

Department News

A Year Like No Other

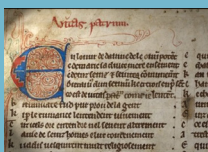
Department continues important work throughout 2020



Joanna Scott, the Roswell Smith Burrows Professor of English, meets outside with Kai Reed '22, a physics and mathematics major who's working on a cluster through the Department of English. Scott used a tutorial structure that combined group classes with individualized meetings

PHOTO CREDIT: J. ADAM FENSTER

IN THIS ISSUE



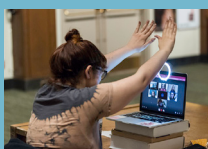
Medieval literature grant

The money will help the Middle English Texts Series provide critical works to scholars around the world.



Nobel Prize controversies

Bette London is teaching students the debates surrounding award-winning authors in literature.



Theatre reimagined

The fall theatre production was performed virtually to be safe for performers & audiences during the pandemic.

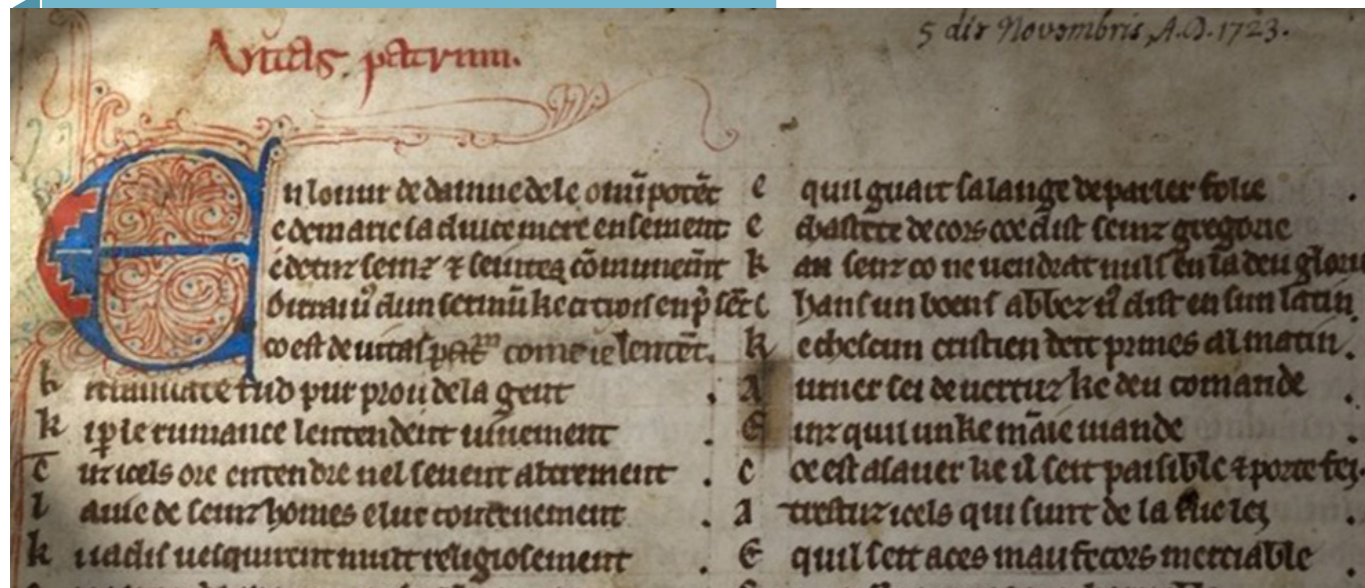


Book publications

Several English Department faculty had new works published in 2019, 2020 and 2021. Take a look at what's new to book store shelves.

English Department News is a regular publication highlighting scholarship, new initiatives, and collaborative projects taking place in the University of Rochester's Department of English.

To submit a potential story, send an email to engdept@ur.rochester.edu.



EXPANDING ACCESS TO MEDIEVAL TEXTS

A pioneering initiative to make texts from the Middle Ages available to scholars and students around the world has received continued support from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Teachers and students of medieval literature long faced a problem that people studying other literary periods did not: the scant availability of texts.

That's not because there wasn't plenty of literature produced in the Middle Ages or because not much survived. The problem was access.

Publishing medieval texts isn't like offering editions of literary works created after the advent of the printing press. "Everything was copied by hand in the Middle Ages, and so every medieval copy is different. And we almost never have the copy that was written by the author. We just have copies of copies of copies," says Anna Siebach-Larsen, director of the University of Rochester's Rossell Hope Robbins Library and Koller-Collins Center for English Studies.

Each copy introduces differences. The scribes made mistakes or repeated words as they carried out the grueling work of copying. When working in languages they did not know, they sometimes introduced misspellings or substituted one word for another. Words, sentences, and even paragraphs might be omitted from a particular copy.

Scholars of medieval literature have traditionally had to travel to

different archives to compare copies—and, if publishing an edition, decide which of the copies is most authoritative and create the notes and context that explain the differences between the various manuscript copies. German scholars took on a lot of this work 200 years ago.

"The German editions, they were made for experts by experts. ... They're hard to use and hard to find," says Siebach-Larsen. As a result, undergraduates studying medieval literature were largely confined to the texts—frequently, just excerpts—available in anthologies. It left students—and anyone else without access to a world-class library—high and dry.

Russell Peck, for more than 50 years a Rochester faculty member and now a professor emeritus of English, knew there had to be a better way. In 1990, working with the Teaching Association for Medieval Studies (TEAMS, of which he is a founding member), he



PECK

established the Middle English Texts Series (METS). It offers free digital and affordable print editions of a wide range of medieval writing. "It completely changed the study of Middle English literature," says Peck, general editor for the series.

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) recently awarded the project a three-year grant to support its mission of offering the broadest possible readership—from specialists to undergraduates and high school students to people simply curious about the Middle Ages—access to the full range of literary output from medieval England. The latest award extends a long history of support for the project from the NEH.



HAHN

Thomas Hahn—a professor of English, the consulting editor to METS, and the principal investigator for the NEH grant—says the series "offers the richest portal into the Middle Ages to the largest number of people with the widest range of interests and expertise of anything that exists out there."

METS is a partnership between TEAMS, scholars in the field, Rochester's Department of English, and the River Campus Libraries, in particular, the Robbins Library—the University's medieval studies library—and the Information Discovery Team, along with the Digital Scholarship Lab and other library metadata and IT experts.

Story above courtesy of University of Rochester Communications

<https://www.sas.rochester.edu/eng/>

Raising Up InVisible Voices

Associate Professors of English Joel Burges and Jeffrey Tucker co-edited a special issue of the journal "InVisible Culture," which featured an essay by Assistant Professor of English Matt Omelsky.



Hazel Carby (center), the 2019 Distinguished Visiting Humanist, speaks as part of the "Black Studies Now" roundtable, also featuring Assistant Professor Matt Omelsky (second from right) at the University of Rochester. (Photo by Julia Tulke)

Below is an excerpt from issue 31 of "InVisible Culture," entitled "Black Studies Now and the Countercurrents of Hazel Carby."

crucible of 1968: speak in a voice resonant with and resistant to power on a range of topics urgent to the world at present.

More than a year later, some of those who assembled for [Carby's lecture] found

In winter 2019, when Hazel V. Carby came to the University of Rochester (UR) as the Distinguished Visiting Humanist, no one knew global pandemic and large-scale anti-racist protests awaited us one year later in the spring, summer, and fall of 2020.



Protest signs outside Rochester City Hall

We did not anticipate the rise of an anti-immigrant visa crisis in higher education as we began to write this introductory essay, or the revelation of the death of Daniel Prude as we were finalizing this issue of InVisible Culture. The unnecessary death of Prude—a Black man experiencing a mental health crisis in March 2020 while visiting Rochester, NY from Chicago, IL—has been declared a homicide resulting from asphyxiation while the police restrained him with a hood over his head in the midst of that crisis.

Once she was able to make it to freezing Rochester, Carby did what she has done since she passed through the

ourselves standing outside in the sun, mobilized against police brutality in the midst of a pandemic, rhythmically chanting "WE. CAN. NOT. BREATHE" with thousands of others worldwide, including in Rochester, NY.

Since Carby's visit to UR in 2019, the currents of our historical moment have shifted. They have gained mass and momentum beyond the seminar rooms and lecture halls in which

always taking Carby's indelible thinking and writing as points of departure, we shared ideas last winter. Now we cannot enter those spaces so easily. Now we find ourselves at home social distancing. Now we are in the streets protesting. Now we are fighting another xenophobic policy. Now we are trying to figure out a new way forward.

[Read the full piece here.](#)

Residencies and Fellowships



Professor of English Jennifer Grotz completed a multi-week poetry residency at the James Merrill House (pictured above) this past Fall. As part of the writer-in-residence program, Grotz was able to stay at his home, now a National Historic Landmark, and draw inspiration to work on projects of her own.

Assistant Professor of English James Rosenow recently finished an internal fellowship at the University of Rochester



ROSENOW

Humanities Center, where she was working on her book on American avant-garde film of the 1930s. As part of her fellowship, she participated in bi-weekly Humanities Center seminars and in the Center's other workshops, conferences, and programs.

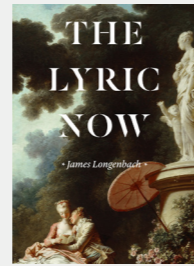
Newly Published Works



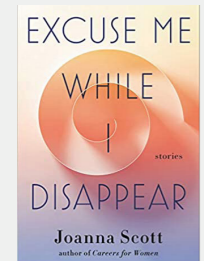
Continuing to publish books, short stories, collections of poems and literary translations is a hallmark of our faculty accomplishments, and we are proud to announce new works that are now available.



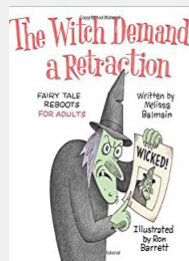
Professor Jennifer Grotz has co-translated, with poet Piotr Sommer, the selected poems of Polish poet Jerzy Ficowski, entitled "Everything I Don't Know." The book will be available this year with World Poetry Books.



Professor James Longenbach's new book, "The Lyric Now," is now out from the University of Chicago Press. It casts a more historical eye on lyric poetry, comparatively short poems that focus on a speaker's emotions.



Joanna Scott, the Roswell Smith Burrows Professor of English, has two books forthcoming: "Conversations with Joanna Scott," a collection of interviews spanning two decades, and a collection of short stories: "Excuse Me While I Disappear."



Adjunct Instructor Melissa Balmain published "The Witch Demands a Retraction: Fairy Tale Reboots for Adults" with Illustrator Ron Barrett. The collection of poems puts an adult, contemporary spin on well-known fairy tales.



Adjunct Instructor David Hansen had three of his stories published in the past year: "My Philosophy" (Puerto del Sol), "My Body" (Chicago Review), and "Three Welsh Names" (South Carolina Review).



Jeffrey Q. McCune, Jr.

NEW FDI DIRECTOR

Jeffrey Q. McCune, Jr., associate professor of women, gender, and sexuality studies and of African and African American studies at Washington University in St. Louis, has been named director of the Frederick Douglass Institute in the School of Arts & Sciences. The Department of English is delighted to welcome him to the university and we are excited to work with him.

Theatre Reimagined

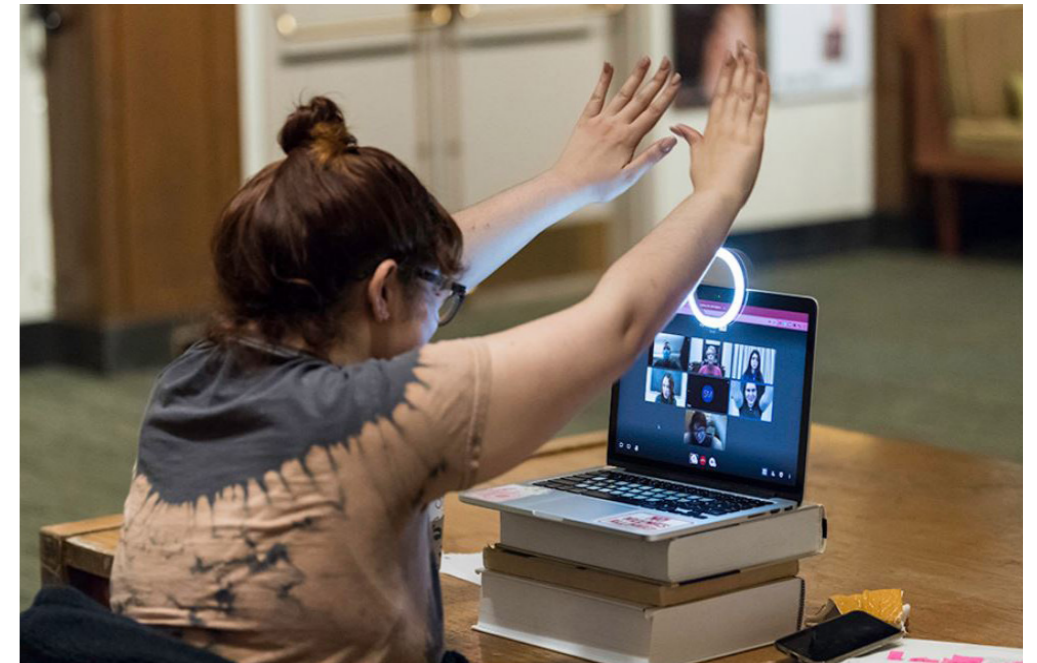
Classic comedic play goes virtual for Fall semester

The University of Rochester's International Theatre Program stepped into new territory as they reimagined Nicolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector* for an era marked by political turmoil and the global pandemic.

Often quoted as the greatest dramatic comedy in Russian literature, the play recognizes the perennial nature of human greed, self-dealing, and corruption in a small town. "The play hilariously charts how a small town tries to shield itself from what they believe to be an impending governmental audit of their corruption," explains Nigel Maister, the Russell and Ruth Peck Artistic Director for the International Theatre Program, who reconceived the political satire intentionally as an online event.

"While significant liberties have been taken with the translation, the text is remarkably accurate," says Maister, who sees the play as a mirror on the current political climate.

Constructing the production involved an enormous logistical undertaking. A large number of locations in the theater building, including offices, classrooms, as well as the copier room, were transformed into unique sets for on-campus actors. Individual spaces allowed students to be unmasked when acting on camera. Each acting station had to have its own lighting with independent audio mics—a challenge since the majority of the spaces were not



Syanis Vargas '21 rehearses through Zoom for the International Theatre Program's production of "The Government Inspector," which premiered in December.

PHOTO CREDIT: J. ADAM FENSTER

intended for theatrical use. In some cases, the locations had to accommodate more than one actor so the production crew installed a green screen. On top of all the equipment requirements, adequate and stable internet connections had to be set up in rooms that might not have previously equipped with an Ethernet connection.

"It was a significant technical challenge," says Maister, who is also a co-founding member of Alarm Will Sound and a recent fellow of the MacDowell Colony. But he took it as an opportunity to "unleash creativity."

"It was almost like shooting a movie," he added. "Every shot had to be set up and mixed in a particular way. Every moment choreographed."

Hernan Sanchez Garcia '21, who played the part of the corrupt mayor's wife, Melania, expressed a similar sentiment. "It feels more like what filming or shooting a film might feel like. The workload is still the same, if anything they're longer hours because you might have to re-film it."

"There are things you have to focus on, the lines, your appearance, breaths, and the job of reading an atmosphere which is not necessarily on you, it's the editors," says Garcia, an English and history major.

Elizabeth Winterbourne '22, an Arizona native who plans to double major in theater and math, prizes the program's emphasis on experimental theater. She adds, "Going through the process of doing these shows is a really good experience for someone who is a young actor. We work with a lot of cool professional level people, from directors to set and costume designers, and see how the whole thing works, including this one."

The cast of more than 50 actors included students and alumni across the United States, and as far away as Guatemala and China. "It represents a truly global, intergenerational theatrical endeavor," says Maister. Thirty-five alumni play small parts in the cast, including Erica Fee '99, producer of the Rochester Fringe Festival.

Story above courtesy of University of Rochester Communications

Stay tuned for updates about our upcoming season!

Becoming a Hub for Textual Science

A collaborative project between RIT students and the University of Rochester uncovered new information about a medieval manuscript. The students developed a system that uses ultraviolet-fluorescence imaging to read text that's invisible to the naked eye.



HEYWORTH

In the process, they discovered lost text on a 15th-century manuscript, revealing it was a palimpsest — a manuscript on parchment with multiple layers of writing. The discovery and the system the students created will help libraries around the world learn more about medieval texts and collections.

Associate Professor Gregory Heyworth, who assisted on the project, spoke on "Connections with Evan Dawson" on WXXI about how this project and cutting-edge research being conducted by students and faculty at the U of R are helping Rochester become a hub for studies in textual science and cultural heritage objects, allowing them to uncover secrets of the past.



Listen to the full program [here](#).

Teaching the Complexities of the Nobel Prize

When American poet Louise Glück received the Nobel Prize in Literature for 2020, she expressed astonishment—and even a note of ambivalence. As she told the *New York Times*, it "seemed to be extremely unlikely that I would ever have this particular event to deal with in my life."

The complexities of the prize are nothing new to Bette London, a professor of English at the University of Rochester. In fact, they're the basis of a course she's created, as well as the subject of her current research.

London has taught the course for 11 years, introducing it when Rochester launched its programs in literary translation. "I thought it would be an excellent way to introduce students to outstanding but often unfamiliar literature from around the world, but I was also interested in the politics of prizes and the institutional structures that support them," she says.

The literature prize's suspension in 2018—in response to the Swedish Academy's handling of sexual abuse allegations—was only the latest incident in a long history of controversy surrounding the prize. Some of the debates over prize winners involve friction between ideas of national literature and what London calls the "potentially homogenizing concept of international literature."

Less than 5 percent of the literature published in the United States each year is literature in translation—and for many US readers, Nobel Prize-winning authors provide their primary exposure to literature from around the world. "The Nobel Prize, with its visibility and prestige, is one of the major ways that international literature gets publicized and made available to large audiences that might not otherwise read it," she says.

The prize's renown belies its conceptual unwieldiness. It's unlimited by nation, genre, language, or year of publication. In his will, Alfred Nobel stipulated only that the award should

go to the author who has "bestowed the greatest benefit on mankind" and created "the most outstanding work of an idealistic tendency." As often as not, the prize functions as a kind of lifetime achievement award, says London, a specialist in 19th- and 20th-century British literature whose research and teaching is oriented toward issues of authorship.



The capaciousness of the Nobel Prize in Literature is part of what makes it, like the Nobel Peace Prize, sometimes a source of contention. There's a kind of public investment in both the literature and the peace prizes, and the accessibility of the accomplishments they recognize—in contrast to physics research, for example—can add to popular second-guessing of the academy's selections.

London helps her students look at the Nobel Prize in Literature with a critical eye, considering how winning writers' works are viewed in their own country versus the authors' international reputations; what sorts of writers are chosen for the award and those who are never considered; and how to assess works that a reader might be able to read only in translation.

The sheer variety of nations, languages, literary traditions, cultural contexts, and genres—ranging from novels and poetry to journalistic oral histories (as in the case of the 2015 winner, Belarusian author Svetlana Alexievich) and songwriting (when Bob Dylan received the prize in 2016, for "having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition")—makes it impossible for any person to be an expert in the works that receive the prize, she says.

She transforms that conundrum into an opportunity for her students. "All of us," she tells them, "will be learners together."

Story above courtesy of University of Rochester Communications

Empty Ballparks, New Challenges

Broadcast historian: pandemic poses problems, opportunities for sports announcers

Excerpt from *Forbes* (July 16, 2020)
By Dan Schlossberg

In this strangest of all baseball seasons, the strangest development just might be the return of the re-created game — albeit a 21st century version with video feeds replacing Western Union ticker tape.



That's the view of broadcast historian Curt Smith, long-time speechwriter for George H.W. Bush, author of 16 books, including "Voices of the Game," and Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Rochester.

Smith said he's relishing the news that Major League Baseball, as part of its safety protocols in this Year of the Pandemic, has ordered teams not to send their broadcasters on the road.

Thanks to safety protocols produced to protect baseball personnel during the raging coronavirus pandemic, broadcasters will be relying on video feeds and canned crowd noise to re-create away games while working from broadcast facilities in their home ballparks.

"This is a great opportunity for baseball broadcasters to really tell stories, to let their descriptive powers blossom," said Smith, who now teaches public speaking at the U of R. "They won't be chained to a cascade of meaningless numbers.

"If I'm a big-league broadcaster, I'm looking forward to this. Baseball fans will get a chance to hear what baseball is all about."

Smith, who spent 15 years writing speeches for Bush, remembered the 41st president

as an ardent fan of the game. He also remembered Ronald Reagan, another former president, as a master of re-creating Chicago Cubs games over powerful Des Moines station WHO. Reagan relied on a printed tape that might read "B1 S1 Single to left" but provide no detail. When Western Union stopped, the broadcaster had to improvise during his re-creation, Smith recalled with a laugh.

"The broadcasters made us fall in love with the game," he insisted. "Those guys were artisans of the language. We have a chance where we can revert to a world of re-creation, with one story after another."

Smith, 68, is writing a new book, due out [in 2021], on the history of baseball broadcasting. It will include re-creating a game, an art that vanished 65 years ago, with a few exceptions (Les Keiter used telegraph reports and sound effects to re-create games of the San Francisco Giants over New York's WINS after the team went west).

Most current announcers have never had to deal with re-creations. "They've got to practice this," Smith said. "We need a spring training for broadcasters too — so that everyone is reading from the same page."

Broadcasting means big bucks for Major League Baseball. FOX signed an extension in 2018 that starts in 2022 and runs through 2028 with a reported value of \$5.1 billion, a 40 per cent increase from the current agreement. Just last month, Turner Sports also re-upped with a 40 per cent hike, agreeing to pay an average \$470 million a year through 2028. That's up from \$325 million a year under the prevailing eight-year deal that ends after 2021.

FOX, Turner, and ESPN are MLB's primary partners for the postseason play, which raises millions for the

game's coffers. According to fellow *Forbes.com* contributor Maury Brown, Major League Baseball earned a record \$10.7 billion last year.

This year's financials figure to be different because teams will not derive game-day revenue from games played without fans in the stands. But teams are counting on retaining fan interest through a wide variety of broadcast outlets, including local stations and regional sports networks in addition to MLB Network, ESPN, FOX, and TBS. Re-created road games will represent half of that regular-season package, with each team playing 30 games at home and the same number away from home.

Asked about the situation, Atlanta Braves television voice Chip Caray said, "We'll be broadcasting games off the monitors so it's not a total re-creation where we're getting games off the Western Union ticker tape. We'll be able to see the field, we just won't be there physically. We'll be relying on really good camera work. Since we won't see where the ball is, it will be a challenge."

Caray, whose FOX Sports South partners are Jeff Francoeur and Tom Glavine, said the Atlanta TV crew will use

the World Broadcast Feed provided by the home team.

"Instead of using what we know about positioning and things like that, we'll be depending upon technology to be our eyes," he told me by phone. "We'll try to translate that to the fans so they'll know what's going on."

Even with fans absent, ballparks won't be silent at home or on the road. "We got word Tuesday that MLB is providing all the teams with some semblance of crowd noise," Caray said. "It's going to sound a lot better than if Acuna hits a home run in an empty ballpark and you hear the ball clattering around in the bleachers.

"There will be a lot of time for story-telling. One thing that baseball has not done a good job of is marketing its players. When Mike Trout is the 97th or 98th most popular sports figure in our country, that's terrible. Nobody tells stories better than the players themselves."

"That's the beauty of it; we can't be afraid to fail. We're going to try new things. We're going to try new things that will become standard fare in years to come. It's a matter of finding our footing and getting used to the new normal."



Awards & Honors



Adjunct Instructor Melissa Balmain won the 2020 Poetry by the Sea Sonnet Contest for her poem, "Niagara Overlook" in June 2020. A virtual event to celebrate her achievement was held in May.

Balmain was also named the Humor Writer of the Month in December at the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop at the University of Dayton.



Jennifer Grotz's poem "The Conversion of Paul" was selected to be included in the new Best American Poetry 2020 anthology. This is Professor Grotz's fifth appearance in the annual

Articles, Essays & More

Below is a selection of articles, essays and other written works recently published by our faculty.

Kenneth Gross

"Angus Fletcher's Precious Idiosyncrasy: Humming with Mind." Forthcoming in *boundary 2*, 47 no. 4 (2020), 157-79.

"Some Romantic Children." *Literary Imagination* 22, no. 3 (2020), 1-9.

"Shakespeare's Puppets." In *Shakespeare's Things*. Edited by Brett Gamboa and Lawrence Switzky. Routledge, 2020, 173-92.

Jennifer Grotz

"May," *Birmingham Poetry Review*, 2020.

"January," *Birmingham Poetry Review*, 2020.

"March," *Birmingham Poetry Review*, Winter 2020. Reprinted on *Poetry Daily* July 25, 2020.

"Self-Portrait in an Unnamed Foreign City," *More Truly and More Strange: 100 Contemporary American Self-Portrait Poems*, edited by Lisa Russ Spaar, Persea Books 2020.

Bette London

"Reading British Modernist Texts: A Case in Open Pedagogy" (with Mantra Roy and Joseph Easterly), in *Open Pedagogy: Varied Definitions, Multiple Approaches*, eds. Kimberly Hoffman and Alexis Clifton (June 2020)

James Longenbach

"The Point of Poetry," *Poetry* 217 (Jan. 2021): 405-13.

"What Sparks Poetry: James Longenbach

on Sir Thomas Wyatt's 'They Flee from Me,' *Poetry Daily*, 3 February 2020.

Katherine Mannheimer

"We Miss Each Other, But Do We Even Know Each Other?" *The Yale Review*, Summer 2020

John Michael

"World Theory: Amitav Ghosh on Being at Sea," *sympløke* 28:1-2 (2020) 331-48.

William Miller

"Innocence after Experience: Robert Herrick's Counter-Epithalamia," *Studies in Philology* 117.1 (Winter 2020), 129-150.

Matthew Omelsky

"Being and Becoming: The Grammar of Black Theory," *InVisible Culture*, 2020.

"African Fugitivities," *The Black Scholar*, vol. 50, no. 1, Spring 2020: 56-69.

Supritha Rajan

"The Future of Economic Criticisms Past." *Routledge Companion to Victorian Literature*. Eds. Talia Schaffer and Dennis Denisoff. New York: Taylor and Francis, 2020, 237-247. (invited essay)

Steven Rozenski

"Ave Ave Ave [Ave]: Bruder Hans and the Multilingual Poetics of Exuberance." *New Medieval Literatures* 20 (2020): pp. 107-42.



For up-to-date information and stories about our faculty, students & alumni, visit www.sas.rochester.edu/eng.

CONTACT US

Katherine Mannheimer Department Chair
Phone: (585) 275-9257
E-mail: katherine.mannheimer@rochester.edu

Sherri Gunter Department Administrator
Phone: (585) 275-9258
E-mail: sherri.gunter@rochester.edu

Ezra Tawil Director of Graduate Studies
Phone: (585) 275-4092
E-mail: ezra.tawil@rochester.edu

Jeffrey Tucker Director of Undergraduate Studies
Phone: (585) 275-2064
E-mail: jeffrey.tucker@rochester.edu

Main Office Morey Hall, Room 426
Phone: (585) 275-4092
E-mail: engdept@ur.rochester.edu



Department News is compiled by Kathy Kingsley, program coordinator for the department, with editing and direction from the Department Chair.

