The Maurice Sendak Foundation has selected UConn’s Northeast Children’s Literature Collection at the Dodd Center to house nearly 10,000 items, including Sendak’s sketches, drafts of books, and material documenting his creative process. The 20th century’s most important picture book writer, Sendak is best known for *Where the Wild Things Are*, the *Nutshell Library*, and *In the Night Kitchen*. Retaining ownership of the material, the Foundation has entrusted UConn with all of the original art in its possession and provided a grant to support curation. Students, faculty, staff, visiting scholars, K-12 teachers, and the wider Connecticut community will have the extraordinary opportunity to peer into the creative and intellectual life of this renowned author.

Sendak had a long relationship with UConn and the Department of English. In the 1970s and ’80s, he visited Children’s Literature courses led by Professor Francelia Butler, a founder of the Children’s Literature Association, and gave lectures to undergrads and signed books at the UConn Co-op. Sendak was especially supportive of Mansfield resident James Marshall, author of the *George and Martha* books, and gave his own personal collection of Marshall’s books, manuscripts, and drawings to the Dodd Center, after which the University founded the James Marshall Fellowship. Sendak received an honorary doctorate from UConn in 1990.

The Sendak collection complements the Department’s longtime commitment to scholarship in children’s literature. From Butler’s creation of the literary journal *Children’s Literature* and founding of the MLA Division on Children’s Literature, to Sam Pickering’s work on 18th-century children’s books and Margaret Higonnet’s scholarship, to the current faculty’s commitment to diverse undergrad and grad courses, the Department has been at the forefront of intellectual work on writing and art for young people. Our grad students win grants and awards, publish articles, and write creatively. In addition, we house one of the oldest sites of the National Writing Project and have been instrumental in the founding of the MLA Standing Committee on K-16 Alliances, efforts that support outreach to K-12 teachers and their students.

We are excited to weave the Sendak collection into our curriculum, drawing undergrads into archival work and offering grad students the opportunity to pursue scholarship on this landmark picture book author. Jason Courtmanche, Director of the Connecticut Writing Project, explains that “our service, outreach, and graduate study with K-12 teachers has shaped public education, especially in the fields of Writing and English Language Arts.” The Sendak collection offers a tremendous opportunity for Connecticut educators to draw young people closer to his work. “I’m eager to use the collection in my grad seminars,” says Victoria Ford Smith, Director of English Graduate Studies. “Sendak’s artwork and manuscripts will give our students a glimpse into the history of children’s book illustration; they will also provide opportunities for archival work.” Given Sendak’s life as a Connecticut resident and longstanding connection to the University of Connecticut, his work has found an apt home. The Sendak collection will enrich the intellectual and aesthetic life of Connecticut students and our community.

**PHDS EARNED**

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<tr>
<th>Alaina Kaus ('17)</th>
<th>Emily Tucker ('18)</th>
<th>M. Breanne Leake ('18)</th>
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<td>George Moore ('17)</td>
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<td>Daniel Graham ('18)</td>
<td>Rachel Nolan ('18)</td>
<td>Sara Austin ('18)</td>
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**GRAD LANDINGS**

Austin, Sara ('18). Visiting Assistant Professor in Children’s Literature, Miami University, Ohio.

Harney-Mahajan, Tara ('16). Assistant Professor in World Literature, Caldwell University, NJ.

Kaus, Alaina ('17). Instructor, University of Alabama.

Nolan, Rachel ('18). Research fellowship and lectureship at University of Manchester, UK.

Piller, Erick ('18). Assistant Professor of Languages and Literature, Nicholls State University, Thibodaux, LA.

Solomon, Christina ('18). Lecturer, Rowan University, Glassboro, New Jersey.

Wright, Laura ('18). Visiting Assistant Professor in Writing, Berry College, Georgia.
In February, English professor Brenda Brueggemann discussed the art and history of deaf people in the United States for her lecture titled “American Deaf Art, History, and Community.”

Brueggemann focused on the impact, history, and interpretation of various mediums utilized by deaf artists—particularly visual arts, performance arts, and literature.

Brueggemann notices several common themes in deaf art. “A lot of the art seems to have something to do with community,” she said.

She also noted that deaf art often revolves around identity, language, and culture. Some deaf art incorporates themes such as “being alone, isolation, solitude, silence, and oppression,” and deaf artists often discuss expression through one’s physical body.

Brueggemann said that schools for deaf children, such as the American School for the Deaf and Clarke School for the Deaf, were instrumental in the development of many deaf artists. These schools were places that students learned ASL and oral methods of communication, while simultaneously forming friendships within their community. These schools, however, were not without their issues.

“The schools were places of shared community and culture. They were a way for deaf kids to locate themselves in relationship to others, [but] they were also locations of oppression and abuse,” Brueggemann explained.

Chris Vials, Professor of American Studies and English, reflected on how deaf artists and writers use their work to speak to these instances of injustice. “Deaf artists and deaf writers are articulating experiences that, in ways, are very similar to other groups that have minoritized experiences,” Vials observed.

Brueggemann presented examples of historical deaf artists and the work they produced. She said that one of the first deaf artists was John Brewster, who is known for “Francis O. Watts with Bird,” “One Shoe Off,” and “Portrait of a Girl with a Bird.” Brewster was also one of the first students of the American School for the Deaf. His paintings are mostly portraits, and Brueggemann pointed out the attention with which Brewster painted the arms and eyes of his subjects.

The next artist that Brueggemann focused on was Peter Cook, one of the most famous deaf poets in the United States. Brueggemann pulled up several video clips of Cook reading his poetry, and each was stunning. “The United States of Poetry” and “Flying Words Project” saw Cook using ASL as a performance tool, exaggerating his facial expressions and movements to evoke emotion in the viewer.

Brueggemann next discussed how deaf rapper Sean Forbes makes his music videos accessible to both hearing and deaf audiences by flashing his lyrics across the screen to the beat of the song.

As Brueggemann concluded her talk, she introduced photographs, sculptures, and paintings created by deaf artists. In this last segment, she discussed artist James Castle. Brueggemann both curated an exhibit on Castle and produced a short documentary about her curating process and the artist himself.

After the presentation, Brueggemann opened the floor for questions. Attendees asked about the oral training method and what it truly means to be deaf as opposed to hearing. Brueggemann explained that deaf culture is different from hearing culture.

She noted that people often don’t realize there is “a deep hearing culture. There is a way that hearing people behave.”

The audience was very engaged by Brueggemann’s presentation and perspectives, and left with a more developed understanding of the history of American deaf art.

—Lauren Brown, The Daily Campus, 21 Feb. 2018
NOTABLE EVENTS

Susanne Davis read from her newly published book of short stories, *The Appointed Hour*, in February at the UConn Bookstore. Davis’s workshop on teaching medieval studies in a world literature frame. Also, Wan-Chuan Kao, professor of English at Washington and Lee University, presented “White Figura and the Animacy of Racialization.”

In March, poet and activist Joy Harjo spoke at the 55th Wallace Stevens Poetry Program in Konover Auditorium, and at the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts. Harjo is the recipient of the 2015 Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets for proven mastery in the art of poetry. She has written eight books of poetry, including *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*, *How We Became Human*, and *She Had Some Horses*. Harjo is a noted teacher, saxophonist, and vocalist. She performed for many years with her band, Poetic Justice, and currently tours with Arrow Dynamics. As a poet and musician, she was influenced by the activism of the American Indian Movement (AIM) during the 1970s. Harjo’s poetry and music often speak of individual women’s experiences while examining larger cultural concerns and Native American traditions. She is also the Chair of Excellence in Creative Writing at the University of Tennessee.

In April, Colum McCann, one of Ireland’s most internationally prominent contemporary fiction writers, delivered the 20th anniversary Gerson Irish Reading at the Alumni Center. (See article on page 3 for more information.)

In April, professor Clare Eby presented “The Zero-Sum Game of Corporate Personhood” in the Stern Room. Eby discussed how US law has developed inconsistent rationales to theorize corporate rights. She examined recent novels that expose the incommensurability of the corporate and the human, such as Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Blansett, Lisa, and Brenda Brueggemann. $67,000 Steelcase Active Learning Center Grant: “Say WAT: Writing Across Technology @ UConn.”


Dennigan, Darcie. 2018 Project Residency from Cill Rialaig (Ireland) to work on a trilogy of plays inspired by Simone Weil’s writings on decreation.

Graham, Dan. 2017-18 Aetna Graduate Teaching Award.

Litman, Ellen. 2018-19 Humanities Institute fellowship.

Lynch, Rachael. AAUP teaching career award for excellence.


Rowe, Rebecca. DMAC Institute fellowship. Columbus, May 2018.

2017-18 CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS

The Edward R. and Frances Schreiber Collins Literary Prizes

Prose Winner/$2,000: Jasmine Smith

Honorable Mention: Rebecca Hill

Poetry Winner/$2,000: Amanda McCarthy

Honorable Mention: Raeann Veronesi

The Jennie Hackman Memorial Prize for Fiction

First place/$1,000: Lucie Turkel

Second place/$300: Rebecca Hill

Third Place/$200: Benjamin Eng

Wallace Stevens Poetry Contest

First place/$1,000: Erin Lynn

Second place/$300: Matthew Ryan Shelton

Third place/$250: Ricardo Alvelo

Honorable Mention: Christiana Ares-Christian

The Aetna Children’s Literature Award

Winner/$250: Kristina Reardon

The Aetna Translation Award

Winner/$250: Robyn Lerebours

Honorables Mentions: Kristina Reardon and Alexandra Yang

The Aetna Creative Nonfiction Awards

Undergraduate First prize/$150: Kaylee Thurlow

Honorable Mentions/$50 each: Brianna McNish and Kimberly Yrayta

Graduate First Prize/$250: Brian Sneeden

Long River Graduate Writing Award

Winner/$250: Kristina Reardon

Honorables Mentions: Kathryn Warrender and Mollie Kervick
Colum McCann believes in the power of telling stories and in our ability to effect change by harnessing this power.

“I believe that if we were to listen to a woman in the markets of Douma in Syria tell a little story about a tomato or selling a piece of fruit, we would not tomorrow fire a missile into that area of the world,” he says. “I just fundamentally believe that storytelling has this power.”

On the night of April 10 in the Alumni Center, McCann spoke as this year’s reader for the 20th-anniversary Gerson Irish Reading. He began by speaking directly to members of the Gerson family, thanking them for their ongoing commitment to the Gerson Fund and acknowledging their stand that Irish voices matter and have power.

McCann reminded his audience that April 10 was also the 20th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, the treaty that culminated the Northern Irish peace process during the 1990s. He focused specifically on the efforts of Senator George Mitchell, whose persistence helped solidify peace plans through this historic agreement. McCann read from his novel Transatlantic, which tells the intertwined stories of the first non-stop transatlantic fliers in 1919; Frederick Douglass’s visit to Ireland in 1845; and the Irish peace process as negotiated by Mitchell in 1998. McCann feels that each story is impactful, significant, and must be told.

McCann’s belief in the power of stories comes from a life of active listening. When he moved from Ireland to America in his twenties, McCann found himself unable to write stories. To counter his writer’s block, he ventured out on his bicycle for an 18-month cross-country road trip from Boston to San Francisco. This trip thoroughly altered his perspective.

“I was a completely changed person, in the sense that I had met all these people, and they had all told me stories as I was going along,” McCann says. He asserts that stories like these function as our means of connection with the world around us. “Stories are where we share our territory,” he declares. “Stories are where we share ourselves. Stories are our actual democracy.”

This theory rings true throughout McCann’s writing as he illuminates the unheard, yet essential stories of the past in Transatlantic and his other novels. He says that he writes about “things that seem very distant from me, but actually are very much a part of me at the same time.”

McCann believes we practice empathy through the physical act of storytelling. “Stories can be the way that we engage with what it means to be somebody else,” he explains. “We each have a story, and no single story is better than another.” About ten years ago, McCann’s storytelling philosophy motivated him to co-found Narrative 4, a non-profit organization with a mission to inspire “fearless hope through radical empathy.”

The core methodology of Narrative 4 involves a facilitated story exchange within a group of individuals. This exchange pairs participants and asks them to tell their partner’s story in first-person. “You get to tell your own story, but even more importantly, you get to tell somebody else’s story. You’re both telling and listening,” McCann describes.

McCann brought Narrative 4 to UConn for two days in April, conducting a story exchange and facilitation training workshop. For many attendees, this exchange of stories was a powerful experience. Participants from completely different lifestyles began to cultivate a sense of emotional ownership over their partners’ narratives. It was clear that McCann’s method yields striking results.

The Narrative 4 story exchange relies on the fundamental human need to be listened to, and more importantly, the fundamental desire to listen. “There’s something in the human spirit that is legislated by storytelling,” McCann says. He describes an equal playing field between storytellers that defies socially constructed boundaries of race, gender, sexuality, political affiliation, and class. “The demand comes upon you to give your story away to somebody, but also to receive their story. You know that your story is in someone else’s hands,” McCann explains. “You’re not being polemical; you’re just telling a story.”

In the future, McCann hopes the world becomes so inherently compassionate that organizations like Narrative 4 aren’t necessary. But he also knows that this won’t be achieved any time soon. In the meantime, he hopes to advance Narrative 4 into the digital age, so that people from different areas of the world can exchange their stories using webcams.

McCann contends that we must engage with the world around us, the people around us. In the face of overwhelming cynicism, we can and should choose to foster empathy. “We must recognize,” he concludes, “that fundamentally, it’s upon us to make this world a better place.”

—Annie Stachura
Brian Sneeden Recognized for Outstanding Translations

PhD candidate Brian Sneeden cultivates his love for the music of Greek poetry by giving life to strikingly beautiful translations. This year, his hard work and passion have been publicly recognized in the form of two prestigious awards. Sneeden recently received a PEN/Heim Translation grant for what will be his third book, a translation of Greek poet Phoebe Giannisi’s *Rhapsodia*. His translation of Giannisi’s book *Homerica* was published earlier this year. Sneeden was also shortlisted for the inaugural Käpylä Translation Prize, an international prize for an exceptional book-length translation project in poetry, fiction, or creative nonfiction from any language into English.

Sneeden, a third-year UConn MA/PhD student, is studying modern and contemporary Greek poetry as well as translation and lyric theory. His love for these pursuits was conceived long before he arrived here.

“I began writing when I was in fifth grade. I discovered Greek mythology, and found myself just really taken and spell-bound by so many of the myths,” he remarks. In his early years of education, Sneeden incorporated Greek myths into his poetry assignments. He soon discovered and developed his love for poetry itself. “I’ve never stopped writing poetry. That’s always been part of my practice of living,” he says. While earning his MFA from the University of Virginia, Sneeden became more and more interested in translations and ultimately, his interest grew into a passion for Greek poetry translation.

Sneeden soon began work on his first published poetry book, a translation of Phoebe Giannisi’s *Homerica*. He describes how grateful he is to have had the opportunity to become close with Giannisi while he translated her poetry, and refers to her as “a wonderful person, as well as a poet.”

In terms of artistic ideology, Sneeden believes that a translation must preserve the essential elements of the original poem, while simultaneously creating something inherently new and poetic in the translated language. “The music for me is often the most important part. It’s where I start with translating,” he says. While translating Giannisi’s poetry, Sneeden worked to sustain moments of rhythmic beauty, alliteration, and internal rhyme. He recalls listening to a recording of Giannisi reading her own poetry aloud until he knew her poetic rhythm by heart. “If I haven’t preserved a sense of the music, then I haven’t translated a poem, in my opinion,” he explains.

As previously mentioned, Sneeden is currently working on translating a second collection of poems by Giannisi which will be titled *Rhapsodia*. He is also collaborating with George Prevedourakis on a book of poems revolving around the economic crisis in Greece.

He advises those interested in poetry translation to avoid falling into the trap of becoming a literary tourist. He contends that one must truly understand the language he or she wishes to translate. It is also important to be immersed in the poet, her sensibility, and the time period in which she wrote. Sneeden also believes that keeping the translation’s new language in mind is crucial. “Never lose sight of the English. Never lose sight of the sensibility of what people are reading now, what people are writing now. If you’re translating into a language, you’re also translating into the time of that language,” he asserts.

Most importantly, he advises aspiring writers, poets, and translators alike to have courage. “Take risks. Why not?” Sneeden insists. “Just follow your passion.”

—Annie Stachura

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We are grateful for the generosity of our many donors—students and their parents, faculty, staff, and others—which allows us to fund scholarships and bring a rich array of learning opportunities to the community. Your gift to the department may be made to honor a department member or student, to support an existing fund or scholarship, or to create a new fund for either current needs or the support of programs into the future. Contribute online through the UConn Foundation secure giving page. Click the search box at the top of the page and type in (or copy and paste) the number and name of one of the following funds that directly benefit the Department of English. The English Fund (20199), the Tribute Fund (31438), the Connecticut Writing Project (20113), Long River Review (22535), or the Elizabeth Shanal Gerson Fund for Irish Studies (30524).

Thanks to the generosity of two of our alums, Kathleen Walsh (‘77 ’79 ’84) and Jim Carrington (’78), we introduced last year the Tribute to English Professors Fund for Graduate Education (31438). The fund provides financial support, including fellowships and travel to conferences, seminars, and symposia, for English graduate students in honor or in memory of English professors.