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Department of English

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Emeritus Arnie Johnston Comes Full Circle as Writer and Playwright

Now that Arnie Johnston has retired after 42 years in Western’s English Department, it’s hard to imagine that when he first arrived here in 1966, he thought he wouldn’t stay. As a graduate student he had sent out twenty-five job application letters and received ten offers, of which Western was the most appealing in terms of teaching and salary—and even then he thought he’d just be here for a few years. However, very quickly he fell in love with the culture of Kalamazoo. Though he now admits, not that he knew much of culture: “I didn’t really know anything about theatre in 1966. I was a working class kid. I had seen one legitimate play, Shaw’s The Devil’s Disciple.”

In fact, when Arnie first arrived at Western, playwriting and the theatre were not his primary focus. He came here to teach modern literature. He became involved in the theatre by appearing in a production at The Civic of The Birthday Party: “I didn’t know the play. But Jim Carver, the Civic’s artistic director, heard I could do an accent.” The play received a tremendous response—in fact, the reviewer walked out partway through. He later said he was so disturbed (“In a positive way,” laughs Arnie) he couldn’t watch anymore.

However, it was through the poet Robert Burns that Arnie’s career as a playwright, and eventually focus on playwriting in the department, was born. Arnie had been performing the poetry of Burns for a few years, even making a recording of his readings for a label in New York, when in 1972 Ted Kistler, artistic director of the New Vic, broached the subject one night after a rehearsal.

According to Johnston, Kistler said, “Give me a title, and we’ll do it in February.” Arnie had never written a play before, and really didn’t know what it would be or where to begin.

Obviously he did some things right. Arnie’s play The Witching Voice became a huge hit in town. After playing for an extended run, it was credited as being one of the first original plays by a Kalamazoo playwright to receive such acclaim. An interesting item to note is that, in the portrait of former WMU President James Miller that hangs in Miller Auditorium, the former president holds a copy of The Witching Voice.

Based on the success of The Witching Voice, Arnie was encouraged to create and offer a course in playwriting.

Things appear to have come full circle for Arnie with Burns. In 2009, in celebration of Burns’ 250th birthday, the New Vic Theatre in Kalamazoo will present a revival of the play, and Arnie’s novel—of the same title—is forthcoming from Wings Press. Johnston will read from his Burns work as part of the Gwen Frostic Reading Series in Spring 2009.

Arnie’s esteemed service to the English Department and university has included serving as graduate director and, of course, for ten years as department chair. When he considers his greatest accomplishments in the English Department, he is quick to list his contribution to the development of the creative writing program at the top.

He notes among his other most important achievements his contributions in working to establish the union and serving three times as chief negotiator. He also feels honored that he was able to teach well enough to have won an alumni-teaching award. However, he is quick to credit the award to the many outstanding students he has worked with over the years.

Finally, he is pleased that as chair he was able to play a part in hiring such outstanding faculty members in the English Department: “I can’t believe I’ve been able to be part of hiring such wonderful and talented colleagues. It’s been so gratifying to work with such terrific people in the English Department.” As chair he felt that, in a department as diverse as English, he was able to serve all the different aspects of the department’s programs so that they gained real strength and continue to thrive.

“Retirement” is a relative term; Arnie has certainly been busier than ever. Among many recent projects, a musical based on his translations of Brel’s work, Lonesome Losers of the Night, continues its critically lauded run at Chicago’s No Exit Café and (with his wife and collaborator Debby) he has a new book of one-act plays—Duets: Love Is Strange—forthcoming soon from March Street Press.

In honor of Arnie’s contribution to the department, an award is being established in his name. The Arnie Johnston Playwriting Awards will be given to three playwrights, a graduate and undergraduate playwright from Western Michigan University, as well as a playwright from our region (MI, WI, IL, OH and IN), so that they may participate in the summer New Play Project, a festival of new plays by Western Michigan University playwrights staged in collaboration with WMU’s Theatre Department. A graduate and undergraduate playwright will each receive an award for their winning new one-act play to help support their participation in the New Play Project.

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Towards the end of this summer English department faculty gathered at WMU’s south-west campus in Benton Harbor for a one day retreat. During the plenary and breakout sessions, we focused on the future of our undergraduate programs, our work as teachers of undergraduate students, and our general identity as an academic unit that embraces linguistics, rhetoric and writing studies, English education, creative writing, and literary studies.

One common practice we found we all shared, despite our specializations, is our dedication to discussing “difficult” texts, to exploring the intricacies of texts that challenge the desire for immediate and easy comprehension. It is this shared dedication to creating, investigating, and enjoying “difficult” texts that has attracted one of the most fascinating contemporary fiction writers, Don Lee, to join us. And it is this same desire that has convinced Mustafa Mirzeler, formerly in the Department of Comparative Religion, to request a transfer to English and provide our students with an opportunity to study storytelling, folklore, mythology, and post-colonial literatures.

Interestingly, the discipleship of “difficulty” spans generations: This year’s departmental Distinguished Alumnus, Robert Bradley, who graduated with a B.A. in English Literature in 1951 and was the second student ever to receive the Department’s prestigious George Sprau Award, still practices what English professors preach as an avid reader and reviewer of “difficult” literary, historical, political, and scientific texts. More on Robert in our spring edition of Footnotes.

All things considered, the department has done exceedingly well last year, boasting College of Arts and Sciences Faculty Achievements Awards in Creative/Scholarly Activity (Nancy Eimers) and Teaching (Steve Feffer), six Dean’s Staff and Faculty Appreciation Awards (Ellen Brinkley, Michelle Hruska, Jana Schulman, Marianne Swierenga, Joyce Walker, Nic Witschi), and a vast number of nationally and internationally recognized publications and performances.

This summer marked our long-awaited return to the “Brown Hall,” after its recent renovation a state-of-the-art classroom building that students and faculty alike are finding an exciting addition to their scholarly lives. Finally, our website has risen from the ashes, providing an inviting window to our various programs, our faculty, and our opportunities for interdisciplinary work, internships, study abroad, and much more.

In addition to the redesigned website, this newsletter, which we publish in a print as well as in an electronic version, is meant to serve as a forum for communication for all former and current disciples of difficulty. Please let us know what you are doing, reading, and thinking about reading, writing, teaching, and studying English texts and contact us about your projects and publications at www.wmich.edu/english. If you are living close enough or are visiting the region, please know that you are always welcome to join us for any of our many departmental events, from literary and scholarly readings to our Annual Student Award and Recognition Ceremony on April 15, 2009. It would be great to see you here on campus!

Cordially,
Richard Utz
Our doctoral candidate (fiction) Michael Davis won the George Garrett Prize for 2008 from Willow Springs for his short story “Gravity.”

Stephanie Butler, who attended Kalamazoo Loy Norrix High School, was among those working at the PromiseNet 2008 conference where educators, elected officials and business leaders from around the country gathered to exchange ideas about community-based scholarship programs such as the pioneering Kalamazoo Promise. Her 2006 graduating class was the first in the school district to be eligible for the Kalamazoo Promise, and she received a 65 percent scholarship.

Butler attended Michigan State University in East Lansing for two years before recently transferring to her hometown school, Western Michigan University. She plans to graduate early, in December 2009, and become a high school English teacher.


Ninth Morning in a Row with Binoculars
Gary L McDowell

I’m in my truck, I-94, I-80—they’re all the same—when a spring-robin flies into my cabin, knocks off the rearview mirror and falls onto the passenger seat, shocked, out cold, its caramel feet docile against its chest. I, too, am breathless, unsure whether to pull over or throw the robin out the window before it wakes. How does one resuscitate a bird? How does one know when to resuscitate a bird? Two nights ago the weatherman said spring is finally here, said fire up those grills, folks, it’s bratwurst time! What an odd thing to say. Every morning a cardinal whistles from the heavy pine outside my bedroom, his trills enough to stir my dogs who know now the sun has risen. I sip coffee on the porch and watch the cardinal tease his mate, his black face, his crest, how he shares seeds by kissing her beak: he perches on a fence post, harmonizes with her, phrases with her: their banter. Behind the house, cars race by on US-131, the whoosh of semis, their long haul beginning or nearly ending, and I remember baseball scores from the radio the night before: Chicago dismantles Houston, 9-3, and the Pirates blow a late lead, fall 8-6 to the Fins. So final. The everyday becomes more everyday every day, yet still I wish I could cup that robin in my palms and breathe life back into him, but this spring is its last, and lying on my passenger seat is the face I fear most, the face I’ve never touched but that I must touch to make authentic, to make other than silent.
I fear most, the face I’ve never touched but that I must touch to make authentic, to make other than silent. It’s asking too much to bring back the fallen: our hands are busy enough predicting the weather, busy enough flipping through radio stations to find the ballgame, to find a voice that’ll tell us good pitching will beat good hitting any time, and vice versa.
I could not have asked for a better place for a summer internship. Where else could I visit a baby snow leopard or feed a giraffe on my lunch break? I’ve had so many amazing experiences this summer, like helping organize sponsors and vendors for the Cheetah Chase 5k Run, working on a number of grants that provided much needed funding for the Zoo, and watching Shanti, our baby snow leopard, being born on a webcam linked to the office. Not only has working for Binder Park Zoo been exciting and unique, working in the Development Department has taught me more about utilizing an English degree in the workplace than I could have possibly imagined.

Along with gaining experience in grant writing, fundraising, and event organization, I’ve learned that I can use the skills that I’ve been practicing in classes for the last three years at Western to make the world a better place. Working at the Zoo has taught me the importance of conserving the amazing things that God put on this earth and that educating people, especially children, about wildlife and the environment is one of the best ways to change the world.

My internship has opened doors for me that I never knew existed. After I graduate in the spring of ’09, I plan on continuing a career in development and fundraising. Working at Binder Park has shown me how I can make a difference while doing a job that I truly enjoy.

Kevin Joseph Krizan

In July, I walked the halls of Sprau Tower for the first time since I graduated. Those intervening twelve years saw me trek to upstate New York, Texas, Wisconsin, Illinois, and California to teach at colleges and universities, while also making time to write four novels and a screenplay.

My novel Well Deserved won the 2008 Sol Books Prose Series Prize, and my novel December’s Children was a finalist for the 2007 Sol Books prize. They are also considering it for publication. My agent in Beverly Hills helped me win a grant from mystery writer Elizabeth George to support writing one of the novels, Not Famous Anymore. My agent is also talking with a European publisher about the book and the screenplay version I wrote. I now teach completely online for a university and just this summer finished a novel called Blue Sparta.

Michael Loyd Grey graduated from Western Michigan University with a Master’s in Fine Arts in 1996. We are pleased that he is once again a part of the WMU English Community.
Brown Hall Renovations Complete

Brown Hall, erected in 1967, was recently renovated with a collection of funds allocated by Western Michigan University, as well as from the State of Michigan and private donors. The 14.8 million dollar project began in 2005 and concluded in May 2008. Along with its sleek new look, it complies with state and university “green” building regulations. Covering five floors and 58,258 square feet, the building boasts a media center, lecture halls, conference rooms, labs, regular classrooms, and study areas.

Faculty members are thrilled about the prospect of teaching classes in the new building, which comes complete with specialized writing and language labs. Instructor Lisa Horton, who is teaching Practical Writing in the new Brown Hall, said, “Apart from the hyperactive alarm system, the new Brown Hall has a very polished appearance and It provides excellent opportunities for hands-on, in-lab workshopping.”

Brown Hall was dedicated to William Brown in June of 1967. Dr. Brown was a professor of English for 39 years and was the department head for 10 years.

-Lauren Azevedo

Rural Sites National Conference Coming to Kalamazoo in March

Western Michigan University’s Third Coast Writing Project (TCWP) has been chosen to host a national conference for the National Writing Project. A number of WMU alumni, along with 300 teachers from across the country are expected to attend the National Writing Project Rural Sites Network (RSN) Conference March 13-15, 2009, at the Radisson Plaza Hotel. The conference will highlight WMU and the communities in and around Kalamazoo.

The conference will begin with a dinner on Friday, March 13, featuring a prominent speaker, Michigan historian and storyteller Larry Massie.

On Saturday, March 14, 2009, the conference will feature 20 to 30 concurrent sessions addressing themes and issues important to educators nationwide. Dr. Karen Vocke, WMU associate professor of English, author of Where Do I Go From Here? Meeting the Unique Educational Needs of Migrant Students and researcher of issues related to English language learners and migrant education issues in rural communities, will be the keynote speaker.

The conference will also feature nationally prominent playwright and WMU assistant professor of English Dr. Steve Feffer, and Laura Feffer, a noted area teacher at Allegan Alternative High School.

The Third Coast Writing Project, in its summer institute directed by Dr. Ellen Brinkley, WMU professor of English, offers classroom-tested, research-based strategies that support teaching and learning at all levels and in all content areas.

Dr. Jonathan Bush, WMU associate professor of English and co-director of Third Coast Writing Project, is directing this national RSN event, along with Ms. Jennifer Conrad, a Third Coast Writing Project teacher consultant and teacher at Allegan High School, Allegan, MI.

According to Bush, the event is an opportunity for both the National Writing Project and WMU. “We’re excited about this conference for many reasons, but one of the most important is the opportunity we have to show off the talents of all the great faculty and students in the English Department at WMU. It’s also a great chance for all of us to meet outstanding and dedicated teachers from throughout the country.”

For more information, contact Jonathan Bush at jonathan.bush@wmich.edu.
Alumni Bookshelf

Shelter by Carey Salerno
Disrupting because of the cruelty intended as kindness to animals and the speaker’s unflinching, relentless insistence on her culpability, these poems force us to consider whether we can be redeemed by our capacity for love, compassion and personal responsibility. Heartrending, but absolutely necessary and enlightening, this lyric debut is beautiful in its courage and honesty.

Elizabeth Kerlikowske, who completed her PhD here in lit/Creative Writing a year ago, has had her dissertation The Laying of the Maples (a collection of poetry) accepted for publication by Wayne State University for its Made in Michigan Series.

The Made in Michigan Writers Series publishes poetry, creative nonfiction, short fiction, and essays by Michigan writers with the aim of encouraging the recognition of the state’s artistic and cultural heritage throughout Michigan, the Midwest, and the nation.

This series publishes 2–4 new books annually by writers with an established track record (through publication, formal training, professional position, and presentations and readings, for example) that present Michigan’s diverse voices on a range of topics of interest to a broad audience of educated nonspecialists and general readers.

Our PhD alumnus (fiction) Darrin Doyle had his first novel taken by LSU Press. Revenge of the Teacher’s Pet: A Love Story will appear in March 2009. He has been a visiting assistant professor at the University of Louisville, and next year will be teaching in the creative writing program at Kansas State.

MCACA Grant Awarded to New Issues will Support the Publication of Michigan Poetry

New Issues Poetry & Prose has been awarded a $9,000 grant from the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs to support the publication of three new titles in the Inland Seas Poetry Series. The three titles, each by poets who currently live in Michigan or who have strong Michigan connections, will be published in 2008-09.

* Beauty Breaks In, a fourth collection of poetry by Mary Ann Samyn, author of two other Inland Seas titles: Inside the Yellow Dress and Purr.
* Hilarity, a third book of poems by Detroit-native Patty Seyburn, and winner of our 2008 Green Rose Prize in Poetry.

“It seems like Michigan really takes care of its own writers,” was a comment we received at a conference once, and yes, New Issues believes in supporting one of Michigan’s most precious natural resources. To date, the publication of over fifty books has been supported by MCACA as part of our Inland Seas Series.

The Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs serves to encourage, develop and facilitate an enriched environment of artistic, creative, cultural activity in Michigan.
All events are scheduled for 7 PM.

**Kristen Tracy** has a lot of good news. She recently sold two young adult novels to Hyperion-Disney, which will be released in 2010 and 2011. Her first young adult novel, *Lost It*, has gone into its sixth printing. And her first middle-grade novel, *Camille McPhee Fell Under the Bus*, is forthcoming from Random House this summer, with a second novel to follow in 2010. She has poems forthcoming in *Threepenny Review, TriQuarterly, Puerto Del Sol,* and *Prairie Schooner.* She wrote the introduction for the most recent *826 Quarterly,* a journal of student writing published by 826 Valencia. In addition to volunteering at 826 Valencia, she is also a volunteer gardener on Alcatraz where she is helping to restore the historic gardens.

**Caitlin McAndrew** is currently teaching 7th grade Writing at an at-risk middle school in Phoenix, AZ. In addition to the five academic blocks of Writing, she also teaches two intervention classes, of reading and math respectively.

She writes: “Though WMU and its programs did an excellent job preparing me with an English and Spanish Education degree, I’m not sure anything could have really prepared me for the differences out here; the students, the language, the culture, even the climate is so drastically unique--it’s been quite the challenge!

“Beyond the classroom, I tutor some struggling students after school, have a Writers’ Club that meets weekly, and even managed to coach the Varsity boys soccer team into the play-offs! To continue my personal development, I’ve taken some online graduate courses discussing English Language Learners (ELLs) and their language acquisition and have even made it on to the Front Row of the Scottsdale Sweet Adelines show choir. We will be competing in Honolulu, HI this upcoming November (Darn, a mandatory week in Hawaii).

Teaching along with all my extracurriculars seems to keep me busy.”

**Bill Bradley:** I graduated in August 2007. (The Prague program was my last class.) I studied Creative Writing, but took the minimum number of workshops and more lit classes. I studied Spanish at Western as well. Also, I interned at Esquire last fall before coming to Vanity Fair.

I try to send my VF.com clips as infrequently as possible. Due to the nature of writing for a blog, I’m writing a couple of things a week, a lot of which isn’t worth reading. (Writing about music can lean toward dubious, pretty much all the time.) I moved to Harlem in January. Regularly attended New Black Panther rallies out of curiosity, not out of explicit interest in black nationalism. Got involved with a handful of politicians running for both local and national office through the Coalition to Save Harlem. Spent a couple of days in my friend’s classroom in the Bronx. And, somehow managed to not get myself in any trouble.

The novelty of the historic backdrop wore off quickly, as it actually is a hood. I’m two avenues from the Bronx. And two blocks North and South from the two bridges that feed the East side of Manhattan to the south Bronx. People do have to raise children in this place. And there are a lot of things besides the Langston Hughes research library.

It’s not that it’s been “eye-opening.” That would cheapen and glorify where I’m living. I’m dealing with the same things any (non-Ivy League) college grad (without a trust fund) tackles. It’s made me aware that I’m in the same tax bracket as a lot of the people in my neighborhood. I just happen to be an upwardly mobile white kid who works at Vanity Fair only supporting myself. There is a frightening pragmatism in gentrification.

**Scholarly Speakers Series, 2008-2009**

The 2008-2009 Scholarly Speakers series started of with a bang on Thursday, September 18. The Keynote Talk, “AWOL Masculinity in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22,*” presented by Western Michigan’s own **Dr. Jon Adams,** drew a record crowd to the new Brown Hall. Mary Crane (Boston College) presented “Roman World, Egyptian Earth: Cognitive Difference and Empire in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*” on October 9, and Jimmie Killingsworth (Texas A&M) delivered a presentation entitled, “Whitman and the Nature Writers: Looking for the Soul in a Disenchanted Land” on October 30. We are looking forward to an equally enthralling spring series, which begins with a presentation on Dr. Scott Salinewski’s forthcoming edition of the collected works of the early American author Sukey Vickery, Emily Hamilton and Other Writings on January 22.

All events are scheduled for 7 PM.

*The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin* to be published in October brings together new essays on the American writer, including Katherine Joslin’s *Kate Chopin on Fashion in a Darwinian World*.

Christopher Nagle spent a good part of his summer working with a prestigious fellowship at the University of Notre Dame exploring the work of female writers in the wake of the 1798 Irish Rising. Sponsored by the American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies and the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, the $4,000 award allowed Nagle to be a visiting scholar in residence at the institute this summer.

Ilan Ilana Nash has contributed a chapter on *Teenage Detectives and Teenage Delinquents* to the forthcoming Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction, ed. Catherine Nickerson (2009). Dr. Nash has recently been honored with a Distinguished Alumna Award from the American Culture Studies Program at Bowling Green State University, where she earned her PhD.

Gwen Raaberg has been invited to be a visiting scholar at the Institute for Women and Art at Rutgers University during her sabbatical this spring semester. She will conduct research on women in the arts and present a guest lecture on the experimental films of Yvonne Rainer.

Charie Thralls’ recently published (2007) collection of essays just received a research award from the National Council of Teachers of English for the 2008 “Best Original Literature and the Web: Reading Collection of Essays in Technical and and Responding with New Technologies” Thralls is co-written by Allen Webb and his former doctoral student, Robert Rozema, now a professor at Grand Valley State University. It sets forward a series of exciting internet-enhanced activities in their literature courses that are models for the rest of the country.

The NCTE awards are one of the most important in the field of Professional Writing.

Grace Tiffany served as keynote speaker at the biannual conference on Shakespeare and Christianity at Wheaton College, Illinois, in June. A Russian translation of her novel about Shakespeare’s Shylock, *The Turquoise Ring*, has been published (in Turkey, not in Turkish as she had first supposed!).

Drawing upon such prominent thinkers as Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Bruno Latour, Gayatri Spivak, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Kenneth Burke, this collection investigates how discourse is regulated and how it regulates when human activity is organized for such purposes as work or belonging to a profession. Locations used to examine this perspective are diverse, covering such organizations as an Internet start-up company, an international energy company, an urban hospital, a university, and a telecommunications corporation.

The book is full of references to which eight WMU English professors and five of our doctoral students, and hundreds of undergraduates participated. Another chapter talks about the use of on-line threaded discussion to enhance a variety of literature and English education classes at WMU, from intro and survey courses to graduate seminars. Throughout the book are found the voices of WMU students. An interesting aspect of how the book is written is that each chapter begins by immersion in a literary work and then moves out from that work to the technology and to a broad range of literary texts and possibilities. This makes it a most engaging read. We think the editors of the book really got it right when they put on the back jacket, “Read the technology book that’s about the content, not the computer.”

What are you up to?

Please tell us where you are and what you’re doing. We’d like to have an alumni update section in our newsletter and include you. Please include the year and degree with which you graduated, as well as something interesting that you’ve done since your time as a Bronco.

Please email us at: engl_news@wmich.edu
Meet the New Faculty

Toby Kahn-Loftus joins us as an Assistant Professor of English (Elementary Education). She began teaching in the Detroit Area where she conducted many six-week, parent/community literacy outreach projects. Ms Kahn-Loftus is researching writing in Middle and High Schools for the National Study of Writing Instruction, and has launched a satellite of MSU’s Red Cedar Project in Northern Michigan (2004). An interesting project that she is fostering is a four year roving family journal, which she wrote with the parents of her own Detroit students. This is what she has to say about her favorite book, “I guess this year my favorite book is What is the What, a biographical novel by Dave Eggers where he retells the story of Valentino Achack Deng. I learned about the lives of the Sudanese refugees through this story and it was a life-changing experience. Our new rural writing project site is attempting to connect to Deng’s work in Sudan, and Deng’s story has become a catalyst for some global literacy outreach possibilities.” You can find Toby Kahn-Loftus teaching English 3690 (Teaching in Writing in the Elementary School), English 3740 (Language in the Elementary School), or spending time with her family.

Michelle House returns to WMU as an Assistant Professor after obtaining her Masters here 6 years ago. She teaches English 3690 (Teaching in Writing in the Elementary School) as well as researches writing in the elementary classroom. Many things about teaching at WMU are appealing to Ms. House: She is excited about encouraging young teachers to inspire authentic writing in the classroom, without the influence of the “red pen.” She is also looking forward to demystifying writing as a craft by using children’s literature as a model. Ms House is amused to be teaching the same course in the same building where she had her undergraduate English Education writing course.

Don Lee comes to WMU as an Associate Professor of Creative Writing. An accomplished novelist, he has received many Creative Writing Awards: Fred R. Brown Literary Award for emerging novelists from the University of Pittsburgh’s creative writing program, O. Henry Award, Pushcart Prize American Book Award, Edgar Award for Best First Novel, Mixed Media Watch Image Award for Outstanding Fiction, and many others. His award winning works Yellow and Country of Origin were recently joined by his latest work Wrack and Ruin (Penguin, Spring 2008). His concentrations are in the fields of Creative Writing: Fiction, Novels, Short Stories; Film; Asian American Studies. He will be teaching English 6660 (Graduate Fiction Workshop), as well as advising Third Coast. Don Lee is an avid windsurfer who travels to Bonaire, the second coast, every May.

Dr. Mustafa Kemal Mirzler is joining WMU as an Associate Professor concentrating in the African Oral Tradition. He came to America as a Turkish refugee in 1980 and received his PhD from University of Wisconsin in 1999. He spent a great deal of time in Africa studying the oral tradition and compiling stories and myths for his book (in progress) African Storytellers: The Jie and Turkana Oral Tradition of Origin. He has also conducted research on oral tradition in Uganda, Kenya, and Azerbaijan, along with receiving the National Endowment for Humanities, Wenner-Gren Foundation, Social Science Research Council. Dr. Mirzeler is excited to enlighten his students to the art of storytelling. He is teaching English 3140 (African Literature) and English 4100 (Contemporary Middle Eastern Fiction) this semester.
William (Bill) Combs: I like being retired in Kalamazoo: great music; interesting and sometimes excellent theater; and a great place for writers. I’m thinking mainly of the WMU English Dept. creative writing faculty and the amazing writers graduating from here with MFAs and PhDs and publishing books you should read.

E.g.: Bonnie Jo Campbell’s *Women and Other Animals* and *Q Road*; Kellie Wells’s *Compression Scars and Skin*; Lisel Litzenburger’s *The Widower*; and Paula Nangle’s *The Leper Compound*.

My review-article on Neela Vaswani’s wonderful stories *Where the Long Grass Bends* was published in the Spring 2005 issue of Third Coast.

In my desultory way I’m working on essays on Faulkner (As I Lay Dying), Welty, and the song and poem settings and cycles of WMU composer Curtis Curtis-Smith.

I’m a frequently angry Democrat.


Clifford Davidson, Professor of English and Medieval Studies, is most recently author of *Festivals and Plays in Late Medieval Britain* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate, 2008), and is presently working on an edition of the York Mystery Plays, comprising forty-seven pageants from the manuscript in the British Library, for the TEAMS series. In connection with this work, he has traveled to England for research and to Sweden for a conference of the International Association of Professors of English. He also is contemplating another book of the York plays (partly completed), but more importantly has prepared a collected edition of some of his late wife Audrey’s essays under the title *Aspects of Early Music and Performance*, accepted and awaiting publication by AMS Press, and is collaborating on a book on Norwegians in Michigan for Michigan State University Press. In May, he served as producer for Play Music, a concert by the Michigan Back Collegium (now Early Music Michigan) and the Western Michigan University Collegium as well as dancers from The Ballet Academy; this was sponsored by Comparative Drama. And most recently of all, he has been appointed to the Board of a non-profit, The Michigan Dance Theatre.

Gus Gianakaris: Good to hear from you and the department. Life in the “retired lane” carries on at a fairly busy clip, I find. Reviewing theater and music for the *Gazette* continues at a quickened pace since my retiring from campus. Recently, I was contacted to write up program/web notes for the Chicago Shakespeare Theater (on Navy Pier) for their upcoming season opening *Amadeus* by Peter Shaffer. Ann and I have graciously been invited to attend the first night gala in Chicago in mid-September. Meanwhile, a revival of Shaffer’s drama *Equus* opens on Broadway in early September.

My best wishes to everyone in the English Department.

Mike Jayne: My critical approach before retirement featured literary deception. Afterwards my emphasis shifted to the quest for truth throughout the remarkable tradition of skepticism in the history of western civilization. Atheism came next as an ultimate truth, and then western civilization’s grand dialectic between Hellenic inquiry and Hebraic credulousness. I turned to politics after Bush was elected. Much may be found in my website edwardjayne.com.

Dave Pugh (1955-1990 at WMU): I winter in the SE Arizona mountains north of Tombstone, west of the Continental Divide. After driving 2,000 miles each Fall/Spring, I am in Michigan, living in the house (with landscape maintenance to do) that I’ve been Footnotes Commitee

Beth Amidon, Chair
Meg Dupuis
JD Dolan
Karen Vocke
Lauren Azevedo, Alyssa Worden Interns
in for half a century, seldom getting north of Milham and Westnedge.

Dr. Thomas H. Seiler  Emeritus Professor of English and Medieval Studies: Since retiring in January of 2002 I have spent my time traveling and working in various volunteer capacities.

With the exception of an art tour to Tuscany, the traveling—to Arizona, Colorado, Costa Rica, Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands, the Hebrides, Kenya, Maine, Mexico (twice), Oregon, Peru, Texas (twice), and Trinidad/Tobago—has been for the purpose of birding.

Between trips I have volunteered with the Audubon Society of Kalamazoo (two terms as President of the Board of Directors) and the Kalamazoo Gay Lesbian Resource Center (presently serving as President of the Board of Directors and acting Executive Director).

Larry Syndergaard has been reading proof for an article soon to appear, Traumatic Transformations: Villy Sørensen’s Interpretive Schema and Four English-Scottish Ballads. Another article, Ballad Translation, Colonialism, and Anti-Colonialism, recently appeared in the festschrift Emily Lyle: The Persistent Scholar. Larry has faced the recent loss of his wife, Ardis.

Larry tenHarmsel: I’ve been enjoying retirement immensely, and am happy to talk about some of the more or less academic parts of my life these days.

I’ve continued to direct the Grand Tour of Europe each summer, taking students to study artistic and cultural history in such places as Amsterdam, Paris, Florence, Venice, and Vienna.

I recently finished co-writing a biography of the retailer Fred Meijer. It will be published by Eerdmans in the spring of 2009.

I’ve also been engaged as the part-time historian of the Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids. My duties include establishing an archive for the Gardens, interviewing all the people involved in the establishment of that institution, and writing a book about its beginnings and more generally about botanical gardens in the Western world, from the Renaissance to the present.

Deans, as you may know, are strongly discouraged from reading, being totally absorbed by manipulation and calculation. I am now trying to catch up on all the reading I postponed during my tenure as Dean of the Lee Honors College. That, too, has been enjoyable.

I hope all’s well in Sprau Tower and its environs.

Connie Weaver: Heeding the advice of retiring to something and not just from it, I spent my first three years of retirement writing two books: The Grammar Plan Book (2007) and Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing (2008), the latter graced with collaboration from our own Jonathan Bush and the generosity of other professional colleagues in writing specialty chapters. Our Michigan Department of Education has drawn upon my expertise in revising and editing certain English language arts documents. At the end of my last semester of teaching, I completed Western’s graduate program in Holistic Health and am now doing related volunteer work in the chemotherapy room of the West Michigan Cancer Center, as well as some Hospice work and programs for the Portage Senior Center.
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