Comparative Literature Newsletter

2011

Notes from the Director



Charles Ross, Director

I sent the following email to Eric Weddle, who asked for opinions on what qualities Purdue should look for in a new president.

Robert Ringle, the former provost of Purdue, said that a university cannot be great without a great liberal arts program. Purdue is basically an engineering and science school, and those fields will domi-

nate the search for a new president. I understand that. But Purdue also it also needs to retain its vibrant liberal arts program, or it will remain second tier, behind schools like Michigan, Illinois, and Northwestern. By liberal arts I mean not just the social sciences and computer graphics, but a full range of offerings in literature, languages, and history. And by a full range I mean everything from the ancient classics through the middle ages and Renaissance, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. In the sciences, you have centers for research, and universities choose their specialties, which can be very narrow. But the liberal arts serve everyone in Purdue's

sphere of influence in Indiana, as well as the nation and international students, if not directly, then through teachers. The key to good teaching in the liberal arts is not to narrow specialties but to keep learning alive in many fields. All this costs very little. It only requires awareness.

Most of what I wrote was published in his story, which began on the first page of the Lafayette Journal and Courier on July 10, 2011.

The Comparative Literature at Purdue has recently been highly ranked by a national research agency. See the IDIS newsletter for more details (http://www.cla.purdue.edu/idis/idis/newsletter/index.html). In this issue we are saving space to honor our students to whom our program is dedicated.

Thanks as always to members of the Steering Committee and others who make the Comparative Literature Program work: Shaun Hughes, Angelica Duran, Beate Allert, Daniel Hsieh, Elena Coda, Howard Mancing, Al Lopez, Robert Marzec, Wendy Flory, Patrice Rankine, Tom Broden, and Maren Linett.

Spotlight on Brady Spangenberg



Brady, March 2006, as he appeared in Purdue FirstLines Pro-

Brady Spangenberg won the Outstanding Dissertation Award for the College of Liberal Arts in 2011. We asked Brady to give us a narrative of his career as a graduate student in Comparative Literature at Purdue University.

I came to Purdue in August of 2004 to pursue a Master's of Arts in Comparative Literature and to teach German. Six and a half years later, I received a contract from BASF, the world's largest chemical company. How these two events relate to each other, I am still not quite sure. But in the intervening years, I read classic writers like Milton, Boccaccio, Goethe, and Shakespeare next to obscure ones like Bruno Schulz, F. de la Motte Fouque, and the Norwich Grocers' Play (you all have to look them up now). I took courses, wrote papers, taught courses, attended conferences, published a couple papers, and wrote a dissertation, all of those things that go into building a curriculum vitae. Rather than rehashing the details of my CV, I would like to explain what I learned as a member of the Comparative Literature Program at Purdue and possibly how that explains why I ended up here in Ludwigshafen, Germany.

Upon arriving at Purdue, I quickly learned that it is hard to define oneself, especially in an interdisciplinary program. Even the name itself, "com-par-a-tive lit-er-a-

ture," is a mouthful, and it tends to scare those who are unfamiliar with the field. For some reason, the name has the power to stop a conversation dead in its tracks. What do you do? I study microbiology (an equally obscure discipline). And you? Comparative Literature. A contorted face, a simple "Oh," and a few backward steps—the conversation is over. I have to admit that I often profiled my conversation partners. If I thought that the actual name of my field would scare them, I simply said I studied English and left out that I also studied German and Latin. As horrible as this sounds, at the time my options seemed limited. Titles such as philologist, man of letters, or literature scholar proved equally alienating. But this also backfired on occasion, as when I told a well-dressed couple in a coffee shop that I studied English, and they both retorted, "That's nice, we studied comparative literature." Lesson learned: you are doing exciting work, own it. (Continued on Page 8.)

Comparative Literature Alumnus Organizes International Conference

José Newton de Seixas Pereira Filho graduated from the Comparative Literature Program in December 2008, after defending his dissertation titled "The Non-violent and Violent Mimetic Desires of Street Orphans in Anglo-American and Luso-Brazilian Literatures."

He entered the concorso for academic appointments and was named an assistant professor in his hometown of Salvador at the University of Bahia, a state in east central Brazil. A little later he became chair of Germanic Languages. He then organized a conference titled "Translation, Cinema Translation, and Cinema" during the XI Seminar of Applied Linguistics and Literature and the VII Seminar of Translation Studies. The conference was held in the In-



Margie Berns looks at a diagram from her paper "English in the Expanding Circle: the Differences Do Make a Difference" in an office at the new facility for Germanic Studies, Universidade Federal da Bahia.



Our hotel, near the airport, Salvador, Brazil. Alternate title: Why We Love Brazil.

stitute of Letters, in Milton Santos Auditorium—Pavilion III, Campus Ondina, at the Universidade Federal da Bahia, from November 12-15, 2010, to which he invited four members of the Comparative Literature Program—Charles Ross, Beate Allert, Shaun Hughes, and Patrice Rankine—plus Margie Berns from the English Department. Their papers will be published in a special column, "Homage to Brazil," in Forum for World Literature Studies.

As the pictures below show, it is not easy leaving West Lafayette in November to travel all the way to the beaches of Brazil, but someone has to do it.



Beate Allert, Patrice Rankine, and host Viviane C. Annunciação from the Universidade Federal da Bahia, in a market, downtown Salvador.



Charles Ross, Jose Newton, and Shaun Hughes, Universidade Federal da Bahia.

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Some New and Current Students



Naty Fontes

Natália Fontes-Oliveira was born in a small city in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. She has recently defended her MA thesis, "Of Women Bonds: Motherhood, Sisterhood and the Ethics of Care in Toni Morrison's Sula and A Mercy" at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG). Natália also has an undergraduate major in Letters: Languages and Literatures from the same university. Her overall interests are feminist criticism, world literatures, visual and performing arts.

Bing Yan entered the M.A. Program in 2010 after completing an M.A. in Chemistry at Virginia Tech. This year she will be a teaching assistant for Angelica Duran's course, "Introduction to Religious Studies." In January 2011 she presented a paper at the Center

for Renaissance Studies' Multid-



Bing Yan

isciplinary Graduate Student Conference at the Newberry Library in Chicago.

Steven C. Gooch helped organize, with Juan Meneses and Derek Royal, the Comparative Literature conference Graphic Engagement: The Politics of Comics and Animation in September 2010, and he co-edited a special issue of the Forum for World Literature Studies 3.1 (2011), which featured articles selected from the conference. He will chair the panel "Framing Violence: Comics and Terrorism" at the Revisioning Terrorism Conference taking place at Purdue in September 2011, and will be presenting at the Midwest Conference on British Studies in November.

Tulin Ece Tosun received her BA from Ege University, Turkey, where she worked as an English instructor for three years. She received her MA from SUNY-Fredonia in 2011, writing a thesis titled "Re-Visionist Women Writers: Re-Writing Epic as a Female Genre." She has lectured on Odysseus's journey and ancient Anatolia and was one of the organizers "Mars and Venus: A Celebration of Pre-Modern Works" at Fredonia. Her interests are women's writing across cultures, Contemporary Turkish Literature (Orhan Pamuk, Elif Shafak, Ayla Kutlu), Minority Literatures (Kurdish, Greek, Armenian) in Modern Turkey and the representation of politics and memory.

Yuhan Huang entered the M.A. program as a Lynn fellow in the fall of 2010 and start as a TA in Chinese in 2011. Yuhan is interested in how the visual arts are understood and presented in literary texts. She is working on a black and white photographic record of the changes Wuhan, China, her hometown, because many of the old ways of living are disappearing and she would like to preserve their memory with her camera.

Rama Alhabian will begin in the Ph.D. program in 2011. She was born and educated in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and there I was raised and educated. She earned her bachelor's degree in Translation Studies (English-Arabic-English) at Effat University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in 2003, then



Yuhan Huang cooking at home.

in 2006 she started a five-year Master's program in King Saud University, Riyadh, in English literature. Her 40,000-word thesis examined *Uhuru*, the political independence of Kenya, from a postcolonialist perspective in three novels by the East African Anglophone political activist and writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o: A *Grain of Wheat* (1967), *Petals of Blood* (1977), and *Devil on the Cross* (1982). She graduated in January, 2011.

Joshua Ballard will begin his MA in Comparative Literature in the fall of 2011, with a teaching assistantship in Spanish. He received his B.A. in Spanish from the University of Cincinnati with a minor Judaic Studies. In addition to studying Hebrew, Josh plans to learn Classical and Modern Standard Arabic, as he is interested in the three Abrahamic religions.



Sijia Yao

Sijia Yao enters the Ph.D. Program in 2011. She is from Zhejiang province, in the southeast of China. She is interested in Chinese poetry, cultural studies, film studies, and Asian American literature.

Purdue-gift Online giving to Purdue

It is now even easier to donate to the Interdisciplinary Studies Programs using Purdue-gift. Purdue-gift makes it simple to make a gift by credit card to Purdue. Go to the following web address:

http://www.purdue.edu/UDO/pages/how_to/egift.html

Click on "Make a Gift", choose "Other" from a drop-down menu, then type in "Comparative Literature", enter some information about yourself, submit your payment information, and the transaction is completed through Purdue's secure server. Make your gift now in three easy steps. It takes just a few minutes.

Alumni Update



Anna Fluegge:

Ph.D. University of Freiburg, Germany, 2008: "James Ellroy and the Novel of Obsession' Exchange Student in Comparative Literature at Purdue, 2006-2007.

Anna's revised dissertation was published as a book in 2010. Since then she has moved

to Munich, she works as an assistant professor of American Literary History. Her interests include novel and film adaptation, crime novels, and several other fields.

Anna read a paper on "Modernism and the Creation of Anti-Landscapes: The Valley of Ashes in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*" at the conference "The Anti-Landscape"

in Odense, Denmark. She also spoke on "Ryan Bingham and Capitalism in Jason Reitman's *Up in the Air*" in Lorient, France. Anna will be teaching at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, during the fall 2011.

Tatyana Babic Williams:

Ph.D. May 2011: "La storia conta e pesa"—The Ghosts of Colonial Past in Igiaba Scego's Writings." Elena Coda (chair), Charles Ross, Beate Allert, Aparajita Sagar.

Tatyana teaches Italian language and culture as a Continuing Lecturer at Purdue. She lives in West Lafayette with her husband Pat and two lovely daughters, Maia (7) and Emma (4). She has recently started training to become a certified instructor of BodyFlow - an athletic blend of Tai Chi, Yoga, and Pilates.

Ashley Izzo (née Tussing):

M.A. August 2010: "Exploring Cultural Reflections through Jules Verne's Around the World in Eighty Days." Charles Ross (chair), Verne Foley,

After receiving her M.A. in Comparative Literature, Ashley was appointed as a Graduate Assistantship in the Collection Management department of the University of Kentucky's library system and began studying for the MLIS degree in Library and Information Science

On May 28, 2011, Ashley married fellow Purdue alumnus Steven Izzo (BS AAE 2008) at St. Thomas Aquinas Church in West Lafayette. Ashley and Steven are very happy together and had a wonderful time on their honeymoon to Costa Rica.

Ashley has decided to change her name. Her name now appears as Ashley Izzo. If you'd like to get in touch with Ashley, she can be reached at ashley.e.izzo@gmail.com and found on Facebook.



Ashley and Steven Izzo

Peirui Su:

Ph.D., August, 2010: "And the Darkness Comprehended It Not' – Epiphany in James Joyce and Fei Ming." Charles Ross (chair), Maren Linett, Shaun Hughes, Daniel Morris.

Her article of "A Heap of Broken Images – A Comparative Study of Li He and T. S. Eliot" will be published in the *Journal of the Southwest Conference on Asian Studies* (Summer 2011).

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Alumni Update (continued)

Steve Pierson:

Ph.D., May 2010: "A Bakhtinian Reading of a Selection of Poems by Hölderlin and Whitman." Howard Mancing (chair), Charles Ross, Beate Allert, Wendy Flory. Steve is Associate Professor of English at Onondaga Community College, 4185 W. Seneca Turnpike, Syracuse, NY 13215. piersons@sunyocc.edu

In November 2010, Steve was elected to the Nominating Committee of the Two -Year College Association (TYCA) of the Northeast, a regional branch of the TYCA, an NCTE affiliate devoted to the professional development of English faculty at community colleges. In March 2011 he gave a paper on ESL writing instruction at the annual SUNY Council on Writing Conference, held in Binghamton, New York. In July 2011, he delivered a paper titled "The Monologic Imagination of Walt Whitman" at the 14th International Bakhtin Conference in Bologna, Italy.



Steven Pierson's doctoral defense, April 19, 2010: Charles Ross, Wendy Flory, Steven, Beate Allert, Howard Mancing.

Outside the academy, his interests are raising his three daughters with his wife, and looking after his rose garden.

Maura Bergonzoni:

Ph.D. May 2007.

Maura teaches English at Liceo Manfredo Fanti in Carpi, Italy, where she is in charge of international exchange programs. Every year she goes to the Netherlands and every other year to San Francisco with honor students. She has co-edited a book, *In Living Memory* (New Academia, 2009) with Professor Ben Lawton on the Italian director and writer Pier Paolo Pasolini. She has also published articles and reviews on Italian documentary films by directors Alina Marazzi and Pippo Delbono.

Lei Jin:

Ph.D. August 2009: "Gardens of Good and Evil: The Supernatural Stories of Pu Songling (1640-1715) and The Gothic Tales of Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849) Gothic Tales." Daniel Hsieh (Chair), G. Richard Thompson, Charles Ross, Robert Lamb.

Lei Jin is assistant professor of Chinese language, literature, and cinema at the College of Charleston, South Carolina. Her article "Poe's Landscape: Dreams, Nightmares, and Enclosed Gardens" has been accepted by Forum for World Literature Studies. Her book length translation Zhongguo gudai yuzhoulun yu zhengzhi wenhua, Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China (by Aihe Wang, published by Cambridge University Press, 2000) has been accepted by Shanghai guji chubanshe. Lei Jin's current research focuses on Chinese documentary films. Working with a poet and fisherman, she is also engaging a translation project about classic Chinese fishing poems.



Cong Yin following her doctoral defense. Relief!.

Cong Yin

Ph.D. May 2011: "The Literary Reputations of Eileen Chang and Vladimir Nabokov." Charles Ross (Chair), Dan Morris, Al López, Robert Marzec.

Cong is now in Shanghai with her husband and two sons, Emo (7) and Leo Zhao (two and a half).

Alumni Update (continued)

Fiorina Catalina Florescu:

Ph.D. August 2007: "Transacting Sites of the Liminal Bodily Spaces." Thomas Adler (chair), Elizabeth K. Mix, Keith Dickson, and Floyd Merrell.

Since graduation Catalina has held teaching appointments near her home in Hoboken, New Jersey, at Rutgers University, St. Peter's College, Stevens Institute of Technology, Hudson County Community College, where she is presently in the English Department. She is developing a literacy and writing program for Hudson county.





Her first book of non-fiction, *Inventing Me/Exerciții de retrăit* was recently published in Romania. Her revised dissertation, *Transacting Sites of the Liminal Bodily Spaces* is available as a book at www.amazon.com and at www.borders.com. She is an MLA Bibliography fellow, appointed to I index articles about Romanian literature & culture.

Her son, Mircea is now six years old and has started to read and write in two languages, English and Romanian. Her blog can be found at http://catalinaflorescu.blogspot.com/ and you can also find her at http://facebook.com/catalina.florescu.

Catalina writes: I have just returned from Craiova, where I had the press release of my first book written in Romanian, *Inventing Me/Exercitii de retrait*. It was a new experience for me because I had to say a few words in my own language. I am now used to read papers almost exclusively in English! :) I gave interviews to local TV and radio stations and signed autographs. I was quite overwhelmed by the event, more emotional than I had originally anticipated.

Martina Witt-Jauch:

Ph.D. May 2010: "Gothic Villains and Criminal Detectives in Theodor Fontane, Anna Katharine Green, and Arthur Conan Doyle." Charles S. Ross and William J. Palmer (co-chairs), P. Ryan Schneider, Robert P. Lamb.

Martina is currently a full-time Lecturer in English and E-Learning at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Hildesheim, Germany. At the same time, she is completing a book project, on the comparative analysis of trauma and terror novels since the French Revolution, at the University of Goettingen as part of her postdoctoral qualification (Habilitation).



Martina presented a chapter from her dissertation Apart from revising my dissertation at UNAM in Mexico City in March 2010 and it will be published in the forthcoming "Gothic Congress Yearbook" Martina writes: "Concerning personal news, I have returned to Germany to pursue my academic career in Europe for a while and have gotten married in February of 2011 as well."

Mahmoud Gewaily:

Ph.D. May 2007: "Explication and Implication in the English Translation of Mohamed Choukri's For Bread Alone: Linguistic and Pragmatic Losses." Shaun Hughes and Charles Ross (co-directors), Howard Mancing, David Blakesley.

Originally from Egypt, Mahmoud is now teaching in Adelaide, Australia, where he is currently on study leave. He has published several articles on Choukri and Nawal El Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero.

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Alumni Update (continued)

Liang Lu Miller:

Ph.D. May 2011: "Western Myth and the Construction of Cao Yu's Two Tragedies." Charles Ross (chair), Daniel Hsieh, Patrice Rankine, Sandor Goodhart.

Liang is currently a Chinese instructor at DePauw University in Indiana. Liang writes: "I am on summer vacation now. I just returned from a hiking trip in Tennessee. I plan to go back to China to visit my family before the new semester starts. Then I will continue job hunting."



Liang Lu Miller, with Ed Plough, on a trip to Chicago with English Renaissance students, September 30, 2006.

Teresa Nunes:

Ph.D. December 2006:

Teresa Nunes is Assistant Professor in the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of Houston where she teaches Portuguese and Spanish and is setting up

a study abroad program to Brazil in conjunction with the Universidade Federal da Bahia in the Northeast region of Brazil, where she is from.

Teresa writes that she is married to Benjamin Cell, a History and Geography teacher. Her husband also coaches football and track for a local High School in Houston, about 4 minutes from their home. They both enjoy the cost of living in Houston, after having lived for several years in New York. They have bought a home in a Latino, Jewish, and South Indian neighborhood. With their children, Emilia Kiana (5 years) and Alceu Nadav (5 months), they attend the Beth Israel congregation and enjoy Houston's many parks and family activities.

Simone Caroti:

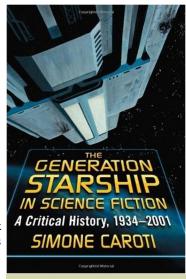
Ph.D. August 2009: "The Generation Starship in Science Fiction, 1934-1977." Charles Ross (chair), William J. Palmer, Shaun Hughes, Cary Mitchell

Simone is an adjunct faculty member in the Communications Department at Brevard Community College, Cocoa campus, Florida. He is also the Director of Public and Educational Outreach for the Astrosociology Research Institute.



Simone Caroti, in grey next to Joy Howard, in light blue; at Tucci Benucch, Chicago, ca. 2008, after a Romance & Epic seminar at the Newberry Library, sponsored by Purdue University, the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and the University of Minnesota, and members of the Newberry Library Center for Renaissance Studies.

His revised dissertation has been published as a book This book is a critical history of generational space travel in science fiction from 1934, the year the first story of this type appeared, to 2001, when Gene Wolfe concluded his *Short Sun* cycle, the last in a twelve-book opus featuring the generation starship as one of its key elements. Framing this history are a chapter on the origins of the concept in the 1920s and a brief concluding overview of generation starship stories in the first decade of the



McFarland & Company (2011): ISBN 0786460679.

21st century. The narrative presents the development of this subset of science fiction both as a repository of stories in its own right, possessed of its themes and overarching concerns, and as a microcosm reflecting the evolution of SF as a whole.

Spotlight on Brady Spangenberg (continued from Page 1)

Another early lesson came from Dr. Charles Ross: it is completely unacceptable to admit ignorance or, even worse, have nothing to say. For my first graduate level class, Twentieth Century World Literature taught by Dr. Ross and Dr. Dan Morris, students were supposed to keep a weekly reading journal. For my entry on Nawal El Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero I wrote, "As I did not find a specific theme to write about, I have included my discussion notes for that day." It is hard to believe that I still received an 'A' for the journal, a potential case of grade inflation for sure. But coded in Dr. Ross's comments was a not-so-subtle hint. Literature scholars make their living by having an opinion; I needed to find one. If this sounds like "fake it 'til you make it" advice, it was not. Dr. Ross never let me or anyone else apologize for our work (especially before presenting it as a paper—an absolute mortal sin). The work just had to be good. Lesson learned: stick out your neck, there are no guillotines here.

Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Beate Allert and Dr. Shaun Hughes in setting up a graduate student exchange with the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, I enjoyed the school year 2006-07 as the first in now a long line of Boilermakers to have an office in Kollegienge-bäude IV. The program was conceived as a way to offer students in the English Studies Program some extra assistance in mastering academic writing, that notoriously ambivalent and multi-faceted talent that we all practice (some days are better than others). What I soon realized in Freiburg, though, was that however much I thought I knew about writing



Acting as host then having lunch with Russell Keck (Department of English) at the Purdue Renaissance Comparative Prose Conference, October 22, 2008, for which he also served as an organizer.

and literary studies, I knew absolutely nothing about self-reliance in the world of academic politics. Through some kind of scheduling snafu, it happened that after two months on the job, I still didn't have an office. I patiently waited not wanting to make any waves. But by then, everyone started wondering where I was and what I was actually doing to help the department. When I replied through a mass email (another mistake), I hadn't received the keys to my office yet, one of the department's professors, Dr. Wolfgang Hochbruck,

quickly fixed the problem. In doing so, he also offered me the best piece of advice I have ever received. Lesson learned: "If it were me that this happened to," he calmly told me, "I would have banged on every door until someone opened up."

Back in West Lafayette to start my doctoral studies, I took a class on Seventeenth Century British Literature with Dr. Angelica Duran. I, like most everyone else in a Humanities graduate program, had been told that I was a great writer. Judging from the corrections she penciled in (thank goodness it wasn't red ink) my first one page response paper, one could swear I was just lucky to have spelled my name correctly. Dr. Duran cared about everything on the page. From good titles (Response Paper #I does not count) to air-tight citation practices and even good capitalization practice, she never let anything slip. At first glance, her attention to detail may come across as over-bearing and unnecessarily persnickety. Though I generally complied with her scribal wishes, dutifully adding titles and italics, I never understood until later, when journal, grant and job applications were flying out the door, the real value of Dr. Duran's grammarian values. She wanted us as burgeoning academic scholars to realize that the age-old adage about looking presentable when you want something also applied to writing. Lesson learned: if you want someone to publish your article, give you some money, or give you a job, you had better look good—no, look exciting and professional—on the page.



Brady participates in the annual Tree Walk for Comparative Literature students, August 17, 2007.

I cannot remember when I started attending the monthly meetings of the C.S. Lewis Society. I am pretty sure it was right after I found out my wife was pregnant. Life was changing, and I had a few questions. For all of life's questions, Lewis was never the type to give a straight, didactic answer, so I don't know why I gravitated towards his philosophies. He would rather tell a story. As a literary person, I always liked stories. In this way, even if we in the Lewis Society (with many thanks due to Crystal Kirgiss for her diligent leadership) could not figure out the answer to all of life's big ethical questions, at least we felt entertained. This little monthly get together also provided something that I think many in academia still sorely need, time to read and think freely. Too often I came to think of reading for class or reading for a paper as "work," as something I had to do. It was freeing simply to read C. S. Lewis and then freely discuss his work without fear of repercussions like bad grades or a rejected paper. I am not sure if my original questions were ever answered by anything we read. More likely, I realized that I was asking the wrong types of questions, looking for someone to feed me all the important answers rather than trusting that the answers will come in due time. Lesson learned: it is not what you read so much as how you do it.

Finally I come to Germany and my new job. Did I ever think that I would researching and writing about new treatments for parasitic weeds in Africa? No, not particularly, but then again I was never the best at self-definition anyway. Whenever I met Dr. Ross in the hallway, he would always ask me a question, which I dreaded at first but then came to enjoy. "So," he would ask, "What are you doing?" Sure, he cared about how I was doing, but more importantly he wanted to make sure that I had projects, that I was doing something to push my career forward. Determining what it is I actually do remains an ongoing process. That is part of the fun about being trained as an interdisciplinary thinker. There is always room to grow; there are always new fields to explore and new connections to make. Lesson learned: we learn more than just how to write and talk about literature.



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