

# ERUDITION

## GILBERT LECTURE SERIES

MARCH 30-31, 2007

Marshall Terry  
Symposium

Location TBA

## EMILY DICKINSON: WORDS AND MUSIC

APRIL 12, 2007

Mary Jo Salter

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

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

APRIL 13, 2007

Recital of  
musical settings of  
Emily Dickinson's  
poems, sung by soprano  
Virginia Dupuy.

Meadows Museum,  
O'Donnell Hall

Time TBA



SMU

SMU Department of English

2006 • issue 1

## A Writer's Teacher

by Tracey Daugherty, *Novelist, B.A. '76*

For most beginning writers, the blank page seems an inhospitable home for the words that hum in their heads. As long as it remains unwritten, a word or a phrase is the writer's private pleasure, but once it's fixed

to paper, what was private becomes public, vulnerable to the gazes of others. A writing teacher's first task, then, is to make a young writer feel at home with the empty page. Marsh Terry understands "Home" in its various aspects, and his understanding accounts, in part, for his unflinching ability, over many decades, to lead young writers to that safe spot where their words can flourish.

In the 1970s, when I was a young pup shying away from the page, Marsh often opened his home on Lover's Lane to his colleagues and students for receptions, dinners, and parties honoring the visiting writers who participated in the SMU Literary Festival, a grand, week-long



Marshall Terry  
E.A. Lilly Professor of English

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event each year (for which Marsh was largely responsible) that enabled us all to meet the nation's best novelists and poets, and glimpse the literary life. In Marsh's home, I sat at the feet of Larry McMurtry and listened to him tell us that the old-fashioned Western was dead—this was shortly before McMurtry

published *Lonesome Dove*, the signature Western of our day. In Marsh's home, I listened to the mysterious Eastern European writer Jerzy Kosinski tell us tales of Cold War spying and assassinations (with the implication that he had taken part in both, at one time). Kosinski's companion, a tall, silent woman in a velvet cape, hovered behind him, staring daggers at anyone who got too close to her man.

Throughout each of these encounters, and many more with writers, some of whom were friendly, some selfish, some helpful, some impatient with eager young students, I watched Marsh stroll through his home, making sure all of his guests were comfortable, and I realized that he was the only model of the literary life that I needed. He was a generous writer, an untiring teacher, a family man and a friend of fierce loyalties, and he knew where each of these parts of his life belonged. Our host, I

saw, was far more balanced than any of the guests he and his lovely wife Toni let into their home. The night of Kosinski's visit, Marsh was the only person brave enough to ignore the caped woman's iciness and approach the writer. He slipped an arm around Kosinski, winked at him, and let him know that he saw through the other writer's malarkey: one storyteller to another. Kosinski smiled. Even the Cold War gave way to Marsh's mirthful hospitality . . .

I think of Marsh and Toni's home, now, whenever I confront a blank page. I want my words to fit as snugly between the margins as we all did in that cozy old place on Lover's Lane. And I want my sentences to ring with the warmth, music, and laughter of Marshall Terry's voice.

*Symposium honoring Marshall Terry for 50 years of service March 30-31, 2007. Check out his latest novel, "The Memorialist: A Novella and Stories."*

## Who Wants to Be an American Idiot?

by Michael Householder, *Assistant Professor of English, Early American Literature*

Lately I've been thinking a lot about stupidity. I'm not alone. It seems like Americans post-9/11 can't stop worrying about "failed intelligence" in Iraq or poorly engineered levees in New Orleans or the growing "science gap" between America and the rest of the world. It's as though, having been blindsided once, we've collectively determined never to be outsmarted again. Like Green Day sings, no one wants to be an American Idiot.

At least, that's how it first appears. Scratch the shiny surface of American pop culture and you'll find that, despite our best

protagonists, each show takes a very different attitude toward the broader implications of stupidity. We sympathize with Earl precisely because he is aware of his limitations. Conversely, we enjoy watching Michael suffer because he is oblivious to his.

As any student of American literature will tell you, Americans' interest in stupidity is nothing new. Well before John Kennedy Toole gave the world Ignatius J. Reilly in *A Confederacy of Dunces* and Mark Twain introduced Huckleberry Finn, American writers were churning out stories, poems, and plays about the nation's various dopes, dupes, dullards, fools, bumpkins, hayseeds, hicks, oafs, rubes, yokels, dimwits, nitwits, nin-compoops, chuckleheads, jackasses,

fumblers, bumlbers, schlemiels and schnooks.

Ironically, the founding father of American stupidity (and yes, we have our idiot mothers too) is also one of the most visible manifestations of American intelligence: Benjamin Franklin. In his *Autobiography*, Franklin presents himself as the original American naïf. In one particularly famous passage, young Benjamin arrives in Philadelphia hungry, home-

less, and without prospects. Unfamiliar with the local economy, he is astonished to find that three pennies could buy him "three great Puffy Rolls." Recalling how he proudly strolled down the streets of Philadelphia with a roll under each arm while eating the third, Franklin admits that he made "a most awkward ridiculous appearance."

One can't help laughing with Franklin at his younger self. In this figure of the innocent yokel, we Americans can imagine ourselves at our best: optimistic, full of promise, and innocent of the decadence and corruption of the "Old World."

Such has been the traditional view in the study of American letters, one that has reinscribed for each generation the belief that Americans are an exceptional people, unlike any other in their innocence and purity, and thus endowed with—and sanctified by—an inherent goodness.

And yet, no matter how much we might cherish it, this view is ultimately a dangerous one, for it fails to grasp an essential fact: Franklin, when he records this vignette, obviously occupies a position of knowledge, not stupidity. The older, savvy writer has the wisdom to smile at the bumpkinish antics of his younger self. Read this way, the story ceases to be a celebration of American innocence—at least in any kind of simple way. Our appreciation works only if we have the distance—the intelligence—to recognize the incongruity between our former stupid selves and the smarter selves we'd like to believe we've become.

The ancient Greeks had a word to describe this incongruity. They called it irony.

In the wake of 9/11, American cultural critics of all political stripes proclaimed the death of irony. Sanctified by their victimization and galvanized by their anger, Americans would rise up in righteous anger to smite their enemies. And we (or at least a politically representative majority) did rise up, with conviction, relying on what has become known as the "best intelligence at the time."

The Greeks also had a word for conviction without self-awareness—that is, without irony. They called it hubris.

Other academic fields seek smartness in all its elusive forms: from the tiniest electrochemical synaptic sparks to the cosmic blueprint that might substantiate intelligent design. But literary study, because of its capacity to help us think ironically, is best equipped to do something even more important: enable us to recognize, respect, and live with our stupidity.



efforts to smarten up, we Americans continue to embrace our inner idiot. As one might expect, the best examples can be found on television. On "My Name is Earl" Jason Lee portrays a bumbling hayseed (Earl) whose lucky strike in the lottery has spurred him to undertake a Wal-Mart version of the examined life. On "The Office" Steve Carell plays a completely different kind of dummy—the corporate drone—as oblivious and obnoxious regional office manager Michael Scott. Despite their similarly stupid

## "What We Have Loved, Others Might Hate"

by Suzanne Bost  
Assistant Professor of English, Chicano Literature

"**W**hat We Have Loved, Others Will Love," a Helen Vendler essay I teach in Contemporary Approaches to Literature, promotes the value of literary

study by demonstrating the rich linguistic complexity of Wordsworth, Yeats, and Stevens. Vendler has such faith in the excellence of "our general literary culture" that she assumes, once they are introduced to these works, our students, too, will love what their professors love.

What I love are the strangely mystical and politically controversial essays of Gloria Anzaldúa. A poet, activist, visionary, and teacher – originally from the South Texas town of Hargill – Anzaldúa died in May, 2004 from diabetes-related complications. Her essays are widely anthologized: included in readers for Rhetoric courses because of her code-switching between English and Spanish, included in American Studies readers because of her celebration of the hybrid cultures of the "borderlands," and included in Women's Studies readers as one of the first Chicana lesbians to publish open criticism of racism and homophobia in the women's movement. Because her work has broken ground in so many fields, it is likely that our students will encounter Anzaldúa in at least one of their courses.

I teach Anzaldúa in my Chicana/o Literature courses. Since I have been writing about Anzaldúa in my new book on pain, illness, and feminism, I know her work backwards and forwards, inside and out. I arrive to class on the "Anzaldúa days" with great excitement and have been surprised to encounter utter silence on the part of my students. Even after hashing out her long passages of untranslated Spanish, her strange invocations of Aztec writing practices, her fascination with snakes, her affirmation of pain as enlightenment, and her insistence that racial and sexual half-breeds represent the future of our planet – those provocative ideas that keep my mind churning – my students tend to be mute.



Suzanne Bost  
Assistant Professor of English

I ask myself, then: Anzaldúa, why do I love thee? Of course there is some personal satisfaction in being able to understand her (my reward for years of learning to read Spanish and training in Latin American Studies). But my love of Anzaldúa is not just self-affirming; it might also be masochistic. (I am, after all, studying pain and illness.) I love to have my ideas about identity, health, language, and proper political behavior challenged. And I am sure that, at some level, my students do, too. It is, however, difficult to love – at first sight – something so new that you don't yet know how to see it, particularly when it controverts some of our most basic assumptions.

Vendler calls what she loves "our inherited culture," assuming a shared identity of English readers who have been educated to respect what Wordsworth, Yeats, and Stevens stand for. Those writers have history on their side and, for Anglo-American readers, some cultural familiarity. My job is to teach writers and ideas that are unfamiliar to most of my students. I suppose I could say "what I have loved, others might love someday." But they might also hate it, and that's their prerogative. I'm sure not everyone loved Wordsworth in his day, either.

Gloria  
Anzaldúa



## Paying My Bill

The trolley cables above the street in San Francisco make no sense, like you, like the ends of crisscrossed shoelaces. Which goes to which? And I don't know if you ever belonged To me.

I started thinking about you earlier, when the day was more awake. I stumbled around Vesuvio with eyes heavy. Then the restless pigeons roosting on the flat roof above left. So I went too, my stomach full of lager, somehow still empty.

And I went to a little place. Italian music and sunshine grated through the shutters where I was eating. I started thinking again, about you, and I twirled my pasta slower and slower until it slid off my fork. So I asked the waiter for the check the way you always did with one finger held out above my head not saying anything.

– Hunter Foreman  
2006 David R. Russell  
Poetry Award First Place

## Changing Sight

I first kissed your  
tattooed shoulder  
Standing under a trellis  
a hibiscus  
while you told me about  
the plumeria tree  
You watch during breaks  
from the construction site.  
I listened to its tiny  
flowers bloom purple  
With the sound of  
your voice.  
Every thing was in  
balance then.

I never noticed how many  
Camels you smoked  
Or why six of us shared two  
beds,  
Because numbers didn't  
matter then  
And we were young  
And we all hated counting.

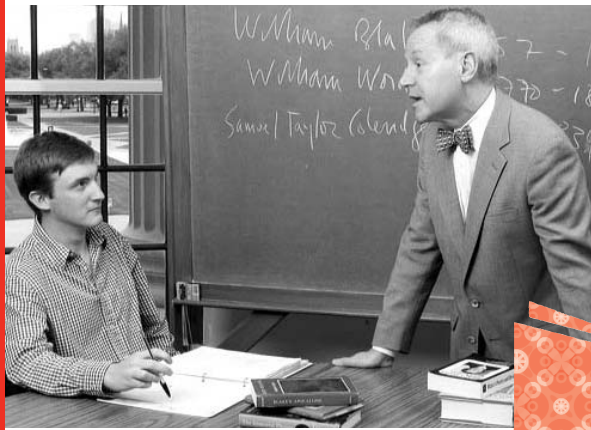
Now, thoughts of you and  
watery islands are caked  
with the past with the grime  
of plaster,  
Now I add numbers together  
in my head  
At busy traffic lights  
The way my eyes see is dif-  
ferent  
They turn only to what is in  
front of me,  
To the things that matter less

- Maya Bakogiannis  
2006 David R. Russell  
Poetry Award Second Place

## His Bowtie Rich and Modest, Asserted by a Knowing Grin

by Alexandra Cassar, *English Major, B.A. '07*

"If you don't mind me asking... how old are you?" After conceding that he teaches students now whose parents had also been his students, he continued to avoid the question. I prodded further. "How does that make you feel?" Above the crisp white of his oxford shirt and his tidy blue bowtie, Professor Spiegelman raised an eyebrow. He turned to face the left side of his third floor office and, with a shoot-me-now look and a snide smile, replied, "Do you see that window?"



Professor Spiegelman, affectionately known as "Rap-Masta Spiegs" by some, is one of SMU's most legendary professors; his caustic wit, pristine bowties, crisp suits, and remarkably extensive knowledge of all things poetic are just some of his most memorable attributes. This year (2006) will be Professor Spiegelman's 35th year of enlightening SMU students and teaching them about the intricacies of the poem, which, according to him, should make us "twitter with excitement and almost pee [our] pants." His area of expertise lies in 19th and 20th century poetry (mostly English), although he has written about verse composed as early as the 18th. In short, he could probably tell you something about any number of poems written from Chaucer's day to the present.

As an undergraduate student at Williams College in Boston, Massachusetts, Professor Spiegelman admits that he was fond of poetry, but found fiction more intriguing. Then, at age 24, while doing his graduate work at Harvard University, he claims to

have had a "momentary epiphany" and he completely "switched gears."

Aside from teaching us, his "lazy" and somewhat incompetent students, Spiegelman has also recently published a compilation of letters written by the late poet Amy Clampitt (1920-1994); he single handedly went through an intensive hands-on research process in order to obtain all of the documents included in the book. Clampitt, who Spiegelman calls the "patron saint of late bloomers," began to publish poetry at age 63, but wrote beautiful and moving letters to family and friends throughout the course of her life. After finding some of these letters in a cottage on Clampitt's estate, Professor Spiegelman also discovered an address book, and wrote to many of Clampitt's family members requesting copies of letters she had sent them; this eventually led to the creation of his fifth book, "Love, Amy": *The Selected Letters of Amy Clampitt*.

Professor Spiegelman is also the current editor-in-chief of America's third oldest continuously published literary magazine, *The Southwest Review*. Founded in 1915 at the

University of Texas, the quarterly is a "belles-lettres," all-purpose literary intellectual magazine that contains poems, works of fiction, and works of non-fiction, all of which "Spiegs" has a hand in choosing. Most of the submissions are from young writers in their twenties, but no undergraduate submissions are allowed (sorry, aspiring SMU undergrads). The magazine does, however, have the "function... of allowing creative writers to get a toe-hold in the marketplace" once they are past the undergraduate barrier.

Published author, poetry analyst extraordinaire, and editor-in-chief, Willard Spiegelman remains one of SMU's most admired and respected professors. In his thirty-five years at SMU, he has cultivated in many students a love for poetry that may never have flourished were he not part of their lives. His enthusiasm for the subject is contagious, and he has done a truly remarkable job at imparting that passion to his students in the classroom; but, then again, as he once said, "it's so hard for me to think of the *wrong* way of doing things."

# It's NOT Fair!

I've done my best, but it's not enough. It's not enough that my students read—to give their developing brains' something to ponder besides money, booze, and sex-perverse ideas such as:

...pinions of men are not the object of civil government...to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency is a dangerous fallacy, which at once destroys... liberty...<sup>2</sup>

**it's not enough** to ask students to find a writer's reason for using a particular word; or to cajole students into writing about ideas rather than their lofty opinions; or to bribe students (with good grades) to research with open minds, to help them understand that preconceptions are useless in developing and writing about new ideas.

**it's not enough** to share snippets of my own (bumbling) research—particularly

research to prepare myself for 1302 classes writing about the First Amendment—to help students understand that accepting the "common wisdom" will make their ideas, well, "common."

**it's not enough** to try to shock students (I admit it) with ideas I've discovered about words in such sacred writings as the Declaration of Independence. ("Creation's God" is not in the King James Bible—the one Jefferson knew. "Equality" occurs once in the KJV and refers to Jesus. Neither "rights" nor "sacred honor" appear in the KJV. "Providence" appears once in the KJV, referring to a Roman Governor; "providence" is a Puritan invention, found first in writing in 1602). Students actually tried to prove me wrong! How dare I take on America's civil religion?

**and** (do I dare mention this?) it's not enough that I've been to the West Bank and Gaza and have radical (un-American) views about the whole mess in the Middle East (I won't elaborate for fear of angering some of my best friends in this department). All I can say is, "IT'S NOT FAIR!"

I spent all that time and money. And where did it get me? None of this is enough to earn me a place on David Horowitz's list of the **101 Most Dangerous Academics in America**.<sup>3</sup>

I don't know what one has to do to make the list. But I'm too old and tired to try much longer. I guess I have to believe what my dad told me years ago. "No one promised it would be fair." Even in academia.

—  
by **Harold Knight**  
Lecturer in English

1 ...scientific research in the last decade has revealed that it's not hormones, but the brain itself that is the culprit [in irrational behavior and thinking]. Jay Giedd, a neuroscientist at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, MD, and the author of the first long-term study of the adolescent brain, used [MRIs] to scan the brains of 145 teens over two-year intervals. The scans revealed brains that are still in transition—works in progress—that won't be thinking logically and rationally until young adults reach their early twenties. (Jami Jones. "Teens Will Be Teens." <<http://SchoolLibraryJournal.com>> 1 Jan 2005; accessed 20 March 2006.)

2 Jefferson, Thomas. "A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in Virginia." Written 1777; enacted 1785.

3 "We all know that left-wing radicals from the 1960s have hung around academia...if you thought they were all harmless, antiquated hippies...far from being harmless, they spew violent anti-Americanism, preach anti-Semitism, and cheer on the killing of American soldiers and civilians—all the while collecting tax dollars and tuition fees to indoctrinate our children." David Horowitz. *The Professors: the 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*. Regnery Publishing, Inc. 2006. (from the inside flap)

# Sigma Tau Delta

by April Hammons, *English Major, B.A. '06*

**S**igma Tau Delta is an international English honors society established in 1924 at Dakota Wesleyan University. The society seeks to honor distinguished English majors and minors who meet and exceed the organization's high academic standards throughout their undergraduate and graduate careers. For SMU's chapter, the requirements for membership vary according to the number of academic hours the student has completed. For 45 hours, the student must maintain a 4.0 grade point average with 6 hours of residency. For 60 hours, the student must earn a 3.5 with 9 hours of residency, and for 90 hours they must achieve a 3.2 with 9 hours of residency. Students are notified of their eligibility during the spring semester, and induction takes place in late April or early

May. The society is an elite organization recognized across the country, and it offers its members a variety of avenues for intellectual development.

Here in Dallas, the Rho Theta chapter of Sigma Tau Delta has experienced a year of change and is continuing to grow. Keith Kobylka was the official chapter president during the fall semester, but before his departure to study abroad in Madrid for the spring, he asked me to take his place. The chapter has held a few events since then, including a very helpful what-to-do-with-an-English-degree discussion panel during which Professor Rosendale gave a very realistic and, therefore, a very frightening account of Ph. D. work and the search for a tenure-track teaching position.

If you want to know more about Sigma Tau Delta, visit <http://www.english.org>.

**This is a newsletter for Alumni,  
Students, Faculty, Staff and Friends  
of the Department of English**

**ERUDITION**

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