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Department of English

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Western Michigan University English Professor Jaimy Gordon is the winner of the 2010 National Book Award for fiction.

Gordon’s new novel Lord of Misrule was selected for the coveted annual prize that USA Today calls “publishing’s version of the Academy Awards.”

Gordon accepted the award after it was announced Nov. 17 at the gala 61st National Book Awards Benefit Dinner and Ceremony in New York City. The prize in fiction has been won previously by such literary giants as William Faulkner, Saul Bellow and John Updike. It comes with a $10,000 cash award and bronze statue, but literary prestige and increased book sales are among the benefits as well.

Gordon’s novel, her fourth, was published in November by McPherson & Co. Set in the world of West Virginia horse racing in the early 1970s, the book was praised by the judges as a “vivid, memorable and linguistically rich novel” about the rock-bottom end of the sport of kings.

Gordon, who has taught at WMU since 1981, based the novel on a world she learned about fresh out of college in the late 1960s when she took a series of jobs intended to boost her life experience. She worked for a period as a groom and hot-walker at Charles Town Race Track in West Virginia. That experience served as background as well for her short story about horseracing, “A Night’s Work,” which was chosen for Best American Short Stories in 1995.

This is the second time in as many years an author with WMU connections has been among the National Book Award finalists. Kalamazoo native Bonnie Jo Campbell, a student of Gordon’s in the 1990s who earned three degrees from WMU, was named a finalist last fall for her book of short stories, American Salvage.

Gordon, a Baltimore native, earned degrees from Antioch College and Brown University. She has published three other novels—Bogeywoman, Champ of the City-Solo and She Drove Without Stopping. The latter, often described as a woman’s road novel, was an American Library Association Notable Book for 1990; in 1991, Gordon won an Academy-Institute Award for her fiction from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Bogeywoman made the Los Angeles Times list of the Best Fiction of 2000.

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Gordon also has published a novella, poetry, masques, short stories and essays. She has won a number of other awards for her work. They include grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and being named a fellow at both the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center and the Bunting Institute of Radcliffe College.

Established in 1950 by publishers, editors, writers and critics, the National Book Awards were conceived as an award given to writers by writers. The American Book Publisher’s Council, the Book Manufacturers’ Institute, and the American Booksellers’ Association jointly sponsored the Awards, bringing together the American literary community to honor the year’s best work in fiction, nonfiction and poetry. The awards quickly established a reputation for recognizing literary excellence.

For 2010, there were more than 300 books submitted for the National Book Award in the fiction category. To learn more about the competition and judges and to read an extended interview with Gordon about her book, visit the National Book Foundation online.

- WMU News; November 18, 2010

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### Chair’s Corner

It’s one of those days. A dozen new e-mails blink at me from my inbox, and all of them have come within the last ten minutes.

I open the most recent issue of Third Coast, our student edited and nationally recognized literary magazine, and the phrase “When it comes to definition, the Midwest is a mushy place; experts cannot even agree on where it begins and ends,” draws me away from the computer screen and into the wondrous world of writing and craft. The issue of Third Coast I hold in my hand contains an entire “Symposium on Writing and the Midwest” I would like to read, and right now.

Of course, the cover of Jaimy Gordon’s Lord of Misrule beckons from the other side of the desk. Next to it reside letters from the Provost granting competitive research sabbaticals to Tony Ellis, Lisa Minnick, Mustafa Mirzeler, and Jana Schulman in 2011, and several news releases about Daneen Wardrop’s National Endowment for the Arts Award (she was chosen as one of 42 out of 1,063 eligible applicants), Judi Rypma’s new chapbook, Forget-Me-Not, and Meg Dupuis and Grace Tiffany’s forthcoming Modern Language Association essay collection on teaching The Taming of the Shrew.

I go back to my screen and open the first message: It is an announcement from the Graduate College informing me that one of our Ph.D. students from Jordan, Abdullah Shehabat, has just been awarded a competitive Graduate College Travel Grant.

As the department chair, I derive my own sense of success vicariously from the numerous successes of our productive and creative students, staff, and faculty, and this fall semester has once again yielded an impressive harvest of great teaching and regional, national, and international professional recognition. I feel truly blessed about being primus inter pares here.

By now, I have read more of Michael Levan’s essay in Third Coast: “The Midwest is hidden in plain sight,” he says. If I keep reading, I may never respond to my e-mails. It’s one of those days.

Please join me in being drawn into a good book over the holidays.

Cordially,

Richard Utz
The English Department’s 2010-2011 Distinguished Alumnus is Dave Dempsey who, after receiving a B.A. from our department in 1977, moved on to help shape conservation and Great Lakes policy for more than two decades and is the author and co-author of five conservation books and many an article and blog. He currently serves as Communications Director for Conservation Minnesota, a nonprofit organization in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Dave has been active in environmental matters since 1982. Past positions include:

- Communications Director, Conservation Minnesota (2006-Present).

Dave is a resident of the Twin Cities region of Minnesota. His book titles include:


In 2009, the Michigan Center for the Book, the Michigan Library Association and Sleeping Bear Press gave Dave the annual Michigan Author Award.

Beyond his Bachelor of Arts degree from Western Michigan University, Dave earned a master’s degree in resource development from Michigan State University (2001). He also served from 1999-2004 as an adjunct instructor at MSU in environmental policy through the Department of Resource Development (now Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies). He is married to Jennifer Morris, a teacher with the Richfield Schools, and stepfather of two.

Mr. Dempsey will be the keynote speaker on March 18, during our annual English Awards and Recognition ceremony.
**Student News**

**Dan Toronto**’s (M.F.A. student, Fiction) short story “Without a Table” was just accepted for publication in the *Denver Quarterly*. Dan reports that this is his first publishing credit in fiction.

**Chad Sweeney** (Ph.D. student, Poetry) sends news:


A book release reading was October 14, at the Kalamazoo Public Library.

Also, Garrison Keillor read Chad’s poem, “The Methodist and His Method,” on the Writer’s Almanac on NPR this Halloween. The poem is from his new book.

Chad has also won a Travel Grant from WMU to support his book tour and readings from Farsi translations at the ALTA translators conference in Philadelphia. His cotranslation of the Iranian poet H.E. Seyeh’s *Selected Poems 1946-2000* will be published by White Pine Press next year.

Besides Chad’s book, two other books by current WMU graduate students were released this semester: **Gary McDowell**’s (Ph.D. student, Poetry) *American Amen* (Dream Horse Press), and **Traci Brimhall**’s (Ph.D. student, Poetry) *Rookery* (Southern Illinois University Press).

**Katie Burpo** (M.F.A. Fiction) reports:

“I wanted to let you know that a piece of mine has been accepted for the 2011 edition the Chautauqua literary magazine. This is my first publication and I’m pretty excited. I wrote the piece in Richard Katrovas’s Creative Non Fiction workshop. It’s called ‘A Series of Wilderness Related Injuries.’ It’s a creative essay in vignettes.”

**Dan Mancilla** (Ph.D. student, Fiction) has a number of fiction pieces recently published.

- “Gypsy Christmas” in *Slice Magazine*
- “The Fifth Sorrowful Mystery” in *The Columbia Review*
- “M.I.A.” in *Specs Journal*
- “Our Gypsy Problem” in *The Dos Passos Review*
- “El Gaucho has the Flu” in *Front Porch*

**Dustin Hoffman**’s (Ph.D. student, Fiction) sends his recent publication news of works accepted in the last six months.

**Short Stories:**

- “Strong as Paper Men,” forthcoming in *Copper Nickel*
- “Lysol Fights,” forthcoming in *Indiana Review*
- “Self-Destruct,” forthcoming in *Southeast Review*
- “Mr. James K. Polk, Please Hold My Windbreaker,” forthcoming in *Cream City Review*
- “Pushing the Knives” anthologized in *On the Clock: A Book of Post-Industrial Fiction, 2010* (Bonnie Jo Campbell was also in this anthology, as well as Michael Martone and Daniel Orozco.)
- “Scratch” forthcoming in *Palooka, 2010*
- “Dispossessions” forthcoming in *Echo Ink Review, 2010*

**Poetry:**

- “An All-Night Diner” in *Naugatuck River Review 2010*

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Brandon Jennings (Ph.D. student, Fiction) sends news of recent publications:

- Essay “Operation Iraqi Freedom is My Fault” was published in Crazyhorse
- Story “Brown-eyed Babe” was published in The Berkeley Fiction Review
- Story “Doc the Fifth” was published in Black Heart Magazine
- Story “Derrick is a Big Man” is forthcoming in The Dark Comedy Review

He has also been nominated for a Pushcart Award.

One of our English 1000 students, Petter Kerizareth, was a finalist in the university-wide “Grab the Reins” essay contest held last month. Petter is a student in Joe Law’s ENGL 1000 class and his essay, “Who helped Me Grab The Reins,” won second prize. Though this year’s “Grab the Reins” contest is finished, other students in Joe’s class were interested in writing essays about who has inspired them to attend Western. So Joe organized his own essay contest for these students during the month of November, and Erinn J. Bentley, Director of Developmental Writing, served as the contest’s judge.

Third Coast Writing Project

The two most recent issues of the Language Arts Journal of Michigan (scholarly journal of the Michigan Council of Teachers of English) include articles by the following Third Coast Writing Project teacher consultants:

Erinn Bentley (right), “Literate Lives: Connecting Literature Instruction with Multigenre Writing.” Erinn is a WMU doctoral student and TCWP teacher consultant. She has taught English at the secondary and university levels.

Ann Burke, “Teacher as Leader in a ‘Flat World’: Preparing Students to Succeed in a Global Community.” Ann is a middle school teacher in Midland, Michigan, and a TCWP teacher consultant.

John Klein, “Nine Principles for a Writing Principal.” John is a co-director of the Third Coast Writing Project and principal of the Washington Writers’ Academy (KPS), an elementary magnet school.

Scott Peterson, “Becoming a Reader in Lincoln.” Scott is a co-director of the Third Coast Writing Project, focusing especially on TCWP’s professional development work with school districts. He has taught our ENGL 3690 course (Writing in the Elementary School) on several occasions and taught for Mattawan Schools for more than 30 years.
Cheryl Almeda (Ph.D.) sends great news:
“I plan on graduating Dec. 18th!
I have been hired as full-time faculty (tenure track) at KVCC for students in Developmental English. I am also working with faculty development in this area. In Nov., I’m traveling to the NCTE Conference and presenting with Amanda Stearns-Peiffer and Erinn J. Bentley (both WMU doctoral students) as part of a 3-woman panel discussing professional development for teachers in the field of English Language Arts.”

The other WMU graduate hired at KVCC in Developmental English is Ronald Higgenbotham. Here’s an update on Ron:
“As for me, I transferred to WMU in 1997. I finished my BA in English in 2002, and my MA in English in 2007. I studied English Lit. for my Masters and had a great interest in Modernist Literature. I was in the Marine Corps from 1967 to 1971. I worked for Checker Motors for 19 years and Stryker Medical for 17 years before coming to KVCC.”

Kate Dernoceour’s (M.F.A.): essay “Saying Goodbye” can be found in Intersections, an anthology published last month by Dream of Things and available at amazon.com or bn.com. “It’s an essay I’ve worked on for a long time, about that period of my life when my mother was dying of cancer at the same time I was pregnant and a new mother.

I graduated with my M.F.A. in creative nonfiction last May and went on to participate as Teaching Assistant for the nonfiction workshop at the Prague Summer Program in July. I have since returned to a less-frenetic post-grad school life of reading, writing, and riding (horses) at my home near Lowell, Michigan.”

Julia Watson (English & German, Honors College, 1967), Professor of Comparative Studies, has been named Associate Dean for Recruitment and Diversity in the College of Arts and Sciences, The Ohio State University. A second, expanded edition of Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives, which is co-written by Watson and Sidonie Smith, was published in summer 2010 by the University of Minnesota Press.

Arnie Johnston shares great news: “Our alum--and my friend and former student--Daryl Murphy has just been nominated for a Pushcart Prize for his story ‘Philly,’ which appeared in The Briar Cliff Review and won its 2010 Fiction Prize. On the strength of the fiction prize, Daryl was asked by the Irene Goodman Literary Agency to submit more of his work.”

What’s New With You?
Please tell us where you are and what you’re doing. We would love to include you in our next alumni update section.
Email us at engl_news@wmich.edu and include the year and degree with which you graduated, any fond memories of the English department, as well as something you’ve done since your times as a Bronco.

“My article started being written when Norm Carlson (emeritus 2001) and I talked about what our colleagues would say about students who couldn’t write a ‘decent sentence.’ I thought why don’t we collect a hundred really good sentences and write a book about them. I think Norm gave me two or three of them. But I began looking for more in books I owned. I soon had a bunch and began analyzing them. It seemed so easy, but I decided that fifty sentences was enough. I was serious about writing a book, and after doing an introduction, I sent the ‘book’ to publishers. They all just sent me a no, except one editor who wrote a very nice letter. He said it was obviously a well written book and that I was a sophisticated, knowledgeable writer. BUT the book wasn’t long enough. It would cost them as much to print as a book three times as long.

So I put the manuscript away for twenty years and when I reached 90 years thought ‘How many writers reach my age before publishing their first book?’ I’ll be unique. So I got at it. I changed the style, made it more personal, gave Miss Kottke a leading part, mentioned my kids, etc. I had been reading a book by a psychologist, whose style was my model.

I made copies of my manuscript, asked my old colleagues if they would read it and give their opinion. They all sent me good feedback. They were Larry Syndergaard, Bill Combs, Dave Pugh, Bill Rosegrant, Martin Gingerich, Norm Carlson, and Ron Spatz. Ron immediately asked my permission to print it in the AQR and also said there would be a generous remuneration. AQR never pays a writer.

So that’s the evolution of ‘How to Write a Good Sentence.’”

Arnie Nelson

Remembering Arnie Nelson by William Combs, Emeritus 1995

Arnie Nelson died in Madison, Wisconsin, on November 13, 2010. In his twenties, Arnie developed diabetes, of the critical type, so that for the rest of his life he had to juggle the amounts of insulin and other medicines he required, and cope with related muscular and neurological troubles. I never thought of him as an invalid. He was versatile and ingenious. He was always interested in new technologies and learned to work, and play, in some of them. He was a good carpenter. He became an excellent photographer. In the English Department, he learned the new linguistics promulgated by Chomsky and others, and along with several colleagues created an English Language course, for years required of English majors and minors, which was modern and unprescriptive, although Arnie never lost his respect and fondness for the “old” grammar.

I got to know Arnie really well when in 1966 the English department’s organization greatly changed. Dave Sadler became the (highly recommended) chair, with three associate chairs. In 1961, Western had 10,000 students; in 1970, over 20,000. There were more than a thousand English majors and hundreds of minors.

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Lisa Cohen Minnick, Faculty Advisor of the Alpha Nu Pi chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the international English honor society, welcomed our Fall 2010 inductees on November 7, close to the fifth anniversary of the granting of our charter.

50 undergraduate and graduate students qualified for membership and were inducted, comprising the largest induction class in our chapter’s history.

Dr. Minnick noted that all 50 inductees were able join Sigma Tau Delta free of charge thanks to institutional support from the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of English, as well as generous donations from faculty and friends.

The Alpha Nu Pi chapter extends its deepest thanks to all who have contributed to the membership fund. Sigma Tau Delta membership changes lives, and free membership makes it possible now for all students who meet the academic standards to join.

Fall 2010 Sigma Tau Delta Inductees:

Brenna Alholm
Hassan Al-Momani
Michelle Andrus
Kyle Blasco
Sara Bower
Nayt Boyt
Kylie Cheevers
Gretchen Colman
William Cope
Eric Cron
Abby Dame
Adam Dietz

Lauren Dixon
Dana Hall
Ashley Harper
Elizabyth Hiscox
Sarah Jones
Elyse Jozlin
Jeanine Kemmer
Amanda Kissman
Angela Kramer
John Kreider
Chandel Lawrence
Erika LaFerier
Jacob Lewis

Megan Lipp
Hannah Lucero
William D. Martin
Maureen Mead
Cody Mejeur
Megan Miller
Ambrosia Neldon
Rachel Neubauer
Melissa Nichols
Kelly O’Keefe
Elan Pavlinch
Katherine Peterson
Sean Pickett

Gena Reist
Justin Reynolds
Andrew Rhodes
Jessica Rungaitis
Jacob Smallegen
Valerie Smolarkiewicz
Nora Strehl
Cora Supenski
Jacob Swanson
Michael Venner
Kristine Voss
Andrew Wolford

It is our great pleasure to introduce to you our new Office Assistant, who began working for us in October. Pamela Mottley comes to us with many years of work experience at Western: Since 1994, she has held positions on our campus as Finance Support Secretary for Grants and Contracts; Administrative Secretary for Office of the Vice President of Research; Administrative Assistant to the Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College; Administrative Assistant to the Vice President for Research, Associate Vice President for Research, and the Director for Community Asset Building; and as Budget Analyst for OVPR. Next time you come to campus, please introduce yourself to her and welcome her.
Daneen Wardrop is the recipient of a coveted Creative Writing Fellowship in poetry awarded by the National Endowment of the Arts. Selected through an anonymous review process, the fellowships encourage the production of new works of literature by allowing writers the time and means to write. The Creative Writing Fellowships alternate annually between poetry and prose. This year, the NEA received 1,063 eligible applications; the 42 poets recommended will each receive a fellowship of $25,000.

Allen Webb presented at the Lee Honors College Lyceum Lectures on September 29, on Terrorism. He spoke about how in the 1950s there was a communist under every bed. Now there is a terrorist. He invited the audience to think about how we define “terrorism,” who are the “terrorists,” how we respond as citizens to the current situation. Webb’s work on the Middle East and Islam provided some bearing there.

In November Judi Rypma organized and directed the first annual Russian Studies Conference on campus. In addition to our own faculty, speakers included best-selling author Robert Alexander and Slava Moshkalo, counselor to the Cultural Attache of the Embassy of the Russian Federation. The event drew over 60 people.

Judi’s new play, “The Malachite Goddess,” was performed by students at the Marshall Academy the following day at Fetzer Center as part of the Russian Festival. During that busy week, she also led a book discussion on Debra Dean’s Madonnas of Leningrad AND did a poetry reading (performed in full Russian folk costume) at the Portage District Library.

And in publishing news, Judi’s fourth chapbook, Forget-Me-Not, is scheduled for release soon from Finishing Line Press.

Casey McKittrick’s essay, “Brothers’ Milk: The Erotic and the Lethal in Bareback Pornography,” appears as part of the thought-provoking and generally provocative new collection, Porn—Philosophy for Everyone: How to Think with Kink (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), edited by Dave Monroe and with a foreword by Gram Ponante. The editor’s introduction singles out Casey’s piece for special consideration: in his words, “I am excited to include his essay, as precious little philosophical literature addresses male homosexual pornography.” The essay examines the subculture of “barebacking” and positions the relatively recent proliferation of filmic representations of its practice within a theoretical framework that attends to its broader cultural and political ramifications.

Bill Olsen’s poem “Light or Dark Speech” received a Pushcart Award and will be published in Pushcart IIIIV. Sand Theory, his fifth book of poetry, will be released by Northwestern University Press in April 2011.

Richard Utz was invited to deliver the plenary speech at this year’s International Conference of the Medieval and Early Modern English Studies Association of Korea (MEMESAK) in Seoul in October. The plenary was entitled, “Medievalism and Medieval Romance.”

Utz also delivered a seminar, entitled “The Colony Writes Back: F.N. Robinson’s Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer and the Translatio of Chaucer Study to the United States,” to faculty and graduate students from Ewha Womans University, Seoul National University, Sogang University, and Yonsei University.
“Nelson” continued from pg. 7

We had more than a hundred full-time faculty and many part-time. Arnie, as associate chair for general education, and I, as director of undergraduate programs, were concerned mostly with the undergraduate curriculum. What we hoped to do was keep English major requirements as respectable, suggestive, open, and flexible as possible. We had a fair number of successes.

About fifty years ago, Arnie began writing a book he intended to call Some Decent Sentences. There were, I recall, fifty of them. The book evolved. It got shorter and sharper. Its title became How to Write a Good Sentence: A Manual for Writers Who Know How to Write Correct Sentences. The Alaska Quarterly Review published it in its Spring and Summer 2010 issue. It’s a wonderful book. It combines scholarship, close reading, autobiography, appreciation. I’m grateful Arnie stuck with his book and that it was published several months before he died so he could enjoy its completion, and praise for it. I presume to quote from my email letter to Arnie last spring after I’d read it in the AQR: “In your commentary on the wonderful sentence from Huck Finn you imply an important point--that what you’re dealing with is the written, not oral, sentence, i.e., with art and craft, with something worked over, revised as well as inspired. As you reworked your drafts over the decades, a combintion of characteristics increased: the book’s wisdom, its knowingness, which includes knowing how to read and analyze, how to appreciate, how to reason and imagine yourself into even deeper and more intimate understanding and appreciation. The discussion of such marvellous and disparate sentences are always interesting, suggestive, smart, and display several types of charm.”

Arnie will, I’m confident, continue to influence and reassure us.

“Faculty News” Continued from Pg. 9


Clifford Davidson, professor of English and Medieval Studies emeritus, is the author, with Sheila White, of “Bullying in the York Corpus Christi Plays,” in Research Opportunities in Medieval and Renaissance Drama (2010), a collaboration with an expert on bullying in organizations in the U.K. His book Norwegians in Michigan was published by Michigan State University Press earlier in the year. His TEAMS edition of the York Corpus Christi plays is in the press, and he is also working on a new edition of John Lydgate’s Dance of Death with Sophie Oosterwijk -- a project which took him to the U.K. for a month this fall. Additionally, he is a contributor to the on-line Oxford medieval bibliography, for which he is also serving a three-year term as an associate editor.