

Spotlight

The e-newsletter for English Faculty Alumni



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Welcome!

Welcome to *Spotlight*, the Faculty of English Language & Literature's alumni e-newsletter. The Faculty has been as busy as ever since the first edition was sent out. We've welcomed in this year's intake of new students, seen the end of the building project, and settled back into our newly refurbished space.

In this issue, two faculty members describe their current research projects. As news channels are filled with images and reports of conflicts all around the globe, Professor Kate McLoughlin, along with Dr Niall Munro from Oxford Brookes University, has won a grant from the Mellon Foundation for a seminar series titled *Post-War: Commemoration, Reconstruction, Reconciliation*. Below, Kate explains more about how this came about, and the aims of the series. Professor Matthew Reynolds is working on a strand of the AHRC-funded Creative Multilingualism project, housed within the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages. He is the leader of the strand *Prismatic Translation*, which investigates ways in which translation reveals or obscures facets of the source text.

We would like to take this opportunity to introduce Professor Lloyd Pratt, Drue Heinz Professor of American Literature, appointed last summer, and Professor Ros Ballaster. Below, Professor Pratt reveals who he would like to dine with, his ideal day, and what he might be doing in an alternative life. Professor Ballaster will be taking over as Faculty Board Chair at the end of this academic year; she tells us about her inspirations, her childhood aspirations, and what she does in her (limited!) spare time.

We had a very good response to our first edition of *Spotlight*, and have had a number of alumni contact us to let us know what they're up to nowadays – find out more about some of them below. It is perhaps unsurprising how many have become published authors and poets since leaving us, and we always enjoy hearing about these and other achievements.

This year, we are planning our first alumni event run jointly with the History Faculty. This is open to all, not just to Joint History and English alumni, so please do come along, see the new faculty space, come to the Pitt Rivers Museum for a discussion session and drinks, and meet up with other alumni. In addition to this, our regular programme of public lectures continues with a number of events over the coming months. Details of a few particular highlights are provided here; and for those who are unable to attend events in Oxford, we provide recordings of lectures after the event whenever possible. These are made available through our [website](#).

We hope you enjoy hearing about life today in the English Faculty!

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Spotlight on Research

Academic Series to Explore How Best We Can Commemorate War

Professor Kate McLoughlin describes the seminar series she is co-organising in 2017-18

War writing is one of my main areas of research but, until now, I haven't had the opportunity to consider it in an applied way. Then, last year, I was invited to submit a bid to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which annually funds seminar series in universities around the world in memory of John E. Sawyer. Together with Dr Niall Munro of Oxford Brookes University—a specialist in American literature—I put together an application for a series which would explore how best we can commemorate war. In September, we were given the great news that the Mellon Foundation would support our proposal. ***Post-War: Commemoration, Reconstruction, Reconciliation*** will take place across the academic year 2017-18.

In devising the series, Niall and I decided that we would consider three major modes of commemoration:



textual (words and pictures), monumental (monuments, sculpture and museums) and aural (music, sound and silence). The textual strand will occupy Michaelmas Term 2017, the monumental strand (at Brookes) Hilary Term 2018 and the aural strand Trinity Term 2018. Each strand will kick off with an 'In Conversation' event in which a leading creative practitioner discusses his / her work with an Oxford or Brookes University faculty member. These events will be open to the public. There will then follow in each term two panel workshops—real working sessions in which shirt-sleeves and coffee will be the order of the day. (These will be open to a small, invited audience—if you'd like to participate, please do get in touch.) Each term will also feature an event for graduate students: a training morning at the Pitt Rivers Museum, a 'Pecha Kucha' day (each participant presenting 20 x 20-second slides) and a one-day graduate conference. The whole series will be rounded off with a concert featuring music written in commemoration of various wars.

Post-War is still very much in the planning stages but Niall and I are keeping certain desiderata in mind. We want to bring writers, artists and musicians into dialogue with academics and figures in the public sector. So we are sending out invitations to novelists, poets, singer-songwriters, installation-creators, instrumentalists and architects, to literature scholars, anthropologists, theologians, archaeologists and sociologists, and to people working in conflict resolution, the charitable sector and diplomacy. We want to understand how cultural practices of commemoration help or hinder post-war reconstruction and reconciliation, so we are keen to hear about what works and what doesn't work, about the approaches of different cultures and about the role of various media, including those based on the internet.

We are fortunate in that the Mellon-Sawyer Grant will fund not only the 'In Conversations', panel workshops, graduate events and concert but also a postdoctoral fellowship and two postgraduate fellowships. We will be recruiting for these fellowships in early 2017 and hope that we'll find early-career scholars who will inject lively and imaginative ideas.

Overall, our aim is for Post-War to be a sterling example of the value of the humanities. We know that war remembrance resonates with human needs and inspires imaginations across cultures: we want to catch the wave. And the time is ripe. The First World War and American Civil War anniversary events have focused the public's attention on post-war commemoration, giving us a real opportunity to learn how it can be optimized. Above all, we hope to understand how such commemoration can have a positive impact, such as reconciliation between different communities or promoting peace. Look out for publicity for the events or contact me directly—and come along!

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Prismatic Translation

Professor Matthew Reynolds sheds light on his translation project



'Poetry is what is lost in translation'; 'no translation is ever as good as the original': many *idées reçues* about translation are decidedly uncomplimentary. But you only need to look at a few examples to see how wrongheaded such kneejerk thinking must be. In *Cathay*, Ezra Pound used translation to revolutionise the expressive possibilities of poetry in English. Dryden's *Aeneis* and Pope's *Iliad* were among the most effusively admired and widely read English literary texts of their times. The translations of W. G. Sebald by Michael Hulse and Anthea Bell have made Sebald's writing, first done in German but rooted in these islands, perhaps the most influential presence in contemporary anglophone literary fiction. Multiple translations of Shakespeare into other languages perpetually remake the plays, bringing new Bengali, Japanese, Albanian and other Shakespeares even to London audiences at the Globe.

The usual reaction to such examples is to say that they are 'versions' or 'free translations', quite different from the dogged, faithful work of 'literal translation' or 'translation proper'. Yet this distinction is not only blunt but radically misleading. Bell's Sebald is as literal as it is literary; Dryden's Virgil was underpinned by the most rigorous scholarship. There is a complicated continuum between the kinds of re-writing that we think of as ordinary translations and the kinds that we prize as 'versions' or 'new works in their own right.' Invention can be prompted by the ambition to be 'close' and 'faithful' just as much as by the will to be 'free'. Every translation is an imaginative work, remaking its source for new audiences in new places through each translator's particular mind and style.

Once you see translation in this way then all the inevitable differences between translations and their sources become, not failures to be lamented, but developments to be explored. This is what the Prismatic Translation project will do. It is funded by the AHRC as part of their Open World Research Initiative programme in Creative Multilingualism, and is led by me in collaboration with Professor Sowon Park at the University of California. One of our focuses will be *Jane Eyre*, often thought to be a very English text but in fact one that came into being through a convergence of cross-cultural and translinguistic influences, including American slave narratives and Charlotte Brontë's intense experience of writing in French at the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels.

Jane Eyre has been multiply translated into many languages, including some with different script systems such as Arabic and Korean. When Sowon and I assemble – as we are about to – a group of experts to engage in precise analysis and discussion of all these different but closely related *Jane Eyres*, what will we discover? There is likely to be something about the different expressive resources of the various languages: how the scope and dynamics of a scene must shift when tense or metaphoricity have to be handled differently. There will no doubt be cultural divergences in attitudes to gender or race or education. I hope there will also be something more – something which might be described as the imaginative potential of the source text which can reveal itself through multiple translations more fully than in English alone.

English writing has drawn much from other languages, as is well known. It can also grow as it is transformed into them via translation in its turn. Translation is not only loss but also gain; and so the study of English literature should include its life in other tongues.

Spotlight on Students

Jacob Lloyd, Balliol College

I matriculated as an undergraduate at Jesus College in 2005 and then completed my MA at the University of Bristol. I enjoyed the chance to study in a different academic environment, and the focus on Romantic poetry for the MA was a useful complement to the broad sweep of the Oxford course. I always knew, though, that I would like to return to Oxford for further graduate study. The scale of academic activity going on here hugely enriches the experience of pursuing a doctorate. From the start of my DPhil, I have helped to run the interdisciplinary graduate network, Romanticism and Eighteenth-Century Studies at Oxford (RECSO). I am now the Social Secretary, a role which has the advantage of transforming work into a leisure activity. Last year, I co-convoked the Long Eighteenth-Century Research in Progress Seminar, where we heard about topics as diverse as economics and the status of pugs in 18th Century life.



Before I started my DPhil I had to save some money: funding is hard to come by, especially following recent government cuts. I worked for two years as an English teacher at two different schools, teaching a large range of abilities and all ages from 11 to 18. I had some really enjoyable experiences, particularly when focusing on the more canonical texts, *King Lear* and *Paradise Lost*, at A-Level. There was some initial resistance (a number of them complained that Milton was 'arrogant'), so it was really pleasing to see them become increasingly enthusiastic about the texts over the course of a couple of terms. This year I am co-supervising an undergraduate thesis in English and History, and I hope to get some opportunities for tutorial teaching before I submit my thesis.

My doctoral thesis is a study of Coleridge's political poetics. I focus on the political implications of Coleridge's response to the poetic models of those poets who influenced him. There is sometimes an assumption that Coleridge was greatly indebted to Shakespeare and, especially, Milton, but, in the early period at least, the poets whom he most frequently quotes and cites are the now comparatively unknown William Lisle Bowles and Mark Akenside. I spend a lot of time reading these 18th Century poets, which allows me to recover a previously obscured context for Coleridge's verse. It can be painstaking work, but it illuminates the workings of Coleridge's craft in surprising ways.

I do not understand why everyone does not want to be a Romanticist: the period is this extraordinary flowering of lyric poetry and I cannot imagine a more rewarding group of writers to spend time with. When not obsessing about Odes and Conversation Poems, I have found time to direct a production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, help to organize a ball, and compete for Balliol on University Challenge. Student life at Oxford remains a whirligig of creative and intellectual endeavour.

Jacob Lloyd, DPhil Candidate, Balliol College



Noreen Masud, Linacre College

I completed my BA in English at Jesus College, Oxford in 2010, and my MPhil at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge in 2012. I spent two years living in Edinburgh, where I spent my time editing, tutoring and writing a very bad but enthusiastic novel about the trickster figure Reynard the Fox. In 2014, I returned to Oxford for my doctorate at Linacre College.

I was delighted to be offered AHRC funding to pursue further study at Oxford. The university offers extraordinary training opportunities, and its library resources are unparalleled. No matter how esoteric the book I need, I know I will be able to access it within a matter of days.

I study the poet and novelist Stevie Smith (1902-1971), exploring the ways in which we can read her writing as 'aphoristic'. Stevie Smith is a fascinatingly elusive writer who is now attracting increasing critical attention: her three novels have been reissued by Virago, and Will May has published a new edition of her collected poetry and drawings. I enjoy the breadth of research which my thesis allows: it draws on Greek tragedy, fairytale, Romantic poetry, cartoon captions and the paintings of Monet, as well as situating Smith's writing against her "middlebrow" and High Modernist contemporaries.

In addition to writing my thesis, in March 2016 I co-organised the first academic conference on Stevie Smith with Dr Frances White; we had twenty-nine speakers and a total of seventy-two attendees from three different continents. I am now co-editing a special issue of *Women: A Cultural Review* focusing on Smith's work. As well as publishing academic articles and reviews – on Smith's 'flatness' and on her similarities to the artist M. C. Escher – I also write a blog named Parrots Ate Them All, in which I discuss Smith's writing for a general audience. Most excitingly, I have been lucky enough to work with Professor Suzie Hanna to create a short animation of Stevie Smith's poem 'The Blue from Heaven'. The film's voiceover has been generously provided by Glenda Jackson, who played Smith in the 1978 film *Stevie*. If I find myself with any free time, I tend to spend it drinking tea and helping to sell books at the Albion Beatnik Bookstore in Jericho.

I am currently Stipendiary Lecturer at St Anne's College, teaching Victorian and Modern Literature to first-year undergraduates. I enjoy finding ways to connect my teaching and my research, as well as using Oxford's incredible resources to support my students' learning. For example, we have run two classes at the Ashmolean Museum, based around its temporary and permanent collections. I am interested in the use of digital technology to enhance student learning. I am a member of the team creating EsScape, an essay-writing app designed to support students transitioning from formulaic A-Level writing styles, to the freer and more innovative structure expected at university level.

I am in the process of applying for post-doctoral roles. My next project will be a study on "flat poetics", which will connect Gertrude Stein, D. H. Lawrence – and, of course, Stevie Smith!

Noreen Masud, DPhil Candidate, Linacre College

Spotlight on Staff

Lloyd Pratt

Which book has had the biggest impact on you?

Two: Emerson's *Nature* and Thoreau's *Walden*

What do you do in your spare time?

I make ambitious and seldom realized plans to de-clutter my life. I also read Haruki Murakami novels and wish that I were a better gardener. Sometimes I try to cook the kind of food I grew up eating in New Orleans. Usually I fail, but the effort is its own reward.

Describe your ideal day.

My partner and I take the train into London. We go to museums and galleries (Tate Britain and Modern, National Portrait Gallery, Autograph: ABP, Whitechapel), eat someplace nice (Ottolenghi, Dishoom, Moro), browse some bookstores (Daunt, Foyles, LRB), meet some friends (they know who they are), have a drink (or two), take the train back to Oxford exhausted and a little sunburned.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would that be?

Other than Oxford, of course: New York.

Who had the greatest influence on you during your childhood?

My sister. We're less than a year apart in age and have always been very close. My family moved to New Orleans when I was four and she was three. The city tends to be a fairly closed society. We ended up forming our own world of stories, references and tag lines.

When did you learn there was no Santa Claus?

I was eight years old on a beach holiday in Grand Isle, Louisiana. It was a very sad day, the kind Kate Chopin might have described in cottony detail.

As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A writer and a teacher. For five minutes I wanted to be a ballet dancer. I spent a couple of years after university collaborating on installation art and spoken work projects.



Who were your childhood heroes?

People who wrote the kind of thing I liked to read. People who were kind to each other and to children. People who were clear about their values, even when those values clashed with my own emerging sense of things.

Do you have pets?

In my imagination I have a chestnut brown miniature dachshund named Ceci.

Were you popular as a teenager?

Depended on the day, *time*, place and context. I think that means probably not.

What is your favourite music?

Britpop to Dolly Parton to *Detroit* House to pretty much anything that strikes my fancy. I was a college radio DJ. Despite that I have never claimed to have very good taste in music.

If you could have dinner with five famous people from history, who would they be?

Hadrian, Frederick Douglass, Marx, Margaret Fuller

Describe yourself in five words

I leave that to others.

How would your friends describe you?

Patient and easily amused

What do you like most about your job? What do you like least?

Sitting in a room with students working through the lines of a Dickinson poem or an Emerson essay or a Baldwin novel can feel like witnessing a sacred rite. On the other hand, the spread of tick box teaching, institutional acronyms and slide presentations drives me to distraction.

Why are we here?

To ask that question.

If you weren't a member of the English Faculty, what would you be?

A contemporary art curator, a manuscript librarian or a very bad DJ.

Ros Ballaster

Which book has had the biggest impact on you?

A colleague once suggested that readers are either oral or anal: oral readers consume everything they can lay their hands on, whereas anal readers like to keep reworking their approaches to one or a small number of works. I am definitely an oral reader so this kind of question gives me pain. The measly allowance of 'Desert Island Discs' – a bible, Shakespeare and one book -- is my idea of hell. But if pressed here are a few selections. The books I return to again and again and could not live without are the novels of Jane Austen. I envy my students who have not yet read them all as they have that joy of discovery to come. I was deeply impressed by the capacity of Byron's *Don Juan* and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* to be humane and wildly funny. I am slowly making my way through Proust (*In Search of Lost Time*) and I am reveling in the discovery of a new kind of reading experience: immersive, observational, reflective. In terms of impact, though, it isn't a literary work I would cite. I think I would have to say a book by French sociologist and feminist, Christine Delphy, called *Close to Home: a Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression* which I read in 1984 as I was coming to feminist consciousness. Her argument was a clear explanation to me of what I was seeing: that women were a class subject to a specific mode of economic exploitation within a domestic mode of production.

What do you do in your spare time?

I watch far too much television. Box-sets and Netflix have slightly raised the quality of the experience. More worthy activities are going to the theatre and cinema. I will go to considerable lengths to see any productions of Restoration or eighteenth-century plays in particular. I spent a joyous summer in 2016 attending a series of script-in-hand readings with all female casts at the Rose Playhouse in London of plays by women of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Hardly a theatre at all – more a cement bunker with a footprint of the Tudor space. But there was so much energy, pleasure, and excitement in bringing these plays back to life. Otherwise what time that isn't spent on reading good books (and here I can't separate 'work' and 'leisure'), is spent on enjoying good food, meeting up with good friends, travel to interesting places.



Describe your ideal day.

Late rising with some time to read in bed in pyjamas, doing a bit of cooking, chatting with my family, meeting up with friends for museum, theatre and

excellent Szechuan dining in central London.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would that be?

Probably Bloomsbury in London or Brooklyn New York. I am in love with cities – even more so now I live in the country! Seems like heaven to have theatre, art, music, restaurants, all on the doorstep.

Who had the greatest influence on you during your childhood?

My older sister who was wise, loving, and very bossy. I would have done anything for her but luckily she took her responsibilities seriously so she never put me at risk. I have always been fascinated by the representation of relationships between sisters in literature: Elinor and Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, Denver and Beloved in *Beloved*, Lizzie and Laura in *Goblin Market*.

When did you learn there was no Santa Claus?

Very early but I'm a pretty greedy person so I kept quiet. I was 13 when my parents announced that they knew we all knew (we were three siblings) and stockings were being retired. In my adult life I insisted on their restoration and still the best moment in Christmas for me is waking up to feeling the weight of a stocking at the end of the bed with my toes.

As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

An author. I wrote a lot of short stories and started many novels. Under the influence of Georgette Heyer, I wrote an entire series of letters set in the Regency period to a young soldier named Milton detailing cotillions, visits to Almacks, pranks and romantic intrigue.

Who were your childhood heroes?

I spent a long time deciding whether I aspired to be St Bernadette or St Joan despite the fact that I was raised in a resolutely Protestant household. It was the choice between the nobility of suffering or the courage to fight hard for what you knew was right.

What teacher had the greatest impact on you?

I had a teacher called Miss Cox in my first year at secondary school who had just taken an English degree at St. Hilda's. She had lots of wild dark hair, gestured vividly with her hands as she talked about the contemporary fiction she loved. She was interested in our own creative writing and gently encouraged me to move beyond mimicry (Heyer, Tolkein, Asimov, were all grist to my derivative mill).

Were you popular as a teenager?

I was at an all-girls school and I succeeded in balancing my reputation as a swot by playing netball and partying pretty hard.

Do you have pets?

A cat called Ollie who is hopelessly devoted to our nearly adult daughter but tolerates the rest of the family in her absence. Two snakes, the property of a son with allergies to fur so it seemed a good idea at the time, named Hadron and Higgs. Hadron, the cornsnake, gives a good hand massage. And we are down to two goldfish.

What is your favourite music?

I am a complete sucker for country music, especially crystal-clear female voices. I came close to tears when I went to see Dolly Parton a few years ago at the O2 in Birmingham. Alison Krauss is a current favourite. In complete contrast, I have very late in life discovered the deep tones of Leonard Cohen. And as a teenager I was obsessed with David Bowie. Both Cohen and Bowie produced stand-out last albums, a great reminder that late work can be great. Not sure I would say the same of the Rolling Stones.

If you could have dinner with five famous people from history, who would they be?

I fear my dinner party may look suspiciously like Caryl Churchill's 'Top Girls'. It would be important that I wasn't cooking as I would want to concentrate on my guests' conversation. If you insist on famous people from history I suppose I will have to forego my first preference for female comedians: Dawn French, Jennifer Saunders, the sadly-missed Victoria Wood, Catherine Tate, and Meera Syal. So let's go for Aphra Behn (I have spent my academic career puzzling over her writing and life and would hope she might be forthcoming enough to explain some of the more intractable mysteries); Jane Austen (she must have been side-splitting once she warmed up); Sylvia Pankhurst (the best of three fascinating sisters); Coretta Scott King (tireless in the causes of Civil and Women's Rights as well as calling her fellow activists 'to make room at the table of brotherhood and sisterhood for lesbian and gay people'); and Elizabeth I (I suspect she might hog the floor but I wouldn't want to pass up the opportunity to find out more about what really went on in her closet both politically and sexually)

Describe yourself in five words:

Impatient, improper, imaginative, determined, curious.

How would your friends describe you?

Loyal, I hope.

What do you like most about your job? What do you like least?

I consider myself absolutely blessed that most days I get paid to talk about books. I don't like disappointing people so marking is a necessary evil, although it is a joy to tell someone they have done great work.

Why are we here?

To live as fully as possible. Not just in terms of gratifying ourselves but in terms of enabling others to fulfil their potential too. I am an atheist so I don't think there is anything other than this life. That makes it all the more precious and significant.

If you weren't a member of the English Faculty, what would you be?

I resist the idea that academics are fit for nothing else. You need a lot of skills to be effective. It is clear that I would not have been a scientist or mathematician as my numeracy is weak. So I hope that I would be working for a charity that was making a significant difference in people's (probably women's) lives. It is though possible that I might be in HR.

Spotlight on the Faculty

Refurbishment complete

The work which has been ongoing in the St Cross Building, refurbishing and repurposing a number of areas, is finally complete. A new ground floor entrance has been created, providing easy access for students, staff or visitors with mobility issues, and we have a new lift in the main foyer which reaches all floors. The main stairwell has been replaced, and the former JCR and SCR have been replaced by a flexible-use café area and seminar/meeting room, which can be opened up to increase the café space for evening receptions.

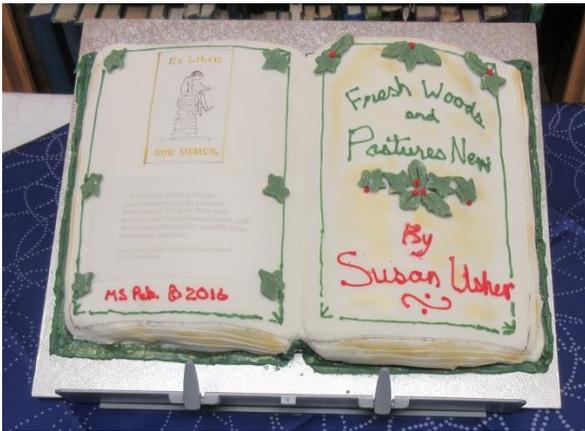
For the English Faculty, the main impact is the opening up of the ground floor area where the Library Rare Book Room was, to form an airy foyer. This new space is being well used for receptions and events, as well as providing a welcoming place for students to wait for lectures and seminars, socialise, or work. New caged bookcases have been installed to hold some of the Library's collection of journals, and this area provides the opportunity to display a number of portraits of former Faculty members.



Library renewal and farewell

2016 saw some big changes for the English Faculty Library; both in terms of the physical spaces and the staff. After 27 years as the English Subject Librarian, Sue Usher retired at the end of December.

One of Sue's first tasks when she joined the EFL in 1990 was to oversee the automation of library circulation; introducing computers to record borrowing. She worked hard to foster good relations with the Faculty, and she will be missed by her staff and colleagues, not least for her wealth of knowledge regarding the library's history and collections, but also for her ethos of mentoring her library team and supporting their professional development.



Sue was keen to break some rules, so her retirement party was held in the library, with eating and drinking in the reading room! The event was well attended by members of faculty, Bodleian staff, friends and former colleagues. Marjorie Szurko, Librarian of Oriol College, baked a book themed cake (complete with edible catalogue card) and Bernard O'Donoghue read an extract from the Scottish ballad 'The Parting Glass'.

Sue's role as subject librarian will be handled by Helen Scott, who was previously the Film Studies librarian. In addition to the collections in the EFL, Helen will have responsibility for the English and Film collections in the

Bodleian and the Film Collections in the Taylor Institution Library. Jo English (previously the Deputy Librarian) is now the Librarian-in-Charge of the English Faculty Library, taking over Sue's operational responsibilities. This restructuring has allowed for a new Part-Time Library Assistant role, raising the overall staff numbers in the library.

Sue was due to retire earlier in the year, but stayed in post long enough to oversee the other major change to the library: the St Cross Building refurbishment. The library entrance has now moved, so access is from the main foyer (next to the porters lodge). The issue and enquiry desk has also moved and access control gates have been installed. The DVD collection is now open access, and there is a new standing desk area. However, the bigger changes have happened behind the scenes. The staff offices have been extended and renovated and a new kitchen has been installed. The new tea break area keeps our librarians happy, which hopefully makes for happy readers!



As part of the wider changes in the St Cross Building, the library also lost two of its three closed stacks, which had housed low-use material, older periodicals and the Library's Rare Book collection. Over 900m of books had to be moved, both by library staff and the Bodleian's team of dedicated book movers. While efforts were made to keep as much material in the building as possible; some special collections have now moved to the Weston Library, and 14,000 low-use items are now housed in the Bodleian's Book Storage Facility (BSF) in Swindon. We now receive daily deliveries of stack requests (Mon- Fri) so these items can be called back to the EFL (and other Bodleian Library reading rooms) usually within 24 hours.

University Mental Health Day

This year, the English Faculty ran a number of activities to mark University Mental Health Day on Thursday 2nd March. The theme for the day was 'Get Active for Mental Health', so we had a couple of representatives from British Rowing with some equipment, encouraging students to get involved with indoor rowing. In addition, a 'mindfulness colouring' station was available in the shared café area, and students and staff from City of Oxford College provided head, shoulder and neck massages, and manicures to encourage relaxation and self-care. The weather co-operated beautifully, as Law Faculty staff also provided the opportunity for people to get their hands dirty with some light gardening activities based around the upstairs courtyard, and playground equipment such as skipping ropes and pogo sticks for more active fun. Throughout the day information was available on where to find support and help for mental health issues both within the University and beyond.

The response from the students and staff has been very positive, with a number of people remarking that we should do this more often!

Spotlight on our Alumni

Carmen Bugan (DPhil, 2004)

Earlier this year I launched my third collection of poems, *Releasing the Porcelain Birds* (Shearsman), at the Poets' House in New York City, celebrating also my return to the US after a long period in Oxford and Geneva. The book was born out of a need to write myself free of the psychological trauma relived as I read thousands of pages of secret police surveillance documents on me and my family during communist Romania. I wanted to peel off the layers of official government narratives from myself, as you peel an



artichoke to get to its tender heart. The book includes secret police files in my literal translations side by side with poems that were born from the experience of reading accounts of my daily life written by officers who could be identified mostly by their initials. This was my most personal and self-revealing work to date, and I struggled with questions about how this 'story' of mine can possibly relate to readers who haven't experienced government oppression and personal surveillance. And yet I am glad this book is out, for I see it as another circle closing and another period of my writerly life opening up.

It has taken me about twelve years to circle back to the heart of my writing subject. I published *Crossing the Carpathians* in 2004 (Carcanet/Oxford Poets) with the naïve hope that I would be crossing, through writing, to a place where I could explore creating the kind of poems free people write: poems of love, of nature, of human relationships, poems concerned with the achievement of form. Instead I ended up peeling away layers of my family history, turning them into poems about personal identity, dissidence and exile. In other words, I kept going inward. *The House of Straw* (Shearsman, 2014) was a sort of inheritance book, in which I worked to preserve old village rituals, such as making wine, and where I looked back into my childhood memories as you look through negatives of photographs. In 2012 I published the memoir *Burying the Typewriter: Childhood Under the Eye of the Secret Police* (Picador), and later on, in 2014, my monograph *Seamus Heaney and East European Poetry in Translation: Poetics of Exile*, where I argued that a poet needs some kind of emotional distance from turbulent history, especially if he or she has personally suffered as a result of that history.

Lately, having completed a novel and a second memoir still dealing with exile, identity and dissidence, I am returning to the original hope that enabled me to write in English: I'd like to write the kind of poetry free people write. Of course, over time, my perspective on freedom to write has changed. Freedom to write in my situation is no longer the emotional capability to choose my subject; I now understand that I will always return to the same subject no matter how hard I try to get away from it. The freedom consists in the ability to be grateful for the possibility to look back without re-living and re-turning to a dark place. These days I hope to mine for hope in all of that dark history, to bring to the surface whatever images that will offer some comfort to a language that currently suffers from deceit, materialism, and the deep fractures that have allowed politicians' lies to penetrate into its soul. I now see an increased need for the immigrant writer to work with the changing English language in the US.

Carmen and her family were granted asylum by the USA in 1989 and moved to Michigan shortly before the fall of the Ceaușescu regime. She has studied at the University of Michigan, Lancaster University, The Poets House, Ireland, and gained her DPhil in English Literature at Balliol College, Oxford. From 2005 to 2009, Carmen was a Creative Arts Fellow in Literature at Wolfson College, and in 2017 she was made a Fellow of [The Orwell Prize](#).



John Simmons (BA, 1969)

I read English at Wadham College from 1966-69. I then began a career which took me into the world of design and branding, becoming a director of Interbrand, the world's leading brand agency. In my latter years at Interbrand I pioneered the brand discipline of tone of voice, the way brands communicate through language – so clearly something had stuck from my time reading English at Wadham. Leaving Interbrand in 2003 to become an independent writer and consultant, I originated a creative writing for business programme called *Dark Angels* (named after one of my books on writing) whose title and content was influenced by reading Milton's *Paradise Lost* at Oxford (similar to Seamus Perry, I see). Three of my books on the subject of writing for brands have now been republished in new editions in 2016 – *We, Me, Them & It*, *The Invisible Grail*, and *Dark Angels*.



In recent years I have come late to the writing I always wanted to do as a young man leaving Wadham. In 2015 I had my first novel published – *Leaves* – and it was well-reviewed, finding enough readers to encourage further fictional writing. As a result my second novel *Spanish Crossings* will be published in April 2017 on the 80th anniversary of the bombing of Guernica. Obviously there is a Spanish Civil War background to this novel. A pre-publication review by the screenwriter Rob Williams has been extremely enthusiastic: his words will appear on the cover.

'A compelling story of love and honour that manages to be both politically timely and deeply moving. Lorna is a beautifully imagined central character, drawn into conflicts both abroad then closer to home, she has a humanity, vitality and integrity to match the prose. I found it impossible to stop reading and was bereft at the heartbreaking climax on more than one level.'

Spanish Crossings will be published in April 2017 by independent publisher Urbane. Click [here](#) for more information about John's books.

Harry Lighton (BA, 2012)



Harry, a 24 year old budding film maker has won the film competition The Pitch with his film idea 'Leash' (working title). Entering the competition for the first time he made such an impression on the five top industry judges in the boardroom, with his short supernatural social drama film idea at Pinewood Studios, he was unanimously chosen.

Inspired by a series of hate crimes against Poles in the wake of the EU Referendum, film maker and part-time English teacher Harry bases his film idea on a story about a Polish teenager and her single-mother who are subject to xenophobic abuse. 'Leash', originally pitched as 'Go Home' retells the story of Elisha in the biblical book of Kings where he arrives in Bethel and is taunted by a group of youths insulting him with the words 'Go up your baldhead'. Baldness, considered a blemish against Israelites, gives the insult a racist

bent. Staying true to the biblical passage, the film focusses on the value of inclusiveness. Elisha becomes Alicja and Bethel is swapped for an English seaside location and the taunt to 'go up' becomes a taunt to 'go home'. The core theme of a stranger facing prejudice due to his perceived foreignness resonates in Britain today.

Speaking about how he feels about winning Harry says: "It's incredible! I've worked so



hard for this. It's a muddling feeling which I can't quite register at the moment: I'm thinking about what's ahead of me but I do feel very happy. I know the next 6 months will be tough but I can't wait to get started. First of all I need to go home, ring everyone who has supported me and sleep for a week!"

Describing The Pitch he says, "It's really tough to get funding for short films. The opportunity to have funding, structured support in a streamlined collaborative process and to work with professionals when you're first starting out is fantastic. This competition is so different to others as it focusses on the individual but also provides a community of people for support – something you just don't get elsewhere".

Nev Pierce, one of the industry judges said, "Harry was very clear in his delivery, articulate and engaging and has made a very smart take on the biblical text. He is a talent!"

Luke Walton The Pitch director said, "Harry took an obscure story about Elisha and contemporised it by linking it to post EU Britain. He took plenty of notes then overnight he came back to the boardroom with references, designs and further thoughts. He has written four stories within this competition and has really moved the story on. He understands film language and has responded brilliantly along the way. Harry was unanimously chosen by the judges this year."

He has won a cash production budget of £27.5K with production support on top to deliver 'Leash'. He will also go to Hollywood and meet a host of industry professionals who will give their feedback on his completed film.

Spotlight on Events

Join us for 'Postcolonial Conversations' – Alumni event, Saturday 3rd June 2017

English Faculty alumni are invited to join us on the afternoon of Saturday June 3rd for an event held jointly with the History Faculty. We will start at 2pm in the English Faculty with a short discussion led by Professor Elleke Boehmer and Professor Ankhi Mukherjee on the psyche and history of colonial/postcolonial literature, after which we will move up to the Pitt Rivers Museum. Here Professor Boehmer, Professor Mukherjee and Dr David Dwan (English Faculty) will be in discussion with members of the History Faculty about approaches to postcolonialism. The day will end with a drinks reception in the Museum Court, and an opportunity to look around some of the museum's collection. Tickets for the event cost £25.

For more information, or to book a place, click [here](#).

Public Lectures

We have a busy programme of public lectures arranged for next term. Highlights include the Professor of Poetry lecture from Simon Armitage on 16 May. Simon's Hilary Term lecture was titled 'We need to talk 'bout Robert: Bob Dylan an' the Nobel Prize for Literature' and was delivered to a crowd of over 500 people. A podcast of the lecture will be available on our [website](#).

His May lecture will be held on Tuesday 16 May at 5.30pm in Exam Schools. Everyone is welcome; there is no charge, and seating is on a first-come first-served basis on the night.

Our **Visiting Professor of Creative Media**, Dawn Airey, will be delivering her lectures on 19 May and 22 May in the English Faculty. Entrance is free, and all are welcome. Dawn is currently CEO of Getty Images; prior to this she was a Senior Vice President at Yahoo, and has worked for a number of major TV channels.

We look forward to welcoming two **Astor Lecturers** in Trinity Term. Professor Nicholas Allen, University of Georgia, will be coming to Oxford in early June, and as well as a number of workshops, he will be giving a lecture entitled 'Coastal Literature and the Twentieth Century: Ireland and the Atlantic World' on Thursday 8th June at the English Faculty, to which all are very welcome.

Later in June, Professor Hilary Chute, Northwestern University, will spend a week here, leading and

participating in a variety of events. Amongst others, she will join in a symposium on 'Trauma and Comics' run by the new TORCH network, *Comics And Graphic Novels: The Politics of Form*, as well as leading workshops and seminars at TORCH and at the English Faculty. Her keynote lecture will be delivered on Thursday 22nd June, at TORCH, Radcliffe Humanities Building, Woodstock Road, on the topic 'Disaster Drawn'.

Details about all our public lectures and events are available on our [website](#).

Save the date!

The next Oxford Alumni weekend will be 15-17 September 2017. Amongst the diverse events offered by faculties, departments, and other areas of the University, Professor Sally Shuttleworth and colleagues will be talking about their research into literature, medicine and citizen science. [Subscribe to the events mailing list](#) for more information on this and other events organised by the central Alumni Office.

Contact us

To keep us informed of what you're doing now, or to submit suggestions for what you'd like to see in our newsletter, please email english.office@ell.ox.ac.uk. Alternatively, you can write to:

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