

# The Chronicle



*A Newsletter for the Department of English and Foreign Languages at Texas Southern University/December 2005*

"Do you know," Peter asked, "why swallows build in the eaves of houses? It is to listen to the stories." James M. Barrie, Peter Pan

## **McCleary Symposium Announces THE BLUES II for 2006**

The 8<sup>th</sup> Annual J. Marie McCleary Interdisciplinary Symposium at Texas Southern University seeks papers for its interdisciplinary conference on the theme "The Blues II." The Department encourages interdisciplinary approaches and welcome proposals that consider any facet of this topic. In addition to formal papers, the Department seeks proposals for art displays, performances in music and drama, panels, group discussions, short seminars, or workshops. The two-day program will take place March 30-31, 2006.

The notion of the Blues lies at the heart of one aspect in how we mediate the world and how it is mediated to us. The nexus of the Blues and the world is ripe for discussion, dissection, and deconstruction. How do the words and images of the Blues construct reality? How has our relationship to words and images of the Blues changed over time? To what extent does writing about the Blues transform its images? What can multi-media communication address that other forms of communication cannot? How can words and images convey song, dance, theatrical performance, and religious ritual?

Possible topics for the McCleary Symposium on Blues II include:

Performing through Word and Image

The Blues in Film

Multi-Media Communication: Seeing, Hearing, Reading

Ritual – Text – Memory

Articulating the Ineffable

Documents, Documentation, Documentary

The Blues in Popular Culture

Exhibitions/Performance

The Aural, Visual, and Everyday Life

The Ideology of the Image

Iconography and Iconoclasm: Religious, Historical,  
and Political Reactions to Word, Sound, and Image

Cultural Icons, Cultural Memory

The deadline for proposals is February 15, 2006. E-mail abstracts of no more than 200 words to Dr. Shirley Walker Moore, at [moore\\_sw@tsu.edu](mailto:moore_sw@tsu.edu).

## **Department Members Published in *Encyclopedia of Multiethnic American Literature***

A comprehensive encyclopedia targeting the diversity of ethnic backgrounds in American literature, and including the writings of four Department members, has been recently published by Greenwood Press. The *Encyclopedia of Multiethnic American Literature* covers 2,692 pages in five volumes. Professor Michael Sollars wrote entries on Claude McKay, Eugene, O'Neill, Susan Sontag, Gerald Stern, and Irish American Drama. Professor Arbolina Jennings wrote entries on Enid Dame, Elizabeth Stern, and Helen Yglesias. Professor Rita Saylor completed an entry on Richard Howard, and Professor Donna Kimble-Kilgore wrote a contribution on William Pillin.

The Greenwood *Encyclopedia of Multiethnic American Literature* is edited by Emmanuel S. Nelson, a professor of English at the State University of New York, College at Cortland. While other works cover individual ethnic literary traditions, this massive encyclopedia is the first to offer a comprehensive introduction to the diverse range of ethnic American writers. Included are more than 1100 alphabetically arranged entries by more than 300 scholars. While most of the entries are on individual writers, others cover seminal works, ethnic stereotypes, literary genres, the writings of particular ethnic groups, places that are prominent in ethnic histories, major historical events, key pieces of legislation affecting ethnic populations, and various other topics that form the social context surrounding multiethnic American literature.

Copies of the encyclopedia are available for review in Dr. Sollars' office.

## **Professor Samples Named New Associate**

Dr. Ronald C. Samples, a long-time and distinguished professor in the Department of English and Foreign Languages, has been promoted to Associate Professor. Congratulations!

## **New Members Welcomed In the Department**

Dr. Alexis Brooks de Vita joins the Department as an Associate Professor. She holds a B.A. in Comparative Literature, Summa Cum Laude, from the University of Vermont, and an M.A. and Ph.D., from University of Colorado-Boulder in Comparative Literature both in Comparative Literature in English, French, Italian, Russian, and Spanish. She formed a unique and independently designed major with a thesis entitled "Love, Loss, and Betrayal in the Turn-of-the-Century European Novel." Professor de Vita's doctoral dissertation is entitled "Mythical Symbols and Historico-cultural Relevance in African and Diaspora Women's Literatures. Alexis Brooks de Vita is the recipient of an Academic Achievement Award in 1989 and a Ford Foundation Fellowship.

Prof. Brooks de Vita has taught introductory and upper division women's studies, English composition, French, Italian, and Spanish at Pueblo Community College, the University of Colorado at Boulder, the University of Southern Colorado (now Colorado State-Pueblo), and St. Mary's College, University of Notre Dame. Her specialties include designing and teaching of introductory and upper division African/Diaspora, African American, and Women's Literary and Cultural Studies classes.

Her publications include literary and cultural analysis is *Mythatypes: Signatures and Signs of African/Diaspora and Black Goddesses*, published by Greenwood in 2000. Dr. de Vita has published two dozen essays on English, Classical, African/Diaspora, and African American literary and cultural studies in *English Language Notes* and *The Griot*. She is the book review editor and review board member of *The Griot*, biannual journal of the Southern Conference on African American Studies, Inc.

The Department would like to extend a warm and hearty welcome to Dr. Michael Zeitler who joins the Department as Assistant Professor. Dr. Zeitler first visited TSU when he presented a paper on Ralph Ellison at the McCleary Symposium last March. He and his wife fell in love with the campus and Houston, and moved here. He comes here by way of California, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. He holds a B.A. in Psychology and Literature from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and a M.A. and Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. He has seven years teaching experience at Morgan State University, and one year at Cheyney University (the nation's oldest HBCU, founded by Quakers in 1837), located just west of Philadelphia. His major areas of academic interest include 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century British studies, African-American literature and culture, and anthropology. He is currently working on a book-length study of Thomas Hardy and Victorian Anthropology. Outside of the library, his interests range from natural history to music (traditional folk and blues guitar), and tennis (looking for partners). His wife, Nancy, is an urban educator (who also likes to quilt), and his three children are blessedly diverse in their interests. Chris, a personal trainer and surfer, was featured in the recent surf movie *Sol Sirens*, and Katherine is a Dominican Sister teaching in Nashville, and Dory is a first year student in acting at Emerson College in Boston.

## **Monthly Seminars Offer Sound Instruction**

The Monthly Seminars in Scholarship and Pedagogy during the fall semester 2005 have featured four excellent presentations, all by faculty members of the Department of English and Foreign

Languages. The first of the fall semester sessions was held October 4 and featured scholarly presentations by Dr. Haiging Sun, who read a paper on "For and Against Love in Two Crime Mysteries," and Dr. Michael Zeitler, who spoke on "Representations of Culture: Thomas Hardy's Wessex and Victorian Anthropology."

The second session of the Department's Monthly Seminar, scheduled for November 9, focused on some practical applications of research and pedagogy. Dr. Alexis Brooks de Vita gave a very informative lecture on "Writing Book Reviews for Publication," and Arbolina Jennings read a paper which serves as a case study on the pilot for ENG 231 as an e-learning course, "Computer Applications in World Literature Classrooms."

Dr. Ron Samples chairs the Monthly Seminar program, which is sponsored by Lambda Iota Tau under the direction of Dr. Rhonda Saldivar and the Minerva Literary Association under the direction of co-sponsors Drs. Shirley Walker Moore and Ron C. Samples.

## **Who's Who In the Department**

Professor Iva Woods and Professor Angela Bisong have been honored once again by being included in the ninth edition of *Who's Who Among America's Teachers* in 2005. This multiple-edition achievement brings continued honor to their families and to TSU. This award recognizes the outstanding teaching accomplishments of Professors Woods and Bisong as "The Best Teachers in America Selected by the Best Students."

Professor Angela Bisong has been recently appointed as a biographical candidate to represent Houston, TX, in the *Empire Who's Who Among Executive and Professional Women in Education*. Professor Bisong's experiences in teaching will be noted in the special directory of professional women.

## **Conferences, Presentations, Publications**

Dr. Michael Zeitler presented the paper "Sacred Spaces: Anthropological Ritual and Symbolic Representation in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*" at the Annual Victorian Interdisciplinary Studies Association of the Western United States, Albuquerque, NM, October 27, 2005. ♦ Dr. Zeitler will present his research on "A Survival from the Custom of Capture and Purchase: The Presence of the Past in *Jude the Obscure*" at the 2006 CTE annual meeting in March in Corpus Christi. ♦ Dr. Zeitler has also been informed that his work on "Wessex Past and Present: Primitive Rituals and Victorian Survivals in Hardy's *The Return of the Native*" will be published soon in *Interactions*. 14.2 (2005).

Professor Arbolina L. Jennings presented a paper on "Computer Applications in World Literature Classes: Re-designing Literary Cyber Spaces for Effective E-Learning at Texas Southern University" at the South Central Modern Language Association, Sixty-Second Annual Meeting, October 27-29, 2005, at the Hyatt Regency, Houston, Texas.

Dr. Haiqing Sun will present a paper at the 2005 MLA Convention in Washington D.C., on Dec. 29, 2005. Her paper, "The Globalization of the New Genre Films," involves a comparative study of the detective genre and Kunfu genres.

Student Camilo Antonio Lane in Professor Miryan Boles' Spanish class gave salsa and meringue lessons in the fall semester as a part of Spanish and Cultural awareness.

## **E-Learning Title III Grants in the Department**

Dr. Rita Saylor and a team of major course instructors in the English Department have received Title III grant support to develop online resources for ENG 432, the English Capstone course. The committee is working on guidelines, materials, and course content, particularly that which can be archived and presented online. Dr. Saylor presented the work in progress to the University Instructional Technology Committee in November 2005. Dr. Richard Pitre, the head of the University IT committee, commended Sr. Saylor on the work she and other instructors have accomplished for this course and suggested that the next time ENG 432 is offered, the course might be offered in an electronic classroom so that the course presentations might be videotaped and become a part of an online course research center.

Arbolina L. Jennings, College of Liberal Arts and Behavioral Sciences, working with Kimberley Easley of the Graduate School and Dr. J. Jonathan Lewis of the College of Science and Technology, has completed work on a second E-Learning Grant to research and identify the subjects, courses, topics, and methods most suitable for effective electronic delivery at Texas Southern University. The final report was presented to Dr. Richard Pitre, Associate Provost at TSU, in December 2005. Professor Jennings serves as the College of Liberal Arts and Behavioral Sciences representative on the University Instructional Technology Committee.

## **This Retreat Proves To Be a Real Treat**

Drs. Rita Saylor, Thorpe Butler, and Ron Samples of the Department's Capstone Seminar committee devoted five days in early August to the consideration of a syllabus for English 432, the required capstone seminar to be offered during the fall semester of this year and every year following. Their "drudgery" was relieved considerably by the Santa Fe, NM site of the retreat, which afforded ample opportunities for day trips to Taos, the Taos Pueblo Indian reservation, the historic chapel at Abiquiu, the New Mexico homesteads of D. H. Lawrence and Georgia O'Keefe, and Ghost Ranch, O'Keefe's favorite meditation retreat, all framed and punctuated by desert sunrises, patio brunches, and mountain hikes.

## **Poet's Corner**

*A Verse, a Verse,*

*My Kingdom for a Verse*

The Department held its second annual Poetry Day on October 14, 2005. The program featured both traditional poetry readings and performances in Hip-Hop Blues. There were readings by the NuRoots Creative Writers and enthusiastic participation from students and faculty. Co-Chairs included Professors Donna Kilgore-Kimble and Michon Benson. Dr. Michael Sollars served as the event coordinator. Professor Iva Woods was responsible for the graphic displays to promote the program.

## ***Returning Poet Laureate, An Encore Performance***

The Department is proud to announce that Dr. John B. Sapp has been named Poet Laureate at TSU for the second consecutive time, the upcoming 2005-2006 school year. Dr. Sapp served in the same capacity as the titled Person of Letters this past year. As Poet Laureate, Dr. Sapp represents the Department at many functions such as Poetry Day and the McCleary Symposium. Dr. Sapp is a distinguished writer and professor and chair of the Chemistry Department.

## **Writing and Publishing Opportunities**

The editor of *Callaloo* invites submissions of formal articles, informal essays, and other kinds of texts (including visual and creative works) about the late playwright August Wilson. Selected original works will be published in a special issue of the journal devoted to the author. Each manuscript should be postmarked no later than Monday, July 17, 2006, to:

The Editor

CALLALOO

Department of English

Texas A&M University

College Station, TX 77843-4227

Electronic submissions may be sent to *Callaloo* at [tamu.edu](http://tamu.edu) with the heading August Wilson Manuscript before the aforementioned deadline.

This special issue of *Callaloo* is designed to explore the art and ideas of August Wilson and to celebrate his achievements as an American artist. *Callaloo* is published by the Department of English at Texas A&M University.

## ***Africa Literary Journal, ALJ. 'Re-Imagining African Literature'***

IRCALC editors invite papers for the 2006 edition of *Africa Literary Journal, ALJ*, on *Re-Imagining African Literature*. This 2006 edition, which follows the 2003 theme edited by Charles Smith, is expected to complement the scholarly essays that have appeared in that volume. The ALJ is a joint project of the International Research Confederacy on African Literature and Culture (IRCALC) and Progeny [Africa Research] International of Nigeria for debate, research and exchange on the growing landscape of African literature and cultural expressions with particular emphasis on new writings and emerging literary trends [Please visit their website: [www.africaresearch.us](http://www.africaresearch.us) for update on new writings from Africa]. The ALJ 2006 edition will also feature review and preview articles on published materials in African literature and culture, in addition to submissions aimed at propagating information about conferences on literature and culture of African and Diaspora. Please direct all submissions or inquiries about submissions by email at [ircalc\\_nnp@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ircalc_nnp@yahoo.co.uk) or through the Africa Research website: [www.africaresearch.us](http://www.africaresearch.us)

## ***Faculty MASTER Courses on BlackBoard***

Instructors throughout the University have availed themselves of a wonderfully useful Blackboard feature which is the development of MASTER COUSES. In the English and Foreign

Languages Department, Master Courses on Blackboard have been created for the faculty in each of the following multi-section offerings: ENG 131, ENG 132, ENG 230, ENG 231, and for the Capstone Course ENG 432. Instructors are the users of these courses and are able to post documents and materials on the MASTER course as well as copy from the MASTER course to their Bb section sites. Master Courses are not semester-specific and thus are ideal for keeping and sharing common syllabi as well as for archiving lessons and tutorials. Master Courses are also useful for maintaining an on-going dialogue about content and pedagogy through the Discussion Boards.

Master courses will work especially well in Spanish and French courses, since Blackboard supports those languages, and the Blackboard Course Management site is available totally in Spanish or French. In addition, audio-visual materials, which may be easily uploaded to Blackboard, are especially suitable for language training. Publishers are increasingly making course cartridges available with their textbooks. These cartridges may be placed on individual course web sites or in a Master Lab course, which would be accessible to instructors. A variety of review materials in the language lab can be placed in a Bb LAB TUTORIAL course, which would be a self-paced lab experience for learners of the foreign language.

The tutorials and tests in the Minnie T. Metters Writing Clinic are now available through a Bb course site. The MTMWriting Clinic is under the direction of Professor Michon Benson. Once a student enrolls in the Writing Clinic in person, he or she is able to work on assignments through the internet from any location. These endeavors are first steps toward enriched course content and expanded learning opportunities for the student.

If you would like to peek into a fully developed online course on Blackboard, you may use the **observer** login and the **observer** password.

## The Belize Connection

*During the summer of 2005 Professor Iva Woods and Quinn Shelton visited Belize not only as tourists but as searchers of more than trinkets and familiar trails. Their latest travel into Central America began as any of their previous excursion into a brave but strange world, but soon their sojourn turned from the planned to the unplanned. This modern odyssey, beginning as a wandering search for a mysterious native poet, ended with the discovery of an unexpected human connection between the visitors and a local family. Here is Iva Woods' story.*

Belize City, Belize, formerly British Honduras, is located in Central America on the Caribbean Sea, bordered by Mexico to the north and Guatemala to the west and south. While the country is multi-cultural, the majority of its population is Creole, the result of intermarriages between European settlers and freed slaves. Belize is two hours away from Miami or Houston by air and is a popular cruise ship port. It offers many natural wonders such as tropical rain forests and marine life, as well as its captivating Mayan history, archaeological sites, and historic buildings. Its most fascinating resource and outstanding asset, however, are its people. I find the Belizeans friendly but not pushy. They are quick to greet their visitors with warm smiles, not in order to persuade visitors to buy their wares, but to express their genuine politeness. Like most natives who take pride in their homeland, they are eager to answer questions and to show off their

city's treasures. While the general population is poor, their poverty is very much overshadowed by their dignity, their astonishing comeliness, and their orderliness. These are evidenced, in part, by the methodical hanging of clean laundry on clothes lines strung over unkempt yards, the sometimes undefined lines of property, the indication of no indoor plumbing, the makeshift houses thrown together with scrap materials, and, despite all this, the well-groomed, uniformly dressed children seen going to and from school. These are the dichotomous characteristics of Belize City that deeply impressed me and compelled me to learn more about its citizens.

One sure method of probing the soul of a people is to read their poetry. Knowing this, I grabbed the book *Reality and Beyond* by Margaret Arana, just before taking the second-to-last tender back to my ship. Having read her poems, I became committed to meeting the author and discussing her work with her on my next trip to Belize City. I had not expected to discover such a vast treasure between the pages of a little book. The following excerpt from her text exemplifies and supports my beliefs about her country and countrymen:

#### Ghetto Peace

The echoing sound  
Of leaking faucets  
The stench of leftovers  
In the gutters  
And the patter  
Of little children  
With bare feet  
Running through the alley  
Playing skip  
Saying rhymes  
Clapping their hands  
In unison

Though unfortunate  
It seems  
To them  
There is no greater world  
No enemy  
No hate  
No war  
Just friendship  
Love  
And peace  
Sweet PEACE



Margaret Arana

In a side note she says, "If adults lived like children, peace would govern and love would rule the world." At first glance, her readers may tend to critique the grammar in a few of her poems. However, on the second pass the sheer beauty of the language akin to this region becomes evident.

It was a year later, in August of 2004, that I arrived in Belize for the second time. This time instead of booking shore excursions, I decided to spend my time walking through the little commercial area, not the air conditioned buildings along the waterfront, but a type of flea market that ran along a dusty side street not far from the dock. There I met Carol, a woman whose livelihood was braiding tourists' hair—not a very lucrative business, but at age 34 she supported her eight children by this means. We talked for a while. I met her new baby, Clifton, and her oldest, 17-year old Marvin. As we talked, I revealed to her my mission to find the author of the book of poems that I had purchased on my previous trip. She did not know the writer Margaret Arana, but right away my mission became her pursuit as she began a tenacious inquiry into the whereabouts of my newfound poet. She left Marvin in charge of her shop, placed Clifton on her hip, hailed a cab (warning the driver on pain of death that he should not inflate the fare), and gave Quinn and me a personally guided tour that included a trip to the city's recently established museum. There we stopped for a late lunch. The first stage of this odyssey finally landed us at Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital Authority where Carol had discovered that Margaret was employed as a registered nurse. Margaret was able to leave her ward, Infectious Diseases, and spend approximately five minutes with us. She was delighted and appeared humbled by my appreciation of her work. I felt rewarded for having had the opportunity to discuss with her, though briefly, her artistry and to get my copies of her book autographed.

That was the first and the last time I saw Margaret; however, I have seen Carol twice since then. On my next trip I met two more of her children. This time I recorded all their names and birthdays and began sending birthday cards and other gifts. I could not be sure whether they were receiving them because I had sent Christmas boxes and learned that they had arrived two months late and opened. Eventually, I received a letter from the 14-year old, Crystal, who expressed immense gratitude and said that for the first time in her life she knew how it felt to have a grandmother. Her mother's mother had died when Carol was 11. Crystal would be entering high school in the fall and wondered if I could send pencils, paper, and a book bag, and she would understand if I could not. Well, I was hooked. There was no way I could refuse a child's request for school supplies, particularly when it had been expressed so diplomatically.



It turns out that we had already booked passage on Carnival's Elation from Galveston, and again one of the ports of call scheduled was Belize City. This time I would hand deliver my packages, and this time I wanted to meet all of Carol's children and take them on an outing. This event happened on August 18, 2005, and I am hard pressed to express the joy I felt when I passed out backpacks, pens, pencils, paper, coloring books, puzzles, water colors, folders, scissors, and toys for everybody, including a two-year subscription to *Highlights for Children*. In addition, I handed Crystal some classical novels, a dictionary, a thesaurus, and a globe map. We even were able to locate a bakery and procure a birthday cake for Shayann who was going to be six in two days. The now one-year old Clifton clutched



his teddy bear as if he thought it would run away, and three-year old Nikia never once put down her doll. Four-year old Wallace was determined to find out what made his truck run by pulling loose the battery compartment, at which point it ran no more.



Just to witness such gratitude and supreme happiness on the faces of so many beautiful children was a little overwhelming for me and, indeed, a thrill I will never forget. Carol said this was their first time ever having gone out together for a meal. She had gone to a thrift shop and bought "new" clothes



for everybody and braided the girls' hair to get them ready. Everyday from the time they heard I was coming, they asked, "How many more days before she gets here?" By then four of their little cousins had gotten caught up in the excitement and were added to the party. That was not an imposition, though, because we had hired a van large enough to transport us all to the Belize Cultural and Historical Center Restaurant, and, besides, there were enough gifts to go around.

I do not know when or if I will ever see these children again, but they have a very special place in my heart and will always remain my Belize Connection.

*By Iva*

*Woods*

### **Last thoughts**

### **High Marks at the End**

Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins was born in Stratford, England (1844-1889) to a family of High Church Anglicans. He converted to Catholicism and became a Jesuit priest. He preached in the slums of Manchester, Liverpool, and Glasgow. Working among poor people, he felt that poetry was too self-indulgent. He burned his early poems, but eventually he grew out of it. He sent his written poems to his friend Robert Bridges, who published them after Hopkins' death.

The writer Hopkins spent the end of his years in Dublin as a professor of Greek and Latin, teaching classical languages to students who didn't care for them, and he hated his work. He hated grading papers since so many of his students had failed their exams, but he tried to fight off his depression, and his last words before he died were, "I am happy, so happy."

*The Chronicle, a Newsletter for the Department of English and Foreign Languages, is published each semester. To submit information for a future issue of the Chronicle, please send your topics and copy to the publication's editor Dr. Michael Sollars. The Chronicle results from the efforts of its contributors, writers, and editors, including Shirley Walker Moore, Arbolina Jennings, Ron Samples, Michon Benson, and Donna Kimble.*

