

# Friends of English

CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

SPRING 2011

## Sidonie Smith Welcomed Back to Her Alma Mater

Our big event this year was the homecoming on October 22 of **Sidonie Smith** (GRS '71) to speak on the memoir, and in particular the political memoir, in which one after another Presidential wannabe today is attempting to convert his/her "life" into money, message, and a conduit for voter attachment.

Sid is the Martha Guernsey Colby Collegiate Professor of English and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan, and was president of the Modern Language Association last year. She is "one of our university's most distinguished alums," **Roger Salomon**, who directed her dissertation, noted in his introduction. Sid has remained in close contact with the Salomons and the university over the years and was instrumental in establishing the Salomon dissertation fellowship.

The focus of Sid's talk was the best-selling autobiography *Living History* (2003) in which Hillary Clinton mobilized personal storytelling to persuade readers of her qualifications for a presidential bid. Sid explored the constellation of genres employed in this work to produce the effect of a "real Hillary" equipped to lead the nation – e.g., the *bildungsroman*, the feminist *bildungsroman*, the buddy narrative, the celebrity confession, the survivor narrative, and the war memoir. "It takes a whole village of genres," she concluded, and ended her talk by musing "what might Hillary's next book be and do?"

In addition to the University Circle community, friends of English from across the greater Cleveland area, including many former classmates, attended – **Carol Fox** (GRS '70, '72, LAW '05), **Robert Kekelik** (GRS '70), **Mike Partington** (GRS '67, LYS '68), and **Connie Sapin** (GRS '70), to name just a few. Lively reminiscing abounded at the reception. Throughout the event the second, 2010 edition of one of Sid's many books, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, was available for purchase.



Sidonie Smith and Roger Salomon.



Sidonie Smith and P.K. Saha.



Friends of English at Smith lecture. From left: Amy Kesegich, Judith Oster, Connie Sapin, and Mike Partington.

# Letter from the Chair

Mary Grimm

This year, 2010-11, was my second year as chair. If in the first year, I always felt as if I were barely keeping my head above the sea of paperwork, this year I can say I've learned how to float (not least since we're trying to move to a more paperless office!).

It's been a good year in many ways. We welcomed two new faculty members. **Michael Clune** is an Americanist whose reconceptualization of modern American literature in relation to economics, philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience has gained significant recognition in his field. **Jim Sheeler**, who is the new holder of the Shirley Wormser Professorship in Journalism, is a Pulitzer winner and a finalist for the National Book Award. His class on immersion journalism gives students a chance to experience the changing world of new media (see p.8).

We've also been joined for two years by internationally renowned playwright, **George Seremba**, at CWRU through a Creative Fusion Grant. His award-winning play, *Come Good Rain*, is an account of his torture under Amin and Obote, written after he was exiled from Uganda.

Three of our faculty have had books published in 2010. Three more have books coming out in Summer 2011 (see **Faculty Highlights**). And our faculty, lecturers, and grad students have presented papers and given talks on topics ranging from spies and **Roger Zelazny** ('59) to literary franchises and globalization, in conferences and venues across the nation and beyond.

The English Department has seen some innovations and improvements. Our grad students' teaching loads have been reduced—something that we've been working toward for some years, a significant benefit for our graduate program. The department initiated a series of colloquiums, directed by **Megan Jewell**, to showcase research being done by the faculty, lecturers, and grad students—these have been a great success. We've become more active in community outreach: the Community Writing Assistance Program (based at Cleveland Hts. Public Library), organized by **Rob McAlear**; **Sarah**



Faculty anticipate Sid Smith lecture. From left: Kenny Fountain, Mary Grimm, and Kurt Koenigsberger.

**Gridley's** service with the East Cleveland Parks Association in Forest Hill Park; as well as the Japan Relief Bake Sale spearheaded by grad student **Mary Assad**.

I'm hoping for an even better year in 2011-12.

## Faculty Highlights

**Kim Emmons'** *Black Dogs and Blue Words: Gender and Depression in the Age of Self-Care* (Rutgers UP, 2010) won the College English Association of Ohio's Nancy Dasher Book Award for 2011.

**Sarah Gridley** was awarded a Creative Workforce fellowship for her poetry by the Cuyahoga County Community Partnership for Arts and Culture.

**Kenny Fountain** received a John S. Diekhoff award for excellence in graduate teaching and mentoring; and **Athena Vrettos** was the recipient of a College of Arts & Sciences undergraduate teaching excellence award. **Michael Clune's** fall 2010 course "Forms of Life" was chosen by *The Daily Beast* as one of the twenty hottest college courses in the nation.

2011 saw the publication of **Martha Woodmansee's** *Making and Unmaking Intellectual Property: Creative Production in Legal and Cultural Perspective* (U Chicago P). Two additional books by department faculty are anticipated later this year: **Chris Flint's** *The Appearance of Print in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge UP); and **James Kuzner's** *Open Subjects: Renaissance Republicans, Modern Selfhoods and the Virtue of Vulnerability* (Edinburgh UP).

# Spotlight on Alumni

By Carrie Shanafelt (CWR '01, GRS '03)

Like many CWRU freshmen, I entered college with a perfectly clear idea of what I would do with my life. As I had repeated in a year's worth of applications, campus visits, and interviews, I was going to be a biochemist. If I had time, I would take a few courses in creative writing and film for fun, but I was dedicated to the pursuit of "real" research in the sciences.

The clarity of that distinction between research and pleasure melted away during my freshman year. I found myself increasingly drawn to the English department as I began to learn that the sciences did not hold exclusive rights to rigorous research or relevance to the world. By the time I completed my M.A. in English in 2003, I knew I wanted to go on to a Ph.D. program to study eighteenth-century literature.

I found a perfect fit at the City University of New York Graduate Center. The Graduate Center is the Ph.D.-granting institution of the huge CUNY college system, which includes community colleges, four-year colleges, and graduate programs all over the five boroughs. Most of the professors and students in the Graduate Center English program also teach at other CUNY campuses, where we work with students from everywhere in the world. It's a thrilling place to teach and learn.

My dissertation is an analysis of the rise of "common sense" as a rhetorical strategy in British and American philosophical, literary, and political texts of the eighteenth century. At CUNY, I have been encouraged to pursue research that engages other disciplines while deepening my understanding of the history and theory of literature in English.

While working toward my Ph.D., I have taught courses on the gothic novel, satire, children's literature, and Milton, in addition to composition, surveys of British and American literature, and methodological courses on poetic analysis. I have organized an interdisciplinary lecture series on the eighteenth century that draws scholars from all over the region, and have presented my own work on David Hume, Samuel Johnson, and Henry Fielding at MLA and American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies conferences.

This year, I will join the English department at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, as a Visiting Assistant Professor of eighteenth-century British literature. After eight years of living in Brooklyn, I will miss New York, but I am excited to begin working at this vibrant liberal arts college.

I think fondly of the six years I spent in the CWRU English Department, where I learned how to find work that mattered to me, and to do it well.

## Support English at CWRU

Student awards and fellowships, research funding, and important programs and events like the ones covered in this newsletter depend on support from our alumni and friends. We are enormously grateful for your donations in recent years and hope you will continue to help us build on our achievements. If you would like to make a gift to the department, you may use the enclosed envelope or donate online at <http://www.case.edu/giving/>.



Alumna Carrie Shanafelt (CWR '01, GRS '03)

# News from the Center for the Study of Writing

## Writing Week 2011

The Center for the Study of Writing mounted its third annual Writing Week April 8-15, welcoming to campus donors **Edward S. Sadar** (ADL '64, SOM '68) and **Melinda Melton Sadar** (FSM '66) to join in celebrating the importance and variety of writing produced at the university.

The centerpiece of Writing Week was again the Sadar lecture on writing in the disciplines, delivered this year by University of Chicago historian **Adrian Johns**, who spoke on Google's universal digital library project. In his lecture, "Creativity, Copyright, and the Universal Library: Romanticism and Writing at Times of Media Revolution," Johns explored the history of Google's ambitious digital storage and delivery project from its roots in the library of Alexandria up through the diverse and often astonishing frustrations Alexandrian aspirations encountered in the 18th and 19th centuries. The lecture attracted a wide spectrum of university constituencies, not least because it coincided with heated campus debate about the future direction of the CWRU libraries. The lecture was cosponsored by the Department of History, the CWRU Law School's Center for Law, Technology and the Arts, and the Kelvin Smith Library.

The week-long celebration also featured a poetry reading by **Jerome Rothenberg**, a talk by **Conor Grennan** about *Little Princes*, his recently published account of child trafficking in Nepal, and an evening of creative readings and performances by university faculty, students, and staff.



Donors **Ed and Melinda Sadar** at Adrian Johns' lecture.



Grad student **Michael Parker** and lecturer **Susan Dominguez** announce "Writing with the Stars" competition winners at the Writing Week showcase in Adelbert Gym.

Writing Week culminated in a daylong showcase of undergraduate research and writing across the CWRU disciplines. Once the exclusive domain of the natural sciences and engineering, this poster-style venue is now attracting students from "north of Euclid" in equal numbers, and this year many English students rose to the challenge to re-present their research and writing in formats other than the printed page. The student exhibits filled the old Adelbert Gym, turning it into a veritable Crystal Palace, and throughout the day a steady stream of faculty could be seen, upscale buffet lunch in hand, browsing aisle after aisle of colorful displays manned by young researchers eager to discuss their work.

## Interdisciplinary Dissertation Seminar to be Located in the Center for the Study of Writing

This year the Center for the Study of Writing welcomed the Arts & Sciences Dissertation Seminar into its administrative embrace. Developed by **Martha Woodmansee** with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in the mid 1990s, the program accepts up to twelve graduate students at an early stage of work on the dissertation to participate in a semester-long seminar devoted to discussion of one another's dissertation work and questions of method and purpose raised by humanistic scholarship.

Seminar participants are selected from among applicants working in CWRU's arts, humanities, and social science departments. A team of two faculty representing distinct methodologies directs the seminar. This year History professor **Kenneth Ledford** co-directed it with Martha.

The seminar's purpose is to speed students' transition from course work and qualifying exams to the kind of independent research and writing needed to complete a dissertation. "This can be a difficult transition," Martha noted, "especially for students in the humanities, where scholarly work still remains by and large individual and solitary." The seminar facilitates this transition by offering participants the collegiality and some of the structure of the graduate seminar – e.g., production deadlines, an opportunity to share and get feedback on their work, the obligation to engage critically and constructively with the work of their fellow students. Such cross-disciplinary exchange "develops participants' understanding of the methodologies of their own chosen disciplines," Martha pointed out, "and it gives them crucial practice explaining and defending their work in the larger arena of non-experts."

The dissertation seminar has supported the work of over 90 graduate students since its founding in 1996. Ideally, Center faculty believe, students should not have to teach simultaneously but should instead devote full attention to their research and writing while participating in the seminar. The Center will work with prospective donors to endow the seminar so that it can offer participants more substantial stipends.

## Keep in Touch

Next year, due to budget constraints, the English Department newsletter may go entirely electronic. Please send your email address to [mary.grimm@case.edu](mailto:mary.grimm@case.edu), so you will continue to receive news of English faculty, students, and alums. If you're not accessible by email, let us know--we'll try to send print copies.



The 2010-11 Dissertation Seminar. Clockwise from top left: Tiffany Washington (Art History), Seminar Supervisors Martha Woodmansee (English) and Kenneth Ledford (History), Emily Hess (History), Kelly St. Pierre (Music), Wells Addington (English), Danny Anderson (English), Joshua Terchek (Sociology), Sarah Tomasewski (Music), Indra Lacin (Art History), Nadia El-Shaarawi (Anthropology), Rebecca Siders (Sociology), Dana Cowen (Art History).



Alum **Susan Streeter Carpenter** (CWR '69) signs her 2010 novel *Riders on the Storm* at a Guilford House reading on November 17th. Susan went on to do a Ph.D. in English at the University of Cincinnati and now serves on the English faculty at Bluffton University. Her novel depicts the radical sixties on the CWRU campus.

# Undergraduate Corner

The department continues to take pride in the flexibility of its undergraduate major, which encourages students to define a focus of their choosing and to combine their English degree with a major or minors in related disciplines. And of course we continue to want to take (some of) the credit for their successes. There have been many this year. Two of the most noteworthy are **Fatima Espiritu**'s acceptance into the Creative Writing program at the University of Iowa, aka the Iowa Writers' Workshop; and **Brandon Mordue**'s acceptance into Harvard Law School.



Undergrad Fatima Espiritu (CWR '11).

**Fatima Espiritu** (CWR '11) cast an exceptionally wide net, double-majoring in English and Cognitive Science and minoring in Women's and Gender Studies and Anthropology while also finding the time to study Arabic. Fatima's passion is poetry, and she believes that to become a poet of consequence she needs as broad an education as possible. At the University of Iowa she hopes to continue her study of Arabic and possibly also delve into Physics in addition to – or better, in order to – continue to develop as a poet. She is especially eager to explore the opportunities that new and mixed media offer poets, and anticipates “using Internet technology, studio arts, and even the diagram-like formats derived from cognitive linguistics to build poems.” Fatima looks forward to the teaching obligations of her MFA program and contemplates becoming a professor of poetry.



Undergrad Brandon Mordue (CWR '11).

**Brandon Mordue** (CWR '11) double-majored in English and Political Science with a minor in Philosophy, and graduated with a 4.0 GPA despite having to work 20-30 hours/week. His penchant for pondering “substantive questions to which there may not be one correct answer” drove him from Chemistry to English, which he also credits for “honing his analytic and writing skills.” For his senior project Brandon worked on the cyberpunk novelist William Gibson, whose *Neuromancer* he re-situated in the dystopian tradition of E.M. Forster and Aldous Huxley. Brandon is not yet sure what area of the law he will specialize in at Harvard, but he senses that the activist spirit at the root of his fascination with dystopian fiction may eventually lead him to a career in politics.

Whatever their focus, whether in literary history, creative writing,

or composition and communication, our majors come together in a senior capstone seminar in which they meet weekly throughout the semester to workshop their individual projects. These can range from the creation of a chapbook, screenplay or graphic novelette to an investigation of the interplay of narcissism and synesthesia in Joyce's *Ulysses*, the function of Chinglish in the novels of Amy Tan, or the role of time in *High Noon*. Milestones like submission of the penultimate draft depicted at right are regularly celebrated at nearby bars and cafes.



A Mi Pueblo celebration of the penultimate draft in Martha Woodmansee's senior capstone seminar. Clockwise from top left: Xiaofei (Sophie) Zhou, Brennon Ham, Jon Backmann, Shaun Bell, and Libby Kannard.

# Alumni News

On November 4 double alum **Mark Irwin** (CWR '74, GRS '82) returned to campus to give a poetry reading. Mark, who divides his time between Los Angeles and a house he built in Colorado, is an associate professor of English and creative writing at the University of Southern California. He is the author of seven volumes of his own poetry and two books of translation from French and Romanian. Mark received his B.A. with majors in English and modern languages from CWRU in 1974, and then, after doing a couple of master's degrees (Montpelier, the Iowa Writer's Workshop), he returned to campus to complete a Ph.D. in comparative literature in 1982, under the direction of **Walter Strauss** and **Bob Wallace**.

For Mark the event was a double homecoming. In the 1980s he had taught in the liberal arts department at the Cleveland Institute of Art, which co-sponsored the reading. The reading was attended by faculty and students from both institutions in roughly equal proportions. Reading from four of his books, Mark snared his listeners with a seeming informality of tone that frequently led them to darker and more profound philosophic questions. In part because of the mix of artists and literary scholars in the audience, the reading provoked unusually intense discussion, auguring well for future synergies between the department and the creative writing concentration that Joyce Kessler (GRS '90) has been developing at CIA.

## In Memoriam: Frederica Andrea Ward (1962-2010)



Frederica Andrea Ward (1962-2010).

The department had been looking forward to honoring **Freddy Ward** at a retirement party scheduled for October 8 when we learned of her death on September 30. The news came as a terrible shock. Freddy had served as the department's Administrative Assistant for more than seventeen years. Sadly, her retirement celebration became a memorial service, held in the Guilford House parlor on November 5.

The tone was set by chair **Mary Grimm** who, in her welcoming remarks, urged our Guilford House community to grieve Freddy's loss by celebrating a “life well lived.” To Freddy the department was in a very real sense an extended family. She brought the kind of heart to her work that only a mother or a special aunt might. In his reminiscences **Gary Stonum** likened her to a cherished “den mother.” Freddy knew each of us, graduate and undergraduate students included, inside and out, suffered our diverse “mood swings,” as she privately termed our charming foibles, with patience and generosity, and tended to our every individual need – except when she was “working on the budget.” In a word, she loved us. She sheltered us from the enlightened despotism of the upper administration in Crawford and Adelbert halls -- and from ourselves. English departments elsewhere are legend for their dissension, Gary reminded us, but here we could count on Freddy to keep the peace. She was our social glue. She made Guilford House a home.

Readers who did not know Freddy may fancy this hyperbole. But the formula was really quite simple, as **Brad Ricca**, speaking for several generations of graduate students, explained: Freddy's overwhelming humanity. “I watched her greet everyone who walked through her door with a warm smile.” It was infectious -- as was her laugh, **Athena Vrettos** recalled. Freddy's capacity for laughter “brought out our own,” and in this way she extinguished all of the little fires of doing business before they could rage out of control. To Freddy these represented essentially trivial disruptions of our essential family peace – as evoked in **Bill Siebenschuh**'s depiction of her sometimes frustrating telephonic interactions with Crawford or Adelbert. Raising her eyebrows in disbelief, Freddy would hold the phone receiver out as if inviting him to “listen to this.” Her healthy perspective on what mattered, and didn't, Bill said, is what sustained him when he was department chair.

## Share Your News

If you have news you would like to share in a future newsletter, please send it to department chair **Mary Grimm** (mary.grimm@case.edu).

The department also has a Facebook page growing apace on which several hundred of your classmates and profs are already sharing their news. Just use your Facebook locator to go to the “CWRU English Department” and see what they've been up to. And above all, become a member of the community and post your own news. We want to know. The department will be posting here regularly too--news of Friends of English events, guest lectures, readings, and links to podcasts.

# In Memoriam continued from page 7

It could not always have been easy for her, **Thrity Umrigar** reminded us, for Freddy had more than her fair share of illness to bear, and she also had a rich, independent life of her own to live. Freddy was at root an artist. In addition to contributing to her church community, she was an ardent participant in the Cleveland arts scene, its poetry and fiction readings and jazz concerts in particular, and she loved above all to read and write. Until her health began to fail she regularly audited or enrolled in literature and creative writing courses, with an eye to sharing and receiving feedback on her poems and short stories, amassing nearly enough credits to complete her B.A. The accomplishment Freddy was proudest of, as her sister Vicki Ward Oliver divulged at the memorial service, was her publication in the premier African American literary journal *Callaloo* of an excerpt from a novel she was working on, *Misty Waters* (Vol. 20, Nr. 3 [Summer 1997], pp. 584-596). Freddy subsequently continued to work on the novel in several courses with Mary Grimm. Freddy's life was too short but it was rich and well lived.

Our department is grateful for Freddy's life, and diminished by losing her. She will remain a member of our family, and a part of each of us.

A minority scholarship fund is being established in Freddy's name. We invite all whose lives were touched by her to contribute. We can think of no tribute that would have pleased her more.

## Mark Your Calendar

On Friday, October 14, 2011, the English department will host a Think Forum with **Jim Sheeler** as part of CWRU's Alumni Weekend. As a Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper reporter Jim Sheeler regularly immersed himself in the lives of people whose stories were often overlooked. As the Wormser Professor of Journalism and Media Writing, he spent the past year immersing his students in those same lives--including a semester spent collecting stories at a local inner-city nursing home. In his multimedia presentation Professor Sheeler will showcase his students' work.



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