

| **ON BEAUTY** |

Lake Winnepesaukee,  
site of U-M's New  
England Literature  
Program (see p.9)

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INSIDE



## Dear Friends of English,

The theme of our departmental newsletter this year is Beauty, and you'll find in these pages abundant confirmation that the realm of the aesthetic, as both object of analysis and distinctly pleasurable form of experience, remains central to our department's work. When I was in grad school, I found it odd that physicists often seemed more comfortable with the language of beauty than did my fellow literature students. Eventually, I realized that "beauty" designates not only a quality of perception but also, in the arts, a means to another end: one component among several that give literary writings the unique power they have over our minds and in the world. This insight, in turn, has led me over the years to see that while the "practical" components of a college education may prepare us to make a living, a literary education may prepare us best to grapple with the question of what we are living for.

The many brilliant and dedicated life-educators in our department continue to garner outsized recognition for their efforts on the local and national stage. We did well, as usual, in major research fellowship competitions this year, with Jeremiah Chamberlin bringing home a Fulbright, Aliyah Khan a fellowship from the American Association of University Women, and Adela Pinch major grants from the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Humanities Center. Recent novels by two of our MFA faculty featured prominently in *The Guardian*, with Peter Ho Davies the subject of a full-page profile and Laura Kasischke named alongside Nabokov and Thomas Mann in a list of the authors of the "Top 10 Authentic Romances."

Closer to home, Michael Awkward, Laura Kasischke, and Ruby Tapia have all been awarded fellowships at the Institute for the Humanities for next year, while Scott Lyons has been selected for a Michigan Humanities Award. Sara Blair was named the Patricia S. Yaeger Collegiate Professor of English and Nick Harp the Sheridan Baker Collegiate Lecturer, both coveted appointments celebrating exceptional achievement. Linda Gregerson received the Henry Russel Lectureship, the University's very highest honor for a senior member of its active faculty, and Tung-Hui Hu the Henry Russel Award, the corresponding accolade for an early-stage faculty member. Eileen Pollack has received the 2016 Distinguished Faculty Achievement Award for outstanding contributions in teaching and scholarship, while Khaled Mattawa was selected for the Regents' Award for Distinguished Public Service, and Alisse Portnoy for the Harold R. Johnson Diversity Service Award from the Office of the Provost.

We are thrilled to welcome four new tenure-track faculty to our department this fall. Hadji Bakara, who recently completed his PhD at the University of Chicago, specializes in the literary history of human rights. Sarah Ensor comes to us as a specialist in Environmental Humanities from the University of Portland. Aida Levy-Hussen joins us from the University of Wisconsin, where she established her reputation as a leading scholar of modern African-American literature. And finally, celebrated poet A. Van Jordan rejoins the MFA faculty after a several-year sejour at Rutgers-Newark. A successful recruiting season was rounded out by the appointment to our faculty of two exceptional post-docs from the Michigan Society of Fellows: Laura Finch, who works on questions of finance and form in the contemporary novel and Benjamin Mangrum, a specialist in the conjunctions of literary tragedy and political theory. You'll find fuller profiles of each of our new colleagues later in this issue.

Every new hire we make, of course, has the potential to shape the department for decades to come, as we were gratefully reminded last year in celebrating the long careers of two retiring faculty: William (Buzz) Alexander, who joined us in 1971 and became best known as the founder of the transformative Prison Creative Arts Project, and Laurence Goldstein, who was hired in 1970 and served for 32 years as the editor of the much heralded *Michigan Quarterly Review*.

We will continue to build on existing strengths in our faculty over the next several months, with two national searches in the fields of poetry / drama and creative nonfiction. Much of our effort in the coming year, however, will be devoted to our decadal external review process, which will culminate in the spring visit of a panel of consultants tasked with helping us to chart an optimal course for the department over the next ten years. New initiatives on the table include an expanded career development program for both undergraduate and graduate students, new course offerings in the blossoming fields of creative nonfiction and public writing, and an increasingly flexible curriculum readily adapted to the needs of a changing student body.

It's worth pointing out that a number of the innovations we're considering either originated in or were refined through conversations with alumni like yourself. Those who have spent time with us as students on the way to successful careers have the benefit of a unique perspective on what we do: an insider view of the passion for the written word that animates our classrooms coupled with an outsider view informed by your later life experience of what makes successful organizations thrive. I know I speak for many of my colleagues in saying how much we welcome your feedback, your suggestions, and your support. Get in touch with me at any time to set up a meeting or a call. My email is [dporter@umich.edu](mailto:dporter@umich.edu).

I hope that you enjoy the meditations on beauty in this newsletter as much as I did, and that you find ample reminders in these pages of how a literary education remains as deeply and lastingly rewarding an opportunity today as it has ever been.

David



# Books

| Recent Faculty Publications |

**The U-M English  
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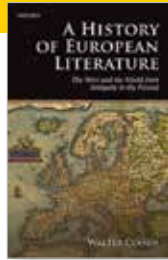


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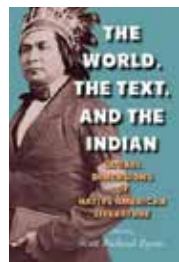
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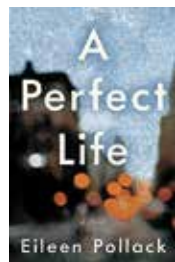
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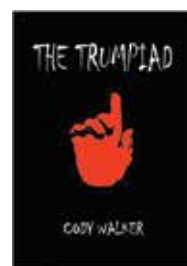
Yopie Prins  
**LADIES' GREEK**



Sidonie Smith and  
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**LIFE WRITING IN  
 THE LONG RUN**



Keith Taylor  
**THE BIRD-WHILE**



Cody Walker  
**THE TRUMPIAD**

## EDITOR'S NOTE

| by Michael Byers |

*Associate Professor  
Director, Hopwood Program*



WHEN IN SPRING OF 2017 WE SETTLED ON the theme of Beauty for this year's newsletter we did so with the expectation that, come Thanksgiving, we might be in need of some uplift. We'd hoped to be wrong. At this writing, at least, it appears we were all too right. As we send this to the copyeditors the floodwaters are still churning in Houston, and the country is still recoiling after white supremacists marched in Virginia, and whatever high true tone of liberty and righteousness this country ever managed seems lost beneath a malicious roar. By the time this appears in your mailbox, who knows what news will have preceded it?

Well—at least here, and least for now, a dedicated troupe of scholars and writers persist in the pursuit of the beautiful and the true, recognizing that this pursuit is fundamental to the maintenance of a humane civilization. In these pages you'll find odes to the classroom, to the British stage, to poems and marginalia, to all different species of joy and inquiry, and to the power to be found when complex art connects with the confounding world. In a country where a certain ugliness of spirit is at the moment flourishing, and where truth is too often in the eye of the beholder, may these dispatches give you heart, and hope; and may your own holidays be full of life and beauty.





| O N B E A U T Y |

The U-M Biological Station,  
Douglas Lake, where Keith  
Taylor teaches “Environmental  
Writing and Great Lakes  
Literature”. (see p. 10) Photo  
courtesy of Mark Kreider

| by Gillian White |

*Associate Professor*

T

THESE ARE THE OPENING LINES of American poet John Ashbery's 1977 poem "And *Ut Pictura Poesis* Is Her Name" —

You can't say it that way any more.  
 Bothered about beauty you have to  
 Come out into the open, into a clearing,  
 And rest. Certainly whatever funny happens to you  
 Is OK.

These lines came to mind when the department asked that we write about beauty for this publication. The poem's wry, talky resignation about how uncomfortable it is to want to address "beauty" as an abstract value is one I share. If there is one thing I can assert to summarize the situation of my academic field, which is twentieth- and twenty-first century poetry and poetics in the U.S., it's that the aesthetic field is far too diverse to substantiate a general category of beauty.

Even moreso, "beauty's" promise as an abstraction to name a value that transcends time and place — to be arresting and true (implicitly for all, and for all time) — seems wildly suspicious to most of the poets I read and write about. "You can't say it that way any more" captures the tone of this situation; the era of practical criticism — when beauty was assumed as an artistic value, and the job of the professor and critic was to illuminate its sources and workings — is gone. It has long been true among those writing about art and literature in the U.S. that there is no single contemporary situation or aesthetic that could speak to everyone, and that to assume otherwise is to flex your privilege. This situation takes on particular urgency in the current moment as I write, when the question of what should be important, and to whom, about monuments and "the past" they name, is being shouted in the streets. I often say to my advanced undergraduate students that I have no taste anymore — I simply find all the poetry I come into contact with, even the poems I don't particularly enjoy, "interesting." I understand this stance to be intellectually important, the mark of my historical situation, and something I'll probably never be able to go back on.

Still, I also recognize it to be utterly inadequate to my personal experience. In one corner of my non-professional life, I use social media to post photos of stunning light on sea coasts, or I ask my children to attend to something I want them to understand is "beautiful." I took a photo of a manhole cover dusted in snow last winter whose contrasts of light and dark I could only justify loving as "beautiful." Oh, but I am suspicious of those posts and tastes and the stories they tell about me. They cannot help but speak my privilege, the particulars of my education, my class, the politicized I feel entitled to in the moment of loving something without knowing anything about

its production or history — not to mention my being drawn in by a photo-sharing technology that allows more and more people to be distracted and lulled to sleep as we pass the tipping point of global warming, as fascism re-blossoms, as we participate in economies and relations that produce human suffering on a global scale.

This is not the subject of Ashbery's poem. But his speaking subject seems equally suspicious and even ashamed by the trappings of stale ideas of beauty, too — his poem takes on a humorous, quasi parental/teacherly voice shortly after the lines I've quoted:

So much for self-analysis. Now,  
About what to put in your poem-painting:  
Flowers are always nice, particularly delphinium.  
Names of boys you once knew and their sleds,  
Skyrockets are good — do they still exist?

Eventually, the poem will admit to an experience in writing poems, a "desire to communicate," that he turns to the painterly (and the beautiful, I think) to figure:

The extreme austerity of an almost empty mind  
Colliding with the lush, Rousseau-like foliage of its desire to communicate  
Something between breaths, if only for the sake  
Of others and their desire to understand you and desert you  
For other centers of communication, so that understanding  
May begin, and in doing so be undone.

The lines, the way they move, their pauses and unfurling, the quick green and calm of Rousseau they flash for us — I find it beautiful. They bear the mark of the "poetic" in the late twentieth century, even as those pauses, and the lines' movement, carry a suggestion of the Victorians Ashbery admired and sought to undo. So what is beauty to me? I have no idea, and wouldn't want to sum it up. But Ashbery's lines offer me the possibility that naming beauty is for me a mode of exposure, a coming out into the open, paradoxically, to rest, to rest assured in my time and assumptions, without fear of being shamed, with the hope, perhaps, of communication there. I am also reminded that animals know that coming out "into a clearing" is the last place they can rest, unless they happen to be at the very top of the food chain — king of the jungle. When I name beauty, I'm king.



| by Cass Adair |

*Frederick Donald Sober  
Post-Doctoral Fellow*

I F I'VE LEARNED ANYTHING from my study of transgender literature, it's this: beauty is a dangerous thing. It's a gendered concept, associated with femininity, and so it brings with it the strange and paradoxical rules of sexism. Don't aspire to beauty? You're prudish, maybe even "mannish." Work too hard at it? You're frivolous, vapid, fraudulent. Maybe someone compares you to a drag queen. In other words, if women do beauty wrong, maybe they aren't real women after all.

And if physical beauty serves as litmus test for gender conformity, transgender literature smashes the whole chemistry set. So much of this work portrays bodies — bodies of different races, abilities, sizes, and gender presentations — as wild things, always in flux. Indeed, in Susan Stryker's foundational piece "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," trans bodies achieve their power and beauty through being monstrous, showing the world new ways of being alive. In more recent work, beautiful trans bodies are portrayed as hellish demons, as chunks of computer code, or as severed starfish. Even in more realist pieces, beautiful trans bodies might bear visible scars from surgery or streetfights.

In other words, transgender beauty isn't necessarily an aesthetic quality: it's a signifier of physical transgression. It's more verb than noun. And I can't help but find that beautiful.

F

OR THE PAST FIVE YEARS I've been engaged in a longitudinal study of the ways our undergraduates develop as writers. Thanks to support from the Sweetland Center for Writing, this has become an extensive examination of the writing and reflections of 168 students as they made their way from first-year writing to graduation. In the process I've come to appreciate the many paths students follow, the understandings they develop, and the stops and starts they all experience as they move from one rhetorical context to another.

The headline — our work does have an impact. Students write differently at the end of their undergraduate years; they have a deeper appreciation for the social nature of writing; they become more aware of and responsive to their audiences; they can work with multiple genres; they draw on previous learning to build new capacities; they use more effective language; and they employ a broader range of writing repertoires.

Even as I write an account of this study I realize I'll never be able to tell the full story of the 322 surveys, 131 interviews, 94 electronic portfolios, and 2406 pieces of writing that we collected. But I can testify to the impressive courage and tenacity of underprepared students, the generous spirits of student writers who reach out to help one another, and the creativity of our undergraduates' multimedia writing. And the most beautiful thing? The deep pleasure students take when their writing finds its audience — and achieves the effects they were intending.

| by Anne Gere |

*Professor  
Director, Program in English and Education  
Chair, Sweetland Center for Writing*



| by William Ingram |

*Professor Emeritus*

# N



NOT SO MUCH BEAUTIFUL as charming; encountering, in a 1620 manuscript list of names and locations, this tiny sketch of a woman holding something that might be a fan. The scribe, whoever he might have been, clearly felt it was time to take a break from writing names, so he did this sketch. It's a lively drawing, deftly and economically done, clearly the work of someone who wasn't new to the limning of human figures. It's enough to make one wonder whether this particular scribe was also an artist. Perhaps it's a sketch of a woman who lived in that particular location, "iij Tunnes Allye" – perhaps even of Lady Tarbuck, wife of Sir William Tarbuck, who did live there and whose name is inserted immediately below the drawing, in a different hand, and mis-spelled as "Tarbutt".

# T

TWO WEEKS AFTER THE WINTER semester ended, after a year of teaching in classrooms on campus, I found myself in a forest, in New Hampshire, attending the New England Literature Program for a few days as an observer and visitor.

I wasn't sure what I'd find in the forest. I'd always imagined NELP as a kind of summer camp for college students — or at least a place that wouldn't remind me of the kind of work I'd been doing with some of these same students in classrooms in Angell Hall during the school year. It's not that I doubted that having fun in the forest while reading Hawthorne could be stimulating (I've seen the positive impact of NELP on students' writing over the years) — but would this really be some kind of classroom? How rigorous could an education in the woods be?

What I found was an entirely new way of thinking about what a classroom can be. And how, thanks to the dedication of the program's director (the English Department's Aric Knuth) and its faculty and staff, NELP can suffuse a forest with the best kind of academic rigor: a commitment to discussion, to clarity of expression and to understanding.

Despite the cold, I found warmth in the forest. Friendships were made, of course, but this was also a community of scholars. I attended several classes — in a wooded cabin, on a grassy hillside, in the wonderfully cluttered library full of New England literature, and in the large central hall (beside the fireplace!). The seriousness of our discussions — and the faculty and students' passion for encountering this literature along with the nature, geography, and history that inspired it — would have impressed me anywhere. Here, this all seemed magical.

But really it was between classes that my understanding of "classroom" expanded, those times when students took our discussions with them as they hiked back to their cabins, or to the library, or to the campfire. I'd come to NELP feeling certain this kind of study would be fun, and I knew the setting would be gorgeous. But I hadn't guessed I'd glimpse what's most beautiful at the heart of every experience of shared learning: the way our studies are made most meaningful when our work pervades our lives.

| by Laura Kasischke |

*Allan Seager Collegiate Professor*

| by Aric Knuth |

*Lecturer**Director, New England Literature Program**English Advisor*

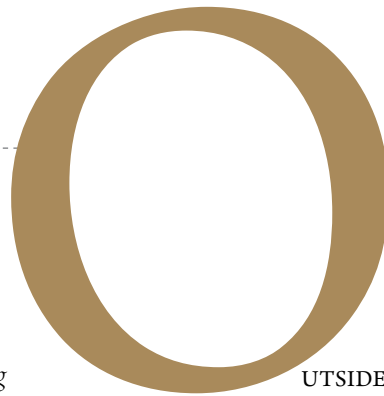
I DON'T NEED MANY REMINDERS of how lucky I am to spend each spring semester in New England with forty of our most dedicated students — studying Thoreau, climbing mountains, cooking meals in our funny little kitchen in the woods on Lake Winnepesaukee. As one might imagine, the amount of beauty we take in during this time together is hard to measure, and as hard to recount. This past spring, though, I did come upon something I won't soon forget — and it was a reminder of how many beautiful things are all around us, every day.

I was out on a trip with some students to work on an organic apple orchard and sheep farm in northern Vermont. We were driving one evening from the farm to a barn in the next town over, where a community of puppeteers was holding an open singing event for the locals and anyone who happened to be passing through. On our drive, we encountered a building whose sign proclaimed it as “The Museum of Everyday Life.” The building was unlocked.

The exhibits at the time featured toothbrushes. And also: a full-sized dress made of safety pins. Grains of sand set up to be viewed under microscopes. A recording of two Canary Islanders communicating with whistles. And a display of “tone balls,” described as an accumulation of hair, dust, insect casings, skin, and other floating matter that makes its way into the sound-hole of a musical instrument, then forms a ball due to the instrument's vibrations. A placard explained that tone balls were considered by some to hold “magical tonal influence,” and that it was very rare to find one outside its host.

At the back of the museum one of my students was sitting — dazed — before a wide curtain of black netting upon which hundreds of bells of all different styles and sizes had been pinned. The bell curtain was affixed to the turntable of a record player, which had started spinning when we flipped the lights on at the front of the building. The spinning turntable waved the curtain of bells; the entire room was full of their jangling. The sound was all around us. And then the student sitting cross-legged on the ground began writing furiously in his journal. I wondered, in that moment, if he'd read yet the Emily Dickinson poem “I saw no Way,” or if I would need to show it to him later.

The poem ends: “I touched the Universe — / And back it slid — and I alone — / A Speck upon a Ball — / Went out upon Circumference — / Beyond the Dip of Bell.”



| by Keith Taylor |

*A.L. Becker Collegiate Lecturer**Coordinator, Undergraduate Creative Writing  
Director, Bear River Writers Conference*

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW of my little cabin, the rain is pelting down. It's cold and gray. All the moisture has kept the bracken green and lush through the back end of August. Usually by this time, this far north, the world has turned yellow and is drooping into autumn. But now water is running in little rivers through the sand, down into Douglas Lake. It pounds on my roof, and I keep checking for leaks. And sheltering chipmunks are beating out a rhythm in my walls.

For the last dozen years I've come up here to the University of Michigan Biological Station — Bug Camp — to teach an English class we call “Environmental Writing and Great Lakes Literature.” Though we seem to have little in common, I like the scientists I work with here. Some of them have become my best friends. But I'm really here for this: the view out the window on a cold, gray day (and sometimes for the view on a cloudless day with a cerulean sky).

No, I'm not ignoring the sound of jackboots marching through the streets of cities further south. But it seems obvious that if I ignore this beauty, if I do nothing to honor it, then the jackboots have already won.

Sometimes when I look out past the bracken, the white pines and the aspen to the lake turned misty in the rain, I can almost believe that the planet has forgiven us.

| by Douglas Trevor |

Professor  
Director, Helen Zell Writers' Program

T

HIS PAST SEMESTER my students and I had fun wrangling with the notion of beauty in William Shakespeare's splendid play *Twelfth Night*. One particularly winning moment in the play occurs in Act 1, Scene 5, when the cross-dressed Viola is sent by Duke Orsino to express his undying devotion and attraction to Olivia. Viola, masquerading as a pubescent boy named Cesario, has won over Orsino with his charm, which Orsino hopes will similarly seduce Olivia on his behalf.

In Duke Orsino's enclave, Olivia's beauty is much celebrated, and Viola acknowledges her attractiveness the moment she lifts her veil – though with a jab. “Excellently done,” Viola says, “if God did all.” Viola retorts: “’Tis in grain, sir. ’Twill endure wind and weather.”

It's here that beauty takes central stage, first with Viola's own explanation of what she imagines to constitute true beauty, and next with Olivia's sarcastic response to this explanation. First Viola, whose lines reflect similar claims readers will soon encounter in Shakespeare's Sonnets:

’Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white  
Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on.  
Lady, you are the cruel'st she alive  
If you will lead these graces to the grave  
And leave the world no copy.

Viola, speaking as a young man on behalf of Orsino, constructs beauty in expressly physical terms: as a set of attributes that merit being passed on to offspring. But Olivia takes this notion of beauty — as deriving from the appreciation of physical qualities alone — as ridiculous. Her response defies even the balance and harmony of verse. She speaks in prose:

O sir, I will not be so hardhearted. I will give out divers schedules of my beauty. It shall be inventoried and every particle and utensil labeled to my will. As *item*, two lips, indifferent red; *item*, two gray eyes, with lids to them; *item*, one neck, one chin, and so forth.

Olivia exposes the ridiculousness of Viola's notion of attractiveness, undercutting as she does one of the poetic means by which human beauty was documented in the Renaissance: the *blazon* (or, by some, the *blason*). This was a form of poetic expression that praised a beloved piece by piece. In Olivia's account (as well as in Shakespeare's Sonnet 130), to compartmentalize in such a manner is to speak coarsely and inaccurately about what it is, exactly, that makes us find a given form appealing. Gray eyes with “lids,” for example, sounds more grotesque than beautiful.

And yet even as she mocks such conventions Olivia finds herself transported by Viola's male form and demeanor. She falls for *her*, thinking she's a *him*. What entices and attracts — what is beautiful in *Twelfth Night* — is never entirely reducible to the physical, and never entirely absent from it, either.



# There Are Birds Here *FOR DETROIT*

by Jamaal May

There are birds here,  
so many birds here  
is what I was trying to say  
when they said those birds were metaphors  
for what is trapped  
between fences  
and buildings. No.  
The birds are here  
to root around for bread  
the girl's hands tear  
and toss like confetti. No,  
I don't mean the bread is torn like cotton,  
I said confetti, and no  
not the confetti  
a tank can make out of a building.  
I mean the confetti  
a boy can't stop smiling about,  
and no his smile isn't much  
like a skeleton at all. And no  
their neighborhood is not like a war zone.  
I am trying to say  
his neighborhood  
is as tattered and feathered  
as anything else,  
as shadow pierced by sun  
and light parted  
by shadow-dance as anything else,  
but they won't stop saying  
how lovely the ruins,  
how ruined the lovely  
children must be in that birdless city.




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Jamaal May is the author of *Hum* (Alice James Books, 2013) and *The Big Book of Exit Strategies* (Alice James Books, 2016). His first collection received a Lannan Foundation Grant, American Library Association's Notable Book Award, and was named a finalist for the Tufts Discovery Award and an NAACP Image Award. He was a Lecturer in the English department in 2016 and 2017.

| by David Halperin |

*W.H. Auden Distinguished University  
Professor of the History and Theory of Sexuality*

T

HERE IS NO SUCH THING as physical attraction, according to Plato. Bodies are not attracted to other bodies. As W. H. Auden wrote, “Our bodies cannot love, but without them, What works of love could we do?” Admittedly, bodies have needs which they drive us to gratify, but they are not the source of our attraction to individual objects. It is the human soul that desires the beauty in bodies, and it does so in order to create, to produce excellence. The impulse to creativity draws me towards beautiful bodies, but what actually evokes my desire is not any bodily particularity but the beauty it incarnates. I desire the body of my beloved only insofar as it is the medium or vehicle of beauty — not qua body, then, but qua beautiful — though if it were not a body my desire for its beauty would not be a sexual desire. The sexual component in passionate erotic desire is not a necessary consequence of the beloved’s beauty but of the corporeal medium through which that beauty manifests itself. Any lover who sets about to translate his so-called physical attraction into sexual activity has in effect substituted the body of his beloved for the beauty in it that attracts him and has thus doomed himself to an enslaving and frustrating obsession. Insofar as his goal is something corporeal, the sexual lover no longer intends a real object but a wraith: he has become an idolator, and his longing is directed at a phantom such as the gods sent to Troy in place of Helen to be an empty focus of contention and strife.

T

| by Anne Curzan |

*Arthur F. Thurnau Professor  
Associate Dean for Humanities*

THE HUMAN CREATIVITY that leads to new words endlessly delights me. This winter, at “Grammar Night,” hosted by Michigan Radio in downtown Ann Arbor, a mother told the story of her daughter using the verb *fast-backward*. After all, if we can fast-forward a recording or a movie, logically we should be able to fast-backward it too.

I don’t know if *fast-backward* will catch on more widely, but another bit of linguistic creativity has definitely taken hold: *verse* as a verb meaning ‘play against.’ I first heard about this new verb from parents of tweens, who complained to me that their kids were saying things like “We’re versing the yellow team” or “Who are we versing today?” All I could see was the brilliance of children, who have back-formed a new verb. Back-formation is a process where speakers reinterpret an existing word as containing prefixes or suffixes not originally there and then omitting a prefix or suffix to create a new lexeme or word. So, for example, long ago speakers reinterpreted French *beggar* as having the suffix *-er* and created the verb *beg*. *Editor* came before *edit*, *television* before *televise*, *lazy* before *laze*.

Now, let’s imagine you’re a kid who hears a television announcer say, “Tonight, Federer versus Nadal!” Or “Tomorrow at 8 pm, the Miami Heat versus the Cleveland Cavaliers!” You could substitute *plays* for *versus* in either statement. And if *plays* comes from *play*, then *versus* must come from *verse*. And voilà, a new verb is born.

Shakespeare gets celebrated in classrooms around the world for his lexical creativity. Let’s also be sure not to miss the beauty of our own inventiveness with the language every day.

| by Lucy Hartley |

Professor


 A large, bold, brown letter 'W' graphic that serves as a decorative element for the article's title.

WHY ARE WE INTERESTED IN BEAUTY? I ask this question not merely because of the given theme but also because it speaks to broader concerns about the value of literature and the humanities in public life.

I want to put emphasis on *interest*, a word with a convoluted history and shifting set of meanings. Derived from *interesse*, 'to be between,' the ancient legal senses of interest as having a right to or a claim upon and a share in something are now forgotten in favor of the modern economic senses of profit, advantage, and self-interest — along with the psychological senses of curiosity, attraction, and concern. Being interested in beauty is thus a simple statement for a mode of understanding that is complex and contradictory.

Here, then, is the question with which I have been preoccupied for a number of years: could the self-interested pursuit of beauty actually help to establish the moral and political norms that enable democratic society to flourish? The question is central to my recent book, *Democratising Beauty in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Art and the Politics of Public Life* (2017), which argues that a new language for speaking about beauty emerged around the 1830s in a climate of political reform and becomes linked to ideals of equality, liberty, and individuality.

Some of the figures I study will be familiar (John Ruskin, Walter Pater, William Morris) and others may not (Charles Eastlake, Edward Poynter, John Addington Symonds). This mixed group of art critics, painters, arts administrators, and scholars shared a confidence in the capacity of the arts to educate and to thereby enrich public life. But they differed in their choices of which civilization (classical, medieval, renaissance) was best suited to remodel the relationship between art, individual, and society — and whether beauty ought to be independent from or indexed to moral, economic, and political concerns. The ensuing debate about democratising beauty raised issues relating to national aesthetics, the various publics for art, and the place of individuals in the collective life of society — and, in turn, exposed conflicts between the legal, psychological, and economic senses of interest.

To identify the reasons why people should care about beauty in an urban, industrial society posed problems and disclosed commitments at once progressive and conservative. Yet the possibility that beauty might function as a tool of or a proxy for democracy contains the insight that being *interested in beauty* matters in public life.



| by Linda Gregerson |

Caroline Walker Bynum  
Distinguished University Professor

I WOULD LIKE TO SING the praises of the British stage.

When I'm feeling particularly distraught about the imprecision and cross-purposes of public discourse — about the *manipulation* of imprecision in public discourse — I find it enormously heartening to encounter mindfulness and precision in the arts. And among the arts, British theater is, for me, a shining star. Year after year, I am stunned to discover scores and scores of brilliant actors whom I've never encountered before, some of them fresh out of drama school, some of them with long careers behind them. The roster of superb directors, set and costume and lighting designers, sound technicians, movement and voice coaches appears to be neverending. And the dialect coaches! Geniuses all! Are there no duds? Of course there are; I've even been known to leave a particularly dreary production during the first interval. But when you love and believe in an art form, as I will always love and believe in the theater, your highest hopes are not for "no mistakes." What a paltry standard that would be. Give me a whole-hearted, thoughtful mistake-riddled effort any time.

And oh the transcendent successes. Let me tell you about just one of the recent highlights:

Homosexuality was decriminalized in England fifty years ago, and this season's Stratford production of Oscar Wilde's *Salome* is just one among the multitude of cultural events designed to commemorate that important moment, and to remind us of how far we have yet to go toward true inclusion and generosity in our troubled world. In a brilliant break from tradition, Director Owen Horseley decided to cast *Salome* as a nubile young man. The actor, Matthew Tennyson (great great great grandson of the poet Tennyson), first appears in red heels and a pale blue satin chemise. No makeup, no gestures of any sort toward drag. The boy is simply very beautiful — an object of universal desire. He is nude once, during the dance of the seven veils, and all but nude the rest of the time, so simply and minimally is he dressed. The portrayal, like the production as a whole, wonderfully frees us from distinctions between "normal" and "not." The magic of this *Salome* is that he has nothing to hide. Every inch of him is presentable, as though one might live in the world without shame.

Wilde's text presents contemporary performers with steep challenges. Highly stylized even in its own era, the dialogue can easily sound portentous to a twenty-first century audience. But not one note of it fails in this production. Matthew Pidgeon (Herod) in particular is enormously resourceful in finding justification and variety within a sequence of lines that are deadly repetitious and thumpingly obvious on the page. It's a higher sort of fidelity, this deeply respectful re-animation of a play first written in 1891, in French, as a vehicle for Sarah Bernhardt. The distance, as well as the proximity, between that cultural moment and our own is treated with utmost delicacy, the line between mimetic realism and stylization perfectly calibrated. I never hope to see a production of this play so fine.

A final, more general word. One of the great achievements of the British stage in recent decades is its robust diversity. It is rich with actors of color, with actors of every vocal and physical and gender-crossing and dis/ability variety, with idioms from the Caribbean, South Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East, from the industrial north and the Scottish and Cornish and Welsh and Irish "fringe." The fringe is central here. It's beautiful.

| by Laurence Goldstein |

Emeritus Professor

P

ROFESSORS AND STUDENTS ALIKE seem to have given up on the old proverb “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” The eye has come to seem too small to be credited as a container of beauty. Since the Romantic era we have relocated beauty to the imagination that transfigures and roughs up visual stimuli. Wordsworth testified to the danger of an empowered imagination: “I too exclusively esteemed that love / And sought that beauty, which as Milton sings / Hath terror in it.” Once the imagination is possessed by *that* kind of beauty, it craves extremity. The Reign of Terror was Wordsworth’s primary example.

As an instructor I feared the susceptibility of young minds to the Terror as reinvented by contemporary authors, politicians, and agitators—bored, feral, in search of the supreme high of threat and apocalypse. I feared an end result like the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen’s gleeful (and then repudiated) response to the events of 9/11, which he called “the greatest work of art that is possible in the whole cosmos.” It would take more than a semester to walk back that claim, keeping in mind that Wordsworth was talking only about gazing into the abyss below mountaintops.

In a recent speech, Charles Baxter praised the fiction of Deborah Eisenberg, who commits herself not to amplifying the lurid terror of violence, the shock of 9/11, but to imagining “a pure, wholehearted, shining love.” The beauty of remembered relationships, of admired objects and truthful speaking. Each of us needs to rediscover such tonics, in the spirit of Baxter’s praise: “‘Twilight of the Superheroes’ is the greatest story by someone of my generation about the world we have recently lost.” Let’s embrace those texts that make us more human, not merely history’s mournful victims.

| by Lillian Li |

Lecturer

I

EXPERIENCED A MOMENT OF BEAUTY on the last day of my Introduction to Creative Writing class this spring. I’d just finished saying goodbye to the last students, and the door had shut behind them, and I was putting chairs back in order—we’d held an end-of-semester reading of their work—and “The Catalogue” aria from *Don Giovanni* was playing over the speakers (a student had wanted to share it with the class). And all at once, every element of the room, of that class, of the past several weeks, crystallized into a moment of beauty so intense that I held my hand to my chest to try to keep the feeling where it was. That stroke of beauty grew, I understood, out of so many *other* moments of pleasure and success throughout that semester—moments I hadn’t really allowed myself to experience. Relatively new to teaching, I’d taught every class with the fear that something bad would happen. I’d been vigilant and superstitious, never savoring a class well-taught until the very end—as if to prematurely celebrate, or even enjoy, the endeavor would be to jinx the entire thing. But on this last day that fear was vanquished. In its place: the joy of teaching a wonderful group of students, and the shreds of beauty that remained behind after they’d gone.

| by Nick Harp |  
 Sheridan Baker Collegiate Lecturer

W

HEN I WAS MYSELF an undergraduate student in this department, my professor Daniel Fader read aloud the whole of Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill" as we followed along silently in the *Norton Anthology*:

The night above the dingle starry,  
 Time let me hail and climb  
 Golden in the heydays of his eyes,  
 ...  
 And the Sabbath rang slowly  
 In the pebbles of the holy streams.  
 ...  
 Time held me green and dying  
 Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

We did not, as I recall, discuss the poem's Biblical allusions that day, or the urgency of its repeated "Ands." And we certainly did not chide its theatrical assonances or alliterations, or interrogate the speaker's death-haunted nostalgia.

Fader finished his reading and smiled kindly and said only, "Beautiful. Isn't it beautiful?" We looked at him and at each other and we smiled too. It was — it is — a beautiful poem.

On other days, of course, we got to figurative language, and I enjoyed learning to think through a poem's contextual situation and its melodic technique. Certainly like any good bookish 19-year old I indulged no small amount of death-haunted nostalgia myself.

But I can't forget that Fader reserved a moment in his English 240 class to witness a poem's beauty, to remind us perhaps that the starting line for our life's work — reading, thinking, living — was to pay attention, and that it could not hurt to pay our first attentions to what is lovely.

Today I find I'm anxious in my own teaching about doing what Professor Fader did, of making room for my students to apprehend and exalt literary beauty. Perhaps I worry that I'll seem insubstantial or effete. Perhaps I fear that my students will not find beautiful what I find beautiful, and we will share a moment of dissonance rather than connection.

I'm willing to bet, however, that many, many Michigan literature students share memories like my own — exquisite moments ringing out from their books like bells. And I hope I'll have the guts to say the word — *beautiful* — more often, in and out of my classes.

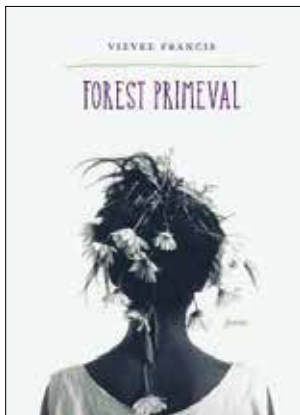


# Noteworthy

| News around the department |

## Events

For this year's annual **MFA ALUMNI READING**, the program welcomed back **Vieve Francis**, Poetry MFA 2009, and **Sebastian Matthews**, Fiction MFA 1993. Known for her explorations of racial identity, modernist poetics, and feminist legacies, Francis received the 2017 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award for her latest collection, *Forest Primeval* (Triquarterly Books/Northwestern University Press). Of her own work, Francis has said: "I want to know how poetry serves us collectively and as individuals in ways that meet this era, this moment; however, in order to gain that understanding contexts cannot be ignored, nor can history be set aside. It is the intent of my instruction and an inherent objective of my own poetry to upturn how we think about poetry, its lineage, and the cultural impact of received aesthetics." Francis is a professor at Dartmouth College and an associate editor for *Callaloo: A Journal of African Diaspora Arts & Letters*, where Matthews also serves on the advisory board. Sebastian Matthews's latest book, *Beginner's Guide to a Head-On Collision*, was just released by Red Hen Press this month.



Our **ZELL VISITING WRITERS SERIES** this semester once again features some of the finest writers in contemporary literature, including **Vieve Francis**, **Ocean Vuong**, **Joyce Carol Oates**, and **Mark Doty**, among many others. In addition to the readings and Q&As, each semester the series also includes a multi-day residency with a renowned poet or prose writer. This fall's **ZELL DISTINGUISHED WRITER IN RESIDENCE** is Gregory Pardlo (pictured above), winner of the 2015 Pulitzer Prize in poetry, Guggenheim Fellow, and poetry editor of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*.

## Awards

The 11th annual **BEN PRIZE** was awarded to **Russell Brakefield**. The Ben Prize was established in 2007 in honor of Laurence Kirshbaum and was made possible through the generosity of Bradley Meltzer and a group of donors to promote the teaching of good writing. The award was named after Mr. Kirshbaum's grandson. Exceptional lecturers are chosen each year for their work with students to improve writing skills. Nominations for this award come from students.



The two recipients of this year's **DAVID AND LINDA MOSCOW PRIZE FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING COMPOSITION** were (below, left to right)

**Megan Behrend** and **Bonnie Tucker**. The selection committee had to make difficult decisions in choosing from such an impressive pool of applicants. The committee found it inspiring and humbling to read the nominees' files, including the many glowing letters of support they received from students and colleagues. The two instructors who were selected this year are remarkable for the highly effective, thoughtful, and innovative activities and assignments they employ in their classes. David and Linda Moscow make this prize possible, and we are grateful for their ongoing generosity to the Writing Program.



ALSO AWARDED this past year was the **FEINBERG FAMILY PRIZE FOR EXCELLENCE IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING**.

Winners were **Julia Dreher** (Instructor: Adam Sneed), **Jason Jin** (Instructor: Aaron Burch), **Jaylin Herskovitz** (Instructor: Tiffany Ball). All three essays, from English 125, were well-written works that demonstrated the range of genres in which our students learn to compose.

# New Faculty

| and Postdoctoral Fellows |

## New Faculty Member

**Hadji  
Bakara**



of *Narrative Theory* on “The Literature of the Refugee.” My research has often been sparked and sustained through archival digging, and at the University of Michigan I hope to jumpstart new initiatives across the

disciplines for graduate students and faculty to share and co-develop new and portable methods of archival research and writing.

Both professionally and personally, I am thrilled to join an English department and wider scholarly community renowned for its innovation, collaborative spirit, political integrity, and devotion to pedagogy. I’ve always known the University of Michigan to further the humanities as a lived force of collective good in the world. In times of great crisis, not only in the humanities but also in the existence and sustainability of public ways of living, I look forward to joining this vital project of public education and public empowerment.

Northwest. The unifying thread of all of these experiences has been the excitement, the challenge, and the constant surprise of the literature classroom, the way that texts and ideas come alive when discussed in the company of others.

Broadly speaking, my research and teaching center on American literature, ecocriticism, and queer theory. My first book project, *Spinster Ecology: Rethinking Relation in the American Literary Environment*, considers the extent to which our most familiar practices of stewardship are often limited by a strictly familial way of understanding our relationship to the environment (such as the emphasis on “Mother Earth” and the insistence on engaging in sustainable practices for the sake of “future generations”). By putting nineteenth- and twentieth-century American environmental literature in conversation with contemporary queer theory, I seek to expand the possible ethical responses to environmental crisis by encouraging us to think relation otherwise.

My second project, *Terminal Regions: Ethics in the Absence of Futurity*, has been shaped by my experiences at PSU, where I brought my ecocritical work into contact with queer kinship, cultural anthropology, and the

medical humanities. Challenging the notion that environmental stewardship is necessarily predicated on futurity, I trace modes of queer relationality that bracket questions of longevity and demonstrate how temporariness, transience, and (apparent) “futurelessness” can inspire investment, community, and care. Whether I am analyzing a muted regionalist text from the 1890s or the intersection of AIDS activism and environmental politics in the 1980s, whether my work leads me to Willa Cather’s Midwestern landscapes or Samuel Delany’s Times Square, I aim throughout my writing

WAS BORN IN ANN ARBOR IN 1980, yet never ended up setting roots in the city, in Michigan, or the United States for that matter. But from my father, born in Detroit, I acquired an early and abiding love of Ann Arbor’s culture, music, politics, and university. As a teenager, I spent time in the city’s great bygone bookstores, Shaman Drum and David’s Books, both of which nurtured my early obsession with literature and its spaces. Later still, as a touring musician in my 20s, there were few venues in America that I loved playing more than Ann Arbor’s Blind Pig. Returning to the city and the University of Michigan as a faculty member thus feels both like a welcome return and a new and unexpected beginning. I couldn’t be happier.

I come to the University of Michigan after an early childhood spent in the Caribbean and South America, and much of my later life spent in Canada. This included ten years in Montreal, where I studied literature and history at McGill University and worked as a musician. I left music in 2010 to pursue graduate studies at the University of Chicago, where I received my PhD in English Language and Literature in 2016.

I am currently at work on a few concurrent projects, the most substantial of which is a book titled *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century: A Global Literary History*. Each chapter focuses on a single figure and historical actor that has been equally formative to literature and human rights: the refugee; the witness, the prisoner, the dissident, and the legislator. Other current focuses include essays on the history and form of refugee literatures, and the editorship of a special issue of the *Journal*

## New Faculty Member

**Sarah  
Ensor**



ARRIVING AT MICHIGAN IS A homecoming for me; I grew up in Ann Arbor and majored in English at Michigan, where I studied with many of the faculty members who are now my colleagues. Life has taken me in various directions since. I taught English at boarding schools in Massachusetts and Connecticut, did my graduate work at Cornell University, and spent the past five years as a professor in the English department at Portland State University, a vibrant urban campus surrounded by the rose gardens, mountains, beaches, and, yes, rain of the Pacific

and my teaching to inhabit the terrain where big conceptual questions and close textual attention meet.

I'm looking forward to teaching in both the English department and the Program in the Environment, a combination that will afford me the opportunity to engage students and faculty from fields across LSA. I am deeply invested in interdisciplinary collaboration, experiential learning, public education, environmental justice, and the power of reading and writing and teaching. Michigan, needless to say, is an ideal place to pursue such interests — and, of course, to discover new ones in the process.

Like many of us in this profession, I have been a wanderer, and have been fortunate to find many happy homes along the way. But I couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity to return to Ann Arbor, and am looking forward to getting reacquainted with the place that has never let go of my heart.

### New Faculty Member

**Aida  
Levy-  
Hussen**



I AM OVERJOYED TO BE RETURNING to my home state and joining the world-class faculty of the University of Michigan's English department this fall. Although I was born in the tiny college town of Meadville, Pennsylvania, I moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan at the age of four and spent my formative years there. Now, after a long period of itinerancy — with stops at Harvard for college, Emory for graduate school, and a first job at the University of Wisconsin-Madison — it is an honor and a delight to be home.

The primary subject of my teaching and research is twentieth and twenty-first century African American literature, which I read alongside psychoanalytic theory, trauma and memory studies, critical race studies, and feminist and queer theory. In the most general terms, I am interested in how the stories we tell about race and racism are structured by history, memory and desire — both personal and collective. Published last year, my first book, *How to Read African American Literature: Post-Civil*

*Rights Fiction and the Task of Interpretation* (NYU, 2016), uses a modified version of psychoanalytic theory to examine the remarkable proliferation of novels about the slave past in the decades since the decline of the modern Civil Rights Movement. I look into how narrative form and content direct our encounters with the (fictional) past, as well as how readers' expectations — say, for epiphany or healing — can set false limits on the full range of interpretive possibility. In addition to this book, I am co-editor of a volume of essays called *The Psychic Hold of Slavery: Legacies in American Expressive Culture* (Rutgers, 2016), which convenes a number of scholars across disciplines to discuss the psychological forces at work in contemporary representations of the slave past. And I am currently working on a second book project, exploring how twenty-first century black writers are reckoning with the host of cultural, demographic, and geo-political shifts that characterize our contemporary moment.

At Wisconsin I held a primary appointment in the English Department and affiliations with the departments of Afro-American Studies and Women's Studies. I regularly taught courses such as "Contemporary African American Literature," "Theories of Identity," "Interracial Literature," and "Feminism and the Literary Imagination." I look forward to reprising old favorites from my teaching repertoire here at Michigan, and am equally eager to develop new courses in conversation with the University's vibrant community of scholars and students. I believe passionately in the mission of the public university, so while teaching would be essential work for me in any setting, I feel especially privileged to have the chance to do it here. I have taught in a range of formats, with class sizes ranging from ten to over three hundred, and I like to think of every classroom as a small public sphere unto itself, where personal and collective engagement with texts and ideas can facilitate self-discovery, communal investments, and collaborative growth. What a wonderful gift: to feel at once on the precipice of such new and transformative relationships, yet anchored by the comforts of a place I know and love.

## New Postdoctoral Fellows

**The Michigan Society of Fellows**, under the auspices of the Rackham Graduate School, was established in 1970 with endowment grants from the Ford Foundation and the Horace H. and Mary Rackham Funds. Each year the Society selects outstanding applicants for appointment to three-year fellowships in the social, physical, and life sciences, and in the professional schools. Eight fellowships are available; this year we are proud to welcome two Fellows to the English department.

### BENJAMIN MANGRUM

#### Assistant Professor Postdoctoral Fellow

Benjamin Mangrum earned a PhD. in English from UNC-Chapel Hill. His scholarship explores twentieth-century literature, with special emphases on political theory, environmental criticism, and American fiction after 1945. His research is published or forthcoming in *American Literature*, *PMLA*, *Arizona Quarterly*, and elsewhere. Mangrum's book project analyzes the transformation of American liberal thought through fiction published between 1945 and 1968. He held a previous visiting appointment at Davidson College.



### LAURA FINCH

#### Assistant Professor Postdoctoral Fellow

Laura Finch received her PhD. in 2016 from the University of Pennsylvania in the program in comparative literature and literary theory. She is currently completing her book manuscript entitled *Intimate Economies: Financial Citizenship and Literary Form in the Contemporary Novel* and is starting work on her second project *Girlish: Empire, Capital, and Impossible Subjects*. After her time at the Society of Fellows, she will join M.I.T. as a member of the English department.





# | MFA Update |

## EILEEN POLLACK

### PROFESSOR

FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS, I have been touring the country, giving talks related to my work of creative nonfiction *The Only Woman in the Room: Why Science Is Still a Boys' Club*. I wrote the book to figure out why, despite my passionate desire to become a theoretical physicist, I ended up a writer, and why even today so few women and minorities go on to careers in the hard sciences. Although the book was difficult to get published, it has met with a gratifying response—from women who loved science but were discouraged from pursuing a career in a technical field, from female scientists who have persevered despite daunting obstacles, from male scientists and educators who have been trying to figure out how to attract more women and people of color to their classrooms. Giving lectures at universities and research institutes, I sometimes encounter resistance from scientists of both genders who believe that if someone truly loves a field like physics, chemistry or mathematics, she will find a way to succeed, no matter what. Such sessions can be emotionally fraught and draining. But I also have been deeply moved by the reception I have received from young women—especially young women of color—who have come up after our discussions to thank me, to relate their own experiences as science students, to seek encouragement, affirmation, or sometimes just a hug. Most gratifying of all are the moments when someone tells me that after she read my book, she decided not to drop her major or leave her program, or that she returned to graduate school to finish her PhD. As someone who primarily writes fiction, I have been stunned to remember how deeply we can connect to one another simply by telling the truth about our lives. I also have found satisfaction in bringing together the scientists and literary types on so many campuses, including our own, a project I am continuing with my most recent novel, *A Perfect Life*, which tells the story of a biologist engaged in trying to find a marker for the genetic disease that killed her mother and that she and her sister each stand a 50-50 chance of having inherited.

# | MFA Update |

continued

## CLAIRE VAYE WATKINS

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

ONE OF MY FAVORITE recent projects was reviewing a memoir called *A Really Good Day: How Microdosing Made a Mega Difference in My Mood, My Marriage, and My Life*, by Ayelet Waldman. Waldman investigates the therapeutic value of taking teeny, sub-perceptual amounts of LSD, which does indeed help with her mood disorder and depression. She tells moving stories about subtle shifts in her self-perception and lovingly relays intensely emotional and apparently transformative journeys of other psychonauts, some of whom use various mind-altering drugs to reach out to lost loved ones. Waldman looks into the use of LSD in palliative care, where researchers say the drug has brought people nearing death measurable peace. But the book goes beyond the personal to the political. Waldman adds her voice to those of doctors, therapists, and researchers in opposition to scientific censorship and in support of “a world free of a drug market controlled by vicious criminal syndicates, where hundreds of thousands are murdered and hundreds of thousands more die of drug reactions and overdose, where millions are incarcerated, and where none can gain legal access to drugs that have the potential for markedly improving their lives.” Waldman, a former public defender, includes powerful anecdotes of the injustices visited by federal drug policy upon her former clients, typically people of color. Her affable and well-supported argument illuminates the racism and hypocrisy of drug legalization without criminal justice reform.

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## PETER HO DAVIES

PROFESSOR

AS A FICTION WRITER my “research” often amounts to a new understanding of my own experiences. Recently, for instance, in the wake of the rising incidence of hate crimes in the US, I found myself recalling a moment from my childhood in Britain when I saw my father break up a racist assault by a gang of skinheads on a turbaned Sikh teenager. This would have been the late 70’s, in my hometown of Coventry, a Saturday morning on a busy shopping street. I can still recall my own befuddlement at what I was seeing: one boy racing or being chased by others. I thought it was a lark at first, hijinx, and even when they caught him, knocked him down, put the boot in, I don’t think I understood what was happening. Nor, I’m sure, did the other shoppers around us. I like to think they didn’t intervene, not out of fear for themselves, but out of simple shock and incomprehension. So how did my father know to react? I used to think it was because of his instinctive decency, some artifact of his rural working-class upbringing. Recalling that act lately, though—and now that I’m a father myself—I believe he was able to act because he had *already anticipated* such a moment, recognized it from his own worst imaginings. That Sikh teenager took the beating my father had always feared for me—his mixed race son—and always prayed he could avert.

## DOUGLAS TREVOR

PROFESSOR | DIRECTOR, HELEN ZELL WRITERS' PROGRAM

IN EARLY MAY OF THIS YEAR the philanthropist Helen Zell, a University of Michigan alumna and an ardent support of education and the arts, donated \$4.1 million dollars to the MFA Creative Writing Program already named in her honor. The Helen Zell Endowed Graduate Support Fund, coupled with additional resources being made available by Andrew Martin, the Dean of LSA, means that the Helen Zell Writers' Program will no longer be required to ask any of its first-year MFAs to work as graders. Instead, all incoming MFA candidates will be on equal footing. Helen's gift thus further enhances the equity in our program and affords our first-year students even more time to devote to their writing and coursework. Moreover, Helen's generosity permits the Department of English to shift its resources, thereby benefiting other students outside of the creative writing program. Her gift thus improves the funding for all our graduate students and strengthens the foundation for humanistic inquiry in general at the University of Michigan. For that we are enormously grateful, and excited for what the future holds.

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## A. VAN JORDAN

PROFESSOR

I'VE RECENTLY RETURNED from the Vermont College of Fine Arts Post-Graduate Conference, where I taught a Master Workshop on the Poetry Manuscript. While there I gave a reading from some new poems. In doing readings from works in progress, I always get a better sense of what's working and what's not; readings in this way constitute a sort of a workshop for me, so I walked away not only with a good deal of encouragement but a sense of what I need to do next. The manuscript I've been working on comprises a sequence of poems imagining the life of Sycorax, Caliban's mother (I use the word "mother" here loosely). In delving into this figure who is referred to in *The Tempest*, but who neither appears nor speaks, I've found a fun, lucid digital archive—more like an archive helper, really—on the blog of Sarah Werner, who used to maintain the folios at the Folger Shakespeare Library. To say that this blog, with hyperlinks to Shakespeare folios in multiple libraries, including the Bodleian, is a national treasure is no hyperbole. Much of the luster of travel has worn off for me, so anything I can find online now really wins out over getting on a plane and going into an archive. So I've spent some time reading Elizabethan English in the hand of scribes (probably Ralph Crane)—but on my laptop, which would not have been possible without the work of Werner.

Having spent the last few years at another institution, I'm excited to return to Michigan—I'm looking forward to reconnecting with my former colleagues and to meeting new ones who've come on board while I've been gone.



 **Announcing a unique giving opportunity**  
**Michael Schoenfeldt Undergraduate Curriculum Enhancement Fund**

In 2014, the friends and former students of Professor Michael Schoenfeldt established the fund in his honor. This fund is dedicated to deepening the classroom experience for students by covering the costs associated with cultural events like plays and visits to museums. In recent years, the fund has enabled undergraduates to see professional stage productions of the *Mikado*, *Madame Butterfly*, and *Othello*, to participate in an Old Time Radio acting workshop, and to publish their own writings.

  
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**31**  
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Still, demand for support continues to outpace available funds. In response, a generous alumnus and friend of the department has now offered a one-for-one match on all gifts to the Michael Schoenfeldt Undergraduate Curriculum Enhancement Fund between \$1 and \$1,000, up to a total of \$10,000, made between now and December 31, 2017. Please consider this opportunity to enhance the learning experience for undergraduate students while doubling the impact of your gift.

Gifts to endowment funds will be administered as a permanent endowment under MI law and then-existing University policies.

**Thank You!**

## Thinking about giving?

Your support is always greatly appreciated.

 Please see the postage paid envelope inside.

If you would like to speak to someone directly about your giving options, please feel free to contact the Chair of the Department, David Porter (dporter@umich.edu), or the LSA Advancement liaison for English Language and Literature, John Ramsburgh.

**John Ramsburgh**

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