Recently I sat down with my new colleagues in Early Modern studies to catch up on their lives and projects. Lyn Tribble joins us from the University of Otago, New Zealand. A senior specialist in Shakespeare and early modern drama, Lyn has written influential books on theatrical cognition and acting, among other topics. Debapriya Sarkar, just a few years out of Rutgers, comes to us after teaching at Hendrix College in Arkansas. She is working to complete her first book on Renaissance science and literature. Lyn has just moved to Windham, about 20 minutes from campus, into a house built in 1783, while Debapriya makes her home in Stamford and commutes to teach at Avery Point. Scratch the surface and you find their careers and interests echo each other in intriguing ways.

Both went to graduate school intending to become somebody else—in Lyn’s case a librarian, in Debapriya’s, an engineer. Now, as English professors, they have both done work that bridges the humanities/sciences divide. Lyn completed her library science degree at UC Berkeley, but English courses she took there spurred her to change fields. Her interest in book arts and readers’ engagement with texts led to her first book, *Margins and Marginality: The Printed Page in Early Modern England*. After exploring cognition, embodiment, and acting skills (work that brought her to the leading rank of Shakespeare scholars), she is enjoying archival work on a new project: studying *grimoires*, handmade books of magical arts. At the Folger library she recently found a spell for summoning a spirit able to write a book at its master’s bidding, wielding powers even the prolific might envy.

Debapriya’s route to English was through engineering. When I ask about this shift, she says, “I was always curious about how things worked (the foundation of my engineering education) and even more interested in the historical and conceptual issues behind these technologies. These were the concerns of humanists, and this is what drew me to studying the relations between literature and science.” Her projects are wide-ranging: she is writing a piece on islands in works by Sidney, Wroth, and Spenser for a volume on the cultural history of the sea, while co-editing a special issue of *Philological Quarterly* on early modern scientific forms. She is also absorbed in the task of teaching her first graduate class at Storrs on science and literature. Her commitments take her all over the map: she teaches at Avery Point and attends meetings and talks in Storrs. She travels frequently to events in New York and conferences farther afield. She recently went to India for a family visit, taking her 8-month-old son Takshak to meet his relatives. He’s very gregarious, she adds: when she takes him to New York he charms everyone on the subway.

**Grad Landings**

**Maddy Kobar** (’18) was accepted to the Columbia Publishing Course at Oxford University. **Sarah Moon** (PhD ’19) has accepted an interdisciplinary tenure-track position for Assistant Professor of Humanities at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy.
Professor Tom Recchio, expert in Victorian literature and in composition studies, recently retired from our faculty. Tom arrived at UConn in September 1989, when he became the Director of Freshman English. Tom drew on his experience in the composition program at Rutgers, where he had worked as associate director, as well as acting director, for three years, and introduced to UConn the Pittsburgh model, which underscores students’ agency and casts them as active learners and writers.

Tom has contributed in many invaluable ways to the Department, the College, and the University. It is, of course, impossible to list his many achievements. Three, though, are particularly noteworthy for their beneficial effects for many different members of the University community.

First, for decades, he developed and led the English section of the Early College Experience Program (ECE); training high school teachers, he extended English college-credit opportunities to secondary school students across the state. During his tenure, the program expanded significantly. In honor of his work, ECE announced in 2016 its annual Thomas E. Recchio Faculty Coordinator Award for Academic Leadership.

Second, some eighteen years ago he redesigned First Year English. Undergraduates used to have to take two three-credit composition courses, 105 and 109, and graduate teaching assistants taught four courses per year. Under Tom’s leadership the composition requirement was reduced to one four-credit course, and graduate assistants in the composition program consequently saw their teaching load reduced from four three-credit to two four-credit courses. The innovation not only allowed undergraduates to move more quickly on to other writing and literature course, but it also freed up both time for graduate students, who were able to complete their degrees in less time, and money for the College, whose staffing expenses were significantly reduced. Especially important to the graduate student community was Tom’s commitment to student agency. According to Kimberly Armstrong of Metropolitan Community College, “As an advisor, professor, and director, Tom Recchio worked tirelessly to empower the students he worked with at all times. As director of Freshman English, he gave graduate students great control, allowing them a voice in shaping the program every summer, preparing us to be thoughtful teachers with a clearly articulated pedagogy.” Christina Henderson Harmer of Augusta University notes Tom’s consistent generosity and advocacy: “Whenever I or other first-year writing instructors faced challenges in our classrooms, Tom’s feedback reflected empathy for both instructors and students. He rigorously supported graduate students by advocating for us on a departmental and university-wide level.”

Tom’s third signal contribution to our community was his development of ENGL 2011, an English Honors gateway course that simultaneously fulfilled the first-year writing requirement. Key to this course was the instructional model: one to two graduate students would be paired with a professor, offering a course in an area of research interest, in learning pods, comprised of the two or three sections of the course. Graduate students and professors would meet regularly to discuss the course and the modes of research it required and invited. In this way graduate students were afforded not only invaluable mentoring but also another teaching opportunity, one distinct from both the regular composition instruction in which they were engaged and the one literature course they were guaranteed. Christiana Salah of Hope College taught in an Honors Pod with Tom. She explains, “The theme was ‘Narrative Sensation and Moral Panic,’ and Tom brought such an energy and depth of knowledge to the topic that I learned at least as much as the students did! He also took the time to mentor me and ask about my ideas, and modeled a generosity of spirit in teaching that has really stuck with me.” Professors, too, have benefitted from the four-credit course: teaching 2011 three times leads to a one-course reduction in teaching. Tom has consistently used his intelligence and care for the well-being of students and faculty alike.

Tom has been deeply committed to the field of composition, but his first love has always been Victorian literature. He is an expert on Elizabeth Gaskell, publishing a monograph on Gaskell’s Cranford and a Norton critical edition of Mary Barton. Gaskell might well be understood as a writer of empathy, for her novels often focus on how characters may come together in fellowship, despite their differences in class, gender, and ability. How fitting that Tom should be drawn to Gaskell, since empathy has marked his work with students and with faculty. His graduate students consider themselves particularly lucky to have worked with Tom on Victorian literature. According to Steve Mollmann of the University of Tampa, “Tom was exactly what I needed in an advisor—a sympathetic reader of my work, always engaged in how to further my project, never imposing his own pet perspective on me, but always providing constructive advice, and patient when I didn’t need it. He could give me motivation when I needed it, and I will always be indebted to him for introducing me to the delights of Elizabeth Gaskell, one of my favorite writers.” Kimberly Armstrong agrees, saying, “As an advisor, he fiercely defended my vision of my dissertation (at times, even to me) and made me a more confident writer.”

Emily Tucker explains the broad appeal of his courses: “His knowledge of the afterlives of nineteenth-century texts introduced many students to new approaches to studying the Victorian era.” A lively and impassioned teacher, Tom helped shape the graduate program’s intellectual community through his work on Victorian literature and the history of the book.

Tom’s career in the department has been marked by his profound kindness and ability to engage all members of our community. Frank Napolitano of Radford University explains that “Tom Recchio was my personal and professional mentor during my time at UConn, someone who guided me when I was uncertain, congratulated me when I succeeded, and encouraged me when I failed. It would be difficult for me to overstake the impact of Tom’s soft-spoken demeanor, his wisdom, and most importantly, his generosity. This last quality is what has impacted my life the most, even though I haven’t seen him in many years. ‘Whenever you have the choice to be generous or otherwise,’ he often would say, ‘always be generous.’ I am now, as Tom was, a supervisor of graduate teaching assistants, and I strive to live by that motto and his example every day. I am forever grateful for his wisdom and friendship.”

Thank you, Tom, for your warmth, brilliance, commitment, and friendship.
INTERVIEW WITH JASON COURTMANCHE, CONNECTICUT WRITING PROJECT DIRECTOR

Danielle Faipler: Why have you dedicated more than 20 years to working as a professor and advisor at UConn?

Jason Courtmanche: I think one of the greatest rewards comes from working with students who are not English majors, who may have had bad experiences in the past with English, and from helping them have a positive experience with literature and writing.

Last fall, a senior math major took my class because she needed a writing course to graduate. She came to my office during the first week and was trembling as she spoke with me, because she had so much anxiety about taking an English class. She told me what a bad writer she was and how scared she was of failing. I asked the students to write a series of 750-word op-eds that discussed current events through the lens of one or more works of literature from the course. This student wrote several successful pieces; her best one described the normalization of violence she experienced visiting Israel, which she compared in her op-ed to the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud chapters in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. She was incredibly proud of her paper and radically changed her attitude not just about English but about herself as a literate person. My job doesn’t get much more rewarding than that!

DF: Where does your passion for teaching writing come from?

JC: I think it would be the contact I had with the former director of the Connecticut Writing Project, Mary Mackley. She was one of my most important mentors as a student and eventual educator. I had two classes with her as an undergraduate that dramatically influenced the way I came to teach. Later, I studied with her during the summer of 1999 as a graduate student, and those courses became my entrée into the PhD program at UConn. From the fall of 1999 through the summer of 2002, I worked for the Writing Project under Mary’s supervision while I also taught high school full time and pursued my PhD. She and I co-taught the Summer Institute through 2002, and during the academic year, I was the editor of Connecticut Student Writers. I learned much from her about being the director of a writing project.

My teaching experiences at an alternative high school also influenced my passion for teaching writing. Much of that instruction had to be student-centered and dynamic, and I try to be that way in all of my classes. My focus and my passion are really teaching writing more than teaching literature.

DF: Why is it important for teachers who teach writing to write themselves? How does that influence and develop them as professionals?

JC: The question lies at the heart of the mission of the National Writing Project. A writing teacher who is a writer is an expert in her field who shares her expertise with her students or with other teachers. If every teacher of writing were a writer, we’d see no more five-paragraph essays, or rigid formulae for genre, or rigid procedures for process, because instruction would be based on the organic experience of the writer who happens to be teaching others how to write. But because this is not widespread, we have canned writing programs that cost school districts scandalous sums of money and create writing-averse students like the math major in my earlier example. It’s no surprise to me that English teachers like Vicky Nordlund at Rockville High or Danielle Pieratti at South Windsor High, who are themselves successful, published writers, produce students who year in and year out win writing awards and get published in various venues.

DF: How have you been able to continue growing as a writer?

JC: One of the ways I’ve grown as a writer was by starting a blog about teaching writing. I publish between 28 and 30 750-word columns a year. At first no one was reading it, but now it is read by hundreds of Connecticut, mostly high school English, teachers, and it has a good following. That’s really exciting for me. I do have a very specific audience I’m writing for, and that’s become important for me. I read voraciously about the education system of Connecticut and always am thinking about what I want to write about.

DF: What advice do you have for writers?

JC: Get involved in a writing group. One of the myths is that of a solitary author, but nobody writes in a vacuum. Most authors write in writing groups to get feedback. Sometimes writing groups don’t work, but when people take them seriously and put in the effort, they work exceptionally.

DF: What are some challenges that come with teaching writing?

JC: People’s fears. People are so afraid that the English teacher is going to criticize every spoken word and language use. It instills fear in a lot of people. [To help people to get over their fear of writing] I try to provide opportunities to write without penalty. I emphasize feedback and response. I try to structure the course to allow them to write things they have an interest and experience in, and they’re given many opportunities to improve, so the occasion for writing isn’t punitive.

—Danielle Faipler, Neag Newsletter, 28 Aug. 2018

Jason Courtmanche congratulates one of the 2018 Letters About Literature contest honorees earlier this spring in Hartford.
**Creative Writing Awards**

**Edward R. and Frances Schreiber Collins Literary Prizes**
- Prose Winner/$2,400: Sean Cavanaugh
- Poetry Winner/$2,400: Veronica Schorr

**Jennie Hackman Memorial Prize for Fiction**
- First place/$1,000: Courtney Haigler
- Second place/$300: Ellen Fuller
- Third Place/$200: Christopher Gardner

**Wallace Stevens Poetry Contest**
- First place/$1,000: Kerry Carnahan
- Second place/$500: Matthew Ryan Shelton
- Third place/$250: Christine Byrne

**The Aetna Children’s Literature Award**
- Winner/$250: Madeline Eller

**The Aetna Translation Award**
- Winner/$250: Xin Xu

**The Aetna Creative Nonfiction Awards**
- Undergraduate First prize co-winners/$125 each: Andrew Kucharski and Natiel Cooper
- Graduate First Prize/$250: Sophia Buckner

**Long River Review Graduate Writing Award**
- Winner/$250: Sophia Buckner

**Edwin Way Teale Award for Nature Writing**
- Winner/$900: Ellen Fuller

**Idea Grants**

Congratulations to two outstanding English majors from the class of 2020. This award allows them to conduct independent research, develop creative works in different media, and initiate programs that engage the University community.

**James Grindley** will be writing “The Cut of a Steer: A Contemporary American Satire,” a creative fiction novel in the broad genre of post-modern Neo American Gothic, where he will discuss a variety of current events that have defined the 21st century and the world we live in today.

**Jasmine Smith** will create a visual journal, “Old/New/Inside/Out: An Exploration of Modern and Traditional Japanese Culture,” documenting experiences in Japan, with a specific interest in traditional vs. modern culture and the public opinion of both. Jasmine aims to cultivate a collection of artwork and creative writings for an exhibition and reading on campus.

**Recent Publications**


Carillo, Ellen C. *Teaching Readers in Post-Truth America.*


Duane, Anna Mae. “‘All Boys Are Bound to Someone:’ Reimagining Freedom in the History of Child Slavery.”


Henderson, Tolonda. “‘I don’t think you’re a waste of space’: Activity, Redemption, and the Social Construction of Fatness.”

Higonnet, Margaret R. “Maternal Cosmopoetics: Käthe Kollwitz and European Women Poets of the First World War.”


Hollenberg, Donna, ed. *Denise Levertov in Company: Essays by Her Students, Colleagues, and Fellow Writers.*

Kervick, Mollie. “‘Looking Back’ at Inis Meáin: Alternative Mothering in Synge’s *The Aran Islands* and Emily Lawless’s *Grania.*”

Litman, Ellen. “After the Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting, a Russian-Jewish Immigrant Remembers Squirrel Hill.”

Prince, Lisa A. “‘Dread, Isolation, and Silence: Teaching Through Horror Literature.”

Rowe, Rebecca. “‘But Mother, I’m a Man Now’: Childhood and Community in the Musical and Film Versions of *Into the Woods.*”

Schlund-Vials, Cathy J. “Immigration, Migration, and the United States: Immigrant/Refugee Writing and Ethnic American Literature.”


**Awards and Honors**

Pamela Bedore earned the Provost’s Award for Excellence in December 2018.

Congratulations to Christine Byrne (’19), who was selected by Connecticut Poetry Circuit as a 2018-19 CT Student Poet. She will tour the state doing poetry readings from February 4-March 15.

Martha J. Cutter was awarded a $60,000 National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Academic Year Fellowship for Sept. 2019-Sept. 2020 for her book project “Slavery as Spectacle: The Lives and Afterlives of Henry Box Brown, the Slave who Mailed Himself to Freedom.”

Penelope Pelizzon won a 2019 Hawthorned Fellowship for poetry. Hawthorned Fellows are hosted for a month’s residency in William Drummond’s Hawthorned Castle in Midlothian, Scotland, while working on a book project.
AN ENGLISH MAJOR AT THE CARRIER FAIR

This semester, I went to the university career fair for the first time in my college experience. Prior to this year, I thought my reasons for not going to the fair were pretty sound: I was sure there would not be companies looking for English majors. I thought the career fair was a place for business students to market themselves and network with the companies that wanted to hire them—companies I had no interest in.

This logic was not the only force holding me back from the career fair. I was also scared, which I realized more and more as the fair approached. I worried that I would not know how to explain myself once I reached the recruiters’ tables. I dreaded the “elevator pitch” I would have to give, marketing myself to someone I had never met, and I thought over the various ways it could go wrong. Most of all, I was nervous that company recruiters would not be interested in my work experiences. Nevertheless, I knew I would be disappointed with myself if I decided not to go, so I printed out copies of my resume and walked into the fair faking cool, confident composure.

In hindsight, I am happy I put these fears behind me, because all the things I worried about turned out to be misconceptions. Something that I did not consider before going to the career fair was that the skills we learn in English classes are transferrable. Companies need employees who are effective communicators, analytical problem-solvers, and able to synthesize information. These are skills I acquired throughout my experiences with writing internships, but they are also skills that English majors exercise in each course they take.

I am pursuing a digital marketing minor, which helped me streamline my decisions for companies I wanted to approach. I talked to representatives from firms that did market research and consolidated information in blog-style articles, as well as companies developing positive brand images for various products. Though these businesses were not populated exclusively by English majors, the skills I fostered throughout my college experience made me feel confident that I was a great candidate for these positions. I also discovered that in reality, elevator pitches are not the painfully awkward soliloquies I had imagined, but conversations between employers and potential employees to determine compatibility of needs and qualifications. This was still kind of scary, but definitely not as bad as I had imagined.

I left the career fair with an altered view. English majors’ skills apply to a wide range of occupations. Knowing what I know now, I will definitely attend the spring career fair, more confident and perhaps a bit more eager to lock down post-graduate employment.

—Annie Stachura

EMINENT GUESTS

In March, Claudia Rankine will conduct a reading at the Konover Auditorium. A 2016 MacArthur Fellow, Rankine is the author of five poetry collections, including Don’t Let Me Be Lonely and Citizen: An American Lyric, which uses poetry, essay, cultural criticism, and visual images to explore what it means to be an American citizen in a “post-racial” society. Among her numerous awards and honors, Rankine is the recipient of the Poets & Writers’ Jackson Poetry Prize and fellowships from the Lannan Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Aetna Writer-in-Residence, poet Shane McCrae, conducted one-on-one writing tutorials in October with ten students. McCrae is the author of six books of poetry—most recently, In the Language of My Captor, which won the 2018 Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for Poetry; and was a finalist for the National Book Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and the William Carlos Williams Award. He teaches at Columbia University.

Dr. Ianna Hawkins Owen delivered a talk titled “Surviving Diaspora: Glance and Relief” for the English Graduate Student Association. Owen is an Assistant Professor of English at Williams College. Her areas of interest include African diaspora theory, asexuality, failure, and freedom.

Caroline Heafey, editor of two forthcoming reissues of the work of Irish novelist and playwright Dorothy Macardle, spoke about hysteria and the uncanny in Macardle’s famous work, The Uninvited. Heafey explained that though there have been many great Irish female writers, like Macardle, many studies in Irish literature focus primarily on literature written by men. “I kept coming back to the same question: Where are all the women?” Heafey said. “I found that it’s not necessarily about finding this material, but asking why it’s missing.”

Irish poet Mary Madec gave a reading from her 2014 publication, Demeter Does Not Remember in November. Madec, the recipient of Ireland’s prestigious Hennessy XO Award for Emerging Poetry, asked her audience to close their eyes and join her in remembering their first experiences with love—connecting this intense emotion with the process of poetic writing. She also explained the personal aspects of her poetry, as well as the relevance of discussing female sexuality in literature.
A warm welcome to Dr. Sarah DeCapua, who joins us as Assistant Professor in Residence for the First-Year Writing Program. DeCapua currently teaches English for International Writers and Introduction to Academic Writing, and dedicates her time in the classroom to creating a supportive and motivating environment for her students.

Before arriving at UConn, DeCapua was Visiting Assistant Professor and Assistant Director of First-Year Composition at Texas Woman’s University. She also worked as an instructor at Southern Connecticut State University, University of New Haven, and Fairfield University. Prior to the start of her teaching career, DeCapua worked as an independent author and an editor for firms that published for children and young adults. In 2016, she earned her PhD in composition and TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

DeCapua says that the opportunity to take part in the First-Year Writing Program at UConn speaks to strengths she fostered throughout her previous teaching experiences. For her, this job represents another opportunity to “elaborate and cooperate.” DeCapua enjoys working in a collegiate environment. “I love college students in general,” she says. “There’s something about this chapter in a person’s life—the learning, the growing, and the discovering—it’s exciting and fun.”

In her courses, many of the students are learning English as a second language. DeCapua teaches these multilingual emerging writers to use English as their academic language.

DeCapua says that the most rewarding part of this process is the result of scaffolding assignments, which means separating a major composition into various stages so that students can internalize the step-by-step process that leads them to create the final product. She adds, “All of those little parts that we’ve practiced in class come together into a composition that is maybe not technically perfect, but it’s a work that the student is proud of, and so it contributes to the conversation surrounding the student’s topic.”

—Annie Stachura