As you read through our newsletter, you’ll see that the English Department had a wonderfully productive and inspiring semester: we had a robust series of talks by visiting scholars, writers, and poets; saw the publication of several faculty books; placed graduate students in academic and non-academic positions; and celebrated the achievements of our terrific undergraduate majors. We also paid tribute to careers and contributions of some legendary retiring professors.

We need your help, though. Since 2008, the number of students majoring in English has dropped sharply both across the country and at UConn. We know how wonderful an English degree is, but we need to make the best case for the value of literary study specifically and the humanities in general. To that end, we would very much like to hear from you about what the English major meant to you and what you have done with it since you graduated. How did it help you build a career? How did it influence your work and life? We’d also like to hear any anecdotes about your favorite professors or classes for inclusion on our website. Email me (hasenfratz@uconn.edu) your thoughts and stories, and be sure to let us know when you graduated and what you’re doing now. We’d love to see any photos of your time as an English major if you’d like to share them with us.
Shakespeare and Time, the 15th Annual Undergraduate Shakespeare Conference, took place on April 2. Garrett Sullivan delivered a lively, well attended plenary talk, "How Britain Fights: Shakespeare and World War II Propaganda." Sixteen students from nine schools presented outstanding papers. The Shakespearcens on the judging committees had a challenge in judging their two award picks: Patrick Franco (College of the Holy Cross), "Contending Time with Madness: The Real Tragedy of Hamlet"; and Erika Panzarino (Adelphi University), "Shakespeare in Our Time: Fanworks and the Bard." The final event featured Lindsay Cummings and two student actors from Connecticut Repertory Theatre, who performed a medley of comedy and tragedy scenes and spoke about translating text and poetry into stage action.

The Elizabeth Shanley Gerson Irish Literature Reading on April 5 featured award-winning poet Sinéad Morrissey. Writing in-residence at Queen’s University, Belfast, Morrissey has published five poetry collections. The reading is organized by the Irish Studies Alliance, which brings an eminent Irish writer to campus every year.

Carl Phillips, the 2016 Wallace Stevens Poet, read from his work on March 22. Professor of English and of African and African American Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, he also teaches in the Creative Writing Program. Phillips is the author of a dozen books of poetry, two works of criticism, various essays, and a translation. His honors include a Lambda Literary Award, an Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Pushcart Prize, the Academy of American Poets Prize, and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Library of Congress. Phillips served as Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 2006 to 2012.

On February 23, the English Grad Student Association presented the "Clash-of-Cooks!" Cook-off. Faculty and students enjoyed many eclectic, tasty foods. Winning dishes included spinach bites, veggie burgers, and chocolate raspberry truffle cupcakes. Winners received gift certificates donated by Willington Pizza House and Wing Express. The event is a fundraiser for departmental get-togethers and graduate lounge upkeep.

Ginger Strand read from her work at the Aetna Celebration of Creative Nonfiction on April 7. The author of a novel and four books of nonfiction, Strand has received grants from various institutions such as the New York Foundation for the Arts and the Mellon Foundation.

Poet and translator Matey Yankelevich read from his work on March 1. In addition to being the cofounder of Ugly Duckling Presse, where he designs and edits, he has authored several books. Yankelevich also curates the Eastern European Poets series, coeditis 66 magazine, teaches at Columbia University, Queens College, CUNY, and is a member of the Writing Faculty at the Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts at Bard College.

Kenneth Wisssaker, editor-in-chief of Duke University Press, spoke on May 4 on the state of American Studies publishing, identifying dynamics in the field and the place of American Studies within the Humanities.
**Alum News**

**Jon Andersen** (MA '12), Stephanie Barefield, and Joe Finckel (MA '09) participated in an English Grad Students Association (EGSA) Professional Development Committee roundtable on teaching at Community Colleges on April 12.

**J. Aaron Sanders** (PhD '08) was featured on LitHub on Feb. 25 with his essay *Walt Whitman is Dead, I’m Divorced, and the Universe Goes On.*

**Amber Went’s** (PhD '14) magnificent poem, “Black Friday,” was published in *Rhizomes.*

**Theodore Van Alst** (PhD '08), whom many of us remember, was recently granted promotion and tenure at the University of Montana. He is now Associate Professor of Native American Studies. Ted received his PhD at UConn in Comparative Literature; Bob Tilton and Norma Bouchard directed his dissertation.

**Kaitlyn's** project will explore teachers’ choice of classroom literature (classical versus young adult literature) and the types of empathetic responses they want to elicit from their students. The project comprises an empirical research study, a literary analysis, and an original curriculum guide.

**Stephanie Koo** (English and Biological Sciences, '17), “Where My Family Calls Home: A Novel Exploring Chinese Diasporas through Family History.”

After investigating her family history and traveling abroad in Malaysia and Singapore, Stephanie will write a novel that discusses the Chinese diaspora and its influence on her family. A website and travelogue will accompany the novel to reach a broader audience.

**Calliope Wong** (Honors English and Pre-Med, '16), who graduated a year early this May, was featured in *UConn Magazine* on March 9. Wong received an IDEA grant to record an album of piano music.

**Outgoing Faculty**

Four revered members of the department retired this year. With much appreciation for many years of service and friendship, we bid adieu to Joseph Comprone, Elizabeth Hart, Margaret Higonnet, and Stephen Jones. We wish you the best and hope to see more of you in the years to come.

**Idea Grant Winners**

**Kaitlin Jenkins** (Elementary Education and English, '17). “Empathy in Young Adult versus Classical Literature: An Analysis of Teachers’ Choices.”

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**Elizabeth Hart: Shakespearean**

Shakespeare continues to be the main interest and specialty of Professor Elizabeth Hart, who retired this semester after a 22-year UConn career. While in graduate school at Vanderbilt University, Hart took a Shakespeare class taught by R. Chris Hassel, and her grasp of the material became clear. “I was surprised when fellow classmates began asking me questions,” Hart recalls. That year, she took another Shakespeare seminar that focused solely on *Richard III,* and she knew that Shakespeare was her calling.

Seven years passed before Hart found herself in front of a classroom. She sat in on many of Hassel’s undergraduate classes, and her teaching is largely inspired by him: the pleasure he took in humor plays, his great insight on how to understand the tradition of the fool, and how to ground plays in seriousness and religion. Hart is still fascinated by how many different Shakespeares there are, because “it all depends on who teaches it. These teachers are products of loving mentorships.” Hart thinks there is always a need for Shakespeare, and the constant presence of Shakespeare in the English curriculum gives her freedom to experiment. She prepared a different syllabus for each class for 22 years.

Hart considers herself fortunate to have had this career at UConn. She loves teaching, viewing it all as “a joyful performance.” Discussions and questions in each class enriched those of the future. “One serendipitous class gives rise to another,” Hart notes. She is grateful for more than two decades of very high quality classroom experience. Hart’s career is filled with memorable experiences. This year, for example, she organized and ran the 15th Annual Undergraduate Shakespeare Conference. Hosting a conference was not a new experience for Hart; she had served as the main coordinator for UConn’s 2006 Literature and Cognitive Science Conference. These two events differed greatly. The literature conference was international and lasted four days, with 30 to 40 papers from Europe and elsewhere. Hart remembers it as “very intense and more much involved,” with strategic planning every day for more than a year. The recent Shakespeare conference, on the other hand, occurred on a smaller scale; it lasted one day, with 16 papers from various institutions in the New England area.

After leaving UConn, Hart plans to spend more of her time writing. She says she really loves writing and is excited to get back to it. The reactions of her students to her research ideas and plans have “whetted her appetite” for the future.

— Kaitlyn Sparta
Professor Margaret Higonnet, who retired at the end of this semester, enjoyed a 46-year UConn career that encompassed a wide range of teaching, studies, and travels.

Higonnet’s travels began long before she arrived at UConn. Her father, professor of American literature, taught at several universities in America and abroad, and his family traveled with him to New Orleans, Maryland, Missouri, California, Vienna, and Mexico. “I think travel is more significant for a child,” Higonnet says. As an American child living in a divided Vienna, she described herself as “the other.” In America, she could trace her roots back to Pocahontas, but she was out of place in Vienna. She remembers seeing “Ami go home” graffitied on the walls. Her friends assured her she was not the target of these messages. They said Americans were “awful,” but they didn’t consider her to be an American—she was one of them. Higonnet notes that this childhood experience gave her greater empathy as an adult for immigrants.

When her father received a fellowship to teach at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, Higonnet seized the opportunity to pursue higher education there, despite not knowing a word of Spanish. She attended classes in English and took tutorials to learn Spanish, her fifth language in addition to Greek, Latin, French, and English. She became fascinated with the history of indigenous Mexicans and gained an appreciation for this group of native people and their artwork. Soon after, she moved to Germany, where she studied at Bryn Mawr University and graduated with a major in German. She then received a fellowship to study in Tübingen, where she lived for a year before returning to America to attend graduate school at Yale. Here, Higonnet studied with René Wellek, a Czech-American comparative literary critic.

Higonnet began teaching at UConn right after grad school. She continued to travel, studying at Paris, Madrid, and Munich, accompanied by her husband and daughter. Higonnet still travels regularly to Paris and Mexico.

Higonnet taught a wide range of subjects at UConn, including the literature of World War I, folklore and fairy tales, suicide, and Victorian and children’s literature. Higonnet’s involvement with children’s literature was influenced by her colleague France- lia Butler, who founded the official journal of Children’s Literature and asked Higonnet to coedit with her. “I only knew about children’s literature because, like everyone else, I was a child,” Higonnet said. She learned a great deal about the genre by collecting and editing essays for the journal. Higonnet incorporated this new knowledge into her career as a professor and began teaching lecture courses on children’s literature and, later, courses on folklore and fairy tales. This new knowledge also reinforced her interest in William Blake, who wrote for both children and adults. Blake illustrated, or as he described it “illuminated,” Dante’s Divina Paradiso. He spoke about the issue of translating voice into image, which fascinated Higonnet. She was captivated by the fact that you can translate and change one medium into another. These ideas became the basis of her Word and Images course.

While the WWI and Victorian courses stemmed from Higonnet’s interest and expertise in comparative literature and women’s studies, her course on suicide was inspired by the studies of another individual, as were her children’s lit and folklore and fairy tales courses. It stemmed from a manuscript she was working on with her husband, who studied eighteenth-century French history and had found suicide to be significant at both this time and in early American history. Suicide, associated with revolution at the time, could be seen as a gesture of liberty. So, while he worked on the historical and political side of the subject, Higonnet worked on the literary side. In literature, suicide could be used as a way of ending tragedy— as an instrument of closure. Higonnet decided to explore this topic in a classroom setting. When the course was first introduced, both faculty and students expressed hesitation about it. No one knew what to expect. However, it soon became clear that the course offered a unique take on literature in a professional way. Thus, Higonnet added a new and revolutionary course to the English curriculum.

Leaving an impressive legacy at UConn, Higonnet has no intention of slowing down. She still has a great deal ahead of her, including plans to complete the suicide manuscript, and, of course, to continue her travels.

— Kaitlyn Sparta


Carillo, Ellen C. "Reimagining the Role of the Reader in the Common Core State Standards." English Journal.


Franklin, Wayne, and Jason Berger, eds. Lawrence of Arabia.


Makowsky, Veronica. The Fiction of Valerie Martin: An Introduction.


Rowe, Asia. "The Filmic Mode and Filmic Spectator in Buchowitzki’s Orphalé and Nelson’s O." Literature/Film Quarterly.

Somerset, Fiona, with J. Patrick Hornbeck II and Midhotouni Bone, eds. A Companion to Lollardy.

Professor J. D. O’Hara (1931-2016) died on March 31. He taught in the English department for 35 years, specializing in modern British literature with a focus on Samuel Beckett.

Chad Jewett received the 2016 Bradford Dissertation Prize of the St. George Tucker Society.

Kathy Knapp was selected for a Fulbright Teaching Fellowship at the University of Vilnius, Lithuania, for the spring semester of 2017.

Veronica Makowsky was given the Student Support Services (SSS) Faculty Recognition Award.

George Moore received a 2016-17 UConn Humanities Institute Residential Faculty Fellowship award.

Shawn Higgins received a UConn Graduate School Pre-Doctoral Fellowship Award.

Jason Courtmanche earned a $20,000 grant from the National Writing Project and the UConn Outstanding First-Year Experience Teaching Award.

Anna Mae Duane won a 2016-17 UConn Humanities Institute Residential Faculty Fellowship award.

Emma Burrus-Jannsen won the Aetna Teaching Award.

Dwight Codr received the Office of Undergraduate Research Mentorship Excellence Award.

The Edward R. and Frances Schreiber Collins Literary Prizes

Poetry Winner ($2,000): Nicholas Diliberto Honorable Mention: Framig Francisco

Prose Winner ($2,000): Traci Parker Honorable Mention: Daniel Apple

The Jennie Hackman Memorial Prize for Fiction

First place ($1,000): Rebecca Hill Second place ($300): Mairead Loschi Third Place ($200): Sten Spinella

Wallace Stevens Poetry Contest

First place ($1,000): Eleanor Reeds Second place ($500): Emily Kraus Third place ($250): Erick Piller

The Aetna Creative Nonfiction Awards

Undergraduate First prize ($250): Katherine Coto Honorable Mention: Mathews Shelton

Dwight Codr received the Office of Undergraduate Research Mentorship Excellence Award.

The Aetna Translation Award Winner ($250): Terry Murnahan Honorable Mention: Matthew Shelton

The Aetna Children’s Literature Award Winner ($250): Kathryn Coto Honorable Mention: Traci Parker

The Aetna Teaching Award Winner ($250): Eleanor Reeds

Kathleen Gibson McPeek Scholarship ($300): Glenda Reilly and Catherine Kohn
While many associate Mother’s Day with May, I actually connect such maternal celebrations to February, the month of my mother’s birth. This year, my mother—Ginko—celebrated her 82nd birthday. Born in 1930s Japan, my mother has clear memories of World War II, even though when it ended she was just 11 years old. Most of her teenage years were spent living under the U.S. occupation of Japan. As she entered adulthood, she found employment in a local cigarette factory that was constructed under the Marshall Plan. Nearby was Misawa Air Base, and it was along its edges that she met my father, an American Air Force man. After a three-year courtship, she and my father married and relocated to the United States. My mother has not returned to Japan since that departure in the mid-1960s. She and my father spent the first decade of their marriage looking for children to adopt. It was near the end of the Vietnam War in Udorn Thani, Thailand, in 1975, that she happened upon me and my twin brother. Our biological father was an American GI who had returned home to his family prior to our birth; our biological mother was an ethnic Cambodian who was at the time married to a Thai military man. Apparently, the two had had an affair. It was a matter of luck and an issue of circumstance that we became a family. To be sure, my mother and I were— and remain— very different people: she was a first-generation immigrant who struggled with English and insisted on a traditional upbringing; I was a 1.5-generation Asian American who wanted nothing more than to be considered “American.”

Notwithstanding our profound differences, it is because of my mother that I would eventually focus my academic career in Asian American studies. I saw firsthand how she had to negotiate a racial stereotype that cast her as a perpetual foreigner, even though she was a naturalized U.S. citizen. I was often struck by the absolute grace she brought to these situations. She, unlike me, never let on how she felt by such dismissals, which often took the form of not being served by waiters, cashiers, salespeople, or professionals.

Yet, even though she remained silent in these instances, she would never abide such behavior toward her daughter. It was when such avoidances were generationally transferred that my mother used her very firm and unwaveringly stalwart voice, courageously insisting in these relatively minor and all-too-mundane instances that such behavior was unacceptable and deplorable. Whether it involved waiting for the right size shoes at a department store or asking for service at a restaurant, whether it meant asserting one’s place in a grocery store line or insisting that it was not okay to assume I was not an American, my mother proved an unassuming advocate.

Regrettably, I have not always appreciated these actions. I was more inclined then to be nullly embarrassed at best, and more often confessedly resentful. It was not until much later— when I encountered other mothers like Mamie Till, Lily Chin, Judy Shepard, and most recently, Lesley McSpadden— that I recognized what it took for my mother to take such a rights-oriented stance. Admittedly, in contrast to them, my mother was never faced with seeking justice for her children after unimaginable violence and equally unspeakable loss. But what unites all these mothers— despite differences in time and place— is that what their children suffered was directly attributable to the refusal of someone to see their humanity.

That refusal led directly to the Aug. 28, 1955 lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till by Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam. This personhood denial is at the core of what happened to Chinese American Vincent Chin— who incidentally was born the same year Emmett Till was murdered, 1955: on June 19, 1982, Chin was beaten almost to death by two out-of-work Detroit autoworkers armed with a baseball bat, who blamed him for Japanese trade deficits and outsourcing; he would succumb to his injuries four days later. It is sadly reiterated in the beating of Matthew Shepard, a gay University of Wyoming student beaten by Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson on Oct. 6, 1998; tied to a fence, Shepard was eventually discovered, although he too perished, six days later. And the theme played out again when, on Aug. 9, 2014, Lesley McSpadden’s son—unarmed teenager Michael Brown— was shot and killed by Ferguson, Missouri, police officer Darren Wilson.

While each mother endured the overwhelming loss of a child, what is remarkably consistent is how Mamie Till, Lily Chin, Judy Shepard, and Lesley McSpadden advocated tirelessly— despite profound grief and in the face of overpowering sadness— for justice. As McSpadden stressed evocatively in a keynote address she delivered at UConn on Feb. 4, while it is at times impossible to “take it all in,” the struggle for racial justice is “far from over” and remains a “fight based on love.”

—Cathy Schlund-Vials, UConn Today, 25 February 2016
In 1769, James Somerset, an enslaved African, stepped off a ship in London with his master, Charles Stewart, a customs officer of the British crown colony of Massachusetts. Two years later, Somerset fled his master’s house, and an enraged Stewart hunted him down, imprisoned him on the British ship Ann and Mary, and swore to sell him to a Jamaican plantation.

But Somerset’s friends called his detainment unlawful in a country that did not authorize slavery, and demanded a writ of habeas corpus to bring him before the court. Lord Mansfield, Chief Justice of the King’s Bench, granted the writ and ruled in 1772 that Somerset could not lawfully be removed from the country. By consequence, he was a free man. So the law of habeas corpus-Latin for “you have the body”-was used in one of the first major examples of assigning a human right to a non-citizen, and in so doing, rescuing him from enslavement.

“A recognizable narrative emerges during this time period involving the rescuing of slaves using the writ,” says Professor Sarah Winter. “It wasn’t just a judicial remedy for unlawful detention, but it also created a legal framework represented in narratives of the time, including literature, that began to give what were understood to be human rights to citizens and non-citizens alike.” Winter’s research into these stories earned her a National Endowment for the Humanities Faculty Fellowship for 2016-17. Her book project, “Habeas Corpus, Human Rights, and the Novel in the 18th and 19th Centuries,” will show how this legal tool evolved from a method of sovereign power into a judicial process championed by early abolitionists for giving rights to those who had none.

The idea that a person could be protected by court summons from unjust imprisonment dates to English common law in the 12th and 13th centuries. Established as a statute in Britain in 1679 by the Habeas Corpus Act, it is a protection considered fundamental to the British constitution and to other common-law judicial systems, including that of the United States. Despite its early use by English kings to control inferior courts, sheriffs, and magistrates, it gained use in the 17th and 18th centuries as a tool to check sovereign power and ensure that imprisonments were lawful. It is so celebrated, says Winter, that it has become a part of English national identity.

The execution of a writ needs a confluence of specific actors to play out, says Winter. Her work shows that these agents were adopted as recurring characters in novels of the time.

“One of the protagonists is the writ itself, a judicial order written on a strip of parchment, which has the agency to release the enslaved person,” she explains. “Another is the advocate for the enslaved, who goes to the judge to request a writ. There’s the judge, like the famous figure Lord Mansfield, who issues the writ, and the jailer, who perpetuates a cruel imprisonment. And, of course, the prisoner himself.”

Winter will travel to several archives in Britain to explore historical news accounts such as that of the Somerset case. She will also critically examine how novels like Charles Dickens’s The Pickwick Papers and A Tale Of Two Cities, William Godwin’s Caleb Williams, Mary Wollstonecraft’s M aria; or, The Wrongs of Woman, and even Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein use this set of characters to comment on issues from the detainment of political prisoners to the imprisonments of wives by their husbands.

Human rights are sometimes defined as rights granted to persons without citizenship in a government that would otherwise protect them. Because habeas corpus also requires that the corpus of the prisoner must appear before a judge, it deals with protecting a person’s physical body from abuse by authorities, and not necessarily with citizenship. So it holds immense authority, says Winter. It was a tool that could suddenly give rights to groups like slaves and women.

“It’s a powerful model, because it is a way of taking an individual body and adjudicating on a certain set of violations having to do with indefinite incarceration and due process of law, regardless of your citizenship status,” Winter says.

Although the United Nations adopted a Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the declaration was not without loopholes. Noted philosopher Hannah Arendt expressed concern that these human rights could not protect the tens of thousands of refugees who had lost citizenship during World War II. Similarly, in the current refugee crisis, Syrian refugees dispersed across Europe are at high risk of human rights violations, Winter says-especially with an increasing number of countries shutting down their borders.

“People who are displaced by war and violence are in danger of falling into an unprotected status equivalent to statelessness, often because they lack identification papers,” she says. “Refugee camps may also begin to function as places of indefinite custody if displaced persons seeking asylum are not allowed to cross borders.”

Fiction’s long history of reflecting human rights issues is the subject of the emerging field of literature and human rights. UConn has been at the center of the emergence of this new field, says Winter, because of support from its Human Rights Institute (HRI) and the Humanities Institute.

Winter held the 2011-12 HRI Faculty Fellowship, and credits the interdisciplinary faculty study groups, supported through a University-funded research program on humanitarianism, as a major force in that movement.

Through literary and historical analysis, Winter aims to show that human rights are not just rights for people suffering catastrophes in war-ravaged or impoverished regions. Rather, she hopes to show that our ability to be responsible citizens goes beyond national borders.

“The history of habeas corpus in relation to the history of human rights suggests that there is a form of law that would bridge rights of citizens and rights of stateless and displaced persons,” she says. “And that would apply to them equally and align them-so we don’t have to keep seeing human rights as the rights of the rightless.”

—Christine Buckley, CLAS website, 18 March 2016