I’ve been trying to get my grass to grow. My husband and I recently built and moved into a new house, and when the snow melted, we were faced with—not exactly a lawn. There are a few swaths of hopeful grass, but there is also construction debris, rocks, and a lot of stubborn dirt. Our will and our work to make things sprout have seen uneven success.

It’s been a slow spring.

But my first term as our department’s Director of Graduate Studies has been a season of abundance. This semester, the Graduate Executive Committee helped me recruit ten diverse and exciting scholars for our incoming cohort. Last month, I watched faculty and graduate student mentors workshop syllabi with PhD students planning their first upper-level courses. And I’ve wrapped up my Professional Development seminar, during which students polished essays on environmental conservation in James Fenimore Cooper, on the problem of queer inheritance in the Irish Big House novel, and on trauma and resilience in Lemony Snicket. I Skyped in visitors from across the country who are leveraging their English PhDs in a variety of vocations: a friend from graduate school helping faculty win Fulbrights; a fellow children’s literature scholar who led my class through the ins and outs of a visiting professorship; and an alum from our own program whose career path has included work in the classroom, the advising office, and now the corporate world. This week, I’m reviewing nominations for our department’s Tribute Awards, which acknowledge graduate students’ accomplishments and honor the legacies of Milton Stern, Francelia Butler, and David Leeming. So while my grass hasn’t grown, my appreciation for the talents and generosity of our department, and indeed our academic community, has.

Happy summer to all!

J. Brandon Benevento (PhD), Sarah Bertekap (MA), Sophia Buckner (MA), Abigail Fagan (PhD), Kate Gross (PhD), Daniel Healey (MA), Kim Kraner (MA for Teachers), Joseph Leake (PhD), Joanna MacGugan (PhD), Sarah Moon (PhD), and Aaron Proudfoot (MA). Sarah Bertekap, Daniel Healey, and Aaron Proudfoot will proceed to our PhD program.

His presence in the classroom, the faculty lunch room, and department meetings was invariably courteous, collegial, conversable, and modest, with a lively dash of wit and humor. He was particularly known in the department for his elegant writing style. When we had to create a document to exemplify our stylistic standards, we enlisted Dave to write it. A paragraph from one of his articles will convey something of what we so admired: its lucidity, economy, sensitivity, freedom from jargon, and unerring instinct for *le mot juste*.

As we have seen, the codes of judgment of all the characters cancel each other: Joseph’s stern evangelicalism, Nelly’s pragmatic preservation of the norm, Edgar’s code of gentility, Heathcliff’s law of the jungle, Linton’s pure egocentrism. One character sees healthful tranquility endangered by destructive violence; another sees fulfilling, expressive passion endangered by stifling repression. The shut windows protect, but they also incarcerate; open, they free, but they also destroy. The coward is offset by the bully; the boor by the snob; obstinacy by spinelessness; extremism by moderation at all costs.

After closing the book, the reader can rest with the apprehension of an ethical deadlock, or he can choose sides according to the bias of his own nature. But in the actual process of reading the book, he is drawn beyond mere apprehension of the confused, indecisive conflicts to the point of actual participation in them. Wuthering Heights consistently encourages the reader to take sides, and then, by introducing behavior or descriptions against the grain of his expectations, to change sides.1

Dave regards grammar as a beautiful system and feels a misplaced modifier as a wound. He regularly taught a one-credit course of his own creation on grammar and wrote what came to be considered the official manual for courses in the department, *The Style Booklet*.

Dave had and still has a second life at the university, on the track with his fellow long-distance runners. In 2006 he was the second fastest over-70 marathoner in the United States and the 12th fastest in the world for his age group.2 He is still going strong.

—A. Harris (Hap) Fairbanks


Yiyang Li, who joined us in January as an Assistant Professor in Residence (APIr) in Second-Language Writing in the First-Year Writing program. He is currently working on final edits to his dissertation for Purdue University, planning to defend on July 8. His research focus is Applied Linguistics, with an emphasis on World Englishes (WE). His dissertation is a chronological examination of each stage of the Kachruvian paradigm, which is named for the Indian linguist Braj Kachru, who developed a system of grouping the varieties of English in the world and coined the term *World English*. Yiyang says his examination is significant “because of the many misinterpretations and misunderstandings about what WE is,” and “it has practical implications for teaching English.” His work contextualizes the conversation for scholars who discuss WE, its place in writing programs, and the curricular development of such programs.

From a professional standpoint, Yiyang was attracted to this APIr position because it brings an opportunity to teach writing to international students at a research institution. He knew the position would be a good fit for him because, as he says, “It’s what I’m good at and it speaks to my research interest in Second-Language Writing.” Yiyang also had personal reasons for pursuing the job: Although he and his wife, Xueying Du, had returned to their native China in 2017 after Yiyang completed his PhD coursework, he focused his job search on the United States because he and his wife want their two-year-old son, Harold, who was born in Chicago, to grow up here.

As Yiyang reflects upon his first semester at UConn, he defines the challenges of his position as consisting mainly of becoming familiar with the First-Year Writing (FYW) program and its systems, and he expresses his gratitude to its leadership for their support and encouragement. “I’m still in the process of getting familiar with the university, the FYW program, and its students,” he says, “I feel that once I learn more, I’ll encounter many more challenges to overcome.” However, Yiyang enthusiastically adds that he feels “satisfied when I realize I’m surviving with a new job, a young child, a new life in the Northeast, and finishing my dissertation.” Unfortunately for Yiyang, he joined us during winter in New England, a time of year when many of us wish we were someplace else. “Having spent the previous 16 months in south China, where the temperature never goes below 50 degrees Fahrenheit, winter here was particularly harsh. When you have to spend extra time in the morning warming up your car, that’s something to get used to.”

In spite of the winters, Yiyang plans to stay with us a while. He looks forward to contributing his linguistics expertise to FYW curriculum design and to becoming more involved in the teaching community. “I look forward to being part of those conversations,” he concluded, “contributing what I know and what I think to positively impact a writing program. It’s a great opportunity and I’m glad to be taking advantage of it.”

—Sarah DeCapua
RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Dawson, Alexander C. “Stasis in Flight: Reframing Disability and Dependence in the Refugee.”
Franklin, Wayne. “Symzonia in Search of an Author.”
Godfrey, Laura. “Revising the Body in Julian of Norwich’s Revelations.”
Roden, Frederick. “Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination.”
Rowe, Rebecca. “Shaping Girls: Analyzing Animated Female Body Shapes.”
Stefan, Hayley C. “A (Head) Case for a Mad Humanities: Sula’s Shadrack and Black Madness.”
Ziering, Anna. “‘Hurt You into Tenderness Finally’: Erotic Masochism and Black Female Subjectivity in Gayl Jones’s Corregidora.”

AWARDS AND HONORS

Kate Capshaw and Anna Mae Duane, eds. Who Writes for Black Children? African American Children’s Literature before 1900. 2019 Best Edited Book Award from the Children’s Lit. Association and 2018 Outstanding Academic Title.
Lauren Cenci (’19) won the Jonathan Hufstader Distinguished English Major award.
Margaret Gibson was named CT State Poet Laureate.
Katie Grant (’19). 2018-19 Early College Experience Award for Outstanding Research.
Cathy Schlund-Vials. 2019 Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor.

The English department welcomed Northern Irish poet Nick Laird in April as this year’s Gerson Irish reader. Introducing him, poet Geraldine Mills said that the author “brings narrative to his poetry and lyricism to his prose.” Acclaimed as a poet and novelist with an individual style, Laird has won numerous awards, including the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature for his collection To a Fault.

Laird began his reading with a joke about his imposing height: “I always have to hunch over the microphone.” Although he noted later in his reading that he doesn’t have any happy poems, Laird spent the evening blending easy wit with often serious subject matter. Laird began with a political poem. Calling out what he sees as racist policy, he dedicated the poem to the many Irish American cabinet members of the current administration, quipping before he read the poem that the Irish have only recently come to be considered white and that they seem to be enjoying it quite a bit.

In addition to reading his own work, Laird, who recently accepted a position as professor of poetry at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry in Northern Ireland, also read Heaney’s poem “Mossbawn” in honor of what would have been the celebrated Irish poet’s 80th birthday. During the question and answer portion of the reading, Laird discussed some of his work in translation. As he told the audience, he considers his work to be “more versions than direct translations,” as what the original poem looks like is less important to him than creating a poem that “works” in English.

—Betty Noe
NOTABLE EVENTS

Christine Byrne (*19) gave a poetry reading in March with other CT Poetry Circuit student winners.

Don James McLaughlin (University of Tulsa) presented “Infection in the Sentence Breeds: Toward a Literary History of Emotions in Early American Rabies Narratives.”

Lyn Tribble gave a Faculty Brown Bag talk, “‘A Strange, Hollow, and Confused Noise’: Prospero’s Start and Early Modern Magical Practice.”

EGSA hosted John Sexton (UConn PhD ’07) from Bridgewater State University for a talk titled “Publishing, Professing, and Scholarly Engagement Beyond Traditional Academe.”

The Poetic Journeys Release and Celebration featured pizza, poetry, and design. Anna Ziering, Sophia Buckner, and Julia Brush gave poetry readings, and the Design Center students presented their creative posters that adorn our hallways and UConn shuttle buses.

Anna Mae Duane presented “‘Modern Slavery’ and ‘Prison Abolition’: The Divergent Political Memories of Slavery in the 21st Century.”


Mary Burke presented “Pagan Parcels: Tom Murphy’s Drama and the Tuam Mother and Baby Home Mass Grave.”

The Aetna Celebration of Student Writing featured poster presentations and prize-winning academic and creative work by UConn students, followed by the Long River Review release party.

Jason Courtmanche managed the 31st Annual Connecticut Student Writers Recognition Night. 42 teachers and 550 K-12 student writers and artists were recognized for their contributions in a ceremony attended by more than 1,500 students, teachers, and family members.

EMINENT GUESTS

Author/poet Nick Laird (NYU) delivered the Gerson Irish Reading. Laird’s many awards include the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature, the Ireland Chair of Poetry Award, the Betty Trask Prize, a Somerset Maugham award, and the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. (For more, see page 3).

The 56th Annual Wallace Stevens Poetry Program featured acclaimed author Claudia Rankine, who read from her work at both the Greater Hartford Magnet School and the Storrs campus. In addition to winning an NEH Fellowship, Rankine received the NAACP Image Award, the PEN Open Book Award, and the LA Times Book Award for poetry.

The Early Modern Studies Group hosted James D. Rice (Tufts), who presented “‘Early Modern’ and ‘Indigenous’ Histories,” exploring historical causation and identity in Native American and settler narratives.

The Creative Writing Program brought Emily Rapp Black to campus. She discussed her creative process and read from her latest book, “The Still Point of the Turning World.”

TRIBUTE AWARDS WINNERS


Nicole Lawrence received the Francelia Butler Graduate Award for Teaching Innovation.

Melissa Rohrer earned the David Leeming Graduate Award for outstanding service to the Department.

SUPPORT ENGLISH

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 Shanley Gerson Fund for Irish Studies (30524).

The generosity of two of our alums, Kathleen Walsh (*’77, ’79, ’84) and Jim Carrington (*’78), allowed us to introduce 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.