

June NOTED 2006

Newsletter of the English Department

Table of Contents

Poem: Speeding.....	2
Poem: Piano	2
Department News.....	3
A Note From the Director	4
Proposed Changes in the <i>plan d'études</i> ..	7
Conferences	7
An Oxford Story	8
English Theatre in Geneva	10
Poem: A Nightmare	11
Barbe à Papa Goes to London.....	12
Poem: To Control	15
Poem: Summer is Gone	15
My Year at Boston University	16
Poem: Night Sky.....	17
Review: <i>Hamlet</i> by Ambroise Thomas..	18
Poetry Reading: Les Murray.....	20
Poem: Somewhere Out There.....	21
Interview with Martin Leer	22
Alumni Column.....	24

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Editorial

“All good things must come to an end.”
“All’s well that ends well.”

“Every end is a new beginning.”

There are lots of platitudes and proverbs to help us think about closure and change. My favorite is from a Polish writer, Edward Stachura, who said: “Nothing that really begins ever really ends.” The key word in this sentence is “really.” It invokes a rhetoric of mysticism, implying that some things are more real than others. The saying makes sense in that usefully imprecise way that good epigraphs do, falling somewhere in between profundity and self-delusion.

Do not worry, dear readers, the occasion for these reflections is not the imminent demise of NOTED, which is alive and well, thanks to you. It is the departure of its senior editor. After teaching at the University of Geneva since 1994, I am leaving to accept an appointment as Assistant Professor of American Literature at the University of Lausanne. My joy at accepting this dream job is tempered only by my regret at leaving the department that has been my academic home for many years. I arrived thinking I would only stay five years, the typical length of an assistantship. A product of bohemian Southern California, I initially hated the gilded aloofness of this city. Over →

the years I have managed to find some of Geneva's secret reservoirs of bohemia and warmth and have made my home in them. The English Department was very different when I first arrived. There were many professors and junior staff but not much team-spirit. The department has been a much more stimulating place to work in the past few years, and I am happy to see as I leave that the student association is reviving and a theater group has formed. I am also happy to leave NOTED in the able hands of my co-editor, Michael Rööslü (who will probably need a helper to keep the newsletter going – any volunteers?). After teaching here for twelve years and defending my doctoral dissertation in 2003, I could call Geneva my “alma

mater,” like technically it will be yours. But the term “mother of my soul” doesn't quite suit the department that has changed as much as I have since I arrived. Perhaps Geneva has been more of a sister-traveler on my intellectual journey. All the more fitting then that I should continue this journey in her sister-city, a short 33-minutes-by-train away. So, to come back to the thoughts on endings at the beginning of this column, I want to suggest that my relationship with the University of Geneva, and this department in particular, is not really ending. It is just taking on another form, as a fellow-traveler on a nearby road. I hope our paths will cross over and over.

Agnieszka Soltysik

Speeding

by Kristijan Marinkovic

How long will I last
In this car of mine
Driving so damn fast
Feeling so damn fine?

Are you in control
Gripping that black wheel
Shifting into fifth
Well, how do you feel?

Boom! adrenalin
Oh, feel the rush but
What if I die young
Like James Dean and Marilyn?

Best leave your fate be
Stay close to the TV.

Kristijan Marinkovic

Piano

by Nicholas Weeks

Fingers floating in between
Silence and the touch of keys
Still, - wait to perceive the scene
Where hands shall meet at ease.

Floating fingers follow the mind
Divided in its path to find
Lines of true emotion.

Fingers floating in the air
When all is said, and yet remains
A resonance lingering clear
In the eyes of those whose ear
Heard just a little more than music.

Nicholas Weeks

Department News

Elvira Pulitano, who has been teaching in Lausanne after leaving our department last year, has gotten a tenure-track position in the Department of Ethnic Studies at California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) in San Luis Obispo.

Agnieszka Soltysik has been appointed Assistant Professor of Anglo-American Literature at the University of Lausanne. (Students who have written work to turn in or exams to take with her should be advised that October 2006 is the last exam session she will be present.)

Margaret Tudeau Clayton, who has taught in Geneva on a number of occasions in recent years, has been appointed Professor of English at the University of Neuchatel.

Petya Ivanova, last-year's Writing Lab monitor and recent graduate, will be going to the University of Lausanne to be an Assistant in Medieval Literature.

ADEA

After our irresistible article in the previous issue of NOTED calling for volunteers, a group of dynamic students has formed the core of the new ADEA: Kristijan MARINKOVIC, Valérie MAURIAC, Louis FOREL, Nicholas WEEKS, Jean DELTEIL, and Anamaria BALGRADEAN. Their first task this semester has been to complete a daunting series of administrative formalities before they had access to the bank account and university funding. An end-of-the year party is being planned to inaugurate the ADEA's activities:

The ADEA party will take place on June 15th, starting around 8 p.m. at the lovely restaurant of the HEI in the Perle du Lac park.

Bourse Thomas Harvey

The Thomas Harvey prize provides SFr. 2,000 every year for a student to travel to an English-speaking country for purposes of study and research. Applicants must be of Swiss nationality and have completed at least two semesters of study at the University of Geneva. Doctoral students are also eligible. Applications (in the form of a letter describing the project and estimating anticipated expenses) should be submitted to David Spurr, the Director of the English Department, by December 30, 2006.

This year, the grant was attributed to assistant Erika Lynn Scheidegger. With additional partial funding from SANAS (Swiss Association for North American Studies) it was thus made possible for her to fly overseas to the United States. In Albuquerque, New Mexico, she presented a paper entitled "Collective Trauma on Lorna Dee Cervantes' Weblog" at the annual Southwestern American Popular Culture Association meeting. The paper dealt with the aftermaths of hurricane season 2005 and its emotional impacts as represented by a Chicana poet on her weblog. After dipping in a hot spring in New Mexico, she flew to chilly and windy Chicago to carry out some research at the Newberry Library, an institution that hosts the D'Arcy McNickle Center. There, she accessed impressive collections of writings (and original manuscripts) dealing with Native American cultures and literatures, and would have wished to stay on for an entire year or more, provided she'd find funding to travel back to Geneva on a weekly basis to teach seminars and visit her loved ones. This being impossible, she then topped off her visit with a four day stay in Washington D.C., and exploring the interactive, recently opened Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI).

A Note from the Director

The scene: lunch at the Remor on the Place du Cirque with an old friend, an editor at one of the daily newspapers in Geneva. Out of idle curiosity, he asks me, “Why would a Swiss student want to study English at the University?” The question catches me a little off guard. I concentrate on the *pavé de veau*, mumbling something about English being an important language and Geneva an international city. In fact, I’ve never seriously thought about it, at least I have never put myself the question in that way.

For a native English speaker, it’s a simpler matter. When I studied English literature at an American university, it was a way of calling up the cultural memory that had made the world which I inhabited, of finding out what had made me. In the cadences of Emerson I can still hear the moral earnestness of my Unitarian elders, tempered by the green shades of their New England: “In this refulgent summer it has been a luxury to draw the breath of life.”ⁱ Until the age of adolescence I believed that my own great-grandfather, a Gloucester sea-captain, had served as Kipling’s model for the hero of *Captains Courageous* (1897).

But I had never much thought of what it would be like to come to all of this from the outside, having grown up with...I am not sure: Schellen-Ursli and Dürrenmatt? Rousseau and Albert Cohen? Raised among these sparkling lakes and snowy mountains, perhaps even within earshot of the Ranz des Vaches and “les accents émus d’un cœur pieux,” how strange must it be for a Swiss student to encounter the Tribe of Ben, the Great Cham, the Sage of Chelsea, the Last of the Mohicans, the Emperor of Ice Cream, and “the best minds of my generation destroyed

by madness, starving hysterical naked.”ⁱⁱ

In search of an answer and assisted by the instructors in “Introduction to English Literature,” I asked first-year students to write a brief statement answering the following questions:

1. What made you decide to study English at the University?
2. What are the most important things that you hope to learn from your studies in English at the University?

Fifty-seven students responded to this survey, with answers ranging from the perfunctory to the passionate. At one end of the spectrum, there is the student who doesn’t answer the first question, but, “really disappointed” by what she has seen so far, is taking her leave of us. Madam, I understand you. But before you give up hope altogether, remember that Shakespeare never frequented a university, that Shelley was expelled from Oxford for blasphemy, that Emily Dickinson left Mount Holyoke after a year, that Johnson warned against the perils of academic ambition:

There mark what ills the scholar’s life assail:
Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail.ⁱⁱⁱ

Another student is a martyr to the globalisation of English. She confesses, “I just don’t like literature and studying a language,” but believes she has to study English in order to get a job. Madam, if we cannot give you pleasure, we shall hope at least to give you a little knowledge.

Twenty of the students responding, or a little over a third, plan to become teachers of English, although one of these is hesitating between that profession and being a television

reporter. Unlike the two cited in the paragraph above, almost all of the respondents claim an inherent interest in the English language, English-language literature, or the culture of the English-speaking world.

But where did that interest come from? A number of students either have English as their mother tongue, or come from Swiss families with anglophone roots. There is the daughter of an Irish mother, who wants “to know more about my origins.” Another, born and raised in Switzerland in a family part English, sees her studies as “a way for me to get closer to a culture I’ve always felt linked to even though I didn’t know it well.”

Another category of students attribute their interest in English to good teaching at the secondary level, such as the one who credits his English teachers at the Lycée International de Ferney for having initiated him in the analysis of literary texts. Among students who trace their interest in English to this stage of their studies, many spent a semester or a year in Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Ireland, or New Zealand. The Emerald Isle in particular seems to excite passion: one student “fell in love with Ireland,” and another hopes to live there some day. Perhaps for the first time since the famine of the 1840s, Ireland is becoming a place to go to rather than from. Meanwhile, at Geneva we also have our share of anglophiles, such as the student who likes “everything related to England.” Everything?

It was a work of English literature, George Chapman’s translation of Homer, that in 1816 persuaded a young medical student that his true vocation lay rather in poetry. That student was John Keats, who on reading Chapman’s 17th century verses felt like an awestruck Spanish explorer, “silent, upon a peak in Darien,”^{iv} gazing out at the vast Pacific. Likewise, many

of our students owe their interest in English to their reading. Though none of them mentions Chapman’s Homer, among the inspirational works cited are Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* (1938), Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1940), and, without naming individual titles, the works of Oscar Wilde, Aldous Huxley, Jack Kerouac, Paul Auster, and David Lodge. All of the students in this category profess a love of literature, such as the “voracious reader” who, in response to question No. 1 (What made you decide etc.) replies, “Books. Being in the university makes me feel like I fell asleep and woke up in Valhalla. This is it...I’m home.” If Keats’ poem had been any longer than a sonnet, he might have been able to use that image. In any case, welcome home, Sir.

A surprising number of our students have a keen interest in the forms of the English language itself. I say surprising because in my experience it is more often French whose defenders, particularly under siege in a time of English linguistic expansion, celebrate the intrinsic qualities of their own language. There is an entire linguistic ideology of French, institutionalized in the Académie Française and elaborated in the days of the French colonial empire, which makes claims for its superior clarity, precision, reason, and elegance—qualities which add up to a moral as well as an esthetic defense of the language. Such an ideology has never been institutionalized in English, yet the particular qualities of this language have not gone unnoticed by our students. They speak of its beauty, its harmonies, its richness of vocabulary, its “sonorities and evocative expressions,” and the sheer pleasure of pronouncing English words. One student says of English that it is “the most interesting, expressive, and creative language.” I cannot disagree with these testimonies; they give me courage for my seminars in poetry. →

Many students also refer to the pre-eminence of English as a world language. One of them states, "It is important for diplomatic, economic, and social reasons, for which it is the most spoken and used language in the world." In fact, there are more speakers of Mandarin Chinese and Spanish than of English, but this student is right in the sense that English still has the edge internationally, especially in business and diplomacy. Another student writes, "If you speak English you can't be lost or out of place, because there is always someone [else] who speaks English!" I see what you mean, but why is it then, when even surrounded by fellow English speakers, I so often feel lost and out of place?

As for the expectations that our students have of the English Department's program, they are many and they are rigorous. It is only the most modest who hope "to achieve an impressive command of the language," "to put my grammar right," "to structure ideas in an essay," "to discover more of the culture," "to enjoy the beauty and wonder of literature, to read books and discuss them with people who love them as much as I do." I think the English Department can meet the expectations of all of these students.

However, other students want to be artists: to write song lyrics, or scripts for the stage and the screen. Can we help? "Creative writing" is not something we teach as such, but we do teach good writing, and all good writing is creative.

Equally if not more ambitious than these is the student who wants to learn "how to read a book, what kinds of questions to ask, how to write an interesting essay, how to use the right words in the right places." No less ambitious is the student who wants to learn "the essence of theory." To these students I say, follow us: we are looking for the same things.

In the last issue of *Noted* readers of this column were asked for help in finding the origin of the name of the Boulevard des Philosophes, home of the English department. Two readers, Myriam Perregaux, assistant in English, and Christophe Perrier, a first-year student, referred me to Jean Paul Galland's *Dictionnaire des rues de Genève* (Genève : Promoédition, 1982). This work states: "Il existait autrefois, à l'emplacement actuel du boulevard, un hameau appelé les Philosophes. On distinguait les Petits-Philosophes qui s'étendaient entre l'Arve et la Rue de Carouge actuelle et les Grands-Philosophes qui couvraient une vaste zone comprenant la Roseraie et le bas de Champel. Selon Edmond Barde, le nom de philosophes vient du fait que ces quartiers étaient habités par des étudiants des deux années supérieures de philosophie de l'Académie". In other words, the "philosophes" were the students who inhabited the quarter, and who still do. What is not explained is how Edmond Barde (1874-1959), an editor of the *Journal de Genève* in the first half of the 20th century, got his information about a name that has its origins in the 18th. Historical research, alas, is not an exact science. Nonetheless, and as promised, both Ms. Perregaux and Mr. Perrier have received, in thanks for their contributions, a bottle of Comte de Peney Cabernet Sauvignon, Domaine des Balisiers, from the Genevan village of Peney.

David Spurr

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- i Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Divinity School Address" (1838).
 - ii Allen Ginsberg, "Howl" (1956).
 - iii Samuel Johnson, "The Vanity of Human Wishes" (1749).
 - iv John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (1816).

Proposed Changes in the *plan d'études*

The English Department has proposed the following changes in the *plan d'études* for the BA and MA degrees.

1. Les attestations pourront être obtenues pour des travaux faits uniquement dans le cadre de séminaires.
2. La modalité d'évaluation pour un cours magistral sera celle d'un examen.
3. Le module BA7 option « langue et littérature anglaises » ainsi que tous les modules de MA consisteront en deux séminaires.
4. En principe, les examens et les attestations ne pourront pas porter sur la matière d'un enseignement dispensé plus d'une année civile auparavant.

The last proposal is intended to replace the current requirement that an attestation be obtained before the student is permitted to take an examination in the same module.

If approved, these changes will take effect beginning in the October examination session of this year, 2006. However, in the June session, the department will not insist on the current rule requiring an attestation before an examination in the same module.

David Spurr

Conferences

3e Cycle 2006

From May 18th to the 20th, the University of Geneva and the Fondation Martin Bodmer hosted this year's *3e Cycle* Conference on Medieval and Early Modern English Texts and Contexts. Organized by Prof. Lukas Erne, the conference took place at the Fondation Martin Bodmer in Cologne on Thursday and continued at the Bastion on Friday and Saturday. A number of distinguished international scholars presented their work, as did several of our Department's Assistants and teaching staff: Kareen Klein, Ioana Balgradean, Emma Depledge (see pictures below), and recent graduate Petya Ivanova.

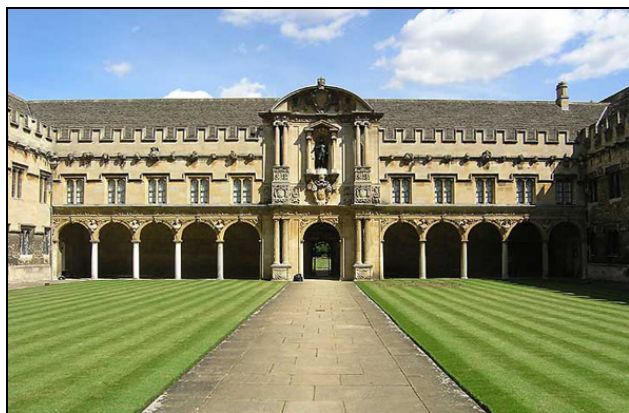


SANAS 2006

On the 10th and 11th of November 2006, the University of Geneva will host the biennial conference of the Swiss Association for North American Studies (SANAS) on the theme of "American Aesthetics." Gerald Vizenor will be one the keynote speakers. Papers will be addressing the history and meaning of the notion of an "American aesthetic." Keep an eye out for posters of this event when you return in the Fall.

An Oxford Story

By Jeremy Ergas



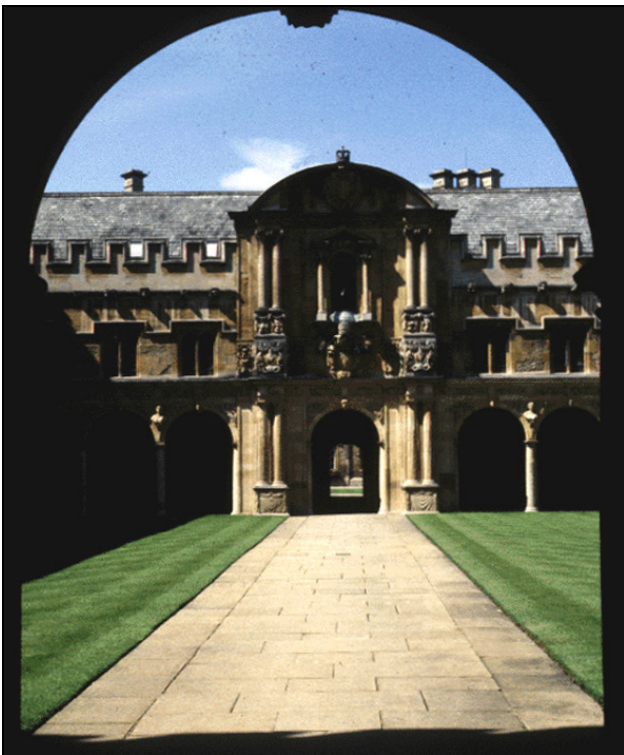
Oxford University is one University divided into 39 Colleges. More than belonging to the University, an Oxford student belongs to his College. My College - the one to which you will be sent if you receive the scholarship that I am benefiting from today - is St. John's College. St. John's is among the largest and most well-established of Oxford's Colleges. It is also the richest. They say that one can walk from Oxford to London on land owned by St. John's College. I personally prefer to take the bus. But the fact remains that St. John's financial ease makes it one of the most agreeable Colleges to study and live in. Not that the accommodation is luxurious (in fact it is quite Spartan), but every little detail is arranged so that the student can fully concentrate on his work without having to worry about anything else. Thus, scouts (such is the name they give to cleaning women in Oxford) come to clean the room and the building facilities every day; food is served three times a day in the close-by Hall for ridiculously low prices (especially since I am paid 340 pounds a term to eat them); computer rooms with free

printing machines and free photocopying machines are numerous; the College Library is two steps away, etc, etc...

Since the work is what really counts in Oxford, let me say a few words about it. The education in Oxford is based on the tutorial system: tutorials are one-on-one discussions lasting 1 to 2 hours for which the student must prepare by reading primary and secondary literature and writing an essay. On average, I read 500 to 600 pages and write a 2500 to 3000-word essay each week. As you will have noticed, the work-rate is fairly intense, but my luck is that - doing an Exchange Master's degree here in St. John's - I have very few restrictions this year. I see myself as some kind of literary and intellectual free-agent who decides what he wants to study at the beginning of each term, and then is offered the help of intelligent and qualified persons in order to do so. My choice has been to specialize in American literature: thus, before the beginning of each term, I tell my Supervisor what I want to work on - Dickinson, Faulkner, Nabokov, Vonnegut, DeLillo, etc... - and he goes through all the trouble of finding me the best tutors in my field among all the scholars in Oxford.

In my mind, the tutorial system is the best educational system that has ever been invented: as Socrates, Plato and the other philosophers of Ancient Greece had understood, learning is made optimal when one can discuss and interact *individually* with a more knowledgeable teacher. Lectures and

15-student Seminars cannot compare. Because in lectures and seminars there is close to no interaction (the interests of each student differing too widely), the teacher's words seem often too distant and far away. But in tutorials, because the teacher can assess the interests and capacities of each student, it is made easier for him to see what is more stimulating and relevant to this or that individual student. Also, it creates a personal relationship between the teacher and his pupil that facilitates the transmission of knowledge. Because one gets to know and to feel at ease with one's tutor, no more socio-psychological barriers exist between knowledge and the student's practical access to it.



This is the great change I have experienced since I have left Geneva University to study in Oxford. This and the special events and ceremonies. Oxford University was established in the XIIth century: consequently,

history and tradition are extremely important here. Ceremonies, Guest Dinners, Special Drinks: all these are part of this tradition. During these unique and magnificent occasions, students wear the academic dress (subfusc: dark suit and shoes - white bow tie - white shirt - gown and uniform cap) and have the chance to meet some of the best and most well-known specialists in their field. Thus, I have had the privilege not only to drink champagne and discuss American literature with Prof. Paul Giles, but also to eat dinner and talk of T.S. Eliot and James Joyce with Prof. J.S. Kelly, Prof. Ron Bush and Prof. Christopher Ricks.

These are the highlights of my stay in Oxford. But some aspects of this stay have been less brilliant: the College tends sometimes to resemble an artificial environment uninterestingly closed to the outside world where everything about every St. John student is known; Oxford students can be indifferent and snobby; the food is repetitive; fire alarms sound too many times for no reason in the middle of the night; cold-water showers are made too frequent in the middle of the winter... Oh I could go on complaining like this for quite a while – it is part of my nature – but the fact is that this has been a great year during which I have met many interesting and loveable persons.

Jeremy Ergas

P.S.If anyone is interested in applying for the same scholarship as I have received, the best is to contact:

Mr. Olivier Lombard
Office: Uni Mail, office R050, last floor
Reception: Mon-Wed-Fri: 10-12.30 & 2-4 p.m.
E-mail: Olivier.Lombard@intl.unige.ch

English Theatre in Geneva

By Karen Klein

GEDS

The Geneva English Drama Society was founded in 1933. Today it presents an opportunity for English-speaking people of all nationalities to get together and share their passion for theatre.

GEDS puts on three full-scale productions each season (this year *Roleplay* by Alan Ayckbourn, *The Sunshine Boys*, by Neil Simon and *Humble Boy* by Charlotte Jones). Sometimes an additional production is set up, whose proceedings go to charity. GEDS does not have a theatre of its own and can therefore be encountered in theatres all over Geneva (or even in Coppet or Nyon). As a member, you enjoy free entrance to all playreadings (see below), and you receive the newsletter, as well as audition notes and publicity for all productions.

Of course, GEDS not only needs actors – there is a lot going on backstage, too: building the scenery, lights and sound, costumes, make-up and hair, prompting, front of house, publicity, programs, you name it!

GEDS' Playreadings

Furthermore, a playreading is arranged every fortnight. The actors read their part, they only have one rehearsal, usually the preceding night, props, scenery and costumes are largely omitted. Some say that playreadings should actually be seen as the opportunity to “hear a play”, yet I find it fascinating how the play

actually comes to life in a mere reading. I've often sat spell-bound, caught up in the action, as in a real performance. Nevertheless, the atmosphere is less formal, the audience is aware of the special situation, and the occasional slip – “I would love to answer that question, but I've lost my place in the script ...” or “That was my line, but thank you ...” – is quickly forgiven, after everyone has had a hearty laugh. You can even participate in a playreading yourself: simply sign up for the plays that interest you, and you're likely to be on stage next time around.

“Stage” is a bit of an exaggeration, since the playreadings take place in the Church Hall of the Holy Trinity Church, just next to the gare routière, on the rue du Mont Blanc.

The remaining calendar of this season:

May 30:	<i>Desire under the Elms</i> , by Eugene O'Neill, Arranged by Jack Martin
June 13:	<i>Ah, Wilderness</i> , by Eugene O'Neill by The EDGE
June 27:	Closing Event: <i>Vita and Virginia</i> , by Eileen Atkins [Venue and Arranger to be announced]

For more information go to:
www.geds.ch

Also see the website of GEDS' sister society, GAOS, the Geneva Amateur Operatic Society:
www.gaos.ch

Howard Productions & Simply Theatre

Additionally, there are two more opportunities to enjoy English theatre in Geneva. First, there is Howard Productions, who bring professional productions to Geneva, usually one in February (this year the awe-inspiring *Lord of the Flies*, in the past a few plays by Arthur Miller), and one in June (this year *The Taming of the Shrew*, June 15-17, in the previous years we've enjoyed some Shakespearean tragedies). This summer performance is special, since it is set in the courtyard of the chateau de Prangins. If it's sunny – a spectacular experience!

Then, there's Simply Theatre, fairly new to Geneva, so far they've put on one production: *George's Marvellous Medicine*, inspired, of course, by Roald Dahl.

Upcoming is *Educating Rita*, from May 23rd to June 10th. Simply Theatre also has its very own theatre academy.

To find out more, visit these websites:

www.howardprod.ch

www.simplytheatre.com

Barbe à Papa

And, last but not least, there is *Barbe à Papa*, the theatre workshop of the English Department. They will be performing their Shakespeare-fusion piece *Shakes-Sheared!* on July 10th, 11th and 13th at Uni-Mail, 8 pm. Please have a look at the article "Barbe à Papa Goes to London" for more information.

Karen Klein

A Nightmare

by Arnaud Barras

In the torments and the cries of my tears
My pain shows up knowing what to wound
It hurts when I'm wrapped in my fears
When there is no outlet and no sound

I want to try to flee from the nightmare
But the last door vanishes in the mist
My eyes see white all around but no lair
It seems I will need to use my fist

This awful dream blinds me with light
And comes up with a beautiful spell
Refusing I want to retrieve my sight
I won't be corrupted by your sell

You're an illusion sketched in my mind
You always try to lure me in vain
I know the dark secret you hide
You're deceitful and insane

Reality is not what it seems
A mere dream in our imagination
It is the worst of all our sins
Corrupting minds with its motion

The last door can be found and touched
To get out of this prison is simple
Like a bird flying out of its hutch
Write down your thoughts in symbol

Arnaud Barras

Barbe à Papa Goes to London

By Sarah-Jane Moloney

Saturday, the 14th of January 2006

In my world, I do not normally use “4 a.m.” and “alarm clock” in the same sentence. However, I recently found myself obliged to review my *Weltanschauung*.

It was on a cold January morning that these two concepts collided. There ensued a racket which, I feel, has condemned me to a lifetime of tachycardia. Nevertheless, I managed to turn my alarm clock off, get up, gather up a few belongings and walk out the door without any other major mishaps. My taxi (no buses at this hour!) did not take long to arrive, and within minutes, I was speeding towards the train station. Within more minutes, I was standing in front of an EasyJet check-in desk with my fellow Barbe à Papas. Among them was Rachel, founder of the English Theatre Workshop and the mastermind behind the organisation of this trip.

In November 2005, as our productions of *Amphitryon 38* were drawing to a close, we started searching for a new theme. Rachel suggested to us none other than William Shakespeare, the *poète extraordinaire* himself. Although slightly daunted at first, we found it impossible to decline such a mouth-watering offer. We began with a series of workshops exploring the different facets of Shakespeare’s life, to better understand the context and the events that shaped him. This led us to consider an ambitious project: a “Shakespeare Trail” in the very city where the Bard had lived, loved, written and acted. It was no sooner said than done, and with the blessing of the English Department, we were soon jetting off to the British capital.

We arrived at Gatwick airport at 7:30 a.m., local time. We treated ourselves to a full English breakfast at Diana’s Diner,

where the initiated amusedly watched the first-timers struggling to reconcile *bacon* with *breakfast*.

Our next stop was the National Portrait Gallery, where the staff politely but urgently asked us to “mind your backpacks around the paintings, please!” We left them at the desk and returned to the exhibition. Unfortunately, the painting that interested us the most, the famous Chandos portrait of Shakespeare, had been momentarily removed from the museum, but we visited the temporary exhibition entitled “The Self-Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary” and even managed to listen in on the guided tour.

It was now time for us to check in at our hostel. After an hour of lugging our bags around central London, having slightly underestimated the distance to the hostel, we finally sank into the welcoming couch of the lobby in St. Christopher’s Orient Espresso (yes, that was its name). After a packed lunch and a well-deserved nap, we headed out to eat our dinner at Fishcotheque, an eatery renowned for its (you guessed it) fish and chips. There we met up with Rachel’s sister Lauren, who works in the Law Courts of London. Also waiting for us was Frankie Cosgrave, once member of the Royal Shakespeare Company and now a teacher at the famous Method Studio. Frankie had visited us in 2005 to give us a wonderful workshop on Method Acting (a technique created by Konstantin Stanislavski and used by many Hollywood actors, among them Dustin Hoffman), so we were all very happy to meet up with her again and tell her about our project.

The most entertaining part of our day, however, was undoubtedly going to see the side-splittingly funny *The Comedy of Errors* at the Novello Theatre, a Royal

Shakespeare Company production. The actors were wonderful, especially the two Dromios, who had the audience in stitches ('Marry, Sir, she's the kitchen wench, and all grease; and I know not what use to put her to but to make a lamp of her, and run from her by her own light... no longer from head to foot than from hip to hip, like a globe. I could find out countries in her' [Act III, scene 2]). After the play, we decided to end the night in style at Lauren's house, albeit on a slightly less Shakespearian note - unless Shakespeare attended house parties.

Sunday, the 15th of January 2006

Our second day in London began with a visit to the Globe Theatre, of which Shakespeare was a shareholder, where most of his plays were performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men. However, the Globe as it stands in 2006 is actually a replica of Shakespeare's, which stood a few metres away. It was built using entirely the same materials and techniques as the Elizabethans'. We took a guided tour around the playhouse, and then had a look at the permanent exhibition. There were several entertaining interactive displays. For example, we were able to record ourselves acting out famous scenes from Shakespeare's plays, alongside the voices of actors from the RSC - very exciting!



Our minds buzzing, we then headed to Southwark Cathedral to attend Evensong and admire its memorial to Shakespeare: a statue of the poet, lying under a stained-glass window with quotes from his plays.

Finally, for the icing on the cake, we decided to stop by George's Inn, where Shakespeare reputedly used to enjoy a few pints of home-brewed ale with his fellow actors. Frankie Cosgrave joined us again and before we knew it, we were reciting Shakespeare's sonnets to an enraptured (and partly exasperated) audience. At one point, Frankie read out sonnet 22 to a hip-hop beat, while some of us accompanied her with an improvised rhythm, using tables and even our own bodies as percussion. By the end of the day, we were well and truly imbued with the spirit of Shakespeare.



Monday, the 16th of January 2006

Our third and final day in London was a free day. Some decided to visit the museums and sights, while some preferred to immerse themselves in the eclectic weirdness of Camden Town. However, we all agreed that when the time came to pack and catch the train to Gatwick, none of us wanted to go home.

This trip was a truly enlightening experience and I am sure that none of us will ever see Shakespeare in the same →

light again. Therefore, I encourage you all to come and attend our production, entitled ***Shakes-Sheared!***, a collage of several Shakespeare plays, set in the cut-throat music industry. We will be performing at Uni-Mail on the 10th, 11th and 13th of July. We look forward to seeing you there!



Very Important Post Scriptum: Barbe à Papa goes to Edinburgh

Barbe à Papa's next destination, scheduled for August of this year, is Scotland, and more specifically Edinburgh. Indeed, we are immensely proud to announce that we will not only be sightseeing - we will be performing in the world famous Edinburgh Fringe Festival! Our productions will take place from the 14th to the 19th of August, in a venue called Riddles Court (where the philosopher David Hume lived!). We hope that the results of our hard work will make both us and the English Department proud.

Finally, I would like to thank Rachel, our leader, for her amazing organisation and her dedication to this project - without her, none of this would have been possible.

Sarah-Jane Moloney

SHAKES-SHEARED!

Created by *RACHEL HOSEIN NISBET* for the Edinburgh Fringe 2006
Characters cropped from: *The Sonnets*; *Twelfth Night*; *Dream* and *Macbeth*
Are collaged into a comic mix of hands, feet, daggers, and lips.

Let Geneva University's English Department Ensemble:
BARBE À PAPA, draw the curtain and show you the picture:

GENEVA: 10th; 11th, and 13th of July
20h: Théâtre d'Uni-Mail, 40, bd du Pont-d'Arve, Room 180
Running time 60 mins: 5 CHF entry.

The play opens when at long last the group *Sweet Thief* is signed to a record label, and booked as a warm-up band for the charity concert: *Tunes for Trees*. But **Lady M**, the group's female vocalist, is concerned that they won't hit the big time without adequate media coverage. So her brother and fellow band member **W** volunteers to woo the event's main artist **Olivia**, as a publicity stunt. This idea does not win the support of W's partner, the group's keyboard player **Cesario**, ... well at least until he falls under the singer's charms.

A second, twisted idea for publicity occurs to Lady M when she discovers that her lover, Mr Lies, is having an affair with Hermia, the guitarist from Female Folk. She plans to murder the miscreant, frame Female Folk, and then act the part of the betrayed, and bereaved lover during the subsequent press coverage ... only even before Mr Lies is out of the picture, Hermia and Helena begin to take their musical relationship to another level.

Matters are further complicated by W's meddling ex, Titania. She is working at Tunes for Trees as a sound technician, and jealously hampers W's plans: kidnapping Cesario, and tricking Olivia's bodyguard Malvolio into believing that he is the sole object of the lady's passions.

So as the curtain call approaches, how in the world will *Sweet Thief* stage their bid for stardom?

To Control

by Conradin Schwarzenbach

Darkness took me for a ride,
Down in the valley, where the sky touches the earth,
A transparent shade cut through the foggy bridge,
Left a wake of sound in the silence.
In the ocean of nowhere, nothing matters.
Loneliness flows bluish through me,
As I breathe in cold night.
The moving sleep embraces my heart,
And it crawls around my eyes.
A wordless song breaks through to my ears,
Slowly stabs my emotions with a rusty sword.
Two bright rays throw shades in front of me,
Dead, but moved through speed,
Meander-less snakes reveal what darkness swallowed.
Control flows from my numb fingers.
All I leave behind is frozen dust,
One moon and its remains will live on in the silver light.
I can feel the haze of unseen movement around me,
Turn one more round on my lonely carousel,
Strive for the start of discovering happiness.
As I approach speed, I find myself left behind,
Two red fires and the darkness surrounds me.

Conradin Schwarzenbach

Summer is Gone

by Jean Delteil

This morning when I woke up,
Silver shells scattered in the sand were winking up,
Like a thousand shining eyes, at me,
Mirroring millions memories from the sea.
Heartlessly hoping, helplessly hovering
Nearby, she whispered she wished she wouldn't wait,
While we were watching afar, the wind weaving the waves.
Little lady lingering, losing love lamenting,
Sailing away a seagull on her shoulder,
Softly singing a song of sorrow:
Summer is gone, and with its leaving,
I am dying to be born.
Such a sad sounding melody.
Why should she shiver suddenly,
Guessing a ghastly ghost had gone, gliding,
Betraying the threat of her thoughts, drifting
Away from her dreams,
As her silk gown swished on the sand.

Jean Delteil

My Year at Boston University

By Yves Christen

BU is one of the many universities in the Boston area. In fact, Massachusetts has the densest concentration of universities in the US (about 50). Like most universities here, BU is a private institution, meaning that a board of trustees composed of private investors control the university. This situation creates, according to European standards, a peculiar relationship between student and university: on one hand it provides services and courses like a private company would, and the student chooses his courses like a customer would go shopping. On the other hand, it means that the students paying a lot of money (fees are as high as 30'000 dollars for a year, not including room and board, food, books, ...) expect the best service possible, and the service is generally set at higher standards than in Switzerland.

In fact, American universities often benefit from comfort that is unknown in Europe, with for example libraries open until midnight, some even 24 hours a day. Everything is made so that the student does not need to leave the campus to eat, sleep, study, or do sports.

BU consists of many colleges, the SMG (School of Management) and the College of Communication having the best reputation. As a Humanities student, I took courses at the College of Arts and Science in the winter semester and at the Graduate School of Arts and Science in the spring semester (note that they also have a summer semester). The existence of a graduate school is unique to the US, and consists of MA and PhD students

specializing in various fields. I could take classes at graduate level because I personally met the professors and explained my motivation for their courses. Courses at graduate levels are reserved to the more advanced students, those having a Bachelor's degree (4 years in the US). Admission can be selective and made on the basis of research papers.

From my experience, courses are demanding and time consuming (in terms of reading material), but they are all the more rewarding since the students actively participate and discussions are very much encouraged. As a student in Art history and English, I took in the winter semester courses on "Poetries and Theories in the 20th C.", another called "Metropolis" (urban studies on Istanbul, London, Paris and New York) and one on Boston Architecture.

In the spring semester I took the seminar "Shakespeare and/in History" (we read 10 plays plus critical material), another on "Laughter and Literature" (we read the play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Stern's *Tristram Shandy*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, two plays by Wilde and some Beckett), and an Art History seminar focusing on Rembrandt.

In most cases, grading is calculated between several types of work: two to four short papers, an oral report, as well as a final research paper. Participation in class always affects the grade, and missing class is not well regarded (attendance lists are common). I especially appreciated the small number of students per class, maximum 12, which made the atmosphere casual and conducive to discussion.

In this regard, the teacher-student relation is more casual than in my experience at Geneva, even if I must say that at the *Faculté des Lettres*, having fewer students per seminar than other faculties, each student had the possibility to have a personal contact with his professor(s).

At the academic level, I am very enthusiastic about my experience: I read a lot, I learned a lot, I studied a lot, but I also managed to spare some time for a decent social life. I met American students with whom I could discuss other issues.

On the other hand, I found the general atmosphere at BU quite

conservative and mainstream (not only in the way people dress). Political issues were rarely discussed, and if so, were soon dismissed for more entertaining and superficial discussions. Students do not question authority, neither their academic or social system. Rebellion is well hidden and the military presence on campus has always been a strange view to me. Despite a high degree of indifference to the state of the world “out there” (read: outside the US), I benefited as much as possible from my year here.

Yves Christen

Night Sky

by Conradin Schwarzenbach

Stardust and storm on the moon,
Where the night lies they all used to swoon,
Of silver haze and golden stars,
Peaceful wars, fought with sleeping swords,
The night cut by a sparkling crescent,
From its wound the stars silently descend,
Into the silent ocean of darkness,
Together in loneliness, filling its emptiness,
Captured in their own shining light,
The beauty of each one, unique in their sight,
All leading towards the moon, and old mirror.
Dangling from the sky, a broken picture,
A dark curtain seems to hang from the sickle.
Its ways towards the horizon are fickle,
Unpredictable like a candle in a storm,
Swallowing shapes like a blurry dream.
So shall it be the creation of night,
Silently bleeding sparkles of light,
Reached out so many times, tried to touch eternity,
Tried to fly and fell into tragedy.
How many dreams found there an illusion,
How many thoughts the reason for their confusion?
Every star a memory, told by countless words,
We all see, but only the night understands.
The darkness is so wise and full of sound,
The moon closes my eyes, leads me into his land.

Conradin Schwarzenbach

Hamlet by Ambroise Thomas

by Karen Klein

NB: The Comparative Literature section offered a project, led by Mme Pennone, which culminated in seeing the dress rehearsal of *Hamlet* at the Grand Théâtre.

Let me first say that I am no expert on opera, nowhere near it, in fact. My interest was in seeing a version of *Hamlet*. This is therefore no critical review of a performance at the Grand Théâtre, but rather a few personal impressions ...

It's not Shakespeare, I was told beforehand. Luckily. My horizon of expectations was hence adequately adapted.

"Ô vin, dissipe la tristesse / Qui pèse sur mon cœur! / A moi les rêves de l'ivresse / Et le rire moqueur! / Ô liqueur enchanteresse! / Verse l'ivresse / Et l'oubli dans mon cœur!" – Now those are a few lines you might expect from the gravediggers. They also sing "La vie est dans le vin" or something similar, but the lines above are actually something of Hamlet's leitmotif in the first half of the opera. Drunkenness substitutes madness. Now I didn't think that that would work, but it somehow does.

Let me give you the ending first, which presents the major differences when compared to Shakespeare: not only did we have the rare pleasure of seeing Polonius mourn at Ophelia's grave (Laertes didn't seem particularly touched), but the ghost decided to stop by for a surprise visit. A *deus ex machina* (appearing to everyone, not just to Hamlet), he resolved things at the end, holding Claudius by the shoulders, so that Hamlet could finally stab him, sending Gertrude off to the convent and announcing that Hamlet

was to be king, whether he liked it or not – the last lines thus being:

LE SPECTRE	Le crime est expié! Le cloître attend ta mère!
LE ROI	Je meurs maudit!
LA REINE	Ô Dieu, pardonne-moi!
LE SPECTRE	Vis pour ton peuple, Hamlet! C'est Dieu qui te fait Roi!
HAMLET	Mon âme est dans la tombe, hélas! Et je suis Roi!
TOUS	Vive Hamlet! vive Hamlet! Vive notre Roi!

"Long live our king!" was of course appropriate for the Grand Opéra of 19th-century France. But, hold on, the Ghost (who, by the way was in rather pagan attire – bare-chested and with a toga-like gown) says "C'est Dieu qui te fait Roi" – thus equalling himself with God. But then, he is a former king, and coming back from the grave, possibly as a messenger. And poor, poor Hamlet, although his soul is in the grave (presumably with Ophelia, whom he really does love, no doubts there), he unfortunately has to be king – alas!

It is nice to see a real love scene between Hamlet and Ophelia for once – both kneeling, cheek to cheek, or he resting his head on her knees, both singing away.

That is my main problem with opera – I just can't seem to take these people seriously, when I want to see their acting, and their face is all scrunched up singing "OOOOOOHHHHH!", mouth wide open. Although I left my horizon of expectations about Shakespeare's *Hamlet* at home, I forgot to leave my theatre-formed mind there as well. Opera is obviously not theatre, and it doesn't aim to be.

There were a few direct Shakespearean quotes: "Frailty thy name is woman" could be heard, something like "Ô femme, ton nom est inconstance"

(whereupon Ophelia entered right on cue). Also present was Hamlet's poem to Ophelia, ending "Ne doutez pas de mon amour," which he actually sang to her, repeatedly. "Être ou ne pas être, ô, mysère" (or was it "ô mystère"?!) was also repeated for the pleasure of the spectator.

Ophelia's mad scene was announced as something special. And just before, my neighbour (who knew the opera) announced: "And now she's going to auto-mutilate herself going 'lalalalala.'" This was, in fact, quite an accurate description of the events. White dress (much scantier than the high-cut one she had been wearing so far), red blood à *volonté*, you imagine the rest ... She gathered and scattered flowers while she seemed to imitate bird songs. The scene was quite nicely presented visually, with numerous flower bouquets and a chandelier hanging low over the ground. What was however typically opera, was that once Ophelia had died - "Je meurs!" - and lay on the ground, the audience clapped wildly, shouting "Bravo!"; she then proceeded to get up, walk around and sing some more, dying (again) downstage.

Some other interesting instances are that Ophelia comes up with the idea of going into a nunnery all by herself, before Hamlet mentions it to her - he does so, at a later point: "Allez dans un cloître, Ophélie! Allez Ophélie!" But as soon as she sees that he does not (seem to) love her anymore, she decides (in an analogy which reminds me a bit of a line in *Play it again, Sam* - "If I can't have you the next best thing is God.") to become a nun.

Furthermore, when Hamlet shows his mother the two pictures of her former and present husband, he has two nearly life-size portraits at hand. He actually rips apart the one which fails to please him.

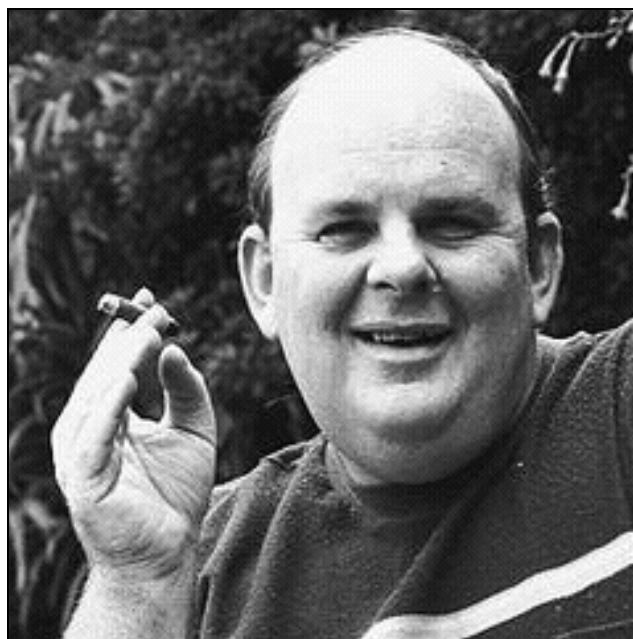
On the whole, the production was rather impressive. Since we had had the advantage of having met some of the main actors beforehand, I was able to identify more with the characters on stage. Others (more experienced than me in the field) told me that Ophelia's singing was especially impressive and that she upstaged Hamlet, but for me Hamlet remained most memorable - a nice guy.

Kareen Klein



Poetry Reading

On May 13, Australian poet Les Murray read his poetry in B106 (the stained-glass room). Invited by Martin Leer, Les treated the audience to poems spanning his 40-year career and answered questions. Asked about his writing process, he described getting a poem down on paper as a matter of timing. Since a poem begins to be written in his head first, the trick is to catch it at just the right moment: when it is no longer “chaotic” but has not begun to get stale. Like a good essay, a poem may have to be rewritten several times before it “lifts off” (as Les puts it). Here is an example of an early poem which soars off the page:



QUINTETS FOR ROBERT MORLEY

Is it possible that hyper-
ventilating up Parnassus
I have neglected to pay tribute
to the Stone Age aristocracy?
I refer to the fat.

We were probably the earliest
civilized, and civilizing, humans,
the first to win the leisure,
sweet boredom, life-enhancing sprawl
that require style.

Tribesfolk spared us and cared for us
for good reasons. Our reasons.
As age's counterfeits, forerunners of the city,
we survived, and multiplied. Out of self-defence
we invented the Self.

It's likely we also invented some of love,
much of fertility (see the Willensdorf Venus)
parts of theology (divine feasting, Unmoved Movers)
likewise complexity, stateliness, the ox-cart
and self-deprecation.

Not that the lists of pugnacity are bare
of stout fellows. Ask a Sumo.
Warriors taunt us still, and fear us:
in heroic war, we are apt to be the specialists
and the generals.

But we do better in peacetime. For ourselves
we would spare the earth. We were the first moderns
after all, being like the Common Man
disqualified from tragedy. Accessible to shame, though,
subtler than the tall,

we make reasonable rulers.
Never trust a lean meritocracy
nor the leader who has been lean;
only the lifelong big have the knack of wedding
greatness with balance.

Never wholly trust the fat man
who lurks in the lean achiever
and in the defeated, yearning to get out.
He has not been through our initiations,
he lacks the light feet.

Our having life abundantly
is equivocal, Robert, in hot climates
where the hungry watch us. I lack the light step then too.
How many of us, I wonder, walk those streets
in terrible disguise?

So much climbing, on a spherical world;
had Newton not been a mere beginner at gravity
he might have asked how the apple got up there
in the first place. And so might have discerned
an ampler physics.

Many thanks to Les Murray for permission to print this.

Somewhere Out There

by Conradin Schwarzenbach

Somewhere out there, beyond the horizon,
Where the skies fade into ocean, and the stars catch their own reflection,
Stands a lighthouse, a tower of red-white-red-white rings;
The night running down on its walls every time after the bright knife cuts the black;
The waterfall of darkness is divided by nothing but a veil,
Running down the rings after having climbed the metal railing, being her partner.
The night breath softly plays with it, finds its way along fabric, crawls over the railing,
Higher and higher, touches soft silver hair, softly holds on, lets go.
It plays, watches the hair slowly float through night, time stands still,
Then it finds a bed in her pale skin; only for a heartbeat; the wind repeats.
Constantly, soft hair goes to bed, is awakened again, floats back to a lonely white expression.
In the night, she does seem a ghost, and the moon soaks her in silver, paints her face with
Unfelt makeup.

The lighthouse cuts the dark, her eyes and the wandering spot of light are lovers,
Surrounded by darkness.
She is searching, searching for connection, all alone, disconnected by life.
Sometimes, she wonders when she woke up at the stairs of red and white.
Someone must have brought her here, left.
The stars dance with waves, she feels white touching her skin, as the wind holds on, lets go.
Repetition surrounds her; Timeless cycles.

Tired wind finds her standing on top of red and white. Tired from a long journey across
Water, a sailor without ship. Brought her a present of waves that crash at her feet.
She is a lonely princess.
Doesn't mean to ignore the given, it is just not as interhuman connection. She hears effort at
Her feet, where water shatters at cliffs, trying to catch her recognition.
She is used to it, no longer special; what desperate effort. The ways of time are not her fault.
Waves reach out to her, raging in addiction to attention.
All her heart cries for is that they would carry connection to her,
The missing piece of relationship.

She senses her loss, as she dances under the moon, this princess of night-tide.
The breathing repetition embraces her, wind repeats, night flows through her.
Silver tear descends from high above, kisses her cheek, softly passes, leaves her and unites
With night and waves.

Somewhere a spot of light catches, meets a tired sailor.
Adventure has taken a Young far from home.
Now he is lost in the oceans, the light a last glimpse of hope.
Wind and waves pull toward princess. In serving forget the fragile.

Somewhere wood disconnects,
Somewhere a Hopeful falls overboard,
Somewhere effort became destructive,
Somewhere breathing is drowned.

(Somewhere a corpse is carried by the ruins of human creation.)

All repeats, she is all alone. The wind and waves will not tell. She dances, ignorant.
Suddenly sleep takes her away, and silver sings a lullaby.
She will never be meant to know.

Interview with Martin Leer

by Rado Minchev

RM: *How did you get into literature?*

ML: Something grew in me very early in life. In a sense that I felt I could combine all the things I was interested in. It was a way that languages, history, art and science could be combined together. My major was English. I was mostly interested in Comparative Literature, but in those days in Copenhagen it seemed totally bogged down in Marxist analyses of the television news as high bourgeois social democratic ideology (I wonder what they would make of the news now?) but English left an opening for me. I had to leave Denmark.

RM: *How did you get interested in postcolonial studies?*

ML: It came from my studies in Denmark, where I ended up taking courses in the things I thought I would avoid. The most interesting teaching was in Australian, American and Medieval literatures and also Irish and modern poetry. I continued with that and I was offered a scholarship to go to Australia. That's why I ended up in Brisbane which turned out to be very interesting. In the 1980s Brisbane was the best place for studying Australian literature, and it was one of the places where postcolonial studies actually started. One of the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, Helen Tiffin, was teaching in Brisbane, and she brought all the leading figures there. But when I went back to Copenhagen with a Ph.D. in Australian literature, I taught everything else from Beowulf to Bollywood but not Australian studies. Too many of my colleagues were already teaching in that field.



My interest in Bollywood came much later. It began as kind of a protest. American studies in Copenhagen had begun to concentrate on teaching Hollywood as a popularity contest. Bollywood was more interesting; more complicated and engaging in that way. The comparison with Hollywood already makes it more challenging. You can never finish with it. Hollywood is five generations that are part of us all (the Danish director Lars von Trier says it's something like 50% of all our minds). Bollywood is a different civilization made partly accessible and is able to give many more different directions, many different ways of thinking. And this is what I actually like in teaching ... to allow for difference.

Through exploring things for themselves, students become individuals, "critical subjects" as we say today about Kant's and Humboldt's university, which is still the most radical we have known. That's what I encountered at university, and I want other people to be able to do the same, to have that freedom, but you have to know how to use it . . .

Media and literature coexist. You can't understand contemporary

literature without understanding media. Contemporary novels are very concerned with the things novels can do which films can't. There is a way in which they react together. Students nowadays have a much easier access to film than to difficult literature, which is what I really want to teach, since it has nowhere to go if it is not taught at university, and it is still where humanity shows itself at its most complex. When you teach postcolonial literatures and when students don't know what those places look like, films make a great difference because they show what those places look like. And so in comparison, the literature as well becomes visualized.

My field of research is literature and geography. How Australia fits into the world? My Ph.D. was a work on a certain phase of postcolonial culture, where the question of geography becomes central. "Where is here?" as the Canadians say. My research – and my teaching – begin in that same kind of wonder, and in full immersion, with learning how to read cultures without understanding them.

RM: *What are your academic projects?*

ML: I am trying to finish several unfinished books. The project overall is called "Literary Geography." I am certainly working on a book called *Literary Cartography*. And then there are books on Canada, the Caribbean and India. The book on India is very much on railways. One part of geography I am interested in is roads and railways. I began a study of roads in literature in the work of William Faulkner and in American culture, where it comes out in film as well with the so-called "road movie." In Indian culture, the great topos, however, seems to be the railway, originally constructed by the British Raj and so they have an important historical dimension. Even contemporary

novelists like Amitav Ghosh concentrate on trains, though up to a point in the movies they don't seem to travel in trains anymore. They have cars, like the Americans. To me roads are very exotic, because I don't drive.

RM: *What are the differences between teaching in Geneva and Copenhagen?*

ML: The biggest difference I found is that you are much better behaved than the Danish students. I have taught in Denmark, Australia, Italy and Greenland. How do you compare with them? This is Geneva, not Switzerland, which makes it very different. Denmark is totally monocultural, except for those who are "not Danish." Here, where everybody is multicultural I don't have any prejudices to break. And I am actually finding it quite hard to adjust to this in my teaching. Australia may appear to be closer, because it is also multicultural, but still it is different because it is not European. Australian students would pretend some kind of innocence, which students here don't. This is of course a fairly conservative culture, but in some ways conservatism seems to be an advantage here rather than disadvantage. There is a big difference. Danish universities have come to be seen as sausage factories churning out standardized products . . . That's not present here yet. You can still reach individuals and develop them into critical subjects in the good old Humboldtian way. In Denmark students seem no longer to be allowed to become interested in subjects or in becoming critical, which may make you unfit for employment. On the other hand, there is more distance between students and teachers here. But that may be because I haven't tuned to the right wavelengths – or because I am growing older.

Rado Minchev

Alumni Column

by Agnieszka Soltysik



Giuseppe Bianco was a student in the English Department from 1990 to 1994, where he founded the newsletter you are currently reading. He now works as a filmmaker in Rome.

What have you been doing since you finished your licence?

I worked as a substitute English teacher in Geneva for two years. In 1997/98, I had the opportunity to go to Cornell University for one year as a non-degree graduate student, thanks to an exchange program Cornell had with the University of Geneva: there I started filmmaking. Then I went back to Geneva and alternated filmmaking and teaching. In 2000, I left for Rome where I went to film school for one year, and then stayed on.

What did you do your mémoire on?

On Oliviero Toscani's advertising campaign for "United Colors of Benetton." No one in the Art History Department wanted to approve the project, so Prof. Wlad Godzich supervised the mémoire.

How useful was your English study to your current work?

The tools I acquired are essential, they go much beyond the study of literature and probably shaped not only the way I think and write, but also the way I edit my footage.

What do you remember most fondly from the English department?

Some seminars and, in general, the open mindedness which other departments totally lacked (I also studied art history...)

What did you appreciate least?

Exams, which I tended to consider useless and artificial "exercices de style."

How did you come to start the newsletter and what were your first newsletter articles about?

Communication, to promote the circulation of ideas within the department: let people know what other people were working on, concerned about and interested in. I think the first newsletter was mainly about a new program called "Reading otherwise," which represented the introduction of "Women's/Gender Studies" in the department.

When did you know you wanted to make films?

When I went to Cornell, I was supposed to work on a project of comparison between European and American cinema. There, I signed up as an auditor for a course called "introduction to 16 millimeters," to add a bit of practice to the theory. By the end of the second meeting, and once I was accepted as a full participant, I realised filmmaking summed up basically everything I was interested in.

What are your favorite recent films?

Brokeback Mountain, Il Caimano (last film by Nanni Moretti selected at Cannes), most HBO t.v. series.

What were your favorite courses in the English department?

I was always more interested in the second half of the 20th century, comparative literature and cultural studies.

This interview was conducted by e-mail.

Agnieszka Soltysik

NOTED is the newsletter of the English Department at the University of Geneva. We publish anything of interest to or by our students and staff. The deadline for the next contribution is November 30th, 2006. You can send your reviews, interviews, musings, fictions, photos, cartoons or drawings to:

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