

Pen & Ink: Notes from the NDSU Department of English

The Buzz

Kevin Brooks (Professor and Chair of English, NDSU) and David Beard (Associate Professor of English, University of Minnesota Duluth) launched a special issue of the journal *Enculturation* on Dec. 31, 2011. The issue's theme, Marshall McLuhan @ 100: Picking Through the Rag and Bone Shop of a Career, invited scholars to consider some of the neglected works of McLuhan (1911-1980), who coined the now famous phrases, "The Medium is the Message" and "The Global Village." Scholars from Canada, the US, and Australia contributed to the collection; NDSU PhD student in English, Steven Hammer produced an audio-video remix of McLuhan's 1969 book *War and Peace in the Global Village* and Associate Professor Andrew Mara added his voice to a multi-vocal review.

Dr. Elizabeth Birmingham was named associate dean for the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at NDSU, effective Jan 9.



Birmingham is an associate professor of English at NDSU. As associate dean, Birmingham will be responsible for promoting grant-funded research, supporting faculty professional development and mentoring, and fostering an environment of diversity, equity and inclusivity. She will also lead efforts to strengthen the college's honors program, enhance general education offerings and recruit and retain talented students.

American literature scholars Gary Totten and Linda Helstern, both associate professors in the NDSU English department, were included on the program of the Modern Language Association's 127th Annual Convention, held in Seattle, Wash., January 5-8. As president of the Edith Wharton Society, Totten chaired the

session "Wharton at 150," as 2012 marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of Edith Wharton. Totten

also participated in a pre-convention workshop, "Getting Started in Digital Humanities," which included sessions on coding and programming, project management, grant funding opportunities, and cross-disciplinary collaboration to support research, archival work, and pedagogy within humanities disciplines.



Helstern presented a paper entitled "Back to Ground Zero: Performing the Fiction of Race in Gerald Vizenor's Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57." Her paper focused



on the representation of Native people in Asian American writing and the representation of Asian Americans in Native-authored texts. Helstern's paper addressed the ways that the White Earth Anishinaabe novelist Gerald Vizenor works in the most experimental of all his novels to counter the model minority stereotype attached to Asian Americans through a range of performative strategies, including kabuki, protest demonstration, striptease, sexual performance, and the re-enactment of Native history.

The English Department celebrated Black History Month with an introduction to three of the most important African American creative writers of the first half of the 20th

century. Presentations by NDSU Department of English professors included: Amy Rupiper-Taggart on Jessie Fausset; Gary Totten on Zora Neale Hurston; Linda Helstern on Richard Wright.

In honor of the 30th Annual NDSU Women's Week celebration, Professor of Practice, Clifford Canku presented "The Five Stages of Becoming a Dakota Woman." Canku is a native Dakota speaker from his childhood and has been teaching courses in Dakota language and culture at the college level for many years.



Dr. Bruce Maylath, NDSU Professor of English, was selected by the Tribal College Liaison to receive a University Green and Golden Globe Diversity Award. Maylath has been instrumental in supporting and promoting Dakota Studies at NDSU. The award ceremony is scheduled for April 16th, in the NDSU Memorial Union.



Department of English Associate Professors Amy Rupiper Taggart and Elizabeth Birmingham received mentor grants from NDSU Forward. They will be attending a mid-career mentoring session at the Rhetoric Society of America Conference in May 2012.



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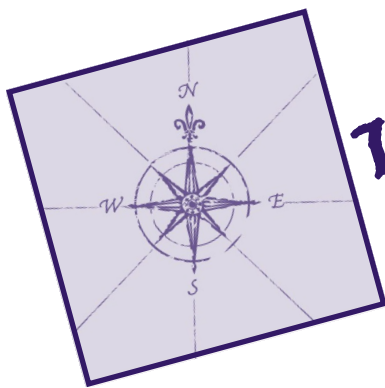
Greetings from the Chair—

I'm pleased to writing a short note to kick off volume 2 of our department newsletter! Gathering information, synthesizing it, and composing a newsletter is, as we knew it would be, a major undertaking, but Tina Young has pulled it off beautifully. We appreciate the comments and support the newsletter has received; please keep

sending us your feedback and updates. Now that we have 4 issues to refer back to, I can update you on some previous stories: 1) we are scheduled to move back to Minard in December of 2012; 2) we will be welcoming Dr. Heather Dubrow from Fordham University in NYC, June 11-15 for our fourth annual Summer Scholar event; 3) we are expecting 20+ dynamic high school students for our 3rd annual Governor's School, June 3 - July 14; 4) our annual spring awards luncheon is scheduled for Monday, April 30th; and 5) our second annual Advisory Board Meeting is scheduled for Friday, May 4th.

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Where is ... ? Catherine Cater

As Ellen K. Voss declares in the Spring 2001 issue of NDSU Magazine's "Perspective," "Catherine Cater. I wouldn't even presume to attach words." So how does one go about discussing Catherine Cater and the legacy she left to NDSU's students and faculty during her tenure from 1962 to 2006?

Perhaps it is fitting that the "Excerpts" from the inaugural issue of NDSU Magazine of Fall 2000 featured a series of quotes and insights from Catherine Cater herself. Rather than forcing Cater into their words, they let Cater voice her own.

"The freedom to explore, is the nature of learning."
Catherine Cater

Cater's own words profess her love of learning and the entire learning process. To this day, Cater finds "the opportunities at NDSU amazing. They offered me the freedom to explore, which is the nature of learning." For three years, Cater was involved with faculty members from each college who met in a weekly seminar to discuss a text from a selected college. One week they might analyze an engineering document, the next a psychology journal, followed by a humanities

study. As Cater recalls, "my first years at NDSU gave me opportunities to create and extend programs in learning in which I believed. Connecting among all knowledges, where I formed friendships in all the colleges." Those meetings became the building blocks for the Humanities and Interdisciplinary Studies, and later the Scholars Program.

As Cater considers her nearly 50-year career, she marvels at the individuals who welcomed her. "John Hove had a good eye for interesting people, and the faculty was so exciting." She recalls working with: Jesse Philips who taught grammar and linguistics — "students were scared to death of her and Francis Schoff was a task master." David Martinson was a student assistant in Cater's very large humanities classes and she recollects that "David wouldn't consider museums for artistic displays because he believed art should be outdoors where all can see it."

"I audited Catherine Cater's classes wherever she was—the most brilliant teacher it has been my privilege to know." Frances Cooper Thompson*

Cater remembers NDSU's people and people remember her. After her feature in the *NDSU Magazine*, several former students were moved to write exemplary comments about Cater's influence on their educations, and she hasn't given the advising up, noting, "I still have access to students to give them advice, but I miss them."

"The first time Dr. Cater physically showed 'quotes,' I thought she was trying to fly ... I quickly realized she was doing something else, because her mind did fly and she challenged us lowly freshmen to come along for the ride." Lynn R Leavens*



Since her retirement, Cater has learned that "only change is permanent." In her transition from her private residence into the assisted living facility at Fargo's Bethany Homes, she has found it interesting to "create a new life. A routinized life. Life comprised with death. We have many deaths here." But once again, Cater is impressed with the individuals around her, complimenting the workers who "are beyond well-trained. They are compassionate, composed, and create an air of independence. The visitors wear a special face, and the residents are visibly happy and independent, despite the atmosphere of change."

"Only change is permanent."
Catherine Cater

Catherine Cater is a woman who continues to learn from life and impresses those vital lessons upon those she meets. She remains as awe-inspiring now, as she was to those "lowly freshman." Cater has also changed with the times, welcoming the digital age — although she misses her cell phone, Cater is the proud owner of an I-Pad and a PC. You can connect with her via her email address: C.Cater@ndsu.edu.

*These comments and observations first appeared as 'Letters' in *NDSU Magazine* Spring 2001.



Introducing — Drs. Andrew & Miriam Mara

AUTOMATIC OUT OF OFFICE REPLY:

[Mara, Andrew & Mara, Miriam](#)

Sent: Monday, March 12, 2012 10:12 AM

To: [Alumni, NDSU](#)

Good day,

Thank you for your email, but we will be out of the office and...

— We interrupt this automatic email message for an important update from the NDSU Department of English —

We're sorry for any inconvenience, but the Mara's are not currently on the NDSU campus. Would you believe our resident adventurers have departed once again for parts more rugged and less populated? The Drs. Mara are currently on sabbatical conducting research in Kenya and South Sudan, but are also making time for a safari and other explorations.

While based in Nairobi, Kenya, Doc Mara is researching the technical communication genres implemented by The Greenbelt Movement. Miriam is investigating the gendered representations of cancer in fictional texts and medical literature, and thereby gathering data on the rhetoric of cancer in medical and health documents, especially those connected with Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) and the Nairobi Cancer Registry. Miriam's Kenya piece involves Margaret Ogola's last novel *Place of Destiny* and the aforementioned KEMRI documents.

In addition to the research with the Greenbelt Movement and KEMRI, the Mara's are also forging some collaborative partnerships with Kenyatta University through translation classes and the Memorandum of Understanding in place between NDSU and Kenyatta University.

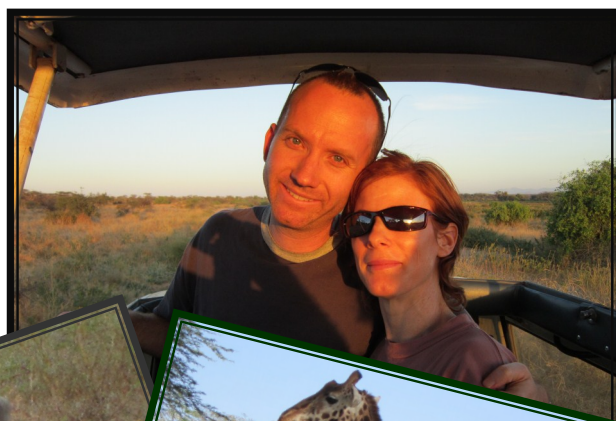
Through the African Soul American Heart program, the Mara's sponsor two Southern Sudanese teens which allows them to attend school in Kenya and while in Africa, they'll trek to South Sudan to meet those two students. The Mara's are also joining two board members from African Soul American Heart on a two-week research and educational support trip to Duk Payuel in South Sudan.

Upon their return to the states, Doc Mara claims they are "hoping to take some time surfing, so that we can get some of the dirt out from under our nails." Being adventurers, since their arrival at NDSU in 2006, the Mara's have spent breaks scouring beaches, scuba diving, hot-air ballooning, and running marathons (while discussing exotic cuisine). Perhaps the most daring adventure of all is the two years they spent as Faculty in Residence at the NDSU Living Learning Center.

— This concludes the message from the Department of English —

...upon returning from sabbatical, we'd love to meet with you. We'll be out of the office and out of the country on developmental leave through April 2012. While we will have some e-mail access, our responses may be delayed. Thank you for your patience.

Best, Andrew & Miriam Mara



EXCERPTS FROM *WEDNESDAYS: A COLLECTION OF FOUR POETS*

Wednesday was the scheduled meeting day of four student poets whose writings were published by the NDSU Center for Writers in 1997 as the poetry chapbook, *Wednesdays: A Collection of Four Poets*. Paige Anderson, Mark Stone, Laura Stowe, and Ryan Trauman met weekly to discuss, critique, and develop ideas. What began as a poetry peer group, evolved into friendship. Mark Stone notes in *Wednesdays* 'Introduction' that "To develop a serious, critical partnership with those who share your passion is to cultivate a familial bond: it requires forbearance, affection, and a constant sense of joy." Time has the power to strengthen or erode those bonds. The bonds may even break, but the memories made and the lessons learned remain. These poems are included to tie echoes of the past to the present voices featured on page 5 — Alumni in Action. We look forward to including updates on Ryan Trauman and Mark Stone in the May/June issue of *Pen and Ink*.

Perfect Women
by Paige Anderson

"Amsterdam is gorgeous!"
the blond squeals in a southern accent,
and I'm thinking of beauty pageants
and how Texas always makes the top five.
The blond loves Amsterdam, prattles about the
pretty people there
"Pretty like us"
and I gag on my pressed turkey on white
and wonder how mothers can give their daughters Barbies
and take no responsibility for the outcome.

And she's obstructing the panorama of the
French countryside
with her giant head,
and I can't prop up my dogged Birkenstocks
because her long legs reach across the train aisle,
her fashionable chunky heels crossed and resting on the seat.

My jeans are a journal —
dirt from Versailles on the cuffs, sticky brie
from Paris on the left thigh
and although I can converse about Monet, Degas,
the history of the IRA,
the chiseled, ponytailed German traveler is misled
by the ocean in her eyes,
sees a perfect woman,
and I can't help but think of the scarecrow
tripping though a sea of poppies.

It could be helpful to think of perfect women
twisting on their four-inch heels,
giant heads of hair trapped in automatic doors,
arms flapping like graceless hens.
It could be helpful to think of perfect women
responding to questions like:
"How do you feel about Foucault's theories on punishment?"
their color-by-number faces contorted in angst.
It could be helpful to think of them eating their favorite foods
and occasionally throwing up and getting bits stuck in their noses.*

It could be helpful. And it is.

When I Visit
by Ryan Trauman

When I visit this quiet place,
I'll know your polished stone well,
Flush to soft ground
Under wet bark on a twisted tree.
And when I visit, I'll scatter bread crumbs
And clothe your grave with birds
For they are more like you than flowers.
As I watch them, even in snow,
Each of them will sing songs for me,
And because of me, for you.

And I will not leave them until the bread is gone,
And I've brushed the snow from your name.

You Ask Me What I Mean By That
by Mark Stone

The trees are on fire with autumn,
but only in the canvas.
Outside, the sky is a snowy cloud,
and the afternoon is dull white
fading into dull blue evening.
I dream of wearing maple in my hair,
of my whole body smoldering with crabapple,
of my mouth wide and delirious
as the sweet, imagined earth you've made.

We sit here, I dreaming, you dappling
acrylic on bright acrylic, your fingers
alive with violet fire, the trees leaping
from your slender bones.

And this is what I mean when I say,
"Your hands are lovely."

First Aid
by Laura Stowe

they taught us to stop drop n roll
if the flames enveloped us
that fire was contagious
after it picked away at our clothes
it would try to melt our flesh

they warned us that water wouldn't always work
that sometimes, lubricants need baking
soda to be calmed down

they made us practice 9 something numbers
plan escape routes, and install alarms

but they never told us how much
stop drop n roll related to men

*This line was borrowed from Jenny Holzer's "Selections from the Living Series, 1989", which is a work of art (a series of benches with engravings) at the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden

TROUBLE OFTEN BEGINS WITH FUN

by Laura (Stowe) Gilles

In Michigan, it is illegal to pick tulips. We posed in white hats, bright twill, and wooden shoes with other siblings, eager to sweep the streets with modern brooms. Like most pictures from our childhood, I hooked my elbow around your neck, keeping you uncomfortably

close. In Minnesota, it is illegal to grab the arm of a girlfriend when she is leaving. You posed for the police before calling our mother, eager to graduate with the science degree of our parents' choice. Like most of our conversations, I kept the phone pressed to my ear as my husband retreated to the computer

alone. In Southern Texas, it is immoral to have fun. You posed inside the church with strangers and a kilted bagpipe player while a sign in the parking lot read *Trouble Often Begins With Fun*. Like most presented with a warning, you pressed forward fiercely, urging your wife to turn off the television, to stay at a job for more than six months, to return your calls.

Brother, I wish we weren't still learning when to hold on and when to let go.

AFTER NDSU: After I completed all of my coursework for a Master's in NDSU's English Literature program, I then took on a myriad of random jobs: market analysis research support, job placement at a temporary agency, staffing nurses and nursing assistants at a large nursing home facility, pottery teacher, middle school English teacher, college teacher. I am now a trainer at The Hartford. I mostly train new hires about Family Medical Leave and Short Term Disability in a classroom and a virtual setting. Steve Ward, Cindy Nichols, and David Martinson taught me about marrying creativity and an independent spirit with a commitment to develop one's profession. More specifically, they taught me how to inspire people to learn.

PERSONAL LIFE: I married Aaron Gilles in 2003, shortly before moving to Minneapolis. We bought a house in South Minneapolis, and we have been humbled by the work it takes to upkeep and improve a 1923 home. We adore our house and

our neighborhood. We have one son named Afton who is turning 4, and we are expecting another boy in June. My husband spits fire, and I spin fire poi; we wonder what our boys will do when they come of age.

BRAGGING RIGHTS: I received the Graduate paper of the year award -- co-authored with Emily Malsam.

ABOUT WEDNESDAY'S: It's hard to separate the importance of the Wednesday book and the Wednesday group. I was 19 when I was introduced to Mark and Ryan, and I looked up to them. The following year, I met Paige, and we are friends to this day. The group gave me a voice and the confidence to use that voice. We were lucky to have a

receptive and supportive audience.

Laura (Stowe) Gilles



Alumni in Action Since Wednesdays

AFTER NDSU: I am a tenured faculty member in the English Department at Anoka-Ramsey Community College, located just northwest of the Twin Cities, where I teach composition, literature, and creative writing courses. At two different

times during my tenure at ARCC, I have been the Department Chair.

PERSONAL LIFE: My husband and I actually met at a Wednesday group poetry reading at NDSU. Laura, Mark, and Ryan knew Damien and

asked him to play piano before our reading. We were married in June of 2001, right before I started at Anoka-Ramsey. Damien works at the law firm Robins, Kaplan, Miller and Ciresi in Minneapolis. We have a six-year-old boy named Aidan and he's the joy of our lives. Our home is in St. Paul.



Paige (Anderson) Riehl

BRAGGING RIGHTS: I very recently won first place in a national poetry contest sponsored by *Literal Latte*, an online literary magazine based out of New York. The prize was publication and \$1,000. The poem was published in the January 2012 issue at <http://www.literal-latte.com/>. I was also a semi-finalist for the 2011 Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry sponsored by *Nimrod International Journal of Prose and Poetry* as well as the 2011 *River Styx International Poetry Contest*. I was a finalist for the 2011 Loft Mentor Series in Poetry sponsored by the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. My poetry and prose has been published in a variety of print and online publications.

ABOUT WEDNESDAYS: Having the chapbook published was a wonderful capstone for our experience together. Our regular workshop meetings on Wednesdays kept me focused and writing, and I'll always be grateful for the feedback and encouragement Laura, Mark, and Ryan gave me. Laura and I actually both live in the Twin Cities and are great friends. We see each other regularly, and our sons are close enough in age that they enjoy playing together.

Choosing Not to Love

by Paige (Anderson) Riehl

To love is to walk in the cold north wind without a coat, to trust the resilience of skin naked and reddened, to pretend it is fur or fish scales or armor. It is to walk in the streets at night hands and body open, eyes looking up. It is to follow the stranger down the unknown path with only bright oranges in your pockets.

Not to love is to have furniture and locks, a heavy ring of keys, a savings account, a series of routines and hasty signatures, brief moments of silence. It is to stare at the beautiful stranger in the cereal aisle, to notice his naked finger, until his eyes raise, see you considering an alternative, then your quick denial—a turned head and hands in pockets full of lint.

This poem first appeared in *Rock, Paper, Scissors* (2011) and was inspired by David Ignatow's "Rescue the Dead."

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To kick off the spring semester, Richard Johnson-Sheehan, Professor of English at Purdue and author of *Writing Today*, was the guest speaker at the department's professional development workshop on January 6, 2012. Johnson-Sheehan presented on teaching genres in composition and technical communication.

The Department of English in conjunction with the Red River Writing Project sponsored a professional development workshop and book reading with professor and author Benjamin Bac Sierra highlighting his new novel, *Barrio Bushido*. A public reading was held in the NDSU Memorial Union on Saturday, January 14, 2012.



Artist Matt Kish gave a presentation at Concordia College and discussed his incredible journey to make an image for every page of *Moby-Dick*, which took more than 550 consecutive days. Kish's efforts were collected into a gorgeous volume, *Moby Dick in Pictures*, published by Tin House, and his book tour

has so far taken him to both coasts.



On January 28, 2012 the Department of English helped sponsor a charter bus to see The Acting Company perform Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* live at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis. It was a stellar production featuring a modern day urban setting with politics not unlike those found in present day Washington, DC.

On February 23rd, the English Department hosted its second advising event for the academic year. The Courses, Careers, and Scholarships program gave pointers on how to apply for scholarships, what to

include in a scholarship application letter, and also offered an overview of available scholarships. Members of the external advisory board committee, Joshua A. Swanson from Vogel Law Office, Bill Thomas from Prairie Public Radio, and Bob Schlomann of MicroSoft Corp. were on-hand to discuss questions of career choices available to a student graduating with a degree in English. Dr. Angela Smith, a new Assistant Professor of History with a BA in English, encouraged students to follow their passions. NDSU Career Center representative, Sara Van De Streek supplied information on teaching abroad, joining the Peace Corps, and options for stateside volunteer positions.



The Department of English EGO Social Committee recently organized and sponsored the 2nd Annual Curling and Potluck Social.

Attendees brought their families, friends, and clean shoes to learn a thing or two about this elusive sport.



Matt Warner delivering a stone.

The 9th Annual Red River Graduate Student Conference is being held in the NDSU Memorial Union on March 23-24, 2012. This year's program features keynote speaker Dr. Gail Houston from University of New Mexico. The RRGSC began as an opportunity for NDSU English graduate students to organize a professional conference where they could present their research. Since then, the range of participants has expanded to include participants from throughout the region and from as far away as Massachusetts. Each year the number of participating schools has increased and this growth over such a short period of time represents the exciting interest and commitment area universities have shown in developing a community of practice.

The registration fee of \$20 for conference participation includes conference materials and Saturday's lunch. Register by March 19, 2012. Please direct **registration inquiries** to: ndsu.rrgsc@ndsu.edu. The **registration form** can be found on the RRGSC website at: <http://www.ndsu.edu/english/rrgsc/>.

	Education		Culture		Language	
	Entertainment		Math		Technology	
<h2>Interdisciplinary English Studies</h2> <p>The Red River Graduate Student Conference North Dakota State University: Memorial Union March 23-24, 2012</p>						
<p>Abstracts / Questions</p> <p>ndsu.rrgsc@ndsu.edu www.ndsu.edu/english/rrgsc/</p>						