma*: "What is the Time of the Decolonial? Who Speaks for the Dispossessed? *Roma* and the Settler Colonial Paradigm." On Friday, September 27th, **Maria Josefina Saldana-Portillo** was joined by **Lisa Lowe** (Samuel Knight Professor of American Studies at Yale University) and **Priscilla Wald** (R. Florence Brinkley Professor of English at Duke University), who engaged in a public discussion on the future of critical race studies in the Americas in an academic roundtable with the department's own **Roberto Tejada**.

The event was assembled by the Department of English professors Sarah Ehlers, Sunny Yang, and Jason Berger, and sponsored by the Houstoun fund, the Center for Public History, and Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies.

In October, the departments of English and History hosted translator, scholar, and critic **Dr. Michelle Hartman (McGill University)**. On October 10th, Dr. Hartman led a lunchtime workshop on a chapter from her latest book, *Breaking Broken English: Black-Arab Solidarity and the Politics of Language*. Her visit culminated in an evening lecture entitled "Jordan Black/June in Jerusalem: Poetry, Black-Arab Solidarity and the Politics of Language." The talk was generously supported by the Department of English, the Arab-American Educational Foundation Chair of Modern Arab History, and the John McNamara Fund for Translation Studies.



Visiting Scholar Michelle Hartman
and Professor Hosam Aboul-Ela

On Thursday, October 24th, the Department of English, Creative Writing Program, and Inprint hosted an event at the Inprint House with translator Kristin Dykstra, Distinguished Scholar in Residence at Saint Michael's College, Vermont. The Poetry in Translation event was entitled "Star-Spangled: Translation and the Era of 'Sonic Attacks.'"

Looking Ahead to Spring...

As the English department works to change the curriculum across graduate degrees, faculty will host brown bag lunches with graduate students to discuss proposed changes. A team of faculty will also offer periodic job seekers workshops, where graduate students will have the opportunity to workshop CVs and practice interviewing from the academic job market.

Select Faculty, Graduate Student, and Alumni Accomplishments

Professor Karen Fang gave a beautiful talk on the KUHF radio show [Engines of our Ingenuity](#) about a Chinese immigrant Tyrus Wong's contributions to the making of Disney's iconic *Bambi*. She is at work on a book-length study of Wong. A selection of her book, *Arresting Cinema: Surveillance in Hong Kong Film*, was translated into Chinese and published in *Film Art*, one of China's leading film journals.

[Dr. Elizabeth Gregory](#) will head up the newly launched [Institute for Research on Women, Gender & Sexuality](#).

Fully 2/5 of the [NATIONAL BOOK FOUNDATION's](#) '5 UNDER 35' Awards for 2019 went to Our Very Own! [Ashley Wurzbacher, PhD + Bryan Washington, BA](#) **Professor Wurzbacher** also visited campus to speak on her leadership role in the famously efficacious TA Sit-In of 2012-13 and read from her new book at Brazos Bookstore. **Mr. Washington** introduced Colson Whitehead at the first Inprint reading of the season.

PhD student Novuyo Tshuma's new novel *House of Stone* is getting [some great reviews](#).

Professor Lauren Zentz and Heydel Cepero announce the birth of a baby girl, Gabrielle Renée Cepero-Zentz, who goes by Gaby.

Professor Chitra Divakaruni received the Houston Literary Award for Excellence from the Houston Public Library Foundation.

In September, **Professor Nick Flynn** published his fifth collection of poems, *I Will Destroy You* (Graywolf). He subsequently performed the poems in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, Brooklyn, Seattle, Portland, Minneapolis, and Chicago, often with his band Killdeer.

JP Gritton's (UH PhD, Literature and Creative Writing) *Wyoming* received starred reviews in *Publishers' Weekly* and *Kirkus Reviews*, where it was named a best book of 2019. He joined the English faculty of Duke University as an assistant professor of the practice of writing in the fall semester of 2019. He is at work on a follow-up to his first novel, which served as his doctoral dissertation at the University of Houston. He will be reading from his novel at BRAZOS BOOKSTORE on January 16th, 2020.

Professor Barry Wood had the following Summer and Fall 2019 Publications:

Book Chapters:

"Constructing Chronologies: Underlying Temporalities of Big History."

The Routledge Companion to Big History. Editor: Craig Benjamin, Esther Quaedacker, David Blanks. Oxford: Routledge, 2019. pp.

"From the Bubble to the Forest: Nature School Environmental Education."

Culture and Environment: Weaving New Connections. Editor: David Zandvliet. Amsterdam: Sense Publications, 2019. pp. 139-162.

"Petrotemporality at Siccar Point: James Hutton's Discovery of the Deep-Time

Narrative." *Time's Urgency*. Vol. 16 of a series. Fifty-year anniversary volume honoring the work of the physicist J. T. Fraser's on time and his founding of the International Society for the Study of Time (ISST). Eds. Carlos Montemayor & Robert Daniel. Leiden: Brill, 2019. pp. 157-178.

Articles:

“Beachcombing and Coastal Settlement: The Long Migration from South Africa to Patagonia—The Greatest Journey Ever Made.” *Journal of Big History*, Vol. 3, No. 4: (Oct. 2019). pp. 19-46.

“Forrageamento e assentamentos costeiros: A longa migração da África do Sul para a Patagônia—A maior jornada já feita.” *Journal of Big History*, 3:4. pp. 47-75.

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Have news to share? Please email Theodora Ziolkowski, our graduate student editorial assistant, at uhenglishforum1@gmail.com.

Stay tuned for features on **Special Collections University Archivist Mary Manning**, the **Poetry & Prose Series**, and other departmental news, interviews, events, and honors, in the Spring 2020 Issue of *Forum*.