Transforming American Literature: The Making of The Heath Anthology

By Mary Pat Brady

At the end of World War II, the G.I. Bill enabled many hundreds of thousands of returning soldiers to attend college in the United States. Without the G.I. Bill, most would not have had the financial means to pursue higher education. Universities, in turn, expanded dramatically and curriculums shifted to acknowledge the need for a more broadly trained professional class. In 1962, at nearly the height of this social transformation, Norton published its first Anthology of English Literature, edited by M. H. Abrams, Cornell professor of English and renowned scholar of the British Romantic period. In doing so, Norton and Professor Abrams brought together an impressive range of literary texts and made it financially possible for an entirely new group of students to experience writers as various, and perhaps as little known, as Thomas Love Peacock, William Ernest Henley, or Matthew Prior. The Norton Anthology, in addition to building a collection of texts that deserved to be studied carefully, it argued, made these works widely available to a new student demographic. It cultivated a readership that had probably not studied much Latin or Greek, nor attended preparatory schools where poetics held pride of place in curriculum. In some sense then, The Norton Anthology of English Literature, like the G.I. Bill, can be seen as a democratic effort. It created an opening to the spheres of knowledge that had formerly engaged a primarily educated and wealthy elite for at least 600 years.

In his general editor’s “Preface” to the first edition, Abrams proudly declares that the massive, 3,500-page, two-volume anthology “includes the best and most characteristic writings of the great writers—not of some, but of all the great writers (other than novelists).” He further notes at the outset that the anthology is the work of faculty who have been teaching introductory and advanced courses in British literature for nearly 20 years and have “respect for the best that has been thought and said about literature in the past.” Furthering its democratic mission, the anthology includes suggestions for additional reading, as well as examples of influential literary criticism by scholars such as I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis, thereby encouraging students to pursue literary analysis independently of professors’ lectures.

The mass expansion of U.S. universities in the 1950s and 1960s that made the Norton Anthology a valuable tool had many other effects, including an increased demand for the study of U.S. literature. In response, Norton published its first Anthology of American Literature in 1979. And with this publication, Norton suggested a shift in editorial thinking. Departing from its British variant, which relied on a few scholars’ expertise to choose the anthology’s selections, Norton’s U.S. anthology announced that its selections were chosen on the basis of the seemingly very American notion of polling university faculty. Yet if the selections in the 1979 anthology enjoyed “majority support,” they differed very little from another Norton-associated anthology, The American Tradition in Literature, first published in 1956. Between these two sets of texts one can see a great deal of consensus supporting the continued study of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman. This “new” 1979 anthology largely supported the literary judgments of an earlier historical moment.

However, another outgrowth of the G.I. Bill (in addition to the transformation of university demographics, which included changes in who was studying literature) was how literature was studied and, more importantly, who was studied. Over the course of the last half of the twentieth century, young students and professors argued that areas of study really matter—they matter enough to fight over. And fight they did, in more ways than one. Professors who believed in the importance, for example, of women’s studies, Black studies, and Chicano studies, taught more courses than they were required to teach in order to create a new curriculum at their colleges; they passed syllabi around to each other at conferences so that a collaborative culture of research and teaching could emerge within these fields; they built publishing houses to reprint forgotten texts such as Rebecca Harding Davis’s Life in the Iron Mills and Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God. One ambitious graduate student at Indiana University, Norma Alarcón, even took time off to learn how to run a typesetting machine in order to start a press and publish the work of women of color. Scholars, confident that there were many other writers’ poems, memoirs, and novels published over the last three centuries than just those that showed up in the standard anthologies, began combing university libraries, private collections of papers, and long forgotten periodicals. They hoped to find writers...
With so many texts rediscovered, scholars began to challenge the consensus about who and what belonged in a survey course of U.S. literature. And a group of them began working on a new anthology to fit that need: The Heath Anthology of American Literature, first published in 1990. The scholars who would help create the Heath such as Paul Lauter, Richard Yarbrough, Raymond Paredes, Carla Mumford, and others solicited suggestions for texts from university, community college, and high school English teachers. They received thousands of suggestions for creating an anthology that would help to map the great range of intellectual, creative work in the United States. Ultimately, those who suggested new writers often wrote the introductions to the texts, offered editorial comments, and helped shape the work’s final appearance in the anthology. This process shifted the nature of the anthology from the product of a small, highly selective group of faculty to a free-ranging, collaborative engagement with hundreds of scholars and more than a dozen members of the editorial board. The Heath became a multi-vocal anthology on a huge scale, running to nearly 10,000 pages. Earlier anthologies had woven together a largely singular story about U.S. literature—one that often mimicked the prominent stories about the development of the United States itself: brave Pilgrims, intrepid explorers with a Divine mission, hardy entrepreneurs, and civil resisters. The Heath proposed, in contrast, that such an account only told a partial truth at best and that indeed U.S. literature should be studied not in a singular fashion but through multiple, sometimes competing, frameworks. Its topics included the violence of colonialism, the displacement and genocide of native Nations, the difficulties of creating a settler-colonial society, the pursuits of new forms of civil liberties and freedoms, the complexities of migration, the multiple legacies of slavery and racialized violence, and the processes of urbanization. These frameworks also helped readers understand how writers have struggled with the limits of language and have been intrigued by the possibilities of new expression as literary forms evolved. As scholars began to grapple with these varying texts they realized, too, that the texts themselves needed to be studied with the understanding that they engaged differing systems of allusions, a varying repertoire of images, and linguistic forms that spoke to different sets of creative questions and imaginative desires. Just as the Heath challenged old assumptions about who counted as important in U.S. literature, it also challenged how we read that literature as well.

Rejected by many scholars as “chaotic” upon its first publication, the Heath Anthology, over the course of seven editions and more than two decades, has nevertheless been extremely successful. Scholars and reviewers have repeatedly confirmed that the Heath transformed not only what texts were anthologized (every other major anthology of American literature, including the Norton, quickly moved to change the writers it included), but also how U.S. literature was studied in general. Indeed, what appeared chaotic was actually a depiction of the rich depths of U.S. literary production spanning more than 400 years. One or two narratives or images could not neatly and simply encapsulate the diversity of writing in the United States. As the Heath proved, the United States has produced an incredible range of writers, styles, and themes. Writers have taken an extraordinary variety of approaches to making meaning, explaining experiences in imaginative language, and exploring ideas through widely different forms.

If the Heath helped propel a revision of American literary study, it has continued to benefit in return from the ongoing transformations in the field. Every edition of the Heath since the first has evolved to include new authors; each edition has shifted emphasis here and there and offered new approaches to literary study, for example, the sixth edition’s acknowledgment of the importance of understanding U.S. writing transnationally; however, every volume has continued to assert the importance of exploring a complex and varied literary history. For example, even as the sixth edition added many new features that located the United States as a member nation of a world of nations, it also added many stunning, nationalist texts, including one by a seemingly ultra-nationalist woman writer, Julia Ward Howe. The author of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” a poem written to express patriotism during the Civil War, and now a ubiquitous song at national memorials, entered the Heath, not as a poet, but as the writer of a secretly produced, experimental novel called The Hermaphrodite. Written in the 1840s, the novel follows Laurence, an intersex child, whose father initially decides to raise his child as a son. Laurence subsequently describes school, a romance with a woman, a passionate relationship with a man, and then a period lived as a woman, with other women, in Rome. It is a remarkable study of
and history. I have had the pleasure of helping to edit the fifth, sixth, and seventh editions of the Heath. Appointed to replace founding editorial board member Raymond Paredes, I largely focus on U.S. Latino literatures, working across all five volumes of the anthology to interweave Latino/a writing so that the anthology more accurately reflects Latina contributions to U.S. literature. It is a surprise to undergraduates that U.S. Latinos have been actively writing novels, poetry, essays, and memoirs since before the American Revolution. Very few people know, for instance, that one of the first novels in the United States was written by a Latino and published in Philadelphia in 1826. ficciones dramatizes the story of the Tlaxcalans’ battle with the Spanish Conquistadores while ruminating on how political morality might be designed in the absence of a Catholic notion of Divine Right. An experiment in history and a philosophy of politics, the novel played a part in a lively Philadelphia community of Spanish speaking intellectuals engaged in understanding the future of the colonies. Other early-nineteenth century texts by Latinos include poems, political tracts, memoirs, and plays written by men and women eagerly debating the role of authority, the place of religion, and the relationship between ethics and secular democracy—debates that we commonly see as characterizing, for example, the writing of Thomas Paine, Henry David Thoreau, and Fredrick Douglass. We learn from this literature that writers feared the effects of vigilant expeditions as early as the 1830s and watched nervously as lynching spread as a form of racialized violence and social control across the continent. We also learn that Latino/a struggled to position themselves within a dominant culture that had created one system of laws for those deemed black and another for those deemed white. And we see writers struggling to find the language to embrace native heritages and participate in a white supremacist ideology that would buffer them from violence against Native American peoples. If today, we are not surprised to find Latino writers represented in Contemporary sections of literature anthologies, we should also not be surprised to find them represented in every other section as well. Consider another example: Modernism is often understood as a particularly high point of U.S. literary production—frequently characterized by the work of Modernist writers like T.S. Elliot, Ezra Pound, and William Faulkner. But the Heath volume on the Modernist period begins with Booker T. Washington and concludes with Carlos Bulosan, which suggests that literary output during the 1910–1945 period was not simply about dramatic new experiments with literary form or the despair and grief occasioned by the violence of World War I. While many Latino/a writers took up these themes, some went beyond them to examine the fundamental relationships between revolution and land, education and equality, and the complex role that collective organizing could play in enhancing human rights. At the same time, Latino/a writers were similarly pushing aesthetic borders with novels such as Mariano Azuela’s Las de abajo, Jovita González’s Caballero, and Américo Paredes’s George Washington Gómez. Does the inclusion of these texts in a major literary anthology completely transform how we understand authors that are studied more frequently? Not entirely, no. But their inclusion does force us to rethink simplistic assumptions about, for example, Manifest Destiny, or the dominance of the English language, or the range of references and national histories that writers might have reasonably assumed their readers would recognize. It challenges us to consider, then, that some of the most literate and literary cultures of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were located outside of New England (in Texas and New Mexico, for instance) and produced in languages other than English in cities such as San Antonio and Santa Fe, which had some of the very first printing presses on the North American continent. And it locates writers such as Cornell alumni Junot Díaz, MFA ’95 and Manuel Muñoz, MFA ’98 (whose short stories appear for the first time in the seventh edition alongside that of their teacher Helena María Viramontes) in a far more intricate context.

Looking back now at the tremendous achievements of the Norton Anthology of English Literature and comparing it to this new edition of The Heath Anthology of American Literature, it is easy to see how much three generations of scholars have transformed the study of literature. By bringing new writers to the table, the Heath allows us to better understand established figures and gives us a fuller and more complex appreciation of the marvelous field that is “American literature.”
Lydia Fakundiny, a member of the English department faculty since 1975, died on March 31, 2013. One of the most beloved undergraduate teachers in recent memory, Lydia specialized in expository writing and in the essay as literary genre. Her course, The Art of the Essay, had a formative impact on generations of Cornell students. She was cited no fewer than four times by Merrill Presidential Scholars as the faculty member who had made the greatest contribution to their college experience.

On April 17, 2013, Lydia’s friends and relatives gathered at the Unitarian Church in Ithaca to remember her. Among those in attendance were her partner Joyce Elbrecht and her brother Wilhelm Fakundiny. Following are excerpts from remarks delivered at the memorial.

Katy Gottschalk, colleague:
Much of Lydia’s impact, on students and colleagues alike, came, I believe, from her intensity, her enormous strength of character, her absolute passion for excellence. That character emerges vividly in the description she wrote for The Practice of Prose when the course became her responsibility. Students who take The Practice of Prose, she wrote, must keep “all [their] wits engaged.” Students will write and revise “until the prose works” because “anything worth doing is worth doing well and . . . learning to do a thing well is both an end in itself and a means to other things worth doing.”

To study with Lydia, then, could lead to becoming not just a better writer, but also a better person: “Learning to do a thing well is both an end in itself and a means to other things worth doing.”

As a freshman, I sat in her office, and feeling what I was trying to do and tell—trying to do and tell—what I miss most about Lydia is the way she didn’t tell me what was important, which somehow often came in the form of how she could always tell what I was trying to do and tell me how to do it. As a freshman, I sat in her office, and feeling unfoolish, told her what I thought “god” was. She said: “You believe in an anthropomorphic god?” What? “Anthropomorphic,” she wrote on a square of paper and handed it to me, with purpose—this was a word I should know. I remember how she told me not to “get blindered” at graduate school in English.

“Blindered?”

“Blindered,” she said, and put her hands at her temples, “like a horse.”

James May, student:
I was a junior, like most of the students in Art of the Essay that year. At that age—I guess most of us were 20—it’s hard to know a teacher as anything other than a trainer of your own projections. If what it means to have an intellectual life is to have an educated conversation going inside your head all the time, then at 20 you’re still populating that conversation with voices. Your teachers are pulled into it willfully, without much regard for how accurately they’re being represented. You turn them into the (half-imagined, half-fictionalized) version of yourselves you need them to be in order to think your thoughts.

Lydia knew that, I believe. I’m sure part of the reason she had the effect she did on so many 20-year-olds was her adroitness at facilitating that particular transference process. Hundreds of students came away from Lydia’s courses with their own versions of her voice speaking clearly in their ears, saying things they could use to think with. I certainly did. I still hear hers among the other important voices when I sit down to write.
English Lessons: Cornell Alumni on How Their Majors Helped Them in Their Careers

By Judith Hamer '60

Well, that's easy enough—but there's much more to me than the careers I've had.

First: the careers. After graduating from Cornell in 1960, I went to Smith College to get a master of arts in teaching (1961) and finally to Columbia University Teachers College for a PhD in education (1984) with a focus on teaching writing. After Smith, I taught English at Bronx Community College and at the City College of New York. I taught graduate writing and linguistics courses at Columbia while earning the PhD; then became the vice president of training and development at UBS, a financial services company; and later, the education officer at the Rockefeller Foundation. In between, I ran a consulting firm that conducted management training. Currently, I write grants for small nonprofits.

How did I do it? I came to Cornell a bright, young, scared woman of color. I felt my outsider status very keenly, always on the outside of a glass wall, nose pressed against it, trying to gain entry to the party inside. But no one saw me. For all intents and purposes, I was visible only to me. But I was at Cornell to learn, my father insisted (a member of the class of 1924). So that's what I did.

The first lesson was to feed my boundless intellectual curiosity. When I arrived at Cornell, I knew how to study and memorize from a decent New York City public high school. I learned how to think and analyze and challenge at Cornell. M. H. Abrams introduced me to English literature in his survey course. I still remember the wonder of reading his

Glossary of Literary Terms (yes, I read it from cover to cover and then used it as a reference guide.) Then I listened to his lectures and, the icing on the cake, became a student in the small section that he led where we had to apply the lessons of the lectures. Even for a jaded, doubting New Yorker who could ride all the subways and know exactly where she was, his insights were a revelation.

The second lesson was perseverance. As a PhD candidate at Columbia, I passed the French qualifying exam easily, thanks to Cornell's rigorous courses. Latin proved difficult, despite four years of study in high school. To master it, I posted Latin conjugations and declensions and vocabulary words on index cards on all the kitchen cabinets so I could study while I cooked for the family. I borrowed a Latin primer series from the local high school that told stories in Latin—a family escapes from erupting Mount Vesuvius, a soldier invades Britain with the Roman army. Despite these efforts, I failed the qualifying exam twice. I could have switched to a computer language, and settled for an EdD degree with no language requirements. But I would not back down. Finally I completed the requirement by taking a Latin course at Barnard College while taking a full graduate course load, teaching graduate level courses, raising three teenaged girls, and commuting from Connecticut to New York City.

Where had I learned to tough it out? Partly from the questions Cornell professors posed on papers that I thought were well written: What do you make of the '1/Eye' dichotomy in those Shakespeare sonnets? What is the narrator's attitude in Tom Brown? Why does Dante use Hell to punish his political enemies? When most seniors were playing, my roommate and I were writing weekly papers for an Impressionist art course that challenged us to see differently: How does Monet use perspective in a particular painting?

Is there a connection between van Gogh's letters to his brother and the turbulence of a later painting? Why did Picasso use African masks in Les Demoiselles d'Avignon?

The third lesson was that pain and wonder were not unique to me. I gasped at Wordsworth's description of daffodils; I understood Donne's bitterness at love in "Go And Catch A Falling Star"; I knew that Emily Dickinson was full of life and longing even as she isolated herself. Then a boyfriend of the moment gave me Ellison's Invisible Man. Reading it was like gorging myself on the meal I'd always craved. I understood the literal narrative, I shuddered at the symbolic events, I anticipated the despairing, futuristic end. I read it each time I went to the hospital to have a baby; and I taught it in freshman composition courses. It was the first book I'd read by a black author.

Then I "lit out for the territories." On my own, I traced Ellison back to Wright and Dostoevsky, read all the African American fiction I could find, started a black women's book club, and edited a collection of short stories by black women. On my desk now are Ayana Mathis's The Twelve Tribes of Hattie, Toni Morrison's Home, Jamaica Kincaid's See Now Then. Additionally, there's Louise Erdrich's The Round House and Billy Collins's Sailing Alone Around the Room. On the bedside table are two volumes by Natasha Trethewey and old New Yorker magazines (to read the fiction).

With each new book I finger the pages, feel its heft, study the book jacket, read the author's bio (even if I already know it), contemplate the dedication, and wonder at the summary (can you really summarize a work of fiction or poetry?). Then I plunge in, anticipating, breathless, and secretly smiling. Thank you Cornell, and especially, thank you M. H. Abrams.

By Clayton Moravec '61

When I arrived at Cornell in 1957, I knew I wanted to be a physician and was unsure of what my major should be to give me the best chance to get into medical school. My freshman English teacher was a chemistry professor who encouraged me to major in chemistry because it would help me organize my thoughts. When I arrived at Cornell, my father insisted (a member of the class of 1924). So that's what I did.

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In 1991 I went beyond my academic specialization of Victorian literature and offered the first version of a course I’ve taught nearly every year since then: The Culture of the 1960s. My original idea was to choose a decade of recent American history and combine an historical account with the literature, film, music, and art of the times in order to study the way texts from various media speak to each other within a defined timeframe. The sixties seemed like the obvious decade to choose for the first version of the course because the relationships between culture and history were so dense during that time; but, I had other reasons as well. The political establishment of the country had moved to the right. Ronald Reagan, the ideological heir of Barry Goldwater, won re-election in 1984 by a landslide comparable to the one by which Lyndon Johnson had defeated the “extremist” Goldwater. It was hard to believe in 1991 that a mere 25 years before, an American president had vowed to wipe out poverty in the United States. (By contrast, a survey conducted after the 2012 presidential campaign found that poverty was discussed in only two percent of media stories on the election.) In this era of diminished expectations and ideals, I wanted to acquaint a new generation with the kind of dreams and possibilities that had excited me as a student—by actually reading the words of those who expressed them. The focus of the course would not be on a unit of past time but a relationship of then and now. As a visual logo, I wrote “60s” on top of “90s” (or “60s” inverted) to suggest that our inheritance of the past is in fact a double mirroring, by which we half discover and half reconstruct the past as we view it—and all too often distort the reflection. But how many students would be interested? To my astonishment, my course pre-enrolled 350 students—far beyond the English department’s capacity to staff. It was flattering to see such a surge of passionate interest in the past on the part of a later generation. We, after all, were supposed to be disdainful of history and of people older than 30. But why had the 1960s become such a fad topic in the 1990s? The short answer, obvious today but not obvious to me at the time, was sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll. My students knew far more than I did about “classic rock,” as it was now called, and the names of exotic drugs, and of course they’d had plenty of sexual experience. But there was much they’d never heard of about the first decade of the Age of Aquarius. Few could distinguish between those who had “tuned in, turned on, and dropped out” and those who actively tried to change society—the New Left, student radicals, antiwar protestors. In their minds the memory of one group tended to erase the memory of the other, and glamorized images of a hip, hedonistic youth culture reigned supreme. In this regard, my students were simply reflecting the reconstructed memory of the culture at large. Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin put it in America Divided (the best one-volume history of the decade in print): For generations growing up after 1960, the famous popular hits of the decade “supply a mildly stimulating soundtrack that overwhelms memories of cultural and racial conflict.” In succeeding years, I’ve thought much more about this systematic misremembering of the 1960s, which (as I can summarize it now) tended to save certain memories by associating them with sexiness or exuberant transgressions and to banish other memories by writing them off as extremist—violent, distasteful, or (worse) adolescent and self-indulgent. The women’s movement fell under the first group. My students did not know about the founding “mothers” or groups or documents of second-wave feminism, they automatically associated, say, the models on the covers of women’s magazines with feminism, thus conflating the women’s movement with sexual liberation. But many of the most telling attacks on patriarchy in the late sixties targeted the fetishization of women’s bodies—the false flattery that both objectified women and made the female body the chief bearer of advertising messages. This particular misconcep-
tion goes back a long way. Susan Faludi makes this point in her book Backlash: “By the mid-70s, the media and advertisers had settled on a line that served to neutralize and commercialize feminism at the same time. Women, the mass media seemed to have decided, were now equal and no longer seeking new rights—just new lifestyles. Women wanted self-gratification, not self-determination—the sort of fulfillment best serviced at a shopping mall.” (This kind of argument was the impetus to infamous ad campaigns like Virginia Slims cigarettes or the one for Pristeen feminine hygiene spray.) The deepest irony of anecdotes like this is that the counter-culture, which once stood for a rebellion against the commodification and mass marketing of everything for youth, from clothing to music to looks, has been marketed to later generations by the very systems of mass production and mass advertising from which the original counter-culture, as it were, had seceded. At moments it seemed to me that all that remained in cultural memories of the sixties was what could be sold to middle-class kids: classic rock, designer jeans, musicals like Hair, movies like The Big Chill. In fact, the social historian Thomas Frank published his first book on this very topic, The Conquest of Cool, which traces the history of the advertising “boutiques” that arose in the sixties to court the “new” buyers, contains a chapter whose title says it all: “Hip Consumerism as Capitalist Norm.” This notion suggested a new goal for the course, which was to press beneath mass-marketed images of sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll, to a better understanding of what the good life can offer.

A different distortion occurred around national memories of Vietnam. By the 1990s, a consensus had emerged in the media that Vietnam was a “quagmire,” a tragic mistake, a blunder, and (most tellingly) a wound inflicted upon the American psyche—a judgment that seemed to forget that the war was also a wound suffered by the Vietnamese. (American losses are slightly above 58,000. Southeast Asian losses are incalculable, though a fair middling figure seems to be two million deaths, mostly civilians.) Without understanding the brutality of the war, it was impossible to understand why people protested against the war with such conviction—and, ultimately, such rage and despair. Unpopular as the war had become, however, the protest of war had become even more unpopular. In the few cases when war protestors appeared in mainstream entertainment, one was certain to see them spitting on soldiers. Most Americans probably still believe this myth. (No reliable first-hand evidence of spitting was recorded at the time, though it might have happened in isolated instances.) Obviously, Americans remain as disturbed today by visible acts of dissent as they did 40 years ago. (During the mass arrests in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention of 1968, crowds shouted “the whole world is watching!” as photographers recorded for national television hearings of unarmed protestors by Chicago police. An opinion poll released the next day showed that three-quarters of viewers approved of police tactics, even though a majority of viewers now disfavored the Vietnam War.)

These thoughts suggested yet another goal for the course: to understand the legitimate place of dissent in American life. As Isserman and Kazin put it, “it is in just such eras of discord and conflict that Americans have shown themselves most likely to rediscover and live out the best traditions to be found in our national experience.” In my course, I try to re-visit all aspects of the movements that gave the decade its complex identity. We do look at the issue of pleasure (what our lives could look like when the struggles have been won), but most often, we look at works of critique and dissent—from the manifesto of the radical women’s group, Redstockings; to Fugitive Days, a vivid memoir by Bill Ayers, former Weather Underground leader; to Martin Luther King’s “Beyond Vietnam”—his attack on the war that’s also, in my opinion, his greatest public utterance that needs to be remembered alongside the more familiar “I Have a Dream” speech. I emphasize that my students’ lives (like my own) are profoundly shaped by the three great social movements that originated, more or less, in the 1960s: the women’s movement, the movement for racial justice, and the movement for gay and lesbian rights—as well as the movement that, largely, failed: the peace movement. I emphasize that these great transformations of human consciousness began as forms of grassroots dissent that were uncomfortable, challenging, and sometimes disruptive, but we have inherited them today as part of an ongoing struggle and dialogue.

I’ve emphasized so far the work of historical reconstruction, but The Culture of the 1960s is just as much an English course, that is, a course devoted to the enjoyment and interpretation of texts in multiple dimensions of meanings. I believe, with the critic Terry Eagleton, that no great cultural work is diminished by embedding it in a specific historical context, but history is not the only context for meaning. For years my students and I have discussed with pleasure, as well as enlightenment, the grotesquely comic antiwar film Dr. Strangelove, the songs of Bob Dylan and Janis Joplin, the poetry of Ginsberg and Adrienne Rich, and the bizarre, yet deeply moving, novel Slaughterhouse-Five by the Cornellian Kurt Vonnegut. The longest assignment is The Autobiography of Malcolm X. As hustler and small-time thief, as minister of a racist religious group, as controversial campus speaker, and finally as (tentative) spokesman for multi-racial understanding, Malcolm X exemplified the painful but deeply important process of struggling and questioning that gives the youth movements of the sixties so much of their enduring value. It’s a great literary work as well as a major historical document, and I try to show why. At the same time, Malcolm X also believed women are the weaker sex and ought to occupy a subordinate role in marriage—that is, when he wasn’t calling women “tricky, deceitful flesh.” I invite my students to look squarely at unpleasant moments like this in the knowledge that no syllabus, however carefully managed, can or should close off the contradictions and imperfections of human lives.

Can a look back at the literature of the 1960s tell my students today anything about their own prospects? The crises we face today are, if anything, more dire than the crises of the 1960s, and the next generation will find new ways to create history. On May 20, 2012, several thousand people marched in the streets of Chicago to witness soldiers (men and women) from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq tear off their medals and ribbons and angrily denounce the brutal failure of American war making as they experienced it; the scene, of course, recalled similar, more famous moments near the end of the Vietnam era, but the scene belongs to today, not to the past. May 20, 2012 happened to also be my daughter’s twentieth birthday, and she was there in the crowd. In the fall of 2012 she voted as a student in Indiana, in an election that, in different ways, recalls the subjects of my course. The punditry now acknowledges that the decisive factor in the election of 2012 was strong turnout by women and ethnic minorities. Three male candidates who made inflammatory remarks about rape and reproductive rights went down to defeat; there are now 20 women in the Senate, including the first openly gay senator; the right of same-sex couples to marry was affirmed or protected in four state referendums; and (most spectacularly) two states voted to legalize the recreational use of marijuana by regulating it in the same manner as tobacco and alcohol. These results, just as clearly, were won by grassroots movements—movements not funded by one or a pair of billion donors; as in the sixties, it was the people who led and the leaders who will be obliged to follow.

A recurrent complaint about education today—which repeats the complaint uttered by the student-authors of the Port Huron Statement 50 years ago—holds that our university system only exists to process students and train them to compete for a shrinking number of positions in bureaucratic structures that may work counter to their values and deepest aspirations even as it rewards them with income and security. Shouldn’t the universities also help them to understand how the world works? To decide for themselves what to value and what to strive for? To determine what side they will be on in the struggles for justice that will continue far beyond their lifetimes? One place to start, of course, is to be able to imagine a good life, which includes pleasure: pleasure in love, in music, in imagination. Another place is Dr. King’s call in a part of the “I Have a Dream” speech: “We will be dissatisfied until justice rolls down like waters.” King’s sublime dissatisfaction is perhaps his greatest legacy to later generations—and the greatest of the many contradictory legacies of those turbulent years.
Philip Lorenz
*The Tears of Sovereignty: Perspectives of Power in Renaissance Drama* (Fordham University Press, 2013)

Philip Lorenz examines the concept of sovereignty as a metaphorical “body” of power in his new book. A comparative study of the representation of sovereignty in paradigmatic plays of early modernity, *The Tears of Sovereignty* argues that the great playwrights of the period—William Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, and Calderón de la Barca—reconstitute the metaphors through which contemporary theorists continue to conceive the problems of sovereignty. Lorenz analyzes three of Shakespeare’s plays and two by Spanish playwrights Pedro Calderón de la Barca and Lope de Vega. “Sovereignty refers not just to power but to the highest power—that power which stands above all others,” says Lorenz, associate professor in the Department of English.

“...a highly theorized account of a set of mesmerizing problem plays from Spanish and English theater, which generate a range of insightful new accounts of the operation of the tropes of metaphor, analogy, and allegory in relation to the theatrical image, the Eucharist, and the insignia of power.”

—Julia Reinhard Lupton, author of *Thinking with Shakespeare: Essays on Politics and Life*

Robert Morgan
*The Road from Gap Creek* (Algonquin Books, 2013)

From the publisher:
When Robert Morgan’s novel *Gap Creek* was published in 1999, it became an Oprah Book Club selection and an instant national bestseller, attracting hundreds of thousands of readers to its story of a marriage begun with love and hope at the turn of the twentieth century. Set in the high country of the Blue Ridge Mountains where Morgan grew up, *Gap Creek* traces the life and loves of the Richards family as they struggled through the first year and a half of their union.

But what, readers asked, of the years that followed? What did the future hold for these members of a family that became the four most famous of Morgan’s characters?

Into their lives, telling their story and the stories of their children through the eyes of their youngest daughter, Annie. Through Annie, we watch as the four Richards children create their own histories, lives that include both triumphs and hardship in the face of the Great Depression and then World War II. Much more than a sequel, *The Road from Gap Creek* is a moving and indelible portrait of people and their world in a time of unprecedented change, an American story told by one of our country’s most acclaimed writers.

Jane Juffer

From the publisher:
Examining how encounters produced by migration lead to intimacies—ranging from sexual, spiritual, and neighborly to hateful and violent, Jane Juffer considers the significant changes that have occurred in small towns following an influx of Latinos to the Midwest.

*Intimacy across Borders* situates the story of the Dutch Reformed Church in Iowa and South Africa within a larger analysis of race, religion, and globalization. Drawing on personal narrative, ethnography, and sociopolitical critique, Juffer shows how migration to rural areas can disrupt even the most thoroughly entrenched religious beliefs and transform the schools, churches, and businesses that form the heart of small-town America. Conversely, such face-to-face encounters can also generate hatred, as illustrated in the increasing number of hate crimes against Latinos and the passage of numerous anti-immigrant ordinances.

*Intimacy across Borders* combines journalistic inquiry with academic know-how as it marshals its reader through its investigation of racialized identities, an ethics of community, the politics of migration, and the ever-growing population of Latina/os in the United States. "...a highly theorized account of a set of mesmerizing problem plays from Spanish and English theater, which generate a range of insightful new accounts of the operation of the tropes of metaphor, analogy, and allegory in relation to the theatrical image, the Eucharist, and the insignia of power.”

—Julia Reinhard Lupton, author of *Thinking with Shakespeare: Essays on Politics and Life*

Philip Lorenz

From the publisher:
In *Fictions of Dignity*, Elizabeth S. Anker shows how the dual enabling fictions of human dignity and bodily integrity contribute to an anxiety about the body that helps to explain many of the contemporary and historical failures of human rights, revealing why and how lives are excluded from human rights protections along the lines of race, gender, class, disability, and species membership. In the process, Anker examines the vital...
work performed by a particular kind of narrative imagination in fostering respect for human rights.

“With deft skill, Elizabeth S. Anker explores some of the most important issues of human rights by moving restlessly between literature and law. The originality of her reading lies in going beyond textual and linguistic codifications and confronting the dignity of the human person in its most urgent, embodied form.”

—Homi K. Bhabha, Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of the Humanities, Harvard University

J. Robert Lennon

Familiar

(Graywolf Press, 2012)

“Returning from her annual pilgrimage to her son Silas’s grave, Elisa Brown is suddenly struck by a sense that things have changed. The car she is driving isn’t hers, her body has transformed, and in the seat next to her sits a conference binder addressed to a Lisa Brown. The old Elisa’s son died at age 15; she was having an extramarital affair; and she was very close to her living son, Sam. This new Lisa is estranged from both of her children and lives in quiet tension with her husband in a home devoid of life. As the old Elisa tries to parse out what has happened to her, she discovers that her new reality is as sad and complicated as her previous life, and she begins to feel trapped between both worlds. Readers who enjoyed Lennon’s previous novel Castle (2009) will see some common themes here, as Elisa questions her own understanding of reality and memory and tries to unravel the emotional mystery that surrounds both of her lives.”

—Heather Paulson

“Familiar is as tightly wound as a great Alfred Hitchcock movie. He keeps Familiar balanced at a perfect pitch between allowing us to see what has happened to Elisa is real and to think that she’s had a mental breakdown brought about by anxiety and depression. In the scientific shadows, Lennon has executed a literary puzzle, a marvelous trick of the mind.”

—Los Angeles Times

Ella Maria Diaz received a PhD in American studies from the College of William and Mary and taught several courses at William and Mary between 2004 and 2005. She developed the college’s first Chicana literature course in the spring of 2005. Her research pertains to the interdependence of Chicana/o and U.S. Latino/a literary and visual cultures. Her dissertation, “Flying Under the Radar with The Royal Chicano Air Force: The Ongoing Politics of Space and Ethnic Identity,” received the College of William and Mary’s Distinguished Dissertation Award in 2010. She was a lecturer in the School of Interdisciplinary Studies at the San Francisco Art Institute between 2006 until 2012, where she continued to hone her research for her current book project on the historical consciousness of a Chicana/o arts collective that produced major and canonical works of poetry, art, and literature.

Amanda Jo Goldstein works on European Romanticism and the life sciences, with special interests in rhetoric and figuration, pre-Darwinian biology, and materialist theories of history, poetry, and nature. Her book project, Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Sciences of Life, shows how writers from Erasmus Darwin to Percy Shelley revived ancient materialism to cast poetry as a privileged technique of empirical enquiry—an experimental practice fit to connect the biological problem of living form to the period’s pressing new sense of its own historicity. Goldstein received a PhD in comparative literature (English, German, French) from the University of California, Berkeley. Before joining the Cornell English department, she was a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Biopolitics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Before coming to Cornell, where he holds the Newton C. Farr Chair in American Culture, George Hutchinson was the Booth Tarkington Professor of English at Indiana University, Bloomington, and chaired the English department for three years. His teaching and research focus on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American literature. He is the author of The Ecstatic Whitman: Literary Shamanism and the Crisis of the Union (1986) and The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White (1995). His most recent book, In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line, won the Christian Gauss Award of Phi Beta Kappa. He is currently writing a book on American literature and culture in the 1940s, for which he held a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2011–2012.

Poet Ishion Hutchinson was born in Port Antonio, Jamaica. He attended the University of the West Indies at Mona, New York University, and the University of Utah where he earned a PhD. His poetry and essays have appeared in such publications as Attica, the Caribbean Review of Books, and the Los Angeles Review of Books. His first collection, Far District, won the PEN/October Press Award for Poetry. In 2013 he received a Whiting Writer’s Award for his “exceptional talent and promise in early career.”

Mukoma Wa Ngugi received a PhD from the University of Wisconsin—Madison, where he specialized in how questions of authorized and unauthorized English, or standard and non-standard English, influenced literary aesthetics in Romantic Britain and Independence-Era Africa. In addition to scholarly work, Mukoma is the author of the novels Nairobi Heat (2011) and Nairobi Black Star (2013), and a collection of poems, Hurling Words at Consciousness (2006). For his fiction, he has been shortlisted for both the Caine Prize for African Writing and the Penguin Prize for African Writing. He is a columnist for the BBC’s Focus On Africa Magazine and his commentary has appeared in the Guardian, the International Herald Tribune, the Los Angeles Times, and Sunday Nation. In 2013 he was named one of the 100 most influential Africans by New African Magazine.
The close of the 2012–2013 academic year saw two of our colleagues deliver rousing orations—one prose, the other verse—affirming the importance of literature and the humanities.

Why You Should Want Me On the Life Raft

By George Hutchinson

English Professor George Hutchinson’s winning speech at the 2013 Life Raft Debate, which was sponsored by LOGOS: The Cornell University Philosophy Club.

Why you should want me on the life raft:

I am an accomplished oarsman, and a one-time rowing coach. I also used to build houses, by the way—both American-style wood frame houses and African style mud brick huts with straw roofs when I was in the Peace Corps. So I have some practical skills to offer, as everyone should. You don’t need a degree in engineering to build a house. And you don’t need one in finance to form bricks out of mud, straw, and dung.

But faced with the problem of starting a community from scratch, why on earth would you need an English professor? Don’t you all speak English already? Please raise your hand if you do not know English! OK. At least you can understand me even if you’re not paying attention. But, you ask, I already speak English. What do I need an English major for?

The English major is about the history, uses, abuses, powers, and limitations of the English language, and language is the most fundamental and powerful instrument we have. It is the forerunner of every invention, every technical achievement. Before there was space travel there was literature about space travel. Literature is the instrument through which all the gods have been imagined and all the religions built. It gives hue and character to every space travel. Literature is the instrument through which all the gods have been imagined and all the religions built. It gives hue and character to every religion. The Koran and the Upanishads—great works of literature all. Looking back over your failures and accomplishments, you will not be regretting the time you blew an experiment or missed a great investment but rather all the times you led down the people you most cared about—not through a lack of technical knowledge but through a lack of self-knowledge or a failure of imagination—and often through a failure of words. Not knowing what word to say, not having the confidence to say anything, saying the wrong thing at the wrong time.

And beyond one’s personal life is the importance of the collective life of which we are all a part: the civilization you will build. The greatest failures and crimes of American civilization have been failures of love and imagination: racism, wars spurred by hatred, misunderstanding, self-deceit, blind patriotism, perhaps above all greed. Yes, our greatest writers have also failed along these lines even as they extended the range of our affections and appreciations. Nonetheless, here the literature of the world is the most capacious of guides. And since all the libraries will be gone and Amazon.com off line, you’ll have to learn from it me. You will also want to leave a record of your accomplishments in the form of a mighty epic—or at least a sitcom—so your descendants will have the example and guidance of your experiences, and so they will remember you. The immortal legacies of ancient Israel, Greece, and China are embodied in their poems.

Finally, while you’re in that life raft and even after you reach land, you’re going to get bored. And how do you think you’ll amuse yourselves? If history is any guide, you’ll do it by telling stories and singing songs.

Therefore, let me finish with a story. I earlier mentioned the symbolism of the life raft during and after World War II. The longest known experience of people surviving in a lifeboat is of a group of 18 young American sailors, male and female, left floating in the South Pacific for 138 days after their ship had sunk in 1944. They started out with three life rafts that they strung together to make a kind of trimaran. After a while, their morale declined and they started to separate into groups. Four engineers—three guys and one girl—decided to leave the others behind as useless to their survival. They knocked off a philosophy major in their raft, cut their line to the others, and paddled off. After two days they managed to rig up a mast, a sail, and a rudder. After a couple of weeks, able to communicate only through equations, groans, and grunts, they got so bored with each other they jumped into the water and were eaten by sharks.

With the departure of the engineers, two biologists and a couple of chemistry majors decided they’d be better off teaming up and leaving the others behind. They did pretty well at first, knowing what kinds of fish, turtles, and seaweed they could safely eat raw—and the chemists rigged up a still to turn sea water into potable water for drinking as well as a whiskey distilled from algae. They lasted a couple of weeks but were picked up by a Japanese naval patrol. They were taken to a prisoner of war camp and demanded, on pain of death, to prove the value of their culture to the world, and to explain the influence of Japanese culture on modern American poetry, architecture, and visual art. Finally they were asked to interpret some haikus. You can guess how that went.

Of the remaining nine sailors, five girls and four guys, one was a biology major minoring in Japanese; one a double-major in English and pre-med; two were philosophy majors with particular interests in Kant and John Stuart Mill; there was also a classics major deeply into Alexander the Great, but she had a minor in math on the side just in case. There was a guy in industrial and labor relations who didn’t know what to do with himself in this company, and one girl who had majored in hotel administration but a closet poet. The other two were, believe it or not, English majors. The group never figured out how to put up a sail but managed to catch fish and collect rainwater for drinking. Having no idea what the future held in store, they amused themselves with stories, jokes, intellectual conversations, and safe consensual sex.

After 138 days, they landed on an uninhabited island. The philosophers drew up a democratic constitution but couldn’t get anyone else interested in it until the English majors rewrote it in a more lively style. Unanimity was achieved with seductive stories of free love in a future multiethnic society, enchanting poems praising the beauty and intelligence of the women, and fables of a fountain of youth just around the bend. These masterpieces by the English majors inspired the hotel student to design a resort around the concept with classical motifs—to appease the classics major, who missed the Temple of Zeus and the Roman sculptures in Goldwin Smith Hall—and the ILR student volunteered as assistant manager. They then had a month-long orgy and populated the island with well-rounded children of diverse talents and physical characteristics, and excellent skills in written and oral expression. And they called it, in honor of their alma mater—Cornell. Ladies and gentlemen, I am at your service!
Chair’s Letter continued from pg. 12

1) Understanding community — Our students have shown adept assessment of social contexts, immensely complicated interrelations, and the essential role of language in those.

2) Justice, in two senses — Our students have demonstrated an ability to sift difficult ethical problems and issues and to focus on doing justice to the past, literature, and their own and others’ ideas.

3) Deft analysis — Our students have displayed outstanding abilities in linking big issues to subtle details.

4) Compelling communication and sharing of all this — The center-point of all the rest.

5) Empathy — Every cultural, historical, and linguistic difference that our students have studied has given them keen abilities to grasp and sensitively articulate cultural differences and interactions.

6) Finally, persistence — Our students have worked long on many projects, persisting on difficult paths to an end that is also a beginning, which, by medieval academic tradition, we fittingly call a commencement.

As another year passes, I delight in our students’ continued commitment to these skills and values, keeping Cornell English the heady intellectual and artistic universe it has long been.

Andrew Galloway, Professor
Acting Chair, 2013–2014
Department of English

Klarman Hall Groundbreaking Ceremony, 23 May 2013
By Joanie Mackowski


Rejoice! We lean into the shovel, for the earth gives.
For humanity’s common ground yields more than human within us.
For we earthlings sprouted from earth, from one humble adamah, a sheath of loam the sun cast off winding the spring of time.
Rejoice! We raise the roof on the threshold and in the center, rounding our west full-circle to the east.
For we unite avocation and vocation as two eyes make one in sight; for this work is play for mortal stakes.
For we lean into the shovel to lean on a shovel or lean on an elbow or back in a chair to consider more reciprocal easts and wests, leanings and learnings, earthlings, starlings, us and vast.
For we’ve the confidence to welcome uncertainty’s principled and ductile evergreen horizon, and we build a stately mansion for our oversoul, and our undersoul and inter- and intrasoul: we plant soul’s kernel in this soil.
Rejoice! We stand the ground of peace. To live in a glass house, we let go the stone; we ply our bones and brains to intangible structures.
For we build a temple for contemplation, with a green roof: for good is as visible as green, and we strike the earth
To stand in the clear of Klarman Hall, a translucent clothing for sound habits of mind.
Rejoice! In our room of windows we’ll entertain the sun. For the sun teaches us to stretch beyond our reach, to be as guests in the lives of others.
For as all seedlings, we earthlings lean in to catch the sun’s drift, the news of our primal generator. For generosity (rain or shine)
Gravitates us toward the light. Generosity shelters us with a vegetable roof so we’re mindful of the ground and keeping the sky in proportion.

Notes:
Adamah is the Hebrew word in the Book of Genesis meaning “ground” or “earth,” and which Adam is sifted from.
“For we unite avocation and vocation” is borrowed from Robert Frost.
Here’s the final stanza of Frost’s poem “Two Tramps in Mud Time”:
My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight.
Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future’s sakes.

“And we build a stately mansion . . .” borrows from Oliver Wendell Holmes’s poem “The Chambered Nautilus,” which concludes:
Build thee more stately mansions,
O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life’s unresting sea!

“Good is as visible as green” is from John Donne’s “Community.”
Letter from the Chair

I’m delighted to have served as chair of English last year. This allowed me to reflect more widely on the intellectual and creative training, energy, and accomplishment that this department fosters. And not only faculty. Although this newsletter emphasizes the faculty’s impressive accomplishments, I wish here to reflect on the intellectual and creative work of our students, in terms of principles and values if not particulars.

Last May, I congratulated a graduating class who wrote senior theses on memory in Toni Morrison’s fiction; on race, biopower, and Jews in medieval literature; on modern physics in Virginia Woolf; on the influence of the Bible on Shakespeare and Marlowe; and many other topics. Among our PhDs, the range was similarly remarkable—dissertations focused on imperialism and tropical medicine in British literature; on print media in abolitionism; on lyrics; and many other topics. Our MFAs produced quantities of poetry and prose, gaining many awards.

I should, of course, name names, to do this properly. Writers and scholars rarely wish to disappear into literary and intellectual “context.” (I say this even as a specialist in medieval literature, whose authors, contrary to expectation, do not lack zeal for personal fame.) Yet what Cornell’s English alumni have graduated from is not just a set of particular teachers and fellow students, but a setting, defined by our close-knit interactions in the very center of beautiful Central New York and by an extraordinarily expansive discipline. As we wonder about the value of the humanities and the English major, we may reflect on the critical mass of that discipline, with its unpredictable but always extraordinary results and wider repercussions.

Does “English” boil down to any one skill-set? In his speech at last year’s Life Raft Debate, Professor George Hutchinson asked: “We all say we know English, so why do we need English professors?” His answer is reprinted in this newsletter: Language is the foundation of nearly all value, meaning, and community. But Professor Hutchinson’s view is not unique or simply academic. As Antonio Márez y Luna, the Chicano boy in Rudolfo Anaya’s visionary novel Bless Me, Ultima, says, when speaking of his English classes, “there was magic in the letters, and I had been eager to learn their secret.” A shepherd in seventh-century England, Cadmon, found the magic too. Stricken by embarrassment at an evening entertainment, Cadmon snuck away before it was his turn to sing, for he did not know any songs.

Falling asleep (so the monastic historian tells us), he dreamt an angel visited him and taught him a song about the creation of the world. In the eighth-century report of this, this constitutes the world’s first written English.

When the abbess discovered he could interpret what angels said, she gave him a full-time job of hearing the Latin Bible, chewing it in his mind “like some clean beast,” then translating it into Old English poetry, which the abbey’s scribes wrote down. With this, Cadmon was given the first known job of interpreting and translating English literature. She even made this shepherd into a monk. This was a job with tenure.

Few define their lives that fast. Nor need we. We know the challenges we face, from global competition to unpredictable economic, institutional, and political transformations. Just because Professor Hutchinson won the “lifeboat” contest doesn’t mean that English majors are safely on the lifeboat of life. But English students are unusually aware of how large and complex that sea is, and how many places there are to go. Thus rather than list English majors’ or doctoral recipients’ distinguished and creative careers, I itemize some of the skills and values that our students cultivate and display—translatable into a vast array of vocations.

continued on page 11