

Noted

Spring 2015

NEWS OF TULANE'S ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

CHAIR'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

Even if they haven't taken a course on his plays, most people know the name Shakespeare. Worshipped as the Bard in the eighteenth century, Shakespeare—along with such writers as Chaucer, Jane Austen, and Virginia Woolf—is a major figure in what used to be called the canon of English literature. His works, collectively or selectively, were once required reading for any intelligent person.

Shakespeare's plays have never gone out of fashion. For instance, they're always being performed, at venues as different and distant as the restored Globe Theatre in London and the summer New Orleans Shakespeare Festival here at Tulane. In Spring 2016, they'll have an additional, physical prominence on our campus, as the focus of a traveling exhibition sponsored by the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. in honor of the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death—*First Folio! The Book that Gave Us Shakespeare*.

Actors (Shakespeare was one) insist that the plays were written to be performed, not read. Even in Shakespeare's lifetime, however, there was a lively readership. People bought and read small-format printings of individual plays. And in 1623, only seven years after Shakespeare's death, a comprehensive, large-format First Folio of his works was published, complete with an engraved author portrait and a preliminary poem of praise by Shakespeare's literary rival, Ben Jonson. Performances, while essential, are ephemeral. We wouldn't be able to enact or remember Shakespeare at all if it were not for his books.

A rare copy of the First Folio will be on display in the Newcomb Art Museum from May 9 until May 31 of 2016. The exhibition will open with the kind of tribute that only New Orleans can offer Shakespeare—a jazz funeral—followed by lectures and performances at the Historic New Orleans Collection in the French Quarter and in local branches of the New Orleans Public Library. Visitors will also trace an "archival circuit" on campus, viewing other rare books that date to the Age of Shakespeare or that memorialize his achievement, such as Tulane's first edition of the King James Version of the Bible, Renaissance herbals, and Langston Hughes's *Shakespeare in Harlem*.

So don't be a surly knave or a varlet: join in the festivities in May 2016 as Tulane celebrates the ongoing cultural influence of Shakespeare!

Best wishes,
Mike Kuczynski
Chair, Tulane/English



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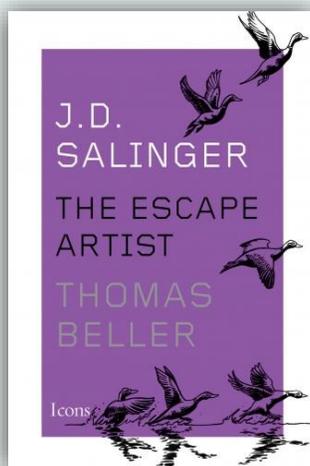
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SPECIAL THANKS

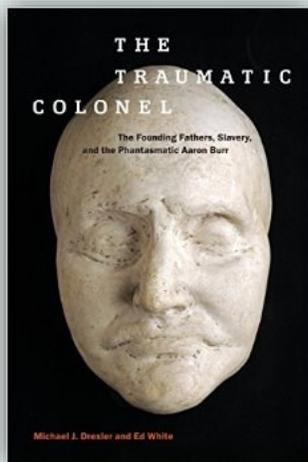
- Michelle Kohler:
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NEW BOOKS BY FACULTY

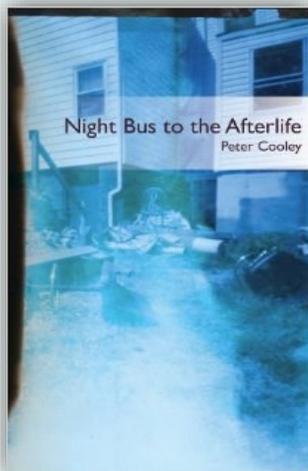
This past year has been a highly productive one for the English Department, with ten faculty members publishing books, several of which have won prestigious awards. To highlight this impressive output, we are devoting this issue of the newsletter to showcasing these achievements.



Thomas Beller's new book *J.D. Salinger: The Escape Artist* (New Harvest, 2014) is a meditation on the legacy of one of our most mythic writers. *The Catcher in the Rye* became an American classic, and Salinger was a longtime contributor to *The New Yorker*, which published his short stories as well as *Franny and Zooey* and *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters*. These works introduced, by way of the Glass family, a new type in contemporary literature: the introspective, voluble cast of characters whose stage is the Upper East Side of New York. Beller has followed his subject's trail, from his Park Avenue childhood to his final refuge in isolation, barnstorming across New England to visit various Salinger shrines, and visiting the Manhattan apartments where Salinger grew up. The result is a quest biography in the tradition of Geoff Dyer's *Out of Sheer Rage*, a book as much about the biographer as about the subject. Winner of the 2015 New York City Book Award for best biography/memoir, *J.D. Salinger: The Escape Artist* has been called "sensitive and irresistible" (*New York Times*), a "genre-bending nonfiction delight" (*New Orleans Times-Picayune*), and a "dark, intense biography . . . studied with original aperçus about the art of biography, the nature of literary influence, and the importance of place to a writer's sensibility" (*The Boston Globe*). Thomas Beller, Associate Professor of Creative Writing in the English Department, is also author of two books of fiction and a collection of essays, and is a frequent contributor to *The New Yorker's* Culture Desk. He has edited numerous anthologies, and was a cofounder and editor of the literary journal *Open City*.



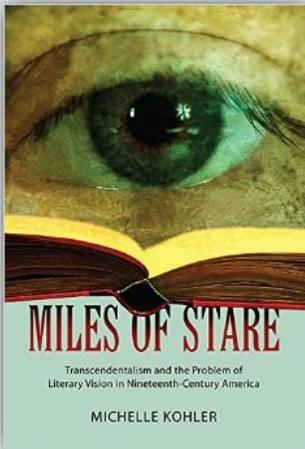
In his new book *The Traumatic Colonel: The Founding Fathers, Slavery, and the Phantasmatic Aaron Burr* (NYU Press, 2014), Ed White, along with Bucknell University English Professor Michael J. Drexler, examines the Founding Fathers as imaginative fictions, characters in the literary sense, whose significance emerged from narrative elements clustered around them. From the revolutionary era through the 1790s, the Founders took shape as a significant cultural system for thinking about politics, race, and sexuality. Yet after 1800, amid the pressures of the Louisiana Purchase and the Haitian Revolution, this system could no longer accommodate the deep anxieties about the United States as a slave nation. White and Drexler assert that the most emblematic of the political tensions of the time is the figure of Aaron Burr, whose rise and fall were detailed in the literature of his time. The authors venture a psychoanalytically informed exploration of post-revolutionary America to suggest that the figure of "Burr" was fundamentally a displaced fantasy for addressing the Haitian Revolution. *The Traumatic Colonel* has been praised as a "significant and unique contribution to early US studies" (Dana Nelson) and a work that "will have a major impact on the field, and profoundly shape work written in its wake" (Duncan Faherty). Ed White is a Professor in the English Department, and he serves as the Pierce Butler Chair in American Literature. His academic interests include critical theory and the development of antebellum abolitionist writings.



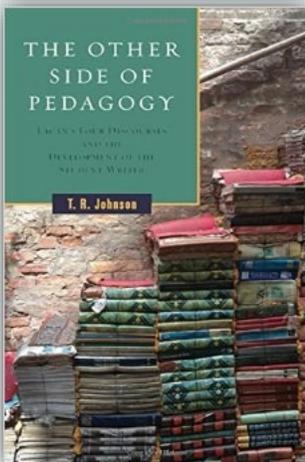
With the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans as his initial subject, Peter Cooley meditates on transience and mortality as he moves through the landscape of the Gulf South in his new book of poems *Night Bus to the Afterlife* (Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2014), the sky and his inner weather reflecting one another. Cooley describes the book as a consideration of "fixity and flux," and these themes permeate Cooley's verse throughout, constantly tugging in opposite directions. In the poem "From this Side," the speaker has "crossed over" into that alterity which is beyond literature and music and art but some synthesis of the three." But, as Cooley notes, these kinds of "imagined constructions" are surprisingly hard to hold at a distance, and eventually it becomes clear that the speaker is "not a speaker; he's just Peter Cooley with his face up against the impossible"—by Cooley's reckoning, "not a bad place to be." *Night Bus to the Afterlife* has been praised for its "enduring lyricism and robust imagination" and poems that "turn on grace notes spiritual and natural, tinged by the Crescent City" and "a treasure of lived reflection that carries us through an urban psychological landscape" (Yusef Komunyakaa). Peter Cooley is a Professor of Creative Writing in the English Department, where he also serves as the Director of the Creative Writing and the Senior Mellon Professor in the Humanities. Most recently, he received an Atlas Grant from the State of Louisiana, as well as the Marble Faun Prize in Poetry from the Faulkner Society.



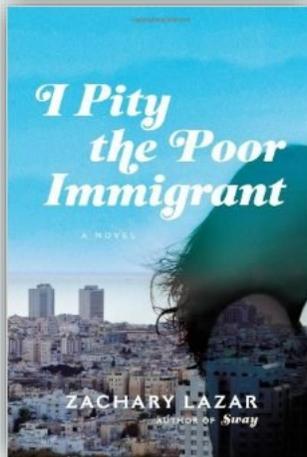
Joel Dinerstein's new book *American Cool* (Prestel, 2014) is the companion catalogue for the popular culture and photography exhibit he curated at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in 2014. Since the 1950s, the term and concept of cool has been intrinsic to any understanding of American culture through the idea of cultural rebellion. In his essays for this volume, Dinerstein provides a theory of cool, explores the origins of this cultural concept in African-American jazz culture in the 1940s, and then analyzes its three generational shifts in the '60s, the '80s, and into the present. For each of the one hundred subjects — such as Miles Davis, James Dean, or Patti Smith — there is a short biography that expressly captures each icon's generational appeal, claim to cool, and cultural legacy. *American Cool* was reviewed in most of the major media, with segments on the *CBS Morning Show*, *BBC World News*, and *NPR*. *The Washington Post* called it "[a]n entertaining and insightful exhibition [that] confronts one of the most dynamic and hard to define concepts in American cultural life," while the *New York Times* called it "the kind of exhibition many people will find irresistible...[b]eing cool assumes authenticity and integrity yet it is also the ultimate performance art." Joel Dinerstein is an Associate Professor of English and the James H. Clark Endowed Chair of American Civilization, as well as the Director of the New Orleans Center for the Gulf South. He recently gave a TED talk entitled "Why Cool Matters."



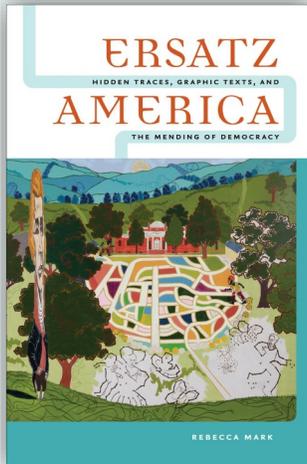
Michelle Kohler's new book *Miles of Stare: Transcendentalism and the Problem of Literary Vision in Nineteenth-Century America* (University of Alabama Press, 2014) explores the discordant visual metaphors for writing that appear throughout the nineteenth century in the wake of Emerson's and other transcendentalists' strange conflation of visible reality and literary language. Why, this book asks, for all the anti-empiricism driving American transcendentalism, is its central trope an eye purged of imagination? Conversely, why, for all its insistent empiricism, is this eye also so decidedly not an eye? What are the ethics of casting this boldly equivocal metaphor as the source of a national literature amidst such a fraught national landscape? First tracing the historical emergence of the transcendentalists' strained poetic eye (exemplified most famously by Emerson's transparent eyeball), Kohler turns to the ensuing literary visions of writers like Frederick Douglass, Emily Dickinson, and Sarah Winnemucca, who reconceptualize the relationship between the eye and the American text. Douglass's "doomed" witness to slavery and Dickinson's empty "miles of Stare," for example, variously skewer the authority of Emerson's all-seeing poetic eye while attributing new authority to the limitations of their own literary gazes. Tracing this metaphorical conflict across genres from the 1830s through the 1880s, *Miles of Stare* illuminates the divergent, contentious fates of American literary vision as nineteenth-century writers wrestle with the commanding conflation of vision and language that lies at the center of American transcendentalism and at the core of American national identity. The book is praised as "Americanist literary scholarship at its best" (William Rossi) and a "milestone in American studies" that "redefines Ralph Waldo Emerson's consequence for the American scene" with "a rare combination of thoroughgoing erudition and playful close reading" (*Emily Dickinson Journal*). Michelle Kohler is Associate Professor in the English Department, specializing in nineteenth-century American literature.



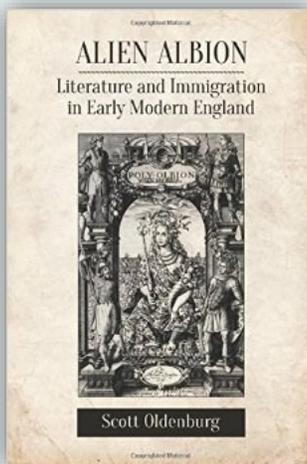
T.R. Johnson's new book *The Other Side of Pedagogy: Lacan's Four Discourses and the Development of the Student Writer* (SUNY Press, 2014) considers a crisis in the university classroom: though popular demands for accountability grow more insistent, no one seems to know what teaching should seek to achieve. Tracing this uncertainty back to the work of Bergson and Piaget, which led scholars in the 1960s to see student growth as a journey into more and more abstract thought, Johnson suggests that since the 1980s we have come to see development only as a vague initiation into the academic community. This book, however, offers an alternative tradition, one rooted in Vygotsky and the feminist movement, that defines the developing student writer in terms of a complex, intersubjective ecology, and then, through these precedents, proposes a fully psychoanalytic model of student development. In his analysis of the freshman writing class, Johnson draws on Lacan's theory of the four discourses and a colorful set of examples, including Franz Kafka, Keith Richards, David Foster Wallace, Hannah Arendt, and many others. *The Other Side of Pedagogy* has been hailed as "[g]raceful, provocative, thoughtful, and well researched" (Joseph Harris). T.R. Johnson is a Professor in the English Department and serves as the Director of the Writing Program.



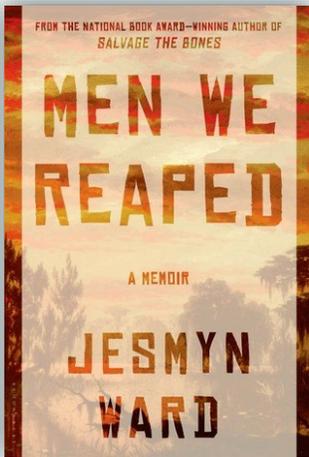
Part crime story, part spiritual quest, Zachary Lazar's new book *I Pity the Poor Immigrant* (Little, Brown, 2014) is also a novelistic consideration of Jewish identity. Lazar weaves together history and fiction, drawing on a variety of sources to tell his story: in 1972, the American gangster Meyer Lansky petitions the Israeli government for citizenship. His request is denied, and he is returned to the U.S. to stand trial. He leaves behind a mistress in Tel Aviv, a Holocaust survivor named Gila Konig. In 2009, American journalist Hannah Groff travels to Israel to investigate the killing of an Israeli writer. She soon finds herself inside a web of violence that takes in the American and Israeli Mafias, the Biblical figure of King David, and the modern state of Israel. As she connects the dots between the murdered writer, Lansky, Gila, and her own father, Hannah becomes increasingly obsessed with the dark side of her heritage. *I Pity the Poor Immigrant*, a *New York Times Book Review* Editor's Choice and one of that publication's Top 100 Notable Books of 2014, has been hailed as "a work of intricate and precise mystery" (Rachel Kushner) and "an inventive, taut, and refreshing take on the crime novel" (Jami Attenberg). Zachary Lazar is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing in the English Department and is most recently the recipient of the 2015 John Updike Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.



In *Ersatz America: Hidden Traces, Graphic Texts, and the Mending of Democracy* (University of Virginia Press, 2014), Rebecca Mark shows how America's four-hundred-year-old obsession with false history has wounded democracy by creating language that is severed from material reality. From the popular legend of Pocahontas to the Civil War soap opera *Gone with the Wind* to countless sculpted heads of George Washington that adorn homes and museums, whole industries have emerged to feed America's addiction to imaginary histories that cover up the often violent acts of building a homogeneous nation. Without the mediating touchstones of body and nature, creative representations of our history have been allowed to spin into dangerous abstraction. Mark contends that throughout American history, citizen artists have responded to the deadly memorialization of the past with artistic expressions and visual artifacts that exist outside the realm of official language, creating a counter narrative. These examples of what she calls visceral graphism are embodied in and connected to the human experience of indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, and silenced women, giving form to the unspeakable. We must learn, Mark suggests, to read the markings of these works against the iconic national myths. In doing so, we can shift from being mesmerized by the monumentalism of this national mirage to embracing the regeneration and recovery of our human history. *Ersatz America* has been called "an astonishing work of scholarship— a brilliant, original, ambitious book that will find a broad audience" (Minrose Gwin). Rebecca Mark is a Professor in the English Department, and has recently been named the Greenberg Family Professor in Social Entrepreneurship for 2014–2016. She is also the founding executive director of the Newcomb College Institute and a founding member of the Deep South Regional Humanities Center at Tulane.



Scott Oldenburg's recent book, *Alien Albion: Literature and Immigration in Early Modern England* (University of Toronto Press, 2015), is about immigration into England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the literary texts that mediated what the influx of foreigners meant to England's sense of itself. Oldenburg argues that early modern England developed unique forms of multiculturalism founded on shared religion, craft, or domestic space and that these types of communities countered and complicated the dominance of early English national identity. Careful analysis shows how literary texts of the period intervened in the tension between nation and multicultural community: for example, Anne Dowriche's poem *The French Historie* highlights the responsibility of coreligionists to one another despite national boundaries; Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* emphasizes solidarity among artisans as more important than linguistic difference; and William Shakespeare shows how the otherness of the alien is often undermined by concerns of marriage and family. *Alien Albion* has been hailed as "nuanced, timely, and readable," (Sujata Iyengar) and "a fascinating and significant new study of the complicated cultural representation of the nation in early modern England [that] will inspire all readers interested in questions of identity and breathes new life into debates about early modern nationality" (Andrew Hadfield). Scott Oldenburg is an Associate Professor in the English Department, where he regularly teaches courses on Shakespeare and his contemporaries. He is currently at work on his second book, a microhistorical account of an artisan poet in sixteenth-century London.



Jesmyn Ward's latest book *Men We Reaped* (Bloomsbury, 2013) is a memoir that reckons with loss and the oppressive weight of history. In five years, Ward lost five young men in her life—to drugs, accidents, suicide, and the bad luck that can follow people who live in poverty, particularly black men. In *Men We Reaped*, Ward writes about her upbringing in DeLisle, Mississippi, revisiting the losses of her only brother and her friends and concluding that ultimately, her brother and her friends all died because of who they were and where they were from, because they lived with a history of racism and economic struggle that fostered drug addiction and the dissolution of family and relationships. Ward also explores the parallel American universe of private school and university life—a universe she was thrust into when she began attending an Episcopal school where she was the only black female student—and examines how some of the same social and racial tensions that DeLisle experiences can spill over into this very different world. *Men We Reaped* was shortlisted for a 2013 National Book Critics Circle Award, and has been called “a haunting and essential read” (Natasha Trethewey), “a miracle,” (Laura Kasischke), and “an important, and perhaps essential, book” (*San Francisco Chronicle*). Jesmyn Ward is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing in the English Department, and she is the 2011 National Book Award winner for her novel *Salvage the Bones*. As the first recipient of Tulane's Paul and Debra Gibbons Professorship, she works closely with the Newcomb College Institute and the New Orleans Center for the Gulf South in addition to teaching English courses. *Men We Reaped* is the Tulane Reading Project's 2015 selection, and the incoming freshman Class of 2019 will hear keynote lectures on the book and participate in small group discussions with the author.

RECENT FACULTY AWARDS



🏆 **Rebecca Mark**

- Stephen H Weiss Presidential Fellowship for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching



🏆 **Gaurav Desai**

- School of Liberal Arts Research Award



🏆 **Molly Rothenberg**

- Oliver Fund Award for Excellence In Faculty Mentoring



🏆 **Zachary Lazar**

- ATLAS Grant



🏆 **Melissa Bailes**

- School of Liberal Arts Glick Fellowship
- Huntington Library Fellowship



🏆 **Thomas Beller**

- New York City Book Award for Biography/Memoir

WHAT WE'RE READING

Tom Albrecht, *My Struggle, Book 2: A Man in Love*, Karl Ove Knausgaard

Amy Parziale, *A Tale for the Time Being*, Ruth Ozeki

Karen Zumhagen-Yekple, *Modernist Fiction and Vagueness: Philosophy, Form, and Language*, Megan Quigley

Michelle Kohler, *Dear Life: Stories*, Alice Munro

Katherine Adams, *Lila*, Marilynne Robinson



2015 CREATIVE WRITING AWARDS

☞ Best student in creative writing:
M'Bilia Meekers

☞ Studio in the Woods Fellowship:
Stephanie Chen

☞ Best service to the university in creative writing:

M'Bilia Meekers

☞ The Dale Edmonds Prize- Best story by an undergraduate:

Axel Lloyd

☞ Best Short story by a woman:
Anna Curry



SENIOR AWARDS CEREMONY RECIPIENTS

☞ The Henry Clay Stier Award in English (Recognizing highest GPA)

Tessa K. Barkan

☞ The Donald Pizer Award in American Literature

Katherine Grover

☞ The Pierce Butler Prize for Excellence in English

Hannah Horowitz

☞ The Virginia Gleaves Lazarus Memorial Award (for best essay written by a junior or senior woman)

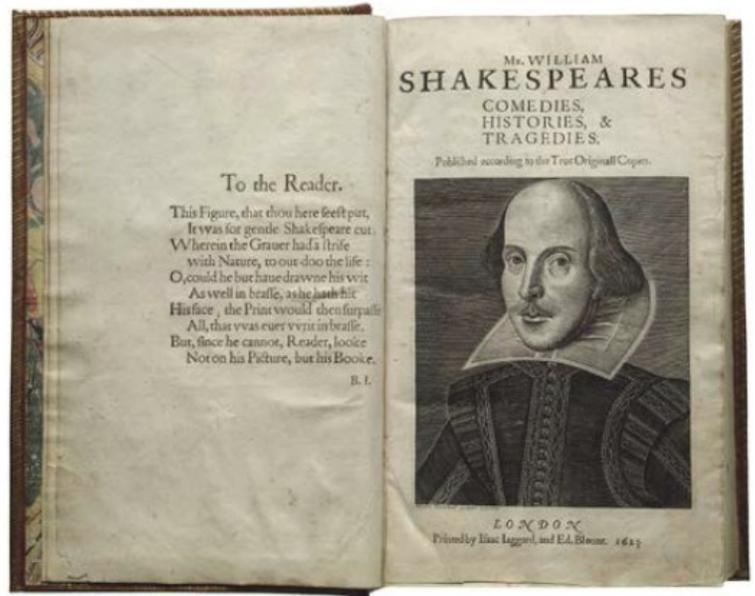
Laura Sibert

☞ The Class of 1903 Shakespeare Prize for the Best Shakespearean Essay by a Woman

Heather Barnes

FIRST FOLIO AT TULANE

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