

# ERUDITION

## GILBERT LECTURE SERIES

FEB 2, 2006

Tony Hoagland

6:00 pm, Reception,  
Texana Room,  
DeGolyer Library

6:30 pm, Stanley  
Marcus Reading Room,  
DeGolyer Library

MARCH 2, 2006

Kirsten Silva Gruesz  
"The Gulf of Mexico as  
Cultural Contact Zone"

6:00 p.m. Reception,  
Texana Room,  
DeGolyer Library

6:30 p.m. Lecture,  
Stanley Marcus Reading  
Room, DeGolyer Library

Book signing  
following lecture

MARCH 21, 2006

Peter Field  
"King Arthur's Battles"

6:00 p.m. Reception,  
Texana Room,  
DeGolyer Library

6:30 p.m. Lecture,  
Stanley Marcus Reading  
Room, DeGolyer Library

Book signing  
following lecture

MARCH 29, 2006

Cyrus Cassells

6:00 pm, Reception,  
Texana Room,  
DeGolyer Library

6:30pm, Stanley Marcus  
Reading Room,  
DeGolyer Library

SMU Department of English

2005 • issue 1

## Letter from the Department Chair

It's official! After two years of continuous committee work, departmental deliberations, and the submission of a proposal to various Dedman College and SMU committees, the English Department now has a Ph.D. program. When the Board of Trustees gave final approval at their meeting of Friday, September 9, English faculty and staff celebrated in our Main Office. Now we've commenced working on program details and on recruiting the first class of doctoral candidates scheduled to arrive for the fall term, 2007.

This new doctoral program will be small, admitting about six new students each year, and it will be designed with the aim of giving degree candidates a closely mentored and high quality graduate training. To start such a program, we needed and are grateful for the five years of hiring that increased the size and quality of English faculty, and that Dean Jasper Neel supported. The patient guidance of former Department Chair Dennis Foster brought the proposal to fruition.

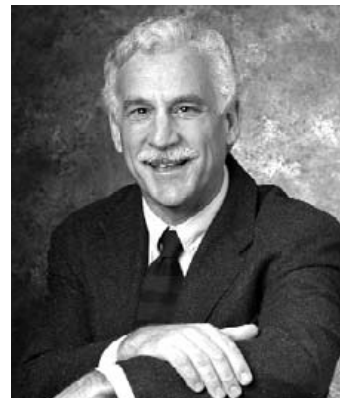
Also official: Our new English major will take effect in Fall 2006. The changes include a new introductory core in Literary Study, and a greater breadth and Department of English offerings in literary history, genres, and topics.

Fall 2005 brings among us two new English faculty members: from Johns Hopkins University, Lisa Siraganian, who joins us as Assistant Professor of English specializing in modern literature; and from the University of California at Irvine, James Ziegler, who joins us for two years as a Visiting Assistant Professor concentrating in twentieth century American literature. Additionally, we are pleased to have among us—full-time after his 2005-6 sabbatical—former Provost Ross Murfin.

This fall we also celebrate colleagues' achievements. Willard Spiegelman recently published two books, an edited volume entitled *Love Amy, The Selected Letters of Amy Clampitt* (Columbia), and *How Poets See the World: The Art of Description in Contemporary Poetry* (Oxford).

Stephen Shepherd edited—for the prestigious Early English Text Society series—a narrative of Charlemagne's defeat at Roncevaux, *Turpines Story* (Oxford), a text regarded as one of the first prose romances in English. Jack Myers, the only Texas Poet Laureate with a Boston accent, brought out a new edition of the popular *New American Poets* (Godine), which he co-edits. In November, Pauline Newton publishes her study, *Transcultural Women of Late-Twentieth Century U.S.-American Literature* (Ashgate).

This year English faculty have been researching in libraries and giving papers at conferences over the world. John Lewis addressed a conference of Thomas Pynchon scholars gathered on the island of Malta. A year ago Rajani Sudan had just returned from a summer's productive research at the British Library. Meantime Ezra Greenspan has been off to the Huntington Library, in Los Angeles, and presenting at a Halifax, Nova Scotia conference. This summer Dennis Foster gave a paper at the James Joyce Symposium at Ithaca, NY; and Tim Crusius gave the keynote for the Burke Society, at Pennsylvania State



Steven Weisenburger, Chair of English Department, Jacob and Frances Mossiker Chair in Humanities

continued on page 2

## Sex Scene Essentials for the Beginning Writer

by Joe Coomer, Novelist, Class '81

It was always my intention to write a sex scene. Sex-scene writing wasn't taught at SMU in 1980, and reading *Great Expectations* in three separate literature classes (my advice to students: read the syllabi. You can cut your reading requirements by 40% by choosing classes that read the same titles) wasn't a lot of help. Reading e.e. cummings didn't help. Reading Eudora Welty did, but I'm still not sure why, and it embarrasses me a little to even mention her name in the same paragraph with the word "sex". The main obstacle in writing my sex scene was not a publisher or an editor. I'd written and published one novel and the world was hungry for more of Joe Coomer. I had an entire \$3000 advance waiting for me. My main obstacle was waiting for all my grandparents to die, and they were incredibly healthy and stalwart in their refusals to go off early. Finally, a day after Grandma Dennis' funeral, I sat down and wrote out at length my love romp, my ode to college fornication. It ran to two pages. Everything I knew about sex was in it. I called the novel *The Mountains of Spices* after the last verse in the *Song of Solomon*. I sent the manuscript off to my editor at St. Martin's, satisfied that I'd at last entered the ranks of adult novelists like Updike and Roth, writers who knew what to compare a nipple to when they saw it.

It was a high time of life for me. I'd landed my first creative writing teaching job at SMU's Fort Burgwin in New Mexico. I was dating a pretty SMU coed. (You can't fire me, I've already quit.) My first novel had a cover and a jacket and paper pages, which was all I'd ever aspired to. I was driving a 1961 Triumph TR-3 convertible that I'd restored after I'd wrecked another one. I had not died in this wreck.

When I received the copyedited manuscript I bypassed the first 150 pages, quickly thumbing to Chapter 12. I thought I might see evidence of my female editor's swooning there. In bright blue ink, scrawled across the

top of the page, she'd written, "Joe, one should never, ever, use the word THROB in a sex scene." I was alone when I read this. I blushed three quarts of barn red. I'd used the word THROB three times in my two page sex scene. She'd crossed through all three of them and written beside each, "think of something else". Why couldn't you use the word THROB in a sex scene? I was mortified. I'd throbbled. I'd definitely throbbled. My only consolation was I'd used the word in three different tenses.

If they ever give me a chance to teach again, I'd like to suggest "Sex Scene Essentials for the Beginning Writer." Who am I kidding? I'd rather take this class than teach it. I've written other sex scenes since that first one, but they all take place in odd locations like mixmasters and nobody ever

throbs. The characters hum a lot and worry their way to the next chapter. God, I miss my grandparents. And I wish Eudora Welty never had to die. I met her at the SMU Literary Festival 25 years ago. She was sitting



in Ken and JoAnna Shield's living room in their blue comfy chair. I approached her timidly with a paperback copy of one of her books. She took it from me and in an elderly hand with tender script she wrote my name, and she took the time to call me "Dear." I've been writing ever since.

### Department Chair — continued from page 1

University. I gave the commencement address for the Flemish Inter-Universities American Studies Program in Brussels and, in Cincinnati in July, the keynote for the Toni Morrison Society, which had gathered there to celebrate the debut of Morrison's new opera, *Margaret Garner*. In future months, Suzanne Bost will be presenting part of her new book-in-progress at the American Studies Association meetings in Washington, D.C. and at the Latin American Studies Association, in San Juan, PR. Tim Rosendale and Michael Householder are slated for a conference in San Antonio; Rick Bozorth, at a convention in Chicago; Bonnie Wheeler, at Kalamazoo; and Beth Newman, at Rutgers University. You can see why, as Department Chair, I've been interested to learn in more detail how very active we are as scholar-teachers.

And finally, a note of remembrance: In June, English and the entire SMU community lost a colleague and friend of forty-plus years. Jim Early arrived at SMU in 1964, rose through the academic and administrative ranks and published widely—on the writings of William Faulkner, for instance, as well as on the architecture and history of the Southwest and Mexico. His 1972 book, *The Making of Go Down, Moses*, on Faulkner's classic novel, remains a standard work of scholarship; his beautifully illustrated *Presidio, Mission, and Pueblo* was published just two years ago. In fact, as Emeritus Professor, Jim had continued to teach at SMU into 2005. Fittingly at the close of such a full life, so well-lived, he was working at another of his loves—working in his yard at the Earlys' Dallas home.

## Stepping Down

*After spending nine years as chair of the Department of English, Dennis Foster was asked to reflect on his time in that office.*

**CANDY (NOT HER REAL NAME):** *Professor Foster, what do you most want to be remembered for following your time as chair of English?*

**DENNIS FOSTER (HIS REAL NAME):** Oh, my, I don't want to be remembered at all. In my experience, almost no one is remembered for anything they have done well. Former chairs, like former deans, former presidents, are almost universally remembered for their lies, blunders, and bad deeds, unless they are so unfortunate as to die in office. The greatest tribute would be amnesia.

*In my experience, almost no one is remembered for anything they have done well... The greatest tribute would be amnesia.*

**C:** *But surely you did accomplish something during your nine years.*

**DF:** Oh, certainly. Mostly a chair files reports, answers mail, attends meetings, and listens to complaints, of which only one provides much scope for amusement. But if one does these things with sufficient liveliness, a department might accomplish things. For example, if you don't spend all your money on photocopies, you can hire new faculty. During the time I was chair, the Department of English hired eleven new professors. Forty-five percent of our current faculty arrived during my time in office. We have always had a good department, but now it is 25% larger; it teaches in areas such as post-colonial studies, earliest American literature, literature of the American southwest, gay and lesbian literature, and a range of cultural studies that we had taught little of, if at all. I would like to say I did this, that this growth and scope is my legacy, but like a good chair, I mostly watched it happen while I filled out annual workload reviews.

**C:** *That doesn't sound very inspiring.*

**DF:** Oh, it isn't, believe me. I think I did make up for it by allowing Professor Schwartz to hold many amusing parties in our house, convincing more than a few people that the Department of English was worth belonging to. I wouldn't underestimate the value of having a dozen good dinner companions on a faculty.

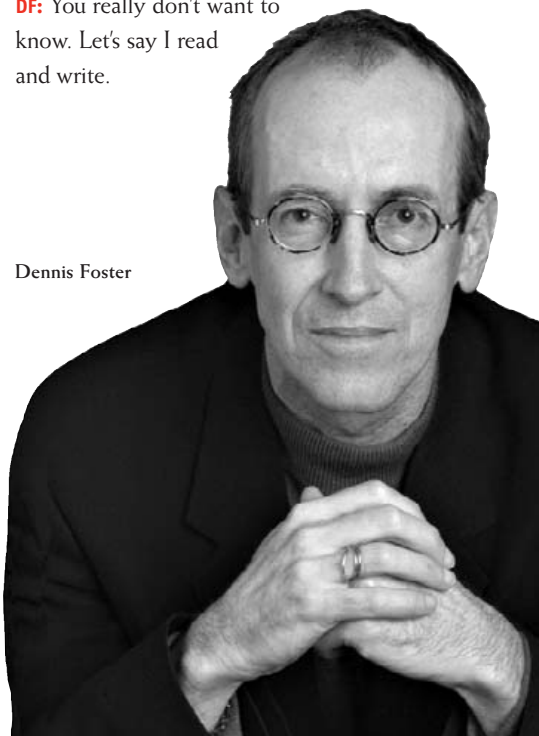
**DC:** *Well, how do you explain the fact that the Department is now beginning a Ph.D.?*

**DF:** I will say that I warned everyone that initiating a Ph.D. would be a lot of work: many sophisticated seminars to prepare; many complicated graduate students to shepherd; many letters to write when they eventually go on the job market. But the faculty insisted we go ahead, making many good arguments: we have the faculty to do it well; teaching Ph.D. students makes everyone better in their fields; undergraduate students will benefit from the higher level of intellectual engagement. This is the time to do it. If SMU is to become a major research institution, good Ph.D. programs are essential. So, seeing that it would do no good to stand in the way, I allowed committees to form and produce a Ph.D. Some might say I have stepped down from the chair's job at just the right time.

**C:** *And what does an ex-chair do?*

**DF:** You really don't want to know. Let's say I read and write.

Dennis Foster



## Writer's Block

*I haven't eaten in twenty days.*

*I've gulped air and licked my lips, wet with rusty water dripping from the exposed pipes of heaven's underside, enough tears to live on.*

*My cheeks aren't hollow, though. They're filled with poems rich and salty as alphabet soup, but hot.*

*Much too hot.*

*My spine is bumpy coral rising delicately under white sand.*

*From my crouch in the middle of nowhere, I can see everything.*



by Vanessa A. Hopper

## Planting Stones

I picked up a  
2.5-pound rock  
walked into the ocean  
chest-high  
then sat down.

I thought the flaws within  
might float away  
like splinters.

I thought of walking  
toward Europe  
and bursting on the horizon  
like a great idea.

In the end there was  
was an acre of  
wall-sized stones, each  
one solid as a held breath,  
each one a  
moment to myself.

by Jack Myers

2003 Texas Poet Laureate

From the book, *The Glowing River*  
(Invisible Cities Press)

## SMU's Novelty

by Jim Zeigler, Visiting Frenseny Assistant  
Professor (2005-2007)

New to the faculty at SMU this fall, I decided to approach my first weeks on campus as if I were an incoming undergraduate again. I bought a Mustang ball cap, went nowhere without my campus map, and attended every barbecue I could find, whether or not I was invited. Having received my Ph.D. in English just last year, on crucial matters I still think like a student. Provided you wear a nametag and can endure temperatures over 100 degrees, during fall orientation you can eat free under a tent on the mall at most times of day and night. I mixed with new students at an opening convocation for the Honors Program; Willard Spiegelman concluded his welcome address with an unabashed endorsement of study in the liberal arts as superior to a curriculum in business. I felt right at home. Later, seated as the designated faculty member at Table Two, I learned from a half-dozen enterprising first-year students about chicken at Bubba's, Hummers in Plano, the Eric Dickerson-era in football, and something vague about a ghost in Virginia-Snyder Hall. No one at the table had seen Dickerson and the ghost together. The evening before the Honors Convocation, the entire entering class rehearsed their college aspirations by proceeding single file under the rotunda of Dallas Hall and down the mall into McFarlin Auditorium, where the faculty in full regalia joined them. Four years or so from now, I learned, the same students are expected to mark the end of their education at SMU by reversing that



Jim Zeigler

journey. They will signal the completion of their degrees by passing again under the rotunda and out the doors of Dallas Hall.

As a literature scholar, I cannot help but discern in SMU's orientation activities for new students the suggestion of a genre. The deliberate effort to introduce new students into the intellectual community of the university also initiates for each of them a narrative of education, or what we, following German literary traditions, call a *bildungsroman*. While the protagonists of the genre such as Wilhelm, Emma, Pip, or Huck may have divergent backgrounds and experiences, their successful development involves the cultivation of ethics as well as the acquisition of what resume handbooks now describe as "skill sets." Having taught prior to this fall exclusively at large public universities that face ever increasing pressure from elected state officials and private interests to "vocalize" higher education, I am encouraged to have observed amidst all of the fall hospitality an attachment at SMU to the idea that a university education ought to exceed the professional application of its curricula. I admit I am romantic about the narratives our students will author as they make their way around campus in the coming years, and there's no question I am stubbornly idealistic in my insistence that schooling not be regarded or represented as a customer service. I am pleased to teach at an institution that, in my brief experience, impresses on its students that university attendance ought to be thought of as an opportunity to practice intelligent, ethical, and artful living.



Rotunda Passage

## Much Ado About Arp

by Alexandra Cassar, English Major, Class '07

Once inside this retired professor's two-story condominium, I was met with brightly colored modern furnishings, and a veranda-like kitchen with windows for walls.

As so many of this former professor's students might have thought appropriate, I had expected the décor to be classic, filled with gilded portraits of Shakespeare, with bookshelves lined with rows of literature containing his plays and sonnets, perhaps with a small shrine set up in his honor. As I followed the scuff of the Detroit native's shoes on the hardwood floors, we passed the dining room on my left, and then entered a living room with a large oil copy of one of Monet's depictions of the Thames on the far wall. As he sat across from me underneath the painting, reclining on his khaki couch with his open-toed sandals in full view, I looked at his grey hair and silver goatee and reminisced about the days in which I was enrolled in his undergraduate Shakespeare course.

For many undergraduate students, Professor Thomas Arp's *World of Shakespeare* course provided an introductory, but nonetheless thorough, look at eight of Shakespeare's many plays. Little did students know that their professor was a pivotal figure in the creation of the course in which they were enrolled. Around 1975-76, Professor Arp collaborated with English department faculty (including Professor Spiegelman, Professor Wheeler and the late Professor Early) to discuss creating "a general undergraduate Shakespeare course." The only Shakespeare courses available at that time were restricted to majors, and Professor Arp considered depriving non-majors of Shakespeare's genius unacceptable. So he developed a curriculum, created a layout for course documents, obtained countless audio/video props to help students visualize pivotal moments in the plays,

and proposed this new course to the department. ENGL 1320 (The World of Shakespeare) was the result. Professor Arp's most noteworthy accomplishment, however, is hardly the development of this course.

His coming to Dallas from the University of California at Berkeley in 1970 marked the beginning of Professor Arp's thirty-five year teaching career at SMU. Compared to Berkeley's ever-controversial campus environment, SMU seemed "mild and quiet — like stepping back into the Eisenhower



Professor Arp with student answering questions about Shakespeare.

years." Before teaching at Berkeley, Professor Arp also taught at Princeton University, the University of Bucharest in Romania, and Bowdoin College in Maine, where his teaching career began. Contrary to popular student belief, Professor Arp's area of expertise is *not* limited to Shakespeare, but encompasses numerous areas of fiction, poetry and drama. He received his B.A. in English from the University of Michigan, and his M.A. and Ph.D in American Literature and English/American Literature (respectively) from Stanford University.

When asked how he keeps himself busy now that he doesn't have students badgering him, Professor Arp replied with an unexpected answer — editing textbooks. In 1977, Laurence Perrine invited Professor

Arp to join him as the co-author of the fifth edition of *Sound and Sense*, a poetry textbook in a series covering three literary genres (fiction, poetry and drama). The fiction textbook is called *Story and Structure*, and *Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense* includes the materials from the first two books, plus a section devoted to drama. Professor Arp accepted Perrine's invitation, and worked with him as co-author of the series until Perrine died in 1995, which made Professor Arp the sole author of the series. About two editions back, Professor Arp extended

an invitation to a former master's student of Perrine's, Greg Johnson (take note, former Arp students — Johnson attended SMU), to join him as the series' new co-author. Since Greg's acceptance, Professor Arp is now editing and compiling the textbooks' material as co-

author once again, which he says is a nice relief from the pressures of flying solo on a project requiring such a high level of commitment.

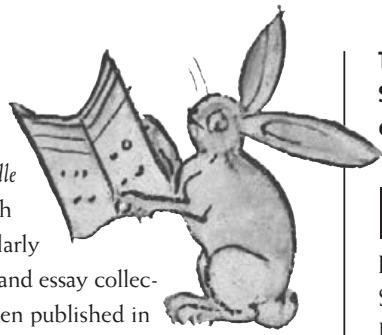
Aside from textbook compilation and editing, Professor Arp is planning to participate in a program that will please students who can't get enough of his literary wisdom. Starting in Spring 2006, Professor Arp may be teaching a course through the Continuing Education office called "The Great Plays of Shakespeare." If registration goes according to plan, the course will be taught in six two-hour meetings on consecutive Saturday mornings and will offer in-depth study of a single play each semester it is taught (*Hamlet* will be the topic for the spring). The first of the six sessions will be an introduction to the play, and the last five will be spent on each of the five acts individually.

For more information, please contact The Office of Continuing Education at 214-768-8446 or [smutbink@smu.edu](mailto:smutbink@smu.edu).

## Medieval Studies

The Medieval Studies faculty and students do more than feast and attend lectures. The students (who can elect minors, majors, or graduate degrees in Medieval Studies) undertake demanding cross-disciplinary course work; the faculty happily supervise this work and are themselves active scholars who write scholarly essays and books, edit journals, books and book series. Within the English Department, Professor Stephen Shepherd has recently published a Norton Critical edition of Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* and an Early English Text Society edition of *Turpin's Story: A Middle English Translation of The Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle*. Jo Goynes, director of the SMU First-Year Writing Program, is associate editor of the scholarly quarterly *Arthuriana* and Bonnie Wheeler is its editor. In addition, Wheeler is series editor of two

book series, *The New Middle Ages* (in which over 60 scholarly monographs and essay collections have been published in the last ten years) and *Studies in Arthurian and Courtly Cultures*. Wheeler writes about topics that range from 12th-century Latin poetry to contemporary gender studies; she has edited or co-edited ten books, and she has another, *Mindful Spirit in Late Medieval Literature: Essays in Honor of Elizabeth D. Kirk*, at press. If you'd like to be on the e-mail list for information about Medieval Studies activities, please contact Dr. Wheeler: [bwheeler@smu.edu](mailto:bwheeler@smu.edu). Like all members of the English Department, she is delighted to hear from former students.



*Illustration courtesy of  
Medieval Studies Department*

This is a newsletter for Alumni,  
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of the Department of English

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