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.

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

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

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.
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 Robbins Library and Koller-Collins Library metadata and IT experts.

Each copy introduces differences. The scribes made mistakes or repeated words as they carried out the grueling work of copying. When work was done, they sometimes introduced mistakes or rephrased sentences—often resulting in the insertion of a word that didn’t exist in the original.

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.

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 experts by experts. … Different archives to compare copies—different spellings or substituted one word for another. That’s not because there wasn’t enough access to a large range of medieval writing. ‘It completely changed the study of Middle English literature,’ says Peck, general editor for the series.

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

We did not anticipate the rise of an anti-immigrant 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. Protest signs outside Rochester City Hall andonto’s (shown outside the sun, prohibited against police brutality in the midst of a pandemic, rhythmically chanting, ‘WE CAN’T BREATHE’ with thousands of others worldwide, including in Rochester, NY.

Since Carby’s visit to UR in 2019, the concerns of our historical moment have shifted. They have gained more and momentum beyond the seminar rooms and lecture halls in which, always taking Carby’s inspiration to work on projects of resistance to power on a range of topics urgent to the world at present.

Below is an excerpt from issue 37 of “Invisible Culture,” entitled “Black Studies Now and the Countercurrents of Hazel Carby.”

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Newly Published Works

Professor Jennifer Grotz has co-translated, with poet Piotr Szmeller, 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.

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.

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.

“When 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 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.”

Stay tuned for updates about our upcoming season!
DEPARTMENT NEWS

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-florescence imaging to read text that’s invisible to the naked eye.

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 librarians 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 the world to uncover secrets of the past.

TEACHING THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE NOBEL PRIZE

In this strangest of all years, one of the strangest development just might be the re-creation of a 21st-century version with video feeds replacing Western Union ticker tape.

That’s the view of broadcast historian Curt Smith, longtime speechwriter for George 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 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 crowd noise to re-create away games while working from broadcast facilities in their home ballparks.

Broadcasting means big bucks for Major League Baseball. FOX signed an extension in 2018 that starts in 2022 and runs through 2028. The current agreement, worth $3.05 billion, a 40 per cent increase over the current agreement. Just last month, Turner Sports also rejoiced with a record $7.2 billion, a 40 per cent increase.

Broadcasting is big business, and for Mike Keiter, the former longtime play-by-play broadcaster for the New York Giants and a former anchor on ESPN’s World Telecast Feed, the pandemic has taken away much of the fun.

Keiter used telegraph reports with a few exceptions (Les Heeter used telegraph reports and sound effects to re-create games of the San Francisco Giants and Chicago Cubs games over New York’s WINS after the team went west).

Most current announcers have the luxury of re-creations. “They’ve got to practice this,” Keiter said. “We need a spring training. Some of us are so close to the microphone that everyone is reading from the script.”

Broadcasters make big breaks for Major League Baseball. FOX signed an extension in 2018 that starts in 2022 and runs through 2028. The current agreement, worth $3.05 billion, a 40 per cent increase over the current agreement. Just last month, Turner Sports also rejoiced with a record $7.2 billion, a 40 per cent increase.

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**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

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

**Articles, Essays & More**

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

**Kenneth Gross**


**Jennifer Grotz**


**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**


**Katherine Mannheimer**

“We Miss Each Other, But Do We Even Know Each Other?” The Yale Review, Summer 2020

**John Michael**


**William Miller**


**Matthew Omelsky**


**Supritha Rajan**


**Steven Rozenski**