Literary Matters

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ASSOCIATION OF LITERARY SCHOLARS, CRITICS, AND WRITERS

Aut nuntiare aut delectare

From the Editor

Though generally I am one who makes a concerted effort to avoid things that are sensationalistic—I detest news media outlets that attempt to turn a sneeze into geopolitical controversy, articles in periodicals that begin with something akin to "The Death of [...]" (fill in the blank)—I suppose I make a significant exception when it comes to matters having to do with literature. My hypocrisy now acknowledged, I justify my inconsistency based on the much-studied and research-backed assertion that there has been a decline in the reading of literature.

What I find particularly troubling about the growing disinterest in reading exhibited by the general population is not confined to my concern for the longevity of the discipline we all, in one way or another, practice. It is also a source of unease because I am of the opinion—and I believe I am not alone here, as countless articles, essays, and studies I've encountered would agree—that reading literature is part of what makes us "human." (After all, it is a part of the "humanities," and the collected disciplines are named thusly for a reason.)

While I'm certainly not about to argue that reading is the single thing that outfits us with qualities like empathy, imagination, and intuition, reading literature does help us understand one another, and ourselves, a great deal more than we otherwise might. It provides an opportunity to interact with the human spirit in a way that maintains a degree of separation and seclusion so that we can take risks in terms of our inferences and our creative leaps without fear of social abashment if we end up a little—or a lot—beyond the box. It offers up a chance to have certain types of relationships and encounters that are not available to us in any other form. Charles M. Blow, an op-ed columnist, articulated the importance of experiencing a person on the page rather beautifully in an essay about the profound impact reading had on his growth and development, and why the modern version of a reader—a person who does in fact read, but only bite-sized bits of text—is missing out: "There is no intellectual equivalent to allowing oneself the time and space to get lost in another person's mind, because in so doing we find ourselves."[1]

His assertion, even if based primarily on his own experience, is substantiated by a great many scientific inquiries into the subject. One experiment demonstrated the significant effect readership has on one's emotive adroitness: "After reading literary fiction...people performed better on tests measuring empathy, social perception and emotional intelligence."[2] The results of the experiment are gratifying. This is not only because there's always satisfaction to be had in seeing something you care about receive praise or gain prominence, but also because they suggest that literature has objective value, even in the "pragmatics-above-personhood" academic culture in which we find ourselves.

Those who conducted the study suggest that one of the reasons literature is able to provoke such improved social awareness is similar to what Blow touches upon:

> Literary fiction often leaves more to the imagination, encouraging readers to make inferences about characters and be sensitive to emotional nuance and complexity...In literary fiction, like Dostoyevsky, "there is no single, overarching authorial voice," [Mr. Kidd] said. "Each character presents a different version of reality, and they aren't necessarily reliable. You have to participate as a reader in this dialectic, which is really something you have to do in real life."[3]

So, in a sense, readers are able to gain insight into themselves and into others—even as-yet-unknown others—because literature does not allow for a passive audience. Reading is collaborative, at least when the text is good and the reader is reasonably willing. From that stance, reading is a lot like a conversation, albeit a silent one, and one of the many ways we gain social know-how and interpersonal skills is by conversing and communicating with others.

Each of this issue's feature pieces explore literary works that put us in touch with what it is to be human; the

1 Charles M. Blow, "Reading Books Is Fundamental," Opinion Pages, *New York Times*, January 22, 2014, http://nyti.ms/1cX1LRx.

2 Pam Belluck, "For Better Social Skills, Scientists Recommend a Little Chekhov," Well, *New York Times*, October 3, 2013, http://nyti.ms/1as98nk.

3 Belluck, "For Better Social Skills..."

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Inside This Issue

complexities and trials we may face when interacting with others, when we want for companionship but have no avenues to attain it; the clashes that may come about when the notion of "the individual" crosses paths with societal infrastructure; and the struggles we may face solely on our own when trying to reconcile who we are with who we wish to be and determine where we belong, or if we belong at all.

John Wallen offers up an essay that reexamines Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, Volume 1. He argues that one of the important points Foucault makes is that most of the ways in which society asks us to define ourselves are arbitrary and a means of making the hegemony feel comfortable, because in categorizing people, it is easier to contend with the masses and control them. This disconnects us from our authentic selves and, in turn, from others. Wallen's writing is itself a reflection of who he is as a unique individual; his passion and precision speak to his character as well as the profound effect reading a work of literature has had on his sensibilities towards the experiences of his fellow man.

George Held has contributed a beautiful review of a recent collection of poetry by Koon Woon, *Water Chasing Water*. Woon's work is hauntingly intimate and deeply personal, recounting the challenges he faced as an immigrant, his struggle with mental illness, and his sense of isolation. In writing about Woon's collection, Held teems with sensitivity and shows he understands Woon's plight. Held's words make clear that he connected with Woon as a person, had emotions and sensations when reading these poems that let him *be* Woon, if only briefly, and he is richer for it. His sense of self and his sense of fellowship are both made stronger simply by finding out what it would feel like to be someone else.

Brett Foster's review of the theatrical works of Conor McPherson presents yet another side of how living vicariously through literature can expand our imaginations and intellect. Plays are perhaps the most explicit means of affording a reader the chance to experience what it would be like to take on a different identity. In reading the lines or watching the performance, we are given a chance to "become" the characters: we get to speak like them (or hear them speak); we get to move like them (or watch them move); we get to react like them (or watch them react). In examining and comparing McPherson's works, Foster writes from a perspective that suggests a level of involvement in the drama of these plays that could only come about from being an active, eager reader who has opened himself up to the emotional and psychological worlds of the characters and the ethos of the literary works.

The final feature piece, an essay by Christina Gibby, focuses on three texts in which the characters face the complex—and at times crushing—burden of having to delineate between reality and fantasy, and find that anything resembling a resolution ultimately creates a sense that life is absurd. The sheer fact that needing to distinguish between fact and fiction is something both literary figures and real people truly do come up against should itself substantiate the idea that reading literature can help us gain insight through seeing how others live and endure. Gibby's perceptive and thorough treatment of these texts, of the wrenching emotions the characters experience, makes clear just how much she found herself moved by the struggles she surveys in her essay. After reading her work, it would be hard to dispute how much there is to gain from visiting the worlds of these characters for ourselves.

In addition to these contributions, this issue also includes news of the achievements of our members, announcements about opportunities for furthering your involvement in the undertakings of the ALSCW, and the Poets' Corner, which once again abounds with moving pieces that will likely impact you in much the way we hope and expect literature can, inviting you into someone else's mind so that you can broaden your understanding of yourself and your fellows. Additionally, the official schedule for the Twentieth Annual Conference is featured. I have no doubt that the recent gathering further demonstrated the keen sensitivities, the expansive insight of one's own condition as well as the conditions of others, and the skillful readership and writing that make literary study and the literary craft the fundamental practices they are, disciplines that must be preserved if we are to maintain a society that is not only successful but humane as well.

As always, I invite you to send your work my way. Whether you wish to write a review, a report on a local meeting, an analytical essay, a poem, or something else entirely, all submissions are most welcome. Please consider sharing with the rest of us whatever it is in the literary world that keeps you reading and writing.

Best wishes,

Samantha Madway
Editor, *Literary Matters*

LITERARY MATTERS

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The Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers (ALSCW) promotes excellence in literary criticism and scholarship, and works to ensure that literature thrives in both scholarly and creative environments. We encourage the reading and writing of literature, criticism, and scholarship, as well as wide-ranging discussions among those committed to the reading and study of literary works.

President's Column:
Thoughts on Reading and the Common Core

By John Briggs

As an English Department faculty member who has had a hand in directing writing programs and training teachers at the University of California for many years, I have grown more skeptical—and more hopeful—about the prospects for improving what students learn in what is often called the "language arts" in the K–12 curriculum. I am talking about reading and writing in preparation for graduation and, as is now likely, college. The advent, or at least the prospect, of implementing the new Common Core Curriculum stirs those mixed feelings with special urgency.

In these days of national debate over the origins and practicality of the Common Core standards, it is worth asking lots of basic questions. What do we mean, for example, when we say that high-school graduates should be "college ready" in reading and writing? What standards should they meet? Is the process of "meeting" standards the best way to talk about the new curriculum? In particular, what do we think good preparation is in reading and writing? Veterans of such debates sometimes draw an analogy between the arts of literacy and the arts of mathematics, where proficiency at one level of problem solving and calculation is assumed to prepare students to do higher levels of mathematical operations. Why not devise a similarly elegant and efficient hierarchy of manipulative skills for reading and writing, and create curricula that move students of letters toward the equivalent of those problem-solving abilities in advanced algebra or calculus?

The problem is, of course, that both mathematics and the arts of literacy have to do with kinds of thinking that are more than technical skills. Specific courses of instruction cannot function as software packages installed in students' cognitive computers. Mathematics obviously involves more than an ability to do exercises or to solve "problems" listed in a textbook. Ask the Chinese educators who come to America to learn about paradigms of liberal arts education that are conducive to broader, deeper forms of understanding. Skills in calculation and the manipulation of formulae are indispensable for a student's progress in mathematics, but thoughtful teachers of mathematics remind us that those skills are not adequate to solve seemingly basic yet

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To contribute to **Literary Matters**, please send articles to literarymatters@alscw.org. Content ranges from columns on neglected authors, to interviews with those working in the literary field, to scholarly analyses of a text, and beyond. Please do not hesitate to contact the editor with any questions you may have.

Submissions for **Issue 7.3** must be received by **June 15, 2014**.

News & Announcements

Volunteers needed for PENCIL's Partnership Program

Calling all professionals looking to make a difference in NYC Public Schools!

The PENCIL Partnership Program pairs professionals from all fields with public school principals to develop long-term capacity-building projects to improve student achievement. Architects are designing school playgrounds, lawyers are coaching mock-trial teams, composers are teaching songwriting to students, investment bankers are enhancing math curricula, and HR directors are working on staff-retention plans. There are so many ways to use your skills and expertise to help improve our schools.

We're looking for NYC volunteers to engage in year-long, customized partnerships that match the skills of the professional with the specific needs of a public school. PENCIL's dedicated team makes the match, helps in the project planning, and provides partnership support every step of the way. We have found that the partnerships that have the greatest impact take a minimum commitment of forty hours over the course of the year.

Check out some of PENCIL's great partnerships at *http://www.pencil.org/partnership-program*! For more information, visit *www.pencil.org* or contact *eloubaton@pencil.org*.

Literary Matters now features a section for book reviews of recent publications. Reviews may range from 500 to 1,500 words, and should be critical in the full sense (not only laudatory). The review need not provide an overview of the entire work, but can instead focus on characteristics you feel set the piece apart. Book reviews may be sent to *literarymatters@alscw.org*. Those received by **June 15, 2014** will be considered for publication in **Issue 7.3**.

A Friendly Reminder to Renew Your Membership

Dear ALSCW Members and Friends,

It's time to renew your membership for 2014, if you haven't done so already. The ALSCW website is ready to process your renewal at http://alscw.org/membership/renew/index.html. If you prefer to use regular mail, you can print out the form provided on the website and send it with your check or credit card number to the Boston Office.

The Association encourages members to sign up for automatic annual renewal, which you can of course cancel at any time. Automatic renewal is a double gift to the ALSCW. It enables you to provide financial support that is relatively consistent, meaning it is helpful not only in the present but also in the future because it enhances our ability to plan for the years to come. Please consider checking the box for automatic renewal on the membership form. The ALSCW office will keep your credit card number on file, and your dues payment will be processed automatically at the beginning of each year.

Renewing now will ensure that you continue to receive all the benefits of ALSCW membership, including uninterrupted subscription to our flagship journal, *Literary Imagination*, the opportunity to participate in our Annual Conferences, and access to a special discount on select titles from Oxford University Press, as well as the privilege of organizing ALSCW local meetings in your own region. Please consider reaching out to your friends and colleagues. The support of new members is critical to maintaining the vitality of our organization.

With best wishes,

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surprisingly challenging "story problems." That first step beyond basic exercises, reached no later than the middle grades, opens into worlds of language and reasoning that require more than a knack for calculation. Much the same thing happens when students are asked to estimate, weigh competing probabilities, or consider the questions that generated plane geometry in the first place. Mathematics reduced to the mastery of exercises is like athletic training that is all calisthenics—we see it is ridiculous because it never goes out on the running course or the playing field, where we know that exercise must play itself out.

Real reading emerges from decoding as it increasingly devotes itself to the text, as it is consumed by what it consumes. Responsible critical reading is not really possible without that primary immersion.

Making what we can of these analogies, we can say that *readers* at all levels face a similar challenge when they read for more than basic information. It takes much more than a directions manual to understand a manual of directions. There are "story problems" enough for students in all subjects that call for reading. Reading literature is more than the collection and sorting of information, or glancing over keywords, topic sentences, and concluding paragraphs (what we now know is standard practice for surfers of the web).

Real reading often becomes—if it is tended well at any level of schooling and life and takes up substantial amounts of literature—a productively ambiguous activity. On the one hand, it is a construing of meaning from text; on the other, and especially in the reading of literature and literary nonfiction, it is a process of absorption, immersion, wondering, and speculation. I am not saying that this is what readers should do; here I'm only trying to describe what real readers in fact do. In the more important sorts of reading, reading for information is absorbed by and evolves into the deeper, more expansive kind. Real reading emerges from decoding as it increasingly *devotes* itself to the text, as it is consumed by what it consumes. Responsible critical reading is not really possible without that primary immersion. The reader must know what she is reading. To know in this sense is to be moved. To be moved to know others' purposes, meanings, and visions, she must participate in them. Otherwise, instead of reading, she is conducting what is (in that fashionable critical vocabulary) an "interrogation," a way of questioning that by its nature impugns, doubts, and suspects its subject's motives and purposes in order to turn up misdeeds. But then why read; why expect young people to read; why hold reading up as an admirable activity except as a criminal investigation? Is a spirit interrogation a sufficient food—is it any food at all—for a young person's journey toward real literacy?

One great truth about literacy education, supported by an increasing body of evidence, is that there is no substitute for young people's immersion in reading and conversation starting in their earliest years, even before they can read for themselves, and continuing throughout their years of school and beyond. Exposure to adult conversation and reading, or being read to, in the first three years of life has a major influence on a child's prospects for higher literacy later on. How then does a curriculum, as they say in the realm of school reform, "facilitate that outcome"? Immersion means swimming all summer, and diving and paddling indoors the rest of the year. It is not a casual activity. To counter the infinite distractions of increasingly invasive social media, it must border on an obsession.

And yet real reading is undeniably a contemplative, almost devotional activity. Forcing it can do it in. We tend to resist quasi-religious analogies in describing the ends and means of reading, but the comparison in this case seems apt. Devotional reading is particularly well suited to entering the spaces within the literary text, finding there what is literary because it is beyond the literal. When the devotional aspects of reading go missing, what remains easily devolves into a frenetic or indifferent scanning of text. In our good sense, we have not created, at least not yet, intensive "reading camps." It's a phrase that makes the skin crawl. Retreats for reading, however, abound. I'm reminded of what I've witnessed: At dawn, a young athlete averse to the morning newspaper discovers an old paperback of *Huckleberry Finn*. Parents taking their children to swim lessons clutch a towel and a book. A lonely teenager takes *Anna Karenina* into her treehouse, discovers she has a dual-language edition, and begins to read on left and right the lineaments of Tolstoy's deeper language.

To its credit, the Common Core Curriculum takes seriously the need for substantial and voluminous reading. For secondary students, it requires—not merely recommends—broad reading in English and American literature. It requires reading key documents

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of the American Founding. But that reading won't be done on a magnitude that is necessary for progress unless we pay attention to how difficult it is to inculcate a habit of obsessive reading without rediscovering the power of literature, which is by far the best kind of material to stimulate and sustain the devoted concentration needed to overcome the mind-sapping, imagination-deadening, conformity-enforcing influences of the new social media. Adult latecomers to the social media scene now see a screen putting sports news in their faces as they pump gas, ride in an elevator, or try to read on a plane. What disposition to read can develop in the young who tweet and are tweeted hundreds of times each day and night, unless an extraordinary effort to redirect their attention is made at all levels of schooling and in personal life? How can that be done without literature in the center of things?

Learning to write, for similar reasons, depends upon literature and literary reading. Both activities need to be pursued almost obsessively. To do more than glean information, or express personal reactions, or exercise one's point of view, one must come to know ways of seeing the world within and beyond the literal facts. To do so, a reader must devote himself to contemplative arts that are also practical, and practical arts that cannot function unless they are also contemplative.

For a generation, the teaching of reading, writing, and literature in higher education has done less and less to develop real arts of literacy. Literary discovery has tended to become a way of explaining that nothing is significantly literary aside from style and contradiction or paradox. Literary texts have become the forensic evidence of various crime scenes or concealed agendas, mainly valuable as artifacts of historical forces that have compromised their makers. Literature for many students has been lost. What now is to keep our students from wondering why they should read at all? If they read to gain sustenance through unveiling so-called sources of oppression, what food are they finding for their freedom? What sort of teachers will they become? What will their students learn?

Real reading and writing revive and prosper in many places. I am impressed by the curiosity and persistence of freshmen at the university. The digital cloud of unknowing has not captured as many young readers as we might think. One suspects that many are turning away from social media for the same reasons they are rejecting television and journalistic gossip: The digital environment's paradoxical suppression of thought and imagination has for them grown intolerable. Literature will continue to enliven minds, imaginations, and sensibilities, perhaps with the help of the new Common Core, because it is the garden of literate thought. In our fallen yet hopeful world, that means we have work to do.

John Briggs
President, ALSCW

Review-Copy Database Being Compiled

In response to the enthusiasm among authors and contributors alike generated by the initiation of the Book Review section in *Literary Matters*, a new program is being established. A database of books that have been made available for review by the authors will be published online, and anyone wishing to write a review can access said list to determine whether any of the options are of interest.

For authors: If you have recently published a book, wish to have it reviewed in an issue of *Literary Matters*, and are willing to provide a copy of your work to a potential contributor who volunteers to read it and write a review, please contact the editor of *Literary Matters*, Samantha Madway, at literarymatters@alscw.org. All genres, subjects, styles, and so forth are welcome. *Please note: choosing to include your book in the list does not guarantee that it will be selected for review. This will be contingent on the predilections of those who visit the database.*

For reviewers: If, upon surveying the list, you discover a publication you wish to review, you can contact the editor of *Literary Matters* at the email address noted above, and she will facilitate having the work sent out to you.

This system is being set up to address the many inquiries that have been sent in by both recently published authors and parties interested in writing reviews. It is, however, important to emphasize that the intention of this service is not to provide assured positive reviews to all who make their works available. Honest, insightful evaluation is the ultimate goal.

Please do not hesitate to contact the editor if you have any questions or need clarification about any of the procedures detailed in this announcement.

Secondary School Essay Contest

The Stephen J. Meringoff

In accordance with the ALSCW's mission to foster and recognize excellence in the critically important area of student writing at the secondary school level, the ALSCW invites submissions of analytical essays dealing with works of recognized literary merit by students in grades nine through twelve. Papers may examine style, characterization, rhetorical technique, structure, and so on, and may be about individual poems, short stories, novels, plays, or essays. Papers may also compare two carefully selected works.

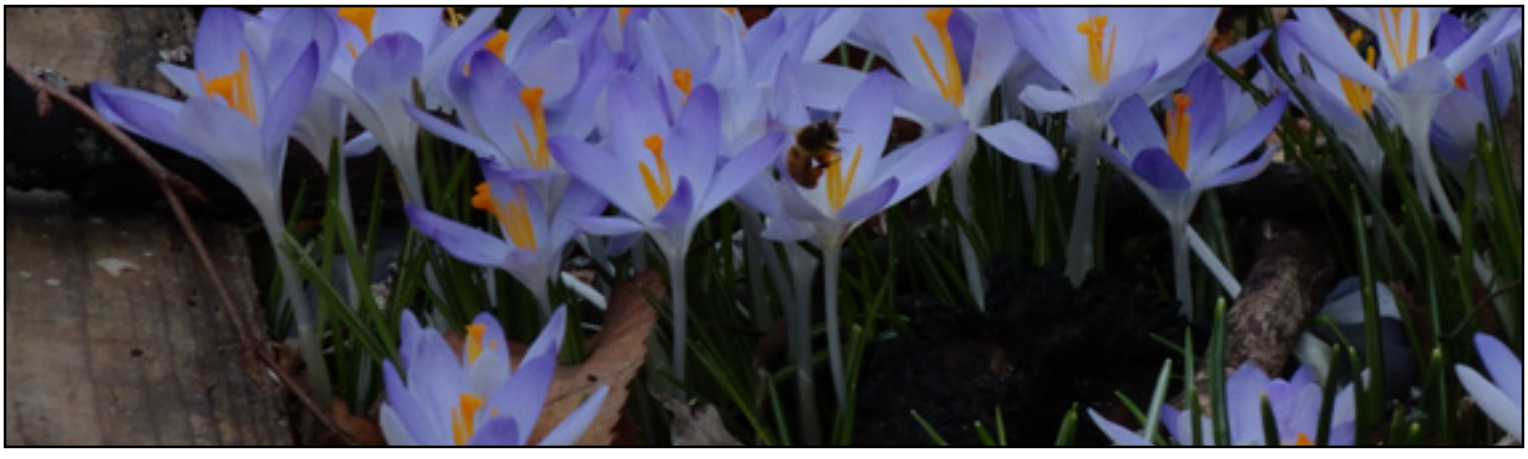
The judges value lucid and lively expression, conceptual maturity, and argumentation that is developed from compelling and careful attention to specific passages. They do not seek term/research papers, but hope to receive carefully crafted interpretive and analytical essays of 1,500 to 2,500 words. Essays written in fulfillment of school assignments are welcome.

The winning essay will be published in *Literary Matters*, the online quarterly publication of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers, and the winning contestant will receive an award of $1,500.

To be eligible for the prize, students must be affiliated with the ALSCW, or with a teacher or high school that is an ALSCW member. For information about joining the ALSCW, go to www.alscw.org.

The deadline for entries is May 15, 2014. Three copies of each entry should be sent to:

ALSCW High School Writing Award
Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers
650 Beacon Street, Suite 510
Boston, MA 02215



Local Meeting Report:

Katherine Powers at the Editorial Institute

Boston, February 12, 2014

By Owen Boynton

Attendees of the local ALSCW meeting of February 12 were treated to two perspectives on the art and life of novelist and short story master J. F. Powers. Katherine A. Powers, daughter of the author, spoke on and read from her new, well-received collection of her father's letters: *Suitable Accommodations: An Autobiographical Story of Family Life: The Letters of J. F. Powers, 1942–1963* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2013). Her words were by turns movingly personal and courageously detached as she provided an account of the circumstances surrounding, and the personality behind, her father's correspondence.

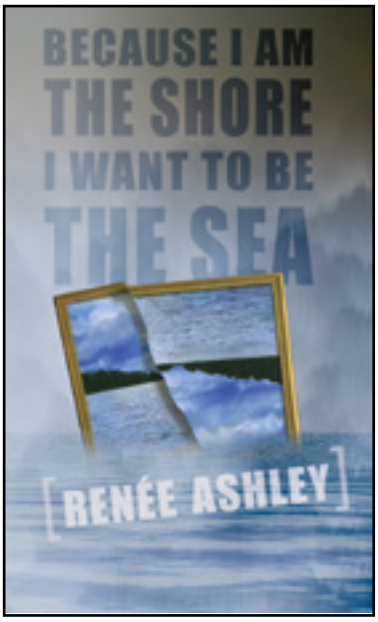
J. F. Powers was extreme in his dedication to a strict brand of Catholicism, restless in habitation, and staunch, even uncompromising, in his commitment to his art—opportunities for much-needed money might be refused on principle. Katherine A. Powers was eloquent, and generous, in describing a life that determined the shape of her childhood and entailed real struggles and occasional suffering for her family. But, most memorably, she was often wryly comic in her reminiscences; it is a quality that she may have inherited from her father, whose letters earn frequent laughter by the mordancy of their phrasing. Central to her talk was what editing the letters involved, pragmatically and personally. The letters—addressed to a remarkable group of friends including Lowell, Waugh, and Bellow—were not always preserved. While surveying the extant letters, Katherine A. Powers adopted a principle of selection, a particular focus on the life of her family, such that some surviving letters were excluded.

Katherine A. Powers

The second act of the meeting was Cassandra Nelson's sensitively insightful and richly suggestive discussion of J. F. Powers's fiction alongside the letters and the fiction of Betty Wahl, Powers's wife. Nelson—whose relation to the Powers family was established when she undertook to edit the letters of Wahl for her masters at Boston University's Editorial Institute—delineated the crucial differences between Wahl's art and Powers's. The former excels at making fiction from life near at hand, the life of her family; J. F. Powers's fiction comes alive in what Nelson called "the middle ground," his characters often resembling himself, but cast as cousins rather than immediate kin. J. F. Powers's family life is imagined most vividly, Nelson observed, in the letters themselves; he had long promised, but never delivered, a novel of family life. By the end of her discussion, Nelson had articulated Katherine A. Powers's achievement: in collecting the letters, she fulfilled her father's promise to produce a novel of family life in a form all her own.

If you would like to see news of recent honors or awards you have received, notices for upcoming events of interest to ALSCW members, or information about Local Meetings you have hosted/are hosting included in **Literary Matters**, please send materials (photographs, text detailing all relevant information, and so forth) to *literarymatters@alscw.org.*

New Publications by Members



Renée Ashley, *Because I Am The Shore I Want To Be The Sea* (Boulder, CO: Subito Press, 2013)

In *Because I Am the Shore I Want to Be the Sea*—Ashley's fifth full-length collection—her narrator, through highly compressed, lyrical prose-poems, engages in what she calls the "imperfect discourse of an unfinished world." Neither conventional nor radically experimental, these poems use syntactic ambiguity and metaphor to compress the philosophical observation of a life into image and back out again. Underlying narratives are often denuded of literal action and grounded allusively. They are poems that evoke *feeling* but not sentiment, story but not history.

" 'Except for every thing we're interchangeable,' writes Renée Ashley, humorously exposing the limberness of language to express insight in paradox, using words to bend understanding inside out. In tautly wrapped prose packages, Ashley makes lyric precision express the errancy in logic[,] and demonstrates how *the real* will trump our attempts to contain it, though we are endlessly tempted to try....With no periods to clarify the ends of sentences, she lets form remind us that nothing ends neatly the way we'd like it to. These language vessels navigate a fecund privacy made eerily public, arriving with iconic force. Yet "vessels" on their way to safe landings they are not....Uncanny is every glimpsed otherness...Does it trouble us? Does unreason's proximity confound? Clearly, if it does, the problem is our own: 'the one-legged birds stand on their one leg The world is not broken The world is local Singing in its spinning dish.' Come inside these poems, and you will hear it. - *Rusty Morrison*

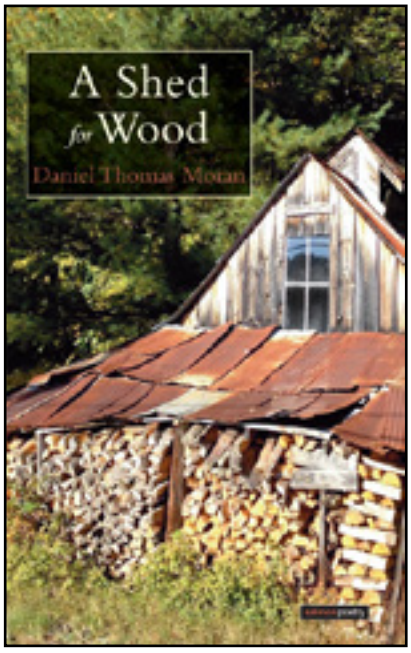
Jay Rogoff, *Venera: Poems* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014)

Venera, Jay Rogoff's fifth book of poetry, explores varieties of love both sacred and profane: parent and child, husband and wife, saint and deity, lover and lover. In these poems—which draw on the natural world, personal intimacy, and the human imagination as evoked in visual art and biblical narrative—devotion's many guises collide to startle us. A husband consoles his wife when she is wakened by an imaginary child; another man daydreams of his kindergarten crush. In the seven-sonnet poem "Laughter," Abraham's fear of God perplexes his love for Isaac, while Mary at the Annunciation, stunned by Gabriel's inhuman beauty, contemplates her decades of purity stretching ahead.

Rogoff's engagement with forms, both traditional and experimental, suffuses the collection. The title sonnet sequence details our drive to venerate the sacred while at the same time submitting to Venus's sensuous power. Wedding elevated language to plainspokenness, and the erotic to the miraculous, Rogoff extends and updates the sonnet-sequence tradition, imagining an ideal woman in devotions that play on religious paradoxes and deliberately confound reverence with desire.

Jay Rogoff's previous books include *The Art of Gravity* (Louisiana State University Press, 2011), *The Long Fault* (Louisiana State University Press, 2008), *How We Came to Stand on That Shore* (River City, 2003), and *The Cutoff: A Sequence* (Word Works, 1995). He lives in Saratoga Springs, New York, where he teaches at Skidmore College.

Daniel Thomas Moran, *A Shed for Wood* (Knockeven, Ireland: Salmon Poetry, 2014)



Daniel Thomas Moran is a poet whose American sinews were birthed by Irish forebears, and who arrives as a poet from an unlikely place. Trained as a scientist and, ultimately, as a doctor of dental surgery, he writes not from pedagogy but from his own nature, with a sense of wonder at and worship for the assorted reflections of existence. It is here, in his seventh collection, *A Shed for Wood*, that he comes home again, to Ireland, with all his accounts of life in the new world. His poems are a travelogue of oddly varied subjects and points of view, faces and places where he engages and acclaims the diverting particulars of living. He does it with poignancy and wit, with tenderness and a peculiar perspective, and with a proud and well-earned American Irish breed of wisdom.

Born in New York City in 1957, Moran holds a BA in biology from Stony Brook University and a doctorate in dental surgery from Howard University. He has read widely throughout New York City and Long Island, and has done readings in Ireland, Italy, Austria, Great Britain, at the Library of Congress, and at the United Nations. He was Poet Laureate of Suffolk County, New York, from 2005 to 2007.

His work has appeared in prestigious journals such as *Confrontation*, the *Recorder*, *Nassau Review*, *Oxford*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Commonweal*, *Parnassus*, *Opium*, *Pedestal*, *Rattapallax*, *LUNGFULL*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, and the *New York Times*.

Lee Oser, *The Oracles Fell Silent* (Milwaukee, WI: Wiseblood Books, 2014)

When the legendary Sir Ted Pop hires young Richard Bellman as his secretary, Bellman's work on the great man's memoir transforms his young life into a divine comedy—or is it a devilish farce? In a New York beach house in Southampton, Bellman treads the forbidden ground of Ted's final hour with Johnny Donovan, his partner in fame, who "fell" from a London rooftop in 1969. Sir Ted battles false prophets and mad messiahs for control over his own story, but what rock's biggest mystery reveals to Bellman is the unthinkable hand of God.

Novelist Lee Oser, of Irish and Jewish extraction, was born in New York City in 1958. He skulked through public school on Long Island and then spent two desultory years at the University of Colorado. After moving to Portland, Oregon, in 1978, he washed dishes, drove a cab, and played bass in a series of rock bands including The Riflebirds, one of Portland's best-known groups during the New Wave period. In 1986, he returned to school and graduated from Reed College in 1988. Oser went on to do graduate work in English at Yale University, which awarded him a doctorate in 1995. Around this time, he returned for good to Roman Catholicism, having been confirmed on his own initiative as a teenager. He taught at Yale and Connecticut College before landing at Holy Cross in 1998, where he became a full professor in 2010. Oser has published three well-received books of literary criticism. His first novel, *Out of What Chaos*, was published by Scarith in 2007.

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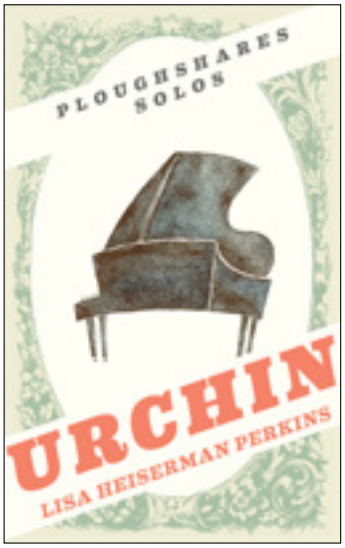
Kasia Buczkowska, *in Prose* (Boston, MA: Un-Gyve Press, 2014)

Kasia Buczkowska is a writer and translator in New York City who writes very short fiction in Polish and English. She has published her "short takes"—so named by Rosanna Warren—in *Literary Imagination* and in *Przegląd Polski*, the cultural supplement to *Nowy Dziennik* in New York City, to which she also contributes articles and reviews.

Her first book is a collection of such short takes with a quality of foreignness to the voice that forms quirky folktales and vignettes both urban and pastoral.

Lisa Heiserman Perkins, "Urchin," (Boston, MA: Ploughshares Solo, 2014)



Living under the shadow of two gifted parents, Astrid Nordling feels trapped everywhere but at the piano, finding solace in Schubert and Debussy. Her piano teacher is convinced that she is a prodigy; her mother is not so sure. Set in 1960s Chicago, this excerpt from Lisa Heiserman Perkins's upcoming novel shows that there can be such a thing as too much talent in a single family. As Astrid competes with her dramatic, high-strung mother for the spotlight, their tug-of-war threatens to pull the family apart.

Before turning to fiction, Lisa Heiserman Perkins earned a PhD from the University of Chicago in nineteenth-century British literature; taught at Tufts, Harvard, and Emerson; and then left academia to make documentary films. She was the associate producer of *Loaded Gun: Life, and Death, and Dickinson* (2002), and is the writer, director, and producer of *Secret Intelligence: Decoding Hedy Lamarr*, which has been placed on hold since the recession. Her stories have appeared in *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Quiddity*, *Fourth River*, and elsewhere. She was a Pushcart nominee in 2011, and won the 2012 New Millennium Fiction Prize and the 2012 Meringoff Fiction Award. She lives in Somerville, Massachusetts. "Urchin" is the first chapter of her novel-in-progress.

Harry Thomas, *Some Complicity: Selected Poems and Translations* (Boston, MA: Un-Gyve Press, 2013)

Harry Thomas is the translator of Joseph Brodsky's masterpiece, "Gorbunov and Gorchakov" (*To Urania*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987), and his selected translations were published as *May This Be* (Jackdaw Press, 2001). He is the editor of *Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy* (Penguin Books, 1993) and *Montale in English* (Handsel Books, 2002). His poems, translations, essays, and reviews have appeared in dozens of magazines. He was Editor in Chief of Handsel Books, an imprint of Other Press and an affiliate of W. W. Norton.

Immersed and Afloat:

On Koon Woon's *Water Chasing Water*

Review by George Held

Water infuses this volume of Koon Woon's selected poems. They float on a bark built of water words and water imagery. As Koon Woon writes in "Village Boy," "I dig a long irrigation ditch and bring water / to my soul."[1] This comes after he has thrice been thrown into the village pond and is followed by mention of China's Pearl River's "mists and rains" (4.27). And in the title poem, the fundamental metaphor is completed:

> "LIKE WATER CHASING WATER"
> under the bridge,
> we are who we are because of the flow.
> (43.1–2)

Our identities are formed not only "because of the flow" but also because of where it takes us. This poem speaks of "liquid empires" (43.5) and "the liquidity of beliefs" (43.19), our fluid generations flowing like a river into a lake that Koon Woon wishes would swell and "make it an ocean" (43.25). For this poet, then, water is substance, essence, symbol, and the source of his philosophy. The philosophical nature of his poetry sets it apart and raises it above most other contemporary American verse, as does his gift for making organic metaphors out of his material, especially water.

These autobiographical poems trace the poet's journey from Chinatown, San Francisco, to Chinatown, Seattle, recounting how he earned his wages in the restaurant trade—as a cook, a waiter, and a dishwasher—and lived in rented rooms. Occasional prose pieces amplify his life's story. "My Father in the Restaurant Kitchen," for example, portrays his father as an almost mythical Chinese immigrant determined to succeed: "He wanted to be the Chinese mayor of Aberdeen [Washington]" (48) and pushed himself hard during fourteen-hour days at his restaurant while Koon Woon read Kafka in the walk-in refrigerator. The subsequent poem, "The Kind of Father He Was," expands on the subject: because the father "couldn't / speak enough English" (49.19–20), despite his superior work he was passed over for promotion at the Oakland shipyard, so Woon "speak[s] for him today" (49.20). And, in doing so, Koon Woon speaks for all other hard-working immigrants as well.

This volume begins with forty previously uncollected poems in a section entitled "Water Chasing Water," and reprints selections from his earlier, prize-winning collection, *The Truth in Rented Rooms* (Kaya/Muae, 1998), divided into three parts. Each of these segments is devoted to poems about

1 Koon Woon, *Water Chasing Water* (New York: Kaya Press, 2013), p. 4, lines 14–15. All further citations appear parenthetically in the text and refer to page and line number(s); in the case of prose pieces, only a page number is provided.

one of Woon's addresses on the West Coast, where he has spent all but eleven of his sixty-four years since emigrating from his native China. Also included is an essay provoked by the first book, Russell Leong's " 'What Is "The Truth in Rented Rooms"?' Asks a Reader." That reader is Leong himself, and he offers tentative answers to his own question. Throughout the collection, Koon Woon attends to the meaning of rented rooms, always able to generalize about the human condition of those who, like himself, must move from one rented room to another as one's economic or psychological state dictates.

One of Koon Woon's richest poems on the subject of rented rooms is "In My Room. . . ," the title of which probably alludes to the pop hit of the same name by the Beach Boys. The song opens with the lines,

> There's a world where I can go
> And tell my secrets to
> In my room.[2]

Koon Woon's poem begins, "In my room the world is true / Simply because I say it is true" (107.1–2). But the poet, never trapped in the cell of nostalgia or solipsism, soon acknow edges other "rooms like mine" (107.5) and places his room in the tenement building as

> one of many
> Parallel rooms that connect like the sections
> Of a dragon
> (107.6–8)

Moreover, a woman visits his room. Is she there for a sexual encounter or an abortion, an "operation" frequently performed in low-rent rooms before women had a choice. In this case, however, "one solitary room needs / ...love, love for all the rooms in this similar class" (108.1–2).

In the book's "Water Chasing Water" section, Koon Woon also has a series of rented-room poems, such as "In My Little Room." Others allude to a woman "down the hall" (19.4) ("I Would Like to Be..." and the moving "Lychee") to his efforts to become a writer despite "the cold / and indifference of editors" (34.3–4), and to his frail mental health as he talks to himself and reasons, "but the burden of sanity is on me" ("The Burden of Sanity," 34.15). In the prose-poem "Mostly...," he learns that "Even when it rains, it is important to write in complete sentences" (37). All the while, we realize that throughout his travails and while immersed in the fluidity of the world, Koon Woon the poet is gestating. In *Water Chasing Water*, he is born again as not just a Chinese American poet, but as a first-rate poet in the line of his masters Whitman and Stevens. This book, beautifully produced by Kaya, will make that clear to anyone who reads it.

2 "In My Room," *Surfer Girl*, written by Brian Wilson and Gary Usher, recorded July 16, 1963 (Los Angeles, CA: Capitol Records, 1963).

George Held has reviewed books for *Literary Matters*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Notre Dame Review*, and other periodicals. His poems appear frequently online and in print, and are featured in many anthologies, including the recent *Obsession: Sestinas in the Twenty-First Century* (Dartmouth, 2014).

On Conor McPherson's *The Night Alive* and *Plays: Three*

Review by Brett Foster

Since the late 1990s, the Irish playwright Conor McPherson has enjoyed critics' acclaim and loyal audiences in London, New York, and beyond. Best known for *The Weir* (1997), which has had a well-received revival run at London's Donmar Warehouse this year, McPherson spent the decade following the break-out success of that pub-and-ghost-story play by writing (and sometimes directing) a string of powerful dramas. Two of his finest, *Shining City* (2004) and *The Seafarer* (2006), in which his strong writing and his storyteller's daring are most on display, now appear together in his third collection, *Plays: Three*.[1] The author fills out this latest collected volume with two adaptations—*The Birds* (2009), based on Daphne du Maurier's short story, and *The Dance of Death* (2012), after Strindberg[2]—and, finally, with *The Veil*, a 2011 play whose premier at the National Theatre met with a more mixed response.

McPherson admits, in a brief foreword to this most recent anthology of plays, that many greeted *The Veil* with "incomprehension" (p. ix) and he supposes that audiences had a more difficult time than usual determining how the various ideas of the play worked together. The playwright explains that German transcendentalist philosophy and Joyce's sense of time in *Finnegans Wake* (!) were dual fascinations for him as he wrote *The Veil*, and he also wished for it "to reflect a sense of disgust and panic at how my country had almost managed to destroy itself over the previous ten years" (p. ix). With these parallels in mind, *The Veil*'s setting—a nineteenth-century Irish manor house during a time of famine—suddenly becomes suggestive.

An onstage séance contributes to one of the more intense scenes in *The Veil*, and the supernatural dimension it introduces has become a hallmark of McPherson's writing. On the other hand, the ensemble quality of *The Veil* and its taking place in a previous century do not resemble his characteristic work, which is known for few characters, powerful monologues, and rough-scrabble settings. (McPherson has repeatedly said that David Mamet's style was a huge influence on him when he first started writing.)

The Night Alive, which premiered at Donmar Warehouse in the summer of 2013 and is already available as a script, marks a return to form for McPherson.[3] The play's world is modest but powerfully focused: Maurice, in his seventies, owns an Edwardian house in Dublin, and his nephew Tommy, in his fifties and perennially down on his luck, dwells in the house's cluttered drawing room. The play's action occurs there entirely, and opens with Tommy awkwardly playing host to Aimee, a mysterious young woman. McPherson's most endearing dramatic creation here is Doc, a

1 Conor McPherson, *Plays: Three* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2013).

2 The works referenced here are Daphne Du Maurier, "The Birds," *The Birds and Other Stories* (London: Victor Gollancz Limited, 1952) and August Strindberg, *The Dance of Death* in *Plays by August Strindberg*, trans. Edwin Björkman (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912).

3 Conor McPherson, *The Night Alive* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2013).

likewise down-and-out friend of Tommy's who we soon learn is mentally a little slow. His lines are regularly surprising and pleasing: at one point, he tells Aimee that he's named "Doc" because it's short for "Brian" (p. 24). Financial shadiness, like something out of an Elmore Leonard novel, drives *The Night Alive*'s story forward. Of course, it would have been better to have seen McPherson's new play performed, but if you were not in London this past summer, or were and unfortunately missed it, then even the script will make for a pleasant, one-sitting reading on its own.

Tommy's involvement with Aimee eventually leads to a confrontation between Doc and a harrowing character named Kenneth, who is searching for her. Kenneth's gentlemanly comportment makes his sinister essence even less predictable. In what feels like an uncanny interlude at the play's center, he works upon Doc with one part indirection and one part insistence, and eventually wields a hammer that has floated ominously through the play as an Ibsen-like pistol. I instantly thought of this scene when reading, in the foreword to *Plays: Three*, the author's comment that a more-experienced playwright gains wisdom even as he risks losing his early recklessness (p. viii); the character of Kenneth represents McPherson's effort to remain on the theatrical razor's edge. As in his earlier plays, emotional rather than physical violence—including failings at connection or reconciliation between characters well known to each other—is at the dramatic heart of *The Night Alive*. Individually, characters struggle to make good on their lives, to avoid disappointing others who pass in and out of them. "You only get a few goes," says Maurice to his nephew. "At life. You don't get endless goes. Two three goes maybe. When you hit the right groove you'll click right in there. No drama. That's only for fucking eejits" (p. 83).

Much of *The Night Alive*'s world feels satisfying albeit small, but toward the end, McPherson lifts his writing to a familiar, more ambitious place. Simply mentioning here a remarkable dream that Doc has late in the play—which involves one of the wise men from the Gospels and a sudden appreciation of black holes—is enough to suggest the strange, startling, imaginative achievements of Conor McPherson.

Brett Foster is the author of two poetry collections, *The Garbage Eater* (Triquarterly Books/Northwestern University Press, 2011) and *Fall Run Road*, which was awarded Finishing Line Press's 2011 Open Chapbook Prize. A new book-length collection is under review. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *AGNI*, *Atlanta Review*, *Boston Review*, *Hudson Review*, *IMAGE*, *Kenyon Review*, *Literary Imagination*, the *New Criterion*, *Pleiades*, *Poetry Daily*, *Raritan*, *Seattle Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Southwest Review*, *Subtropics*, and *Yale Review*. He teaches creative writing and Renaissance literature at Wheaton College, and regularly contributes work about poetry and theater for *Books & Culture*, including a recent essay on Jez Butterworth's play *Jerusalem*.

On Foucault's *History of Sexuality*

By John Wallen

I always loved reading Foucault for the alternative slant he gives you on things: you don't necessarily always agree with him, but he is always intellectually stimulating. In particular, I admire him for his antistatist points of view. Big Brother is watching, but most of us are not fully aware of just how great the surveillance is—Foucault, in this respect, can be an eye-opener. Of course, it is a cliché and an understatement to make the point that Foucault's work on sexuality, power, and the state and surveillance have been extremely empowering and influential in the theoretical spaces of Western academia. Indeed, aspects of his thought currently provide the philosophical underpinnings for branches of inquiry throughout the whole range of disciplines in the humanities. As a consequence of this, I thought it might be a good idea to take a close look at one of his more influential works: *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1: *An Introduction*).

I wasn't sure what I'd get from this late work, but the themes are much the same as elsewhere in Foucault. He is concerned with the way the state uses sex—or sexuality, as he prefers it—to control bodies. He begins by critiquing and contradicting the most prominent discourse on sex in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: the state does not want to *repress* sex to consolidate its own power in an effort to stop emotional libertinism from getting out of hand and causing a rebellion. Rather (according to Foucault), the power of the state wishes to *direct* the multiple discourses on sex in order to control its power. Repression would be too simplistic a tactic.

Foucault moves into uncharted territory as he begins to make his essential argument: since the Enlightenment, during which the great confinement and emphasis on a sterile medicalization of discourse took place, the state has had to look at the big picture of what it wants when it comes to population, birth control, demographics, genetics, etc. Clearly, many of these most-essential areas for state control are bound up with sexuality in one way or another. In these circumstances, the state has found it expedient to medicalize the ever-increasing number of discourses on sex. Therefore, sexuality has become, essentially, discourse based at the present time, more so than at any other point in history—and those who can control the discursive debates on sexuality will have the real power.

Often, there is a hegemonic and Gramscian aspect to Foucault's ideas, where the superstructure of a society begins to work in an independent and subliminal manner, unconscious of its adherence to state power structures. For example, though Foucault doesn't say it directly, one conclusion to be drawn from the way the state may wish to regulate the sexual activities of its citizens could be to encourage gay people to "marry" (gay marriage) within the existing structures, as this is better than having

Foucault makes it clear that beyond the needs of this biopower of sex, there is no independent logic or reason for people to define their essential natures in terms of sexuality

them "infect" the demographic equation and having biological kids, mentoring them with advice based on tolerance, antistate ideas, and so forth, which would destabilize the rules-based heterosexual production of compliant children. Perhaps Foucault felt this quite deeply as a gay writer himself—or as a writer who happened to be gay.

According to Foucault, the state surrounds us with so many discourses about sexuality because this is something that would otherwise be hidden, and it must be made known for the state to manifest full control. Keeping an individual and silent space for sexuality would be to escape the power of the state, as it would no longer know what its citizens were doing in this potentially explosive area. Therefore, the state prefers to have all the fantasies and compulsions out in the open where the medical industry can classify them as "appropriate" or "abnormal" behaviors.

In a sense, secret discourses about sex are what the state fears most because its control would no longer be guaranteed over people as individual agents took responsibility for their own lives and went off in different moral directions. For the state, it is crucial that "sexuality" remains monolithic even though the discourses about it must constantly multiply in order to keep things under control. According to Foucault, one concomitant of this is that the state pushes us to define our fundamental nature in terms of our sexuality—a way of submitting one's essential bodily reality to the supervision of the state. In a society regulated by psychiatrists and psychotherapists who are (hegemonically) encouraged to convince us that all aspects of our lives and nature are founded on sexual impulses, there can be no escape for the tormented, individual psyche; when it tries to revolt, it is quickly brought back into the sheep pen by whichever discourse on sex can best indicate the subliminal sexual impotence of the subject.

Foucault makes it clear that beyond the needs of this biopower of sex, there is no independent logic or reason for people to define their essential natures in terms of sexuality, no more than there would be for them to define it in terms of musical taste or personal diet preferences. In a more neutral place, our sexuality would just be one aspect of who we are, but the modern "biostate" wishes to convince us that everything we do, everything we are, can be traced back to our sexuality because this is the most effective way of controlling large numbers of regulated bodies.

Volume 1 was an exciting trip, though I fancy volumes 2 and 3 might be a little slower with their emphasis on the uses of pleasure in classical antiquity.

John Wallen has taught in the Middle East for more than fifteen years. He is currently an assistant professor at Nizwa University in Oman. Previously he worked at Bahrain University and Qatar University. He has published two books of criticism, a novel, and several books of short stories. He received his PhD from Royal Holloway, University of London in 2011.

Perceiving Reality in Calderón, Maupassant, and James

By Kristina Gibby

Pedro Calderón de la Barca's play *La vida es sueño* (*Life is a Dream*) is a quintessential baroque text.[1] The title suggests the baroque illusionism typical of the literature, art, and architecture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In many ways, baroque artistic themes responded to troubling contemporary events, such as the Protestant Reformation and the publication of Copernicus's heliocentric theories, both of which provoked the reevaluation of established truths.

Although illusionism dominates baroque art, it is not exclusively a baroque theme. Nineteenth-century works, such as Guy de Maupassant's "The Necklace" and Henry James's "Paste," also address the tension between illusion and reality in order to comment on the seeming absurdity of the human condition;[2] as in the baroque play, "reality" fails to be what it seems. Like Calderón, these nineteenth-century authors challenge their characters to consider the meaning and purpose of their existence by placing upon them the responsibility to discern between authenticity and imitation.

In *La vida es sueño*, the King of Poland imprisons his infant son, Segismundo, to evade the fulfillment of the child's horoscope, which predicts that the baby will grow up to be a cruel and violent prince. Decades later, without an heir to his throne, the king realizes the tyranny of his inhumane act and decides to provide Segismundo with an opportunity to prove that man can triumph over his "fate." The king has Segismundo drugged and brought to the palace, relying on the seeming "illusion" of the royal experience to provide Segismundo with an "explanation" in the event that the experiment fails and he is forced to re-imprison his son. If Segismundo

> finds himself, after being obeyed as a prince,
> Back in his prison
> he will believe that it was all a dream
> (2.1.35)

When Segismundo awakens in the palace, he is understandably confused. The revelations of his true identity and unjust imprisonment cause him to act rashly and violently, thus fulfilling the prophecy. He is drugged and taken back to his tower. When Segismundo wakes in chains, he laments the reality of his imprisonment and attempts to accept that his life as a prince was only a dream.

But his sorrow is short lived. Polish soldiers, eager to have Segismundo as their prince rather than a foreigner, rescue him from the tower and prove to him that his time at court was not a dream. This discovery blurs the

1 Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Life's a Dream*, trans. Kathleen Raine and R. M. Nadal (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1969), originally published as *La vida es sueño*. All citations are provided parenthetically in the text. References are to act, scene, and page number of this edition of the work.

2 All references to these texts are taken from the following editions: Guy de Mauppassant, "The Necklace," in *A Parisian Affair and Other Stories*, trans. Siân Miles (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 296–304; Henry James, "Paste," in *The Novels and Tales of Henry James*, vol. 16 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), 315–337. All citations are provided parenthetically in the text. References are to page number of these editions of the work.

line dividing illusion and reality. Segismundo exclaims,

> Into what doubt am I thrown!
> So it was real,
> It was not a dream! But if real, no less strange;
> For it seems I cannot distinguish the real from the dream.
> Is all glory so like a dream that the real seems illusion
> And the illusion, true? So like the shadow
> The substance, that the substance seems the shade?
> Is there so little difference, then, between waking and sleeping?
> The copy so like the original we cannot tell which is the real
> And which the replica?
> (3.8.104–105)

After multiple awakenings and living differing "realities," Segismundo is not sure if he can be certain of anything. Without anything to anchor his perceptions, life appears futile and absurd.

> These authors challenge their characters to consider the meaning and purpose of their existence by placing upon them the responsibility to discern between authenticity and imitation.

Yet Calderón does not subject Segismundo to the dire implications of a futile existence. The protagonist is pulled back from an existential abyss and is content to find meaning in Christianity. Rather than giving into despair, Segismundo concludes that if there is no difference between wakefulness and the dream state, then all is in vain. Like the *vanitas* paintings of the baroque era, the play's didacticism compels readers to contemplate the inevitability of their own death. Lester Crocker explains that Segismundo's only coping strategy is to rely on the religious codes and values of the seventeenth century. The Catholic worldview teaches him that "he may awaken from other dreams, as from this one; and at the end he will awaken from life, from appearance to reality, and must act so as to prepare for that event."[3] The play functions as a *memento mori*—a reminder that the reader is mortal and eventually will "wake" from this dream of life to face the judgment of God.

Segismundo finds meaning in his existence when he conquers his pride and submits to a higher power. Max Oppenheimer explains that from the Catholic baroque viewpoint, Segismundo has fully developed as a character "by purging himself of all faith in his human powers [and] by becoming aware of the vanity of self-realization."[4] Oppenheimer argues that Calderón's purpose is to ennoble Segismundo when the character recognizes the futility of a humanistic perspective.[5] This is apparent in the final lines of the play when Segismundo exclaims,

> From a dream I learned a lesson
> . . . . . .
> From a dream I came to know
> That joy must vanish like a dream.
> And now, before my dream is broken
> I desire to use it well.
> The forgiving heart is noble,
> So may our sins be all forgiven!
> (3.12.116)

3 Lester Crocker, "*Hamlet*, *Don Quijote*, *La vida es sueño*: The Quest for Values," *PMLA* 69, no.1 (March 1954): 290, http://www.jstor.org/stable/460142.

4 Max Oppenheimer, "The Baroque Impasse in the Calderonian Drama," *PMLA* 65, no. 6 (December 1950): 1161, http://www.jstor.org/stable/459726.

5 Max Oppenheimer, "The Baroque Impasse in the Calderonian Drama," 1161.

To provide a resolution to his existential dilemma, Segismundo suppresses his individualism and conforms to the expectations imposed upon him by both his king and society.

Despite the play's conveniently tidy ending, one cannot easily forget Segismundo's crisis in judging between illusion and reality. According to Crocker, Segismundo's ultimate concern is to "redetermine the nature of reality, and the nature of man."[6] That is to say, Segismundo's burden is to judge the nature of reality and how it affects the meaning of his existence. Both Maupassant's "The Necklace" and James's "Paste" also highlight the problem of discerning the original from a copy. The characters in those stories face the same difficulty Segismundo does in differentiating between dream and reality.

Maupassant's "The Necklace" describes the fateful consequence suffered by a woman who mistakes imitation jewelry for an authentic diamond necklace. The ironic force extends to the story's final sentence when Mathilde Loisel discovers that she has spent the last ten years of her life settling debts incurred to replace a borrowed necklace that, as it turns out, was not even real. Mathilde Loisel borrows the necklace from Madame Forestier, an old school friend, so that she has attire suitable to wear to the Ministry of Education ball. Although beautiful and charming, Mathilde was born into the *petite bourgeoisie* and married a minor bureaucrat. What makes Mathilde's existence all the more painful is her belief that "she had been destined . . . for a delicate life of luxury" (296).

Maupassant establishes the injustice of her life in the first sentence: "She was one of those charming, pretty young women who seem to have been born by some cruel quirk of fate into quite the wrong social rank: in this instance, the minor bureaucracy" (296). Fate's rewards are incongruous with the model that society has provided. According to society's standards, Maupassant explains, a woman's worth is based on her exterior appearance: "Women generally are bound neither by race nor caste, and their own beauty, gracefulness or charm are all they

6 "*Hamlet*, *Don Quijote*, *La vida es sueño*: The Quest for Values," 285.

possess in terms of birthright and heritage" (296). If she had been born poor and ugly, Mathilde's fate would not seem so cruel and at odds with the social paradigm.

It is clear from the beginning of the story that Mathilde's sense of self is deeply connected to her appearance and material possessions: "She had no elegant dresses and no jewellery to wear, or at least nothing in which she could really take pride and nothing in which she felt truly herself" (297). The necklace's uncanny social influence transforms her into *somebody*. With that singular piece of jewelry, she becomes worthy of notice. Even the minister himself admires the clerk's wife. Like the imitation necklace that is perceived as authentic because of its expensive case, Mathilde is accepted by high society because of her material adornments. But this experience is an illusion that cannot be maintained.

After such an exultant, triumphant night, the loss of the necklace and subsequent descent into poverty is that much more tragic. Like Segismundo, Mathilde is harshly awakened from a euphoric dream, yet the reality that she faces is much more severe than the one she knew before the ball. Some critics see the social fall of Madame Loisel as the heroine's regeneration, indicating that she has been "saved" by penury.[7] Mary Donaldson-Evans goes so far as to say that, through poverty, Mathilde "has found her raison d'être."[8] The implication of such an analysis is that Maupassant assigns some kind of moral weight to poverty, which cannot be supported by the text. Poverty has not cured Mathilde of her vain fantasies; if anything, it gives her more cause to yearn to escape her reality.

7 James T. Stewart, "Two Uses of Maupassant by R. P. Warren," *Modern Language Notes* 70, no. 4 (April 1955): 279, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3039778.

8 Mary Donaldson-Evans, "The Last Laugh: Maupassant's 'Les Bijoux' and 'La Parure,' " *French Forum* 10, no. 2 (May 1985): 169.

She often daydreams of the night of the ball and wonders what life might have been like if she had not lost the necklace. Unable to answer her own question, she can only express the futility of life: "How strange life is, how unpredictable! What a little thing it takes to ruin or raise you to heaven!" (303). Some critics take this passage as indication that she has been raised to heaven—that her social descent has functioned as a moral ascent.[9] Such a reading undermines the closing scene's potent effect. The revelation that Mathilde has sacrificed her beauty, status, and youth all for nothing emphasizes the absurd nature of her forfeiture.

> These three texts illustrate the human desire to reconcile one's perception of reality with the meaning of existence—a desire that crosses temporal and spatial boundaries.

Rather than a declaration of salvation, it would seem that Mathilde's philosophical soliloquy is an assertion that she understands that life may not have any clear meaning. Her declaration echoes Segismundo's:

> What is life? a delirium!
> What is life? illusion,
> A shadow, a fiction,
> Whose greatest good is nothing,
> Because life is a dream!
> Even dreams are only dreams.
> (2.17.74–75)

Like the Spanish baroque play, Maupassant's story handles the question of reality in provocative ways—specifically, the twist ending. According to Fusco, this unforeseen turn asks

9 Stewart, "Two Uses of Maupassant by R. P. Warren," 279.

us as readers to reconsider how we judge reality: "By ending with the surprise, Maupassant forces his audience to contend with its own perceptual folly."[10] Readers are just as shocked to discover the true value of the borrowed necklace as Mathilde is.

Henry James also challenges his readers to discern between truth and invention when he consciously transposes the plot of "The Necklace" in his short story "Paste." In the preface to the New York Edition of "Paste," he writes, "The origin of 'Paste'...was to consist but of the ingenious thought of transposing the terms of one of Guy de Maupassant's admirable *contes*" (x). Like the works of Calderón and Maupassant, James's short story focuses on the protagonist's struggle to distinguish illusion from reality in order to emphasize the absurd.

James goes a step beyond Calderón and Maupassant by grounding the theme of absurdity in multiple textual ambiguities. Richard Hocks suggests that the narrative strategy of James's short stories "conspires to intensify the condition of ambiguity and deception in a world where the simpler Cartesian division between mind and external phenomena no longer quite prevails."[11]

Just as Segismundo and Mathilde Loisel are burdened with the task of discerning the original from an imitation, so too is James's protagonist, Charlotte Prime, though what differentiates James's approach from both Calderón's and Maupassant's is the emphasis he places on the social and moral implications of her judgment. The authenticity of an inherited string of pearls would condemn the respectability of their owner, Charlotte's aunt, the widow of a humble vicar. The story begins days after her aunt's death when Charlotte's cousin, Arthur Prime, gives her a box filled with his stepmother's costume jewelry—remnants of her brief career in the theatre. Arthur is appalled by the gaudy jewelry, which he terms " 'too dreadfully good to be true' " (316).

After searching through the box, Charlotte wonders if some of the pieces may not in fact be real, especially the string of pearls. Arthur does not allow himself to entertain the idea—to do so would be to consider the implication that his stepmother was the kind of woman who would accept such extravagant gifts. He exclaims, " 'But momma wasn't of that sort. ...Not a nobody to whom somebody—well, not a nobody with diamonds' " (317). Full of "virtuous sternness" (318), Arthur forcibly maintains the perception of his stepmother as "an honest widowed cleric" (316). He is content to perpetuate the illusion of her respectability rather than discover the truth.

Charlotte accepts the jewelry and returns to her post as a governess at Eaton Square. After some time, she loans the pearl necklace to a friend, Mrs. Guy (an obvious homage to Maupassant), who insists that the pearls are real. From Charlotte's perspective, to keep the pearls would make her a thief. And so, despite the moral implications of their worth, Charlotte returns the pearls to her cousin, but Arthur does not appreciate Charlotte's integrity. Her assessment of the pearls deeply offends him and disrupts his constructed reality. He says, " 'I really can't allow you to leave the house under the impression that my stepmother was at *any* time of her life the sort of person to allow herself to be approached—' " (321). Unable to finish such an outrageous thought, he declares his intention to have

10 Richard Fusco, *Maupassant and the American Short Story: The Influence of Form at the Turn of the Century* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 29.

11 Richard A. Hocks, *Henry James: A Study of the Short Fiction* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 7.

the pearls appraised on Bond Street. Shortly thereafter, he writes to tell Charlotte that he destroyed the pearls when they were discovered to be paste.

Charlotte cannot help but question his story when she encounters Mrs. Guy wearing pearls identical to those Arthur has supposedly destroyed. Mrs. Guy claims that they are the same pearls: " 'I tracked them—after your folly, and, by miraculous luck, recognized them in the Bond Street window to which [Arthur] had disposed of them' " (337). Charlotte is deeply troubled after leaving Mrs. Guy. Not only is there the possibility that Arthur has lied to her, but there is also reason to question the veracity of her friend's story: If Mrs. Guy had attained the same string of pearls, "Hadn't she perhaps in truth dealt with Arthur directly? It came back to Charlotte almost luridly that she had had his address" (337).

Unlike Maupassant, who gives readers a resolution, James ends his story with Charlotte's dubiety—in regard to both the worth of the necklace and her relationships with her cousin and her friend. To conclude the story with such arresting ambiguity further stresses the futility of Charlotte's situation. She is unable to trust those closest to her. Arthur is too keen to keep up appearances for propriety's sake, and Mrs. Guy is a dishonest entertainer with a duplicitous appearance, "a person with the face of a baby and the authority of a commodore" (323). Like Segismundo, Charlotte is plagued by uncertainty and must manage without the assurance of ultimate truth.

Despite their obvious differences, these three texts illustrate the human desire to reconcile one's perception of reality with the meaning of

existence—a desire that crosses temporal and spatial boundaries. These works comment on the seeming futility that results when there is no clear distinction between illusion and reality, although the consequences of such a realization differ for the individual characters. Segismundo is ennobled by acknowledging the vanity of mortality, but Mathilde and Charlotte appear to be the victims of their absurd situations. As readers, we too are tasked with the responsibility to discern between the real and the counterfeit. Whereas *La vida es sueño* allows us to remain somewhat emotionally detached, "The Necklace" and "Paste," through absurd endings and textual ambiguities, challenge us to judge our own perceptions of reality.

Kristina Gibby is a first-year PhD student in the Comparative Literature Program at Louisiana State University. She earned an MA in comparative studies and a BA in humanities from Brigham Young University. Her research interests are modernism in art and literature, gender studies, and post-colonialism.

Dear So & So

Even our artist, author, Mac-teacher friends
have let the envelopes go,
the hand-drawn addresses
with quotes from Li-Po,
the exotic stamps added
because they once looked exotic,
messages from books just finished
facing front and back,
a sea of one-cent stamps
fully filling the front,
hoping the mailman might stop
might see a little and laugh,
from as far as four days away
waiting for the paper they wrote in to,
possibly ruined by rain or snow
or the mailman's heel,
always allowing for time
to open and read whenever
right away and then with others to share:
to lift the day's load
these fibers of thought we shook
from feelings never exhausted,
far beyond the moment seen,
and more boxes to hold these in.

-Timothy Jackson

Intuitive Assumption

The moment
of death

the fall
from time
to untime

has a
nutmeg scent

-Erik Frisch

Works published in the Poets' Corner are selected by Greg Delanty, former President of the ALSCW (2010–11), who reads the submissions without knowing the identities of the poets.

To contribute poetry—both original pieces and translations are accepted—to the Poets' Corner, send your work to *literarymatters@alscw.org* by the submission deadline for **Issue 7.3: June 15, 2014**.

Notes after the Midsummer Party

Midsummer green beer bottles
in midsummer grass

Swift sparrow voices
eagerly perform
a foliage symphony
in the shrubbery
guide your thoughts
to the red currants
and gooseberries too,
actually,
that silently
grow towards
redemption and jam

Not to speak of
semi-dry white wine corks
in dewy groundscape

where you can sense
that even the earthworm
must struggle to survive
underground

-Erik Frisch

Erik Frisch was born in Oslo in 1944. He is one of a handful of poets who have kept alive the Beat poetic tradition in Norway. In addition to verse, he has written novels, short stories, and plays, and often accompanies presentations of his literary works with illustrations from his own hand. These poems were originally published in his collection *The Literary Cat & Other Poems* (Lyrical Translations, 2013).

Uncle Wally

The hand in yours –
these surfaces full of holes
we touched without.

Thirty-two bones of mine
stuttered above your maxilla:
lanuginous luminosity.

All day your irides changed,
clear and a ton of air –
I asked for your hand.

-Timothy Jackson

Timothy Jackson is an independent scholar currently preparing a critical edition of Edna St. Vincent Millay's poetry for publication. A former CLIR Fellow, he served as an assistant editor of the *Walt Whitman Archive*, and executive editor of Zea E-Books, the digital imprint of UNL Libraries.

Poets' Corner Submission Guidelines:

- You may send up to five poems during each submission period.
- Please submit poem(s) via email as an attachment. When submitting multiple poems, please include all pieces in one file.
- You are encouraged to provide a biographical note (100 words or fewer) with your submission, which will appear alongside your poetry if it is accepted for publication.
- In order to provide a balanced forum for emerging poets, we ask those featured in the Poets' Corner to refrain from sending in further submissions for six months following the publication of their poetry.

The Twentieth Annual Conference

of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers

Thursday, April 3–Sunday, April 6, 2014 | Indiana University, Bloomington

Schedule of Events

Indiana Memorial Union | Indiana University, Bloomington

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All events will be held at the Indiana Memorial Union

Thursday, April 3

7:30–9:30 PM **An Evening of Poetry Readings**

The President's Room, Indiana Memorial Union, University Club

The gathering will feature Greg Delanty; briefer readings by John Burt, Rebekah Scott, Kevin Tsai, Brett Foster, Ben Mazer, Jacob Bennett, and Jee Leong Koh will follow. Refreshments will be served.

Open to the public

Friday, April 4

8:00–9:00 AM **Registration with Continental Breakfast**

Conference Lounge, Indiana Memorial Union

9:15–11:15 AM **Panel 1: Literary Translation from German and Slavic Languages**

Dogwood Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Moderator: Vincent Kling, *La Salle University*

Jacob Bennett, *La Salle University*:
"In Defense of 'Illiterate' Translation"

Hans Gabriel, *University of North Caroline School of the Arts*:
"Translating the Self-inclusive *Schadenfreude* of Gottfried Keller's *People of Seldwyla*"

Misha Semenov, *Princeton University*:
"Sorry, Wrong Address…Discovering Strategies for the Translation of the Russian Vy/Ty Distinction from Russian into English Through an Analysis of the English-Language Editions of *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*"

11:30 AM–12:45 PM **Panel 2: Listening to Victorian Poets: Performance, Interpretation, Discussion**

Dogwood Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Moderator: Debra Fried, *Cornell University*

Rebekah Scott, *University of Nottingham*:
"Browning's Bluff"

Dustin Simpson, *Reed College*:
"Performance vs. Scrutiny: The Case of Gerard Manley Hopkins"

Giffen Mare Maupin, *Hendrix College*:
"Victorian Poetry's Family Voices"

Herbert Marks, *Indiana University*:
"Hardy's Voiceless Ghost"

Lunch break **12:45–2:30 PM**

Panel 3: Rhetoric and Asian American Poetry **2:30–4:00 PM**

Dogwood Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Moderator: Jee Leong Koh, *The Brearley School*

Kevin Tsai, *Indiana University*:
"*Dictée*'s Rhetoric Between Word and Image"

Alan Ramón Clinton, *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture*:
"The Feeling Is Actualized: Completing the Aristotelian Triangle in the Poetry of Paolo Javier"

Jee Leong Koh, *The Brearley School*:
"Erratic as Thought: Goh Poh Seng's *Lines from Batu Ferringhi*"

Seminar: The Bible and Literature **4:15–5:30 PM**

Dogwood Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Leader: Stephen Cox, *University of California, San Diego*

Scott Crider, *University of Dallas*:
"The Test: Narrating God, Abraham, and Isaac in the English Bible, Genesis 22:1–19"

Margaret Ducharme, *Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Engineering*:
"Groanings From Within: Paul's Concept of Spirit in Romans 8:1–39"

James M. Kee, *College of the Holy Cross*:
"The Bible and Literature: A Hermeneutical Vision"

John Savoie, *Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville*:
"Literary Creation: Johnson, Lewis, Milton, Jesus Read—and Write—Genesis 1 and 2"

Workshop 1: "Indiana's Draft Literature Standards: What Are Your Suggestions for Improvement?" **5:45–7:00 PM**

Dogwood Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Moderator: Sandra Stotsky, *University of Arkansas*

Dinner break **7:00–8:00 PM**

Readings by this year's Meringoff Award Winners **8:00–9:30 PM**

Dogwood Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Host: John Briggs

George Kalogeris, Poetry
Anneliese Schultz, Fiction
Alex Effgen, Literary Nonfiction

Saturday, April 5

8:30–9:15 AM **Members' meeting with Continental Breakfast**

Dogwood Room, Indiana Memorial Union

9:15–10:30 AM **Concurrent Seminars:**

Seminar 1: Reading Literature and Learning to Write: A Discussion of Successful Pedagogies at University of California, Riverside

Persimmon Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Leader: John Briggs, *University of California, Riverside*

Lash Vance, *University of California, Riverside*

Paul Beehler, *University of California, Riverside*

Wallace Cleaves, *University of California, Riverside*

Seminar 2: Wonder and Literature

Dogwood Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Leader: David Smith, *Indiana University*

Brian Chappell, *Catholic University of America*:
"Wonder in the Age of Simulation: The Case of Don DeLillo"

Peter Cortland, *Quinnipiac University, Hamden, CT*:
"Wonder and Literature"

Ashish Patwardhan, *Sitwell Friends School*:
"The Secret Fire: Wonder, Grief and Recovery in Tolkien and Shakespeare"

John Wallen, *Nizwa University, Oman*:
"*The Great Gatsby* and the Wonder of the Green Light"

JHS McGregor, *University of Georgia*:
"Wonder? In the *Inferno*?"

10:45 AM–12:45 PM **Panel 4: The Role and Significance of Literature in the Common Core**

Dogwood Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Chair: John Briggs, *University of California, Riverside*

Sandra Stotsky, *University of Arkansas*:
"The Fate of Poetry in a Common Core-Based Curriculum"

Mark Bauerlein, *Emory University*:
"It All Depends on Personnel"

(For background information, see the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy* and the reading lists in that document's appendix at www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy.)

Luncheon for all Conference Registrants and Visiting Teachers **12:45–2:15 PM**

Tudor Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Featured Speaker: Mark Bauerlein, *Emory University*:
"Why Informational Text?"

Two Events **2:30–4:30 PM**

Panel 5: Compassionate Fictions: Fellow Feeling in Renaissance Literature

Dogwood Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Leader: Leah Whittington, *Harvard University*

Katherine Ibbett, *University College, London*:
"Compassion's Edge: Fictional Feeling and its Limits in Seventeenth-Century France"

Leah Whittington, *Harvard University*:
"Compassion in the Classroom or What Shakespeare Learned from Vergil"

John Staines, *CUNY*:
" 'It is no little thing to make / Mine eyes to sweat compassion': Compassion and Tragic Pity in *Coriolanus*"

Oliver Arnold, *University of California, Berkeley*:
" 'He to Hecuba': Impossible Relations and Compassion in *King Lear* and Early Modern England"

Workshop 2: The Indiana Literature Standards

Persimmon Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Moderator: Sandra Stotsky, *University of Arkansas*

4:45–6:30 PM **Panel 6: The Problem of the Chorus in Athenian Tragedy, Then and Now**

Dogwood Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Chair: Stephen Scully, *Boston University*

Thomas Hubbard, *University of Texas, Austin*:
"Choral Unwisdom and the Inadequacy of Democratic Man"

Francis Blessington, *Northeastern University*:
"The Greek Chorus and Alternative Tragedies"

Helaine L. Smith, *The Brearley School*:
"Aristophanes's Comic Choruses: Sixth Graders Perform *Clouds* and *Women at the Thesmophoria*"

Herbert Golder, *Boston University*:
"Cradle of Storms"

6:15 PM **Cash bar opens**

Tudor Room, Indiana Memorial Union

7:00 PM **Banquet with Dessert Readings of some favorite passages from the publications of the ALSCW**

Tudor Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Sunday, April 6

10:00 AM–12:00 PM **ALSCW Council Meeting**

Charter Room, Indiana Memorial Union

Franklin Hall and the Sample Gates | Indiana University, Bloomington

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