

NOT JUST LETTERS

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY | DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH | SPRING 2011

Mason Hosts International Writing Conference

More than 600 writing scholars from 38 countries will be coming to Fairfax this winter when Mason hosts the fourth annual International Conference on Writing Research. "Writing Research Across Borders II," the second of these conferences with a distinct international focus, takes place February 17–20.

The University of California-Santa Barbara hosted the first three conferences, which are held every three years. The decision to relocate the program across the country was in part driven by **Professor Paul Rogers**, who helped organize the two previous gatherings and who himself relocated from one coast to the other.

"When I came to Mason, I wanted to move the conference to the East Coast, as well, to reach out to the East Coast more," Rogers explains. "We wanted a broader geographical representation than we've had before, and we actually have that."

Rogers stresses that Mason is also the perfect place for such a meeting because of its longstanding reputation as a center for excellence in this area. As support, he cites a proposed new PhD in Public Rhetorics and Writing Programs; the longstanding accomplishments of the Northern Virginia Writing Project (NVWP), which Rogers will soon lead; and the national reputation of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program, recently recognized by *U.S. News & World Report* for the ninth year in a row as one of the nation's best.

"While the conference precedes the launch of our doctoral program, it does bring

another level of attention to our faculty's work in this direction," says Rogers. "The support, participation, and contributions of **Doug Eyman, Don Gallehr, Susan Lawrence, Shelley Reid, Eve Wiederhold, and Terry Zawacki** to planning the conference help draw attention to the university and give visibility to our emerging programs."

Many sessions will focus on K–12 education—the focus of the NVWP. The National Writing Project (NWP) will hold its annual meeting two days before the Mason conference, so that members of its research consortium can attend both events. As for the WAC angle, Zawacki, who directs the program at Mason, echoes the strength of the partnership.

"Having the conference at Mason definitely enhances our already strong WAC reputation," adds Zawacki, who has orga-

nized two back-to-back panels on writing center research with presenters from seven countries. "I'm excited about chairing these panels because the presenters' research shows how integral writing centers are to WAC goals. In fact, for most of the international presenters (China, Sweden, United Kingdom, Ireland, and Lebanon), the writing center is the place where WAC happens."

The international component stands as a conference highlight, one that Rogers says is the most fun and most engaging for most participants.

"The circumstances are local for teaching," Rogers says. "But then when you share what you're doing across these borders, I think those differences are really what makes this conference so rich."

Continued on page 3

Eric Johnson and Open Source Shakespeare

Quick. How many times does the word "magic" appear in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*? And how many references to "mother" appear in *Hamlet*?

If you went to your bookshelf and took down that large volume of Shakespeare's complete works, you probably would have a long day ahead of you. If, instead, you went to Open Source Shakespeare, a website created by **Eric Johnson**, MA '05, as part of his master's thesis, your search would take mere milliseconds. (By the way, the answers, respectively, are 3 and

46.) Open Source Shakespeare is just one of the websites that have gained Johnson national and international attention.



Eric Johnson

Better news? There's more to come, with Mason's English Department at the heart of some potentially groundbreaking initiatives.

Continued on page 7

SAVE THE DATE

Homecoming Weekend, Feb. 4-6
alumni.gmu.edu/homecoming/

New Leaves Writers' Conference, March 31–April 1
creativewriting.gmu.edu

FROM THE CHAIR

I recently heard about a new website, sponsored by the great Oxford English Dictionary, called "Save the Words" (www.savethewords.org). On this website one can adopt rarely used words such as *historiaster* (a bad historian) or *riviation* (fishing) by promising to use the word regularly in writing and conversation. The website got me thinking. What are the Mason English Department faculty's favorite words? So I asked.

Professor Devon Hodges likes two words she only hears together, *snickets* and *ginnels*. These words, still regularly used in England, refer to paths between hedges or fences (snickets) and between high walls (ginnels). Professor Hodges likes these words because they describe a tradition in England of paths that cross through private property, allowing walkers or cyclists to avoid busy roads. Of course, she says, she also likes how the two words sound.

Sound is also what **Professor Jennifer Atkinson** likes about words she calls doubles, such as *roly-poly*, *ping-pong*, *hodgepodge*, *tutti-frutti*, *bric-a-brac*. She also likes words such as *ruly* (orderly), *kempt* (combed), *whelm* (to cover or bury), *ruth* (pity). Because these words are typically encountered only in their negative versions (for example, unruly), she enjoys the surprise of using of their far rarer, positive roots. And she wants to keep them rare! "Greedy, I want them undimmed for myself."

Professor David Kuebrich likes the funny image produced by *chinfest*, which means an informal discussion. He enjoys the idea of chins having a good time. **Professor Winnie Keaney** likes to think about word origins. One of the department's medievalists, she notes that a favorite phrase of hers, *willy-nilly* (without choice or randomly), comes from the Middle English "wil he, nil he," meaning, "will he or will he not."

Others admire words for their precision. **Professor Denise Albanese** mentions *transmogrify*, which means not just to transform but to transform into something grotesque. **Professor Roger Lathbury** notes *adventitious*, which means something added from without. He calls it a beautiful, exact word. And **Professor Amelia Rutledge** likes *temerity* (excessive boldness). "What I found—and still find—striking is the rightness of the word...", she says. "Temerity" conveys a nuance of decorum and, unlike 'rash' or 'bold,' is almost never used positively."

All these choices remind me why people care about words. Some are windows into different places and ways of living. Some provide access to ideas or feelings that we otherwise could not describe so precisely. Some remind us of how concepts evolve from particular human experiences. Some words are surprising, and some just fun. We are lucky that the tools by which we communicate can also make a sort of music.

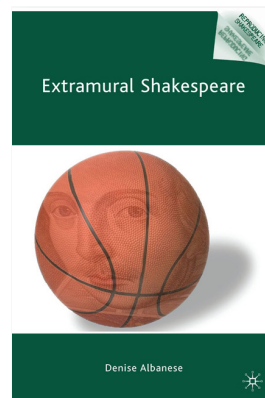
Those of us who are students or teachers of English share a love of words. So I invite you to go to the Save the Words site and adopt one. If you enjoy words and enjoyed your time in the English Department studying them, I also invite you to consider donating to the department. To contribute, go *yare*—don't *penelopize*—to english.gmu.edu/support, and follow the instructions on that page. Your donation will support the English Department mission to save the words—and celebrate them.

Robert Matz
Chair, English Department

Not Just Letters is produced by the English Department and distributed to alumni twice a year. The newsletter is edited by **Art Taylor**, MFA '06 and assistant professor of English, and **Bill Miller**, MFA '87, director of the Graduate Writing Program, and director of Fall for the Book.

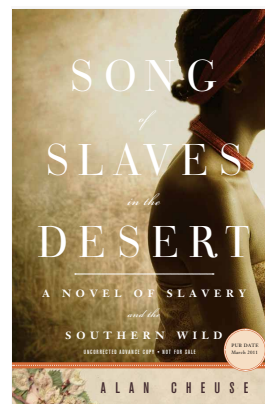
FACULTY NEWS

Here we celebrate the English Department faculty's awards, honors, publications, and presentations.



Denise Albanese's *Extramural Shakespeare*, which examines Shakespeare's place in American culture in the new millennium, was published this fall by Palgrave Macmillan.

Eric Anderson's "The Presence of Early Native Studies: A Response to Stephanie Fitzgerald and Hilary E. Wyss" was jointly published in *American Literary History's* summer 2010 issue and *Early American Literature's* 2010 issue. Anderson also delivered the paper "Reading and Writing Earthworks: Architectonics of the Native South" at the Modern Language Association conference in Los Angeles in January 2011.



Alan Cheuse's new novel, *Song of Slaves in the Desert*, will be published in mid-March by Sourcebooks. He also has a novella, "When the Stars Threw Down Their Spears and Water'd Heaven with their Tears," forthcoming in

The Idaho Review, and a short story, "Nailed!" forthcoming in the online magazine of the Center for Fiction. Cheuse served as guest editor for a special section on the contemporary short story around the world in the latest issue of *World Literature Today*. The issue features essays by Cheuse and Mason MFA student **Nicole Lee**, as well as a Danish short story translated by former MFA student **K. E. Semmel**.

Ben Doller's *Dead Ahead* was named a notable book of 2010 by the Academy of American Poets.

In August, **John Burt Foster** presented a paper, "Yourcenar, Orwell, Nabokov: Writing Conflict on the Eve of World War II," at the triennial conference of the International Comparative Literature Association in Seoul,

Continued on page 3

Faculty News,

continued from page 2

Republic of Korea. At that meeting, he was elected the association's English-language secretary. Foster also has an article, "Memory in the Literary Memoir," appearing in the interdisciplinary volume *The Memory Process: Neuroscientific and Humanistic Perspectives* (MIT Press). He gave a paper on this topic at the 2011 Modern Language Association conference, where he also chaired the panel "Tolstoy in the Long Twentieth Century, 1890–2010," marking the centennial of Tolstoy's death in November 1910.

Recently, a revised and expanded edition of **Stephen Goodwin's** *Dream Golf: The Making of Bandon Dunes* was published, with a new section on the building of Old Macdonald, a back-to-the-future golf course on the high dunes of the south Oregon coast.

Erika Lin received a 2010–11 College of Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty Research and Development Award for her project, *Theatre, Games, and Sports: A Seventeenth-Century Treatise*. She also presented a plenary paper, "Re-creating the Eye of the Beholder: Dancing and Spectacular Display in Early Modern English Theatre," at the American Society for Theatre Research conference in Seattle in November.

"When you can no longer dwell in the solitude of your heart," a poem by **Sarah Marcus**, was published in the *Cimarron Review's* summer 2010 issue.

Robert Matz's essay "The Scandals of Shakespeare's Sonnets" was published in summer 2010 in the journal *ELH: English Literary History*.

Writing Conference,

continued from page 1

While freshman composition courses are a staple of U.S. universities, no equivalent exists widely in European settings, for example. The same is true of journaling as a writing tactic. But Rogers notes that European studies of writing are often more methodologically sophisticated, for example, using hand–eye motion studies that follow a writer's eye and his or her typing, to help understand the writing process at a finer level. "We can each learn from the other," he says.

Thanks to a previous iteration of this conference, scholars are also learning about writing research in China, of which little has been known in the West until recently.

ENGLISH FACULTY EARN TOP UNIVERSITY HONORS

Two members of the department's MFA faculty earned high distinction from Mason in 2010.

Alan Cheuse was the 2010 recipient of the Award for Scholarship from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Begun in 1996, these annual awards recognize outstanding faculty members whose work has played an important role in the advancement of their disciplines and who are widely known as first-rate scholars and speakers.

Courtney Brkic was one of three Mason faculty members selected this year to receive Emerging Researcher, Scholar, Creator Awards, each including a \$3,000 stipend. Presented in November, the awards honor young faculty who have earned national and international recognition for their works.

In October, **Ellen Moody** presented "People That Marry Can Never Part: An Intertextual Reading of the Gothic in *Northanger Abbey*" at the Jane Austen Society of America's annual general meeting in Portland, Oregon. Moody then presented a shorter version of the paper at the East-Central American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies in Pittsburgh.

Paul Rogers will take over as director of the Northern Virginia Writing Project (NVWP) in July 2011 when Don Gallehr steps down. The NVWP recently received two research grants from the National Writing Project.

Cathy Saunders, Lisa Koch, and Jessie Matthews organized the fall meeting of the DC-Area Chapter of the Society for the Study of American Women Writers. The daylong meeting, held at the College of William and Mary on November 13, focused on the various ways that women's poetry circulated in the 18th-century, ranging from book publication to broadsides to manuscripts and commonplace books. Common readings for the discussion

included Phillis Wheatley's 1773 Poems and a group of her broadsides, as well as the hybrid print-manuscript poems of Virginia writer Margaret Lowther Page.

Art Taylor's short story, "A Voice from the Past," was shortlisted for this year's *Best American Mystery Stories* anthology.

Three works by **Terry Myers Zawacki** have been published: "Addressing Writing in the Disciplines: Challenges and Advice" in *The Bedford Handbook Instructors Annotated Seventh Edition*; "Will Our Stories Help Teachers Understand?" *Multilingual Students Talk about Identity, Voice, and Expectations across Academic Communities*, co-written with Anna Sophia Habib, in *Reinventing Identities in Second Language Writing*; and "Voices at the Table: Balancing the Needs and Wants of Program Stakeholders to Design a Value-added Writing Assessment Plan," co-written with **Shelley Reid**, Ying Zhou, and Sarah Baker, in *Across the Disciplines: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Language, Learning, and Academic Writing*.

"A visiting scholar from China came to our last conference in Santa Barbara," Rogers says. "A few of us asked what was happening with research on writing in China. She didn't know, but she went back and completed a big review, which hadn't been done before. Following similar terms for other scientific studies, such as sociology or anthropology, the Chinese now refer to this new field as writingology."

Another focus of the conference will be on a lifespan approach to learning writing, contrary to potential assumptions that might limit that education to school years. "What the research shows is that people continue to learn to write throughout their professional trajectories," says Rogers. "People who are in their late 20s and

beyond continue to learn to write in specific genres—a bank report, for example—and try to solve these higher level tasks both intellectually and rhetorically. For professionals, whatever your prep is, when you go into industry or nonprofits or government, there are particulars in each of those settings."

More information, including registration information, is available at www.writing.ucsb.edu/wrconf11. Please note that graduate students, K–12 teachers, adjunct faculty, and Mason faculty are all eligible for the discount rate of \$170. Anyone interested in volunteering for the conference should contact Rogers directly at progers2@gmu.edu.

Susan Tichy Draws on Personal Past for Ambitious New Project

In the 1650s, **Susan Tichy**'s earliest immigrant ancestor, a Highland Scot named Alexander Magruder, arrived in Maryland as a prisoner of war and was sold into indentured servitude. When Magruder died a quarter-century later, he owned one slave, four indentured servants, and 1,200 acres of what had been native land.

His descendants became tobacco planters and slaveholders. A little more than a century later, they also became descendants of Clan Gregor, one of the most famous and storied clans in Scottish history. King James VI (James I of England) outlawed the name MacGregor, threatening anyone bearing it with death. Any four MacGregors gathering in one place was considered a rebellion against the crown. Hundreds were executed, and more deported. Daniel Defoe wrote about Clan Gregor, as did Sir Walter Scott in *Lady of the Lake* and *Rob Roy*, about the famous outlaw folk hero.

Tichy, a poet and a professor of creative writing at Mason, recently began work again on *Trafficke: An Autobiography*.

The long-term project explores how her personal history and the history of her immediate family fit into this larger history of an entire people that stretches back more than 300 years. But it's not simply the chronological scope of the subject matter that has made *Trafficke* such an ambitious project or the complex interweaving of genres—verse,

lyric prose, historical narrative—that has offered the greatest challenge. Coming to terms with the hotly contested discrepancies within the family's history and positioning herself in relation to shifting ideas about who she is and where she came from has been more difficult.

Speaking of her upbringing, Tichy says, "Asserting your MacGregor identity was a way of declaring that we had survived,"

but she stresses that the key phrase above, 'became descendants,' is an important one. "As far as any serious researcher can tell, American Magruders invented this connection to Clan Gregor for themselves, unknown among Scottish McGruders."

That revelation is relatively new and has shifted the direction of Tichy's project and her understanding of her family and herself. Tichy's great-grandfather was a founding member of the American Clan Gregor Society. Her grandmother and mother were both registrars, keeping all the genealogical records. Her father, who married into the family, became assistant chieftain. And Tichy herself serves as the scholarship chair for the group. As a child, she loved the romance of the stories, and as a young adult she delved into the society's archives, reading books, taking notes, laying out genealogies.

Increasingly, Tichy's thoughts and feelings on the topic became "like Swiss cheese," she says. "There were things that weren't said, stories that weren't told. A lot of it was denial in my immediate family about slavery. Those feelings disturbed me."

TRAFFICKE IS NOT JUST
A COLLAGE OF GENRES
BUT VERY PURPOSEFULLY
A COLLAGE OF VOICES,
AS WELL, DRAWING ON MORE
THAN 200 SOURCES TO
PRESENT THE MANY SIDES
OF THIS LARGE HISTORY.

From 1994 to 2000, motivated by these concerns, Tichy made her first attempt at the project.

"I wrote all of this one time believing we were MacGregors," she says. "The project was begun to connect the Scottish past with the American history of native displacement and slavery. Then the exact nature of our

Scottish past came into question, so I set it aside while DNA research on the families was completed."

The American Clan Gregor Society, to which Tichy still belongs, officially discounts the scientific studies that undermine their genealogical claims. Though Tichy accepts those studies, she admits that she mourned that the family's connection to the romance was not true. But the

battle over those claims, the lure of that romanticized past, and her own mourning are central to how Tichy is revisiting and revising her work.



Susan Tichy

"The book has to do with identity and finding out that your identity is false," Tichy says. "A big chunk of what I wrote before has to be taken out. I want to ask how this story got started, what it means to people who believe it. And the question of racial ideology needs to be readdressed, the connections between the invention of a romantic Scottish past and the history of the Lost Cause"—the reinterpretation of Southern slaveholders' history in equally romanticized terms.

Trafficke is not just a collage of genres but very purposefully a collage of voices, as well, drawing on more than 200 sources to present the many sides of this large history. Tichy intends the book to work on several levels for several kinds of readers.

"There is a factual narrative line," she says. "People who want to read that and de-emphasize the lyric parts can do so. But those who focus on speaker and language can breeze through the more factual stuff, using it as a platform for the lyric performance. In both parts of the text, language acts as a bridge between thoughts, a place where contradictory ideas can exist simultaneously."

In the 1990s, excerpts from *Trafficke* appeared in *Indiana Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Quarter After Eight*, and other journals. Tichy hopes to submit the full manuscript to her publisher in 2012. Once the book is completed, Tichy plans a website, as well, detailing her research and the personal journey it sparked.

Such "dual reading possibilities," as Tichy calls them, offer abundant chances for more readers to explore this provocative work that is not just decades, but ultimately centuries in the making.

Off the Clock: Steven Weinberger

EXCERPT FROM *TRAFFICKE: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*

By Susan Tichy

Alexander sumtyme MacGregor, of Clan Skilled, Clan Landless, robbed of Election, possessed of employment, arrived a prisoner of war. After five years at hard labor, bondsmen might receive freedom and *headright* to fifty acres—prisoners and immigrants, alike, indentured to the promise. New men were sold, then left to season a few months in the lethal climate. And if he survived? Each man *come out of his time* had first to *find* his fifty acres, pay the surveyor and the clerk. Fifty acres, without labor—worth less than a good cow. Tobacco, the only cash crop, required three men to turn ten acres to use, with one expected to die before the harvest. Debts payable in days of work, collectible from a dead man. To *own labor*—that was wealth. Importers of men earned their own *headrights*, or a thousand pounds (tobacco), on each man or woman. But a seasoned hand brought twice as much, for he was less likely to die. Only one jail in the colony. For criminals, debtors, rescued defectors—brought back from refuge with the Indians—any accused of infraction: punishment was not confinement but bondage: indenture could be extended into smoke.

elegance of conviction
indented document
He spake of the temple of his body

trafficke in human boundary
reddendum

Old TVs and computers. Broken wristwatches and defunct calculators. Vacuum tubes, diodes, stray memory chips. A 60s-era light bulb. An old bowling trophy. Bits of wire.

What some might consider junk, **Professor Steven Weinberger** sees as art—both the raw material for pieces he's been creating since his graduate school days 20 years ago and, in many cases, works of graceful design in and of themselves.

"There's a hidden beauty in every circuit," he says, pointing to the intricate design inherent in a single component of one of his finished works. "People who use them might not find them beautiful, might see them as only utilitarian, the same as with the inside of computers, but others see them as curiosities and see the beauty within."

Weinberger's artwork ranges in size and scope. At the smaller end of the scale, he has made brooches from vacuum tubes and earrings from tiny carpenter's levels, fuses, or typewriter keys. One of his largest constructions is five feet tall and just as wide. Most of his work lies somewhere in between: small frames with an amalgamation of parts, many of them interactive, lighting up, buzzing, or beeping, all at the push of a button. One even has a remote control.

"There are different levels of creativity to each of the pieces," Weinberger explains. "One of these might come from six different sources: transistors, resistors, diodes, half a memory chip, a battery, a light bulb. I like to mix things from different eras, then I solder the separate components together."

The parts come from a variety of places. Weinberger subscribes to major surplus catalogs and once made regular trips to surplus stores in lower Manhattan. He gets frames from antique stores. "You can never have too many," he says.

And these days, he has a helper for gathering



Steven Weinberger

material: his 8-year-old son, who brings home things he's found on the playground and helps scout out material on "Junk Day," each Friday when father and son walk to school.

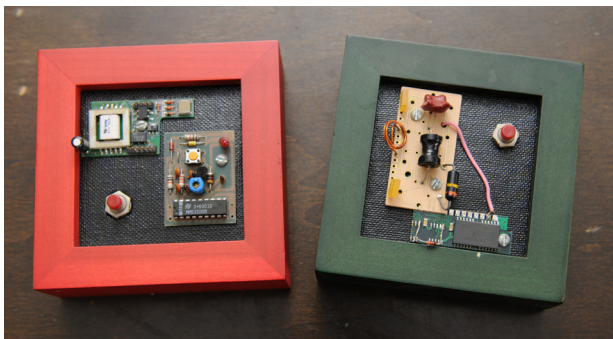
Weinberger's interest in building dates back to his own boyhood. "Every toy I had was immediately taken apart," he says. "But I'd never put them back together. Instead, I'd make something else out of the pieces. My parents called me an inventor."

In graduate school, what began as a diversion took on semiprofessional dimensions. "I had a small space in a store in a tony section of Seattle, and I sold stuff, mostly pins, for charity."

In the years since, demand for Weinberger's art has grown substantially. His work has been featured in gallery shows in Seattle, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C.; he has received commissions from collectors; and he is frequently asked to donate pieces for charity auctions. He currently has a studio and gallery space in Takoma Park, Maryland, but may move his studio to his home to allow easier access and more time for his art.

"I wish I had more time," he says. "When you're running a PhD program and an MA and undergraduate concentration, it's tough to find the time to gather and create and promote. There are months when I won't make anything, and other times when I become quite prolific."

But now, as throughout the years, Weinberger is driven less by commercial demands than by curiosity and the creative impulse. "When I'm inspired," he says, "I work."



English Alumna Earns Fulbright to Italy

Lauren-Claire Kelley, BA '10, recently earned a Fulbright Scholarship in a dream destination: the town of Matera in southern Italy. In addition to pursuing a degree in English at Mason, Kelley also studied Italian with Kristina Olson. In early October, she began a nine-month stint on the other side of the desk, balancing both sides of that language divide. She is now an assistant teacher of English at two Italian high schools, shuttling back and forth between the *liceo scientifico* (a school for students who intend to study science at university) and the *liceo classico* (for students who intend to study the humanities). While hopping from class to class (in Italy the teachers change rooms while the students stay put), Kelley has had limited Internet access, but she did indulge us a few questions via e-mail in late November about her experience so far.

NJL: What does a normal day consist of? And what's been your favorite classroom experience?

Kelley: It is difficult to describe a normal day at the schools, because I teach eight different classes and at least six different topics. Very often I grab five minutes between classes to finalize lesson plans with my master teachers, which can change during the class because of the inspiration of the moment.

Perhaps the easiest way to respond to this question is to describe my experience in one class, 5A (*la quinta A*). Without a doubt, our work on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* has been my favorite. The 5A has arrived at its last year at the *liceo scientifico*. At 17 to 18 years old, they are a delightfully zany group, motivated, lively, and creative, if a little nervous sometimes because they are facing final exams. This past month, we analyzed *Pride and Prejudice*'s famous first chapter and its sixth chapter. Besides performing a basic linguistic analysis, necessary because they are not native speakers, we discussed *Pride and Prejudice* as a novel of manners.

I am so proud of these students. Even if many struggle with Austen's language, they speak intelligently of her use of irony and characterization to convey her attitude toward social conventions of the period. We compared the opening scenes in the most recent film versions, that with Kiera Knightley and that with Colin Firth, and I am pleased to report that most of the class was horrified by the Knightley version. Such was the enthusiasm of this class for literature that we founded a book club, which meets every Saturday afternoon. Last week, we had our first meeting, during



which we had tea *all'inglese*, as they say, and analyzed the second chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*. We have yet to decide whether we will focus on Austen or read other authors.

NJL: What's been the biggest surprise about living in Italy?

Kelley: The thing that I love about living in Italy is that everything is a surprise. I am never bored. There is always something to learn, even if I am just shopping for food. Rarely, do I run errands without falling into conversation with the employees. The Materani are always eager to share information about their city or whatever product I am examining. Perhaps one of the most surprising things I have learned thus far has been how welcoming the Materani are. I was surprised by how readily the people here invite me for coffee or try to ease my transition into Italian life, whether by giving me extra hangers when I buy clothes or slipping some extra parsley in my shopping bag.

NJL: What's been the biggest change in you since your arrival?

Kelley: It may be too soon to say, but I have noticed that I am much more relaxed about scheduling. I have also grown used to working on the spur of the moment, even if I spent hours the night before preparing a lesson. I can change a lesson plan on the spot if my colleagues introduce a new idea or the students don't respond to the material. "Plan so that you can improvise" is my new motto.

NJL: How has your time at Mason contributed to your work in this new setting?

Kelley: If I had not studied with Dr. [Kristina] Olson and had a wonderful experience in her Italian 250 class, I would not be here. Furthermore, I would not desire to teach. Every day in class, I try use many of the techniques that I learned while observing Dr. Olson: pacing my explanation according to the level of the student, taking every opportunity to point out idiomatic expressions, keeping the students from always working in the same groups, and always, always, acknowledging when the work is difficult and letting the student know that I appreciate his or her efforts.

NJL: What do you hope to take into the next stage of your life from your Fulbright experience?

Kelley: I love teaching and cannot imagine a better career than being a professor of Italian; however, I hope to spend at least another year in Italy before going to graduate school. I want to stay not only to learn the language, but also to determine my focus in graduate school. Should I study Italian language and the teaching of Italian, or should I study Italian literature? If the latter, which era or author? In the meantime, I do know that from my Fulbright experience I hope to take increased creativity, whether for preparing lesson plans or dealing with real-life situations, and an enriched appreciation for what it means to be a global citizen.

For more updates on Kelley's Fulbright experiences, visit her blog at letteredallitalia.blogspot.com.

Eric Johnson,

continued from page 1

Johnson first had the idea for Open Source Shakespeare in 2001, when he was working at the *Washington Times* (initially in web design and then contributing theater reviews) and pursuing a master's degree at Mason. Though he enjoyed looking up quotes from Shakespeare's plays on the web, he was surprised to find the lack of a single comprehensive and accessible Shakespeare site online.

"The ones that were comprehensive were not free, and the free ones were not comprehensive," he wrote in his thesis, adding that even the best of these was not searchable and easy to use—seemingly a must for scholars at all levels.

So he set out to build it himself.

And if that doesn't seem like enough of a challenge, Johnson did it in the middle of the desert, a Marine reservist trying to keep his laptop from getting dusty.

"I was one of the first folks in Iraq in 2003 and then was redeployed to Kuwait in 2003," Johnson said in a recent interview. "As we waited to return home, I found myself with time on my hands."

The site he created has a number of benefits for Shakespeare scholars, college students, casual readers, and both theatergoers and the actors.

"What I really wanted was to create something useful for a broad range of users," he explained. "The concordance helps users choose a key word in a soliloquy, for example, and then find how Shakespeare used that word elsewhere in the play—or in any of the plays. And there's another feature for actors learning lines: they can simply see all the lines from the character they're playing, plus the cue lines."

The site has received high marks from scholars, including a rave review in *Shakespeare Quarterly's* fall 2010 issue. And it has grown in popularity, as well. Four years ago, the site welcomed about 8,000 visitors a month, except in March 2010, when it topped 75,000 in a single month. Open Source Shakespeare has hosted more than 1.8 million visitors since June 2006.

"Traffic goes up and down depending on the time of year," says Johnson. "Spring is usually big because of students, then it's

fallow in summer when they're out of school."

Johnson continues to refine the site: a mobile version debuted in mid-2009, for example, and future developments will include incorporation of social media.

In addition to his work on this project, Johnson has gone on to make headlines in other areas. While working in the State Department's Office of eDiplomacy, he spearheaded the development of Diplopedia, an internal database of articles about political leaders, business issues, and more to serve the diplomatic corps. As with Wikipedia, the site allows users not just to access information, but to add their own—a move that initially prompted security concerns but that now has won great support. Johnson's work was featured in the *New York Times* in 2008. That same year, he was invited to speak in Egypt at Wikipedia's annual conference.

Johnson went on to serve as a consultant at the World Bank. More recently, he has worked as a senior consultant at Navigation Arts, a web design company based in Northern Virginia, where he leads project teams working with such organizations as the Corporation for National and Community Service (the parent company of AmeriCorps) and the Advisory Board Company, a health-care consultancy, among others.

But ties to Mason remain strong, and one of the biggest projects on the horizon involves a broadening of the Open Source Shakespeare project to include many

more writers, focusing on widely read, widely taught public domain texts and ultimately including more user-generated contributions.

"For example, a professor could mark up *Paradise Lost* with class notes that he wanted his students to see," says Johnson. "Or someone who's been going to plays in New York for 40 years will certainly have something to add. Once we have people talking to one another online about these texts, we should be able to capture a lot of knowledge from people who love particular authors and know a lot about them."

To support this work, Johnson, along with English Department faculty members Eric Anderson, Robert Matz, and Alok Yadav, have applied for a digital humanities grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Other English Department faculty members also serve as project consultants.

Johnson has proven unusual in blending his interest in the humanities with his skills in cutting-edge technologies. "In my experience, when someone is not technically inclined but deep into literature, the tendency is to see the literature as the real value and the technology as an appendage," he says. "And the technical people think that the technical aspect holds the real value, because anybody can bang out words. That seems to me a hindrance to success. Keeping the technical component on an equal footing with the humanities—that's my goal."

The screenshot shows the Open Source Shakespeare website in a web browser. The URL is http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/. The page features a search bar at the top with the text "Open Source Shakespeare: search ...". Below the search bar is a large banner with the text "OpenSourceShakespeare" and "AN EXPERIMENT IN LITERARY TECHNOLOGY". To the left of the banner is a portrait of William Shakespeare with the text "William Shakespeare 1564-1616". To the right of the banner are several sections: "Features" (concordance, keyword search, advanced search, statistics), "Plays" (by genre, by number of lines, character list, character search), and "Sonnets and Poems" (individual sonnets, sonnets compared side-by-side, all sonnets, all poems). Below these sections is a "More than just a collection of texts..." section, followed by a "Why use Open Source Shakespeare?" section, and a "See how the site was built, and how it works" section. On the right side of the page, there are three search boxes: "TEXT SEARCH", "CONCORDANCE SEARCH", and "CHARACTER SEARCH". At the bottom right, there is a section for "Other Shakespeare-related sites" including the British Shakespeare Association, First Folio Facsimile, Gutenberg Project, and Works of the Bard.



Department of English
4400 University Drive, MS 3E4
Fairfax, VA 22030

engnews@gmu.edu

Nonprofit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Fairfax, Virginia
Permit No. 1532

ALUMNI AND STUDENT NEWS!

Join us in congratulating alumni and current students on their awards, accomplishments, and initiatives—and remember to send your own kudos to engnews@gmu.edu!

The Flight Cage: Poems by **Rebecca Dunham**, MFA '01, was published by Tupelo Press.

Lara Ek, BA '10, will make use of both her English degree and her minor in Chinese when she begins teaching English at the Harbin Institute of Technology (HIT) in mid-February. Located in China's 10th-largest city, HIT is one of the country's top three engineering schools. Ek will focus on teaching speaking, writing and presentation skills.

Matt Green, BA '08, assistant undergraduate advisor for Mason's English Department, coordinates the Cantankerous Kitten Writing Workshop each Saturday from noon to 3 p.m. in the Johnson Center. Workshop pieces are distributed in advance. All genres are welcome: fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, and everything in between. For more information or to join, contact Green at mgreenb@gmu.edu.

Lauren Lauzon, a current English major, has been awarded an internship at the Smithsonian Institution, helping to plan the 2011 Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

Jeffrey McDaniel, MFA '93, was one of the poetry judges for the 2010 National Book Awards. He has written four collections himself, most recently *The Endarkenment*. McDaniel currently teaches writing at Sarah Lawrence College.

Kyle Munkittrick, BA '07, blogs on transhumanism for *Discover* magazine. He is the program director at the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies and a graduate student at New York University.

Harper Perennial will publish *Domestic Violets*, the debut novel by **Matt Norman**, MFA '06, in fall 2011.

Sarah Perrier, MFA '00, had her poetry collection *Nothing Fatal* published by the University of Akron Press.

Carlos Rosales, an English major focused on creative writing, will present his paper "Strate-

gies for Developing Non-Linear Plots" as part of a pedagogy forum at the upcoming Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) conference in Washington, D.C.

Brittany Warman, a folklore student in

Mason's Master of Interdisciplinary Studies program, was awarded the Elli Kõngäs-Maranda Student Prize from the Women's Section of the American Folklore Society

in October 2010 at the society's annual meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. Her prize-winning paper, "Awake with New Dreams: Reconstructing Ideas of Sleeping and Waking in Feminist Contemporary Retellings of the Fairy Tale 'Sleeping Beauty,'" was based on her work in Professor Amelia Rutledge's and Professor Margaret Yocom's English classes.



Brittany Warman

engnews@gmu.edu