



Department of English
2001 Main Street
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This is Just to Say

The English Department Newsletter

2007

Chair's 2 Cents

A sea change is occurring in our Department, and I feel as if I'm at the center and all the changes are flowing through me—a rather Whitmanesque sentiment, though it's more the result of being the department chair than anything else.

These remarks on the cycles of renewal experienced in our Department, prompted by the current baby boom here, also led to thoughts on how change and continuity affect our work as teachers and writers. In recent years, the Department has welcomed two little girls by adoption, and several of our faculty have become fathers. What is new for us is the presence of expectant and new mothers. Just two weeks ago, as I write this, one of our faculty gave birth to a son, and we anticipate the birth of a daughter to another very soon.

As for expressions in our work of these perennial subjects, two recent examples: a study of several generations of his Italian immigrant family by one faculty member, and a new course on the literature of motherhood by another. Proof, offered with a kind of gratitude, that the themes of love and generational continuity continue to be perennial in our teaching and writing, as well as in our lives as human beings.

Dr. Sandra Cookson

Professor Eric Gansworth Wins PEN Award

Novelist, poet, essayist, and painter Eric Gansworth, enrolled member of the Onondaga Nation, professor, and Lowery Writer-in-Residence in the English Department, continues to make headlines.

The local and national attention that his writing has garnered continues apace with his receipt of the sixteenth annual PEN Oakland-Josephine Miles Literary Award for his

third novel, *Mending Skins* (Bison Books, 2005). Honoring excellence in multicultural literature in several categories, the award was conferred on ten persons this year, including television journalist Bill Moyers, at a ceremony in the Oakland Public Library in California on December 3.

Closer to home, Eric presided at the unveiling of his original painting,

From One Dance, Creation, in Grupp Fireside Lounge on November 2.

The unveiling was the centerpiece of a multimedia event that featured addresses in the Seneca language and performances of Native American dance, as well as remarks by event co-organizers Kevin Koch ('07) and Richard Sasala ('07), Fr. John Bucki of the Campus Ministry Office, and Jessica Blum of the Bouwhuis Library, to which Eric has donated the painting.

In concluding the unveiling ceremony, Eric thanked the College for allowing him the privilege

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Left: Original painting by Prof. Eric Gansworth, *Breathing the Monster Alive*
Right: Keyla Zintek



Global Volunteer heads to Rwanda

English major Keyla Zintek ('09) has always been interested in helping people who have nothing. This summer, her interest will take her to Rwanda as a volunteer for the Global Volunteer Network, a non-governmental agency based in New Zealand.

As a volunteer in Northwest Rwanda, Zintek will have several responsibilities. She will build enclosures for goats as part of the Kinigi Goat Project and repair and reconstruct houses that have been washed away by flood waters. She also will teach literacy to

families and arts and crafts to the Widows' Association. In regards to her assignments, Zintek states, "I will be going back to the basics and will be helping people survive." With thirteen other global volunteers, Zintek will be staying at

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2006

Writer's Series Presents: October Storm

Thursday evening, October 12 will go down in the snowy annals of Buffalo as the surprise storm, but we students of literature will remember it as the second in the annual Canisius College Writers Series, readings by members of the college community organized by Eric Gansworth of the English Department.

Students, faculty, and friends gathered in Grupp Fireside Lounge for a reading that featured Janet McNally ('02), two of our department faculty, Sandra Cookson and Mick Cochrane, and a friend from the administration, Associate Dean Barbara Porter. Eric handled the introductions and the readers were all warmly received.

Porter read a prose poem, "Kitchen Stories," and an essay, "Celebration;" both pieces used a distinctive voice to explore the realities of disease, desire, and storytelling.

Cochrane read part of an on-going narrative about a family that, as he said, he revisits, in this instance for an episode that followed

the trials of a father struggling with educational bureaucrats and a son who is different, who doesn't sing the title's "Simple Songs."

Cookson read a number of poems, one longer piece, "Old Women at Kazan Cathedral," that drew on her experience studying in St. Petersburg, Russia and others, like "Junipers," that were closer to the flora of our city, quietly getting buried in heavy, wet snow as the evening progressed.

The last reader was Janet McNally, an English Department graduate who presently teaches at Canisius High School; she read a story, "Winter Positions," that wove facts and myths of the red planet Mars into a narrative of contemporary urban sensibilities and perspectives.

The readers came up as an ensemble at the end to respond to some questions from the audience. It was a stimulating and yet relaxed evening that left the audience awaiting the next in the series.

Alumni Bring Dennis to Canisius

On Tuesday, November 14, 2006, Pulitzer-Prize winning poet Carl Dennis visited Canisius College for a poetry reading. Professor Sandra Cookson, Chair of the English Department, introduced Dennis to a large crowd of students, faculty, and visitors in Grupp Fireside Lounge.

Dennis, who is a professor of English at SUNY Buffalo, is the author of nine books of poetry and a book-length essay, *Poetry as Persuasion*. He read from his latest collection of poetry, *New and Selected Poems, 1974-2004* (2004).

Opening the night with a poem on injustice, titled "Loss," Dennis interspersed his poems with interesting commentary.

Before reading a new poem entitled "Gravestones," he

told the crowd that he was excited to read at Canisius because our students attend school across the street from one of the nation's "greatest cemeteries." He encouraged students to "muse among the stones."

Dennis closed the night reading two new poems on writing, "Writing at Night" and "More Poetry."

Dennis' reading was made possible by a gift from Canisius English alumni John Kolaga ('82) and Judy Kubiniec ('83). Last year, Kolaga and Kubiniec brought poet John Ashbery to campus. Their generous gift has been much appreciated by the Department and the College.



Left: Judy Kubiniec, Carl Dennis, and John Kolaga

Below: Dennis Reading from his book *New and Selected Poems*



Right: John Kolaga, Judy Kubiniec, and Prof. Sandra Cookson, Chair, English Department



Gansworth Receives PEN Award

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of “doing what every Haudenosaunee artist should do: to celebrate the Creation story.”

A very different kind of story serves as the focus of *Breathing the Monster Alive*, Eric’s latest book, excerpts from which were presented at an on-campus reading on November 9. Revolving around the legendary Bigfoot, Eric’s collection of personal essays, paintings and poems analyzes the phenomenon of the “Sasquatch” from a dazzling variety of perspectives. The essay “Before the Monster” uses the stalking creature as a springboard to

consider “the fear element” in all “belief systems,” while the poem “Jasper Applebee Embraces His Fame, Such as It Is” explores the need for belief in mysteries in a world hostile to them. Poems like “Jasper Applebee Gets a Date” and “Jasper Applebee Finds Himself in the Liquidation Bin” reflect on the fleeting celebrity of an actor who starred in a low-budget film about the monster.

Congratulations to Eric for his ongoing accomplishments!



Above: Prof. Eric Gansworth signing his new book, Below: Prof. Ken Sroka with Martina Williams

Faculty Speaks: Ken Sroka - Martina Williams ('07)

Dr. Kenneth Sroka is one of the most well-liked and respected professors and colleagues in the English Department. His energy and enthusiasm are infectious. How could I resist selecting him as our very first Faculty Q&A interviewee?

Dickens. Anyone who has ever glanced inside your office knows that you have a love for Dickens. What is it about Dickens and his work that you admire so much?

I like Dickens' energy--the vitality and humor of his writing, his attempt to swallow the universe in his own life, his love of Shakespeare and theatre, his concern for social causes, his contribution to how we view Christmas, among other things.

In a Vegas championship fight who is more likely to win: Dickens or Hemingway?

Dickens would whip Hemingway, hands down in a Vegas fight, despite what Roger Stephenson believes. Hemingway took on animals, bulls and caribou and the like, but Dickens took on the wealth and power of

the British Empire, and put them in their place a bit.

If you had the opportunity to pick one character to be or one scene to live out, from any novel, who/what would it be and why?

I really like Pierre Bezukhov in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. He's quieter than Dickens, meeker, more philosophical, an appreciator. One of his neatest moments happens when he's arrested by the French who are sacking Moscow and he laughs at his captors and says in effect you can't arrest me, the whole world is inside of me. He narrowly escapes death, survives Napoleon's invasion, marries, and gets more political in his later years. Quite an admirable character!

What advice would you give any English major wondering what to do after graduation?

English majors can literally do anything they want--med school, law, teaching, business, social service, print and broadcast journalism--and they do! The best advice is that they shouldn't sell themselves short or think too narrowly about their options. Don't make the safe choices; take a risk. You'll be sorry if you don't.



What has been your proudest or most memorable moment as a professor?

One of my proudest and most memorable moments was being hired at Canisius, my alma mater, and finding myself with the likes of Les Warren, Charles Brady, Joe Lovering, Joe Sandman, Mel Schroeder, Dave Lauerman, Dick Thompson, Frank Riga, and Ed Zimmermann, all my undergrad heroes, and being able to work with them as a colleague. And then to meet the then "younger" department members and to feel part of a very worthwhile profession with memorable students. Who could want more from a career?

What's your must-read pick for this summer?

A bunch of us have just finished reading Barack Obama's autobiography, *Dreams from My Father*. It's a good book and a real insight into the potential of our only black U.S. Senator, someone under 60 who might one day make a decent president.

Christmas Brings Department Together

On Friday, December 8, 2006, the English Department had its holiday party in the Faculty Dining Room.

The party was sponsored by the *Quadrangle* Staff and was organized by students Carly Czech, Alixandra Krzemien, Duyen Nguyen, Kevin Koch, and Jesse Baier.

The party was attended by faculty and various student activity groups. There was plenty of good food and cheer.

Students and faculty were happy to celebrate the end of the semester and the beginning of the holiday season.



Above: *Quadrangle* Editors
Top Right: Prof. Robert Lopez with his daughter, and Prof. Jane Fisher
Top Middle: Students, Jesse Baier and Carlise Lipke
Right: Students, Kevin Koch and Justin Karcher with Prof. Jack D'Amico

Gregg Maday Returns to Canisius -Martina Williams ('07)

On Friday, November 17, 2006, Canisius College alum and English major Gregg Maday ('70) spoke before an intimate audience in the Marie Maday Theatre. He arrived in Buffalo to receive a distinguished alumni award from the College.

Maday returned to his alma mater as the Executive Vice President of Warner Brothers Theatre Ventures. Obtaining his M.F.A. from Carnegie Mellon University, Maday has worked for H.B.O. and CBS and he has the distinction as the longest reigning creative executive at Warner Brothers.

On the stage of the theatre named for his great aunt, Marie Maday, Maday provided students with a priceless gem of advice: "learn through failure." He shared his tale of risk and disappointment in producing the failed play *The Song of The Synergistic Vampire*, a Broadway production of Lestat. Maday stated, "Failure can be a really valuable contribution to growth as an individual and growth as a professional."

Crediting his English major background for helping him to speak in both a literary and directorial context, Maday said, "reading literature and understanding structure are invaluable skills to success."

Tribute to the English Major -Martina Williams ('07)

My dear Puck was on to something when he famously exclaimed, "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" Last weekend, I happened to find myself trapped in one of those uncomfortable dinner settings with a friend and their friends of friends. As anticipated, the conversation led to those age old grumbles about homework and classes (no education is complete without at least 100 complaints per semester). It was then that I heard it and my eyes inwardly began to roll in anticipation of what was to come. "So, what's your major?" One simple little question that as English majors, many of us have come to loathe. In the same breath that you mumble "English," you watch people's expression change from neutral to one of condescending amusement. The predictable annotations follow: "Oh, that's nice," "What do you

plan to do with that?" or "That doesn't pay well at all" make me want to scream. Moments like these have made me an advocate of granting English degrees with little emergency boxes. Inside would rest literature's Holy Grail: a taser gun of enlightenment, complete with a book insignia. Why is it so shocking that the beauty of Dickens, the empowerment of Wright, and the candidness of Vonnegut, which mesmerizes me, is somehow less admirable than business or medical fields? Literature is imaginative, impressive and unique beyond expression. It is the world in black, white, and all the space in between. So, when I see those pitying smirks, I proudly smile. I have met yet another person who failed to understand that English is more than books; it is culture in its purest form. Lord, what fools these mortals be!

Student Contributions

Seniors Win Awards: Brady & Warren

Every spring, the English Department confers on its most talented majors two awards, named in honor of former professors in the Department.

The Charles A. Brady Award is given to the graduating senior English major with the highest achievement in English courses and literary extracurricular activities. This year's Brady Award winner is Carly Czech, a student member of the English Council and the Editor-in-Chief of the *Quadrangle*.

The Leslie C. Warren Award is bestowed on the graduating senior English major with the highest academic average in his or her class. Receiving it this year is Lauren Woome, a double major in English and Philosophy with a GPA of 3.99.

Our sincere congratulations go out to these exceptionally bright and hard-working students.

Zintek Heads to Rwanda

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a house in Ruhengeri, Rwanda, a town two hours from the capital of Kigali. While Zintek has the option to take a cell phone, she refuses because she wants the experience of living alone among poverty. Zintek has raised \$875.00 for her trip, but still needs \$3,000. "Raising the money has been challenging. I want people to know how much help Rwandans need. This country is completely poverty-stricken," states Zintek. Zintek is still collecting donations. If you are interested in donating money or giving advice to her, donations can be sent to 182 Hastings Place, Syracuse, NY 13206, or she can be reached at 315-382-0529 or zintek@canisius.edu.

UP AND COMING EVENTS:

- March 28: *Quadrangle* hosts The English Connection (Old Main 214, 6PM)
- March 29: Annual Honors Banquet (Pearle Street Grille, 6PM)
- April 19: Sigma Tau Delta's Induction Ceremony (Grupp Fireside Lounge, 3PM)
- April 19: Contemporary Writer's Series hosts Connie Porter (Grupp Fireside Lounge, 7PM)
- April 24: Sigma Tau Delta's Poster Fair (Grupp Fireside Lounge, 4PM)
- April 26: *Quadrangle* unveils its 55th Edition (Grupp Fireside Lounge, 6PM)
- April 26-28: Little Theatre's Second Stage (Marie Maday Theatre, 8PM)

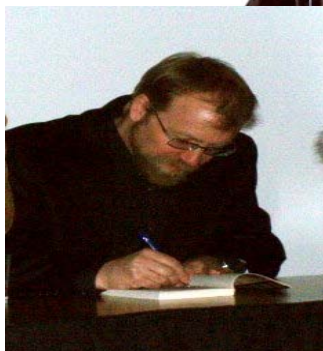
George Saunders Kicks Off Writer's Series 2007

George Saunders read from his work at the Montante Cultural Center on February 8 as part of the Contemporary Writers Series, which is in its 8th year under the direction of the Department's Dr. Mick Cochrane. A sizeable and appreciative audience enjoyed Saunders, a satirist whose timing and shifts in voice conveyed the distinctive character of his short fiction.

From *Pastoralia*, he read two sections of a story which follows the misogynistic fantasies of a barber. When asked during the question and answer period how he maintains the excruciating edge of that story and others like it, he explained that having decided to explore a given character, at every critical point in the

writing he opts for the excruciating over the lame.

His eye and ear for the language and lunacies of American culture came across in a few examples of his surreal commercials from *In Persuasion Nation*. Commenting on his career, he pointed out that his training as an engineer, his life experiences, and his work as a technical writer all contributed to his development as a writer of fiction. And his advice to young writers to put in the hours required to work through imitation to find their own voice was, like his stories, both honest and perceptive. To judge from the audience response and the number of people lined up to have copies of his books signed, the evening was a decided success.



Left and Above: Saunders signing books for students; Below: Saunders reading from his book, *In Persuasion Nation*





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This is Just to Say

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

In the poem, "This Is Just To Say"
by William Carlos Williams, the
speaker tells us that he just ate
some "delicious," "sweet" and "cold"
plums. We would like to know much
more than that from you. Please
contact us with your achievements,
news, and stories. We are eager
to hear from you!

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This is Just to Say...

Thank You for Being a Part of Us

Faculty News:

Bob Butler published "The Religious Vision of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*" in *Harper Lee: Essays and Reflections* (University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

Jack D'Amico is in training to swim the Dardanelles (the ancient Hellespont) in northwestern Turkey on his sabbatical, during which he will complete his book on the mythical Hero and Leander, whose love affair blossomed on the famous straits.

Paul Dowling will present a paper at the New York College English Association Conference at SUNY at New Paltz this April. The paper is tentatively titled "The Hidden Revolution of Shakespeare's Henry: Moderating Sectarian Violence in *The History of King Henry VIII*."

Joe Grossi will take a leave of absence to spend 2007-08 as a visiting researcher at the University of Victoria (British Columbia, Canada), where his wife has accepted a position in the Department of Hispanic and Italian Studies. He will use this time to master Canadian English and work on a book-length study of the medieval literature of East Anglia, in eastern England.

Jim Pribek, S.J., spent the summer (2006) in Ireland researching Joseph Darlington, S.J., the historical prototype for the Jesuit dean of studies in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Jim spoke on Fr. Darlington to the Hopkins Summer School and the National Newman Conference. In February he responded to a lecture at the Albright-Knox's annual "Joyce with Gusto" celebrations.

Ken Sroka recently completed an article on "Beauties, Beasts, and Myth in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*" with the help of Martina Williams ('07). He also traveled to Greece and Turkey in June, 2006.

Alumni News:

Michael Fiegel, '95, is the author of the *Ninja Burger Employee Handbook*, a non-fiction humor book about fast-food delivering ninja, which was published by Citadel Press in June 2006. Fiegel previously has published credits as a role-playing game author, but this is his first novel. He is also the creator of Ninja Burger (www.ninjaburger.com), the website on which the book was based. Ninja Burger has been featured on TechTV and the Food Network, and the property has been developed into two Role-Playing Games (from 9th Level Games and Fiegel's own company, aethereal FORGE) and a card game from Steve Jackson Games.

Janet McNally, '02, read from her creative writing as part of the Second Annual Canisius College Writers Series, whose participants presented their literary work on Thursday evening, October 12. Currently a member of the English Department at Canisius High School, Janet is the first alumna to participate in the Series.

Jeff Siuda, '94, teaches English at McQuaid High School, in Rochester, NY, and is active in Rochester area theatre.

Eric Soehnlein, '06, is doing well in his first year at Columbia University Law School.

Robin Sroka, '00, is the program coordinator and a language arts teacher at Grahame Park Middle School, Triangle, Virginia.

After a year and a half as Legal Counsel to Sen. Charles Schumer (D, NY) on the Senate Judiciary Committee, **Scott Sroka, '94**, was recently appointed as an U.S. Attorney in Washington, DC. He continues to serve on the Canisius College Alumni Board as well.

Laura Szkutak, '05, teaches English at Buffalo Academy of Science Charter School. She also is pursuing her M.A. in literacy at Canisius and has published her senior honors thesis, "Once Upon Charles Dickens" (PublishAmerica, 2006).

Shana Williams, '06, is in her first year of the Master's Program in English at the University at Buffalo.