

# **Suffolk University English Department Newsletter**

Stuart Millner, Editor Summer 2000

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The day shall not get up so soon as I / To try the fair adventure of tomorrow

The 1999-2000 academic year turned out to be extraordinarily busy for the department. Three professors retired; three professors were hired; some were promoted or received sabbaticals; and faculty and students were giving poetry readings and traveling hither and yon to attend meetings and give presentations. There's a lot of news to impart, so - down to business.

## **Retirement Year Fetes Three Professors**

Without doubt, the big news of this year was the imminent retirement of three beloved professors who collectively had contributed almost a century of service to Suffolk: Ann Hughes, Robert Johnson, and Frederick Wilkins. Instead of a year of sad farewells, Prof. Mandl had the happy thought of organizing (with Prof. Merzlak's enthusiastic approval) a lecture series to be given by the three professors. The series was so successful that it might become a permanent fixture of the College's retirement procedures.

### **Prof. Hughes and the "Hanover"**

In October, Ann Hughes, in the midst of her research into the subjects of Maine shipbuilding and her family's history, spoke on "The Voyages of the [Ship] Hanover." As her husband Philip noted in his introduction, "Ann is from Maine, and her heart has never left port. Her ancestors were builders of ships, captains, owners, mercantile entrepreneurs." Her interest in her ancestors' maritime history led her to uncover many fascinating stories of ships' sailings, among which was the story of the "Hanover."

### **Prof. Johnson Reminisces**

For the second talk of the series, Bob Johnson spoke of his circuitous route to a successful career as poet and teacher. He noted that he began to write poetry in order to sharpen his fiction, and was surprised that the poetry rather than the fiction was accepted for publication. But he knew a signal when he saw it, and poetry became his life's work from then on. As Prof. Marchant said in his introduction to this talk, Bob has an "impish eye...for folly in the world at large," but the majority of his work is "a poetry of commitment...which explores relationships over the long haul, over the ups and downs, and into the wondrous renewals which are sometimes blessedly possible."

### **Prof. Wilkins and Eugene O'Neill**

In December, Fred Wilkins delighted his audience with memories of the beginnings of his love of the theater and especially of the plays of Eugene O'Neill. This enthrallment led to his founding of the "Eugene O'Neill Newsletter," which soon became the highly respected Eugene O'Neill Review. As Prof. Connolly remarked in his introduction, "O'Neillians all over the world are passionately devoted to this periodical and to its editor." His efforts to bring O'Neill scholarship to an international audience contributed significantly to making Suffolk known in countries and among scholars across the planet.

### **Retirement Dinner at the Omni Parker House**

Prof. Marlene McKinley led a committee of faculty in preparing a dinner and celebration which took place at the Omni Parker House Hotel in April. Approximately 125 faculty, administrators, family members and friends attended. Dean Michael Ronayne conveyed Suffolk's best wishes and each retiree received appropriate gifts. Fred Marchant wrote a poem especially for the occasion, and it is here reprinted with permission.

Ithaca Near

for Ann Hughes, Bob Johnson, and Fred Wilkins

It was second month's end, and third's beginning,  
when the winter's fields were in gray-green grass,  
and floes drifted, uncertain, on a river thickening.

This was in a city rich with the vague and efficient,  
in an era of must-be-dones, those good but lesser tasks  
of second month's end, and third's beginning.

Sitting in the Common, on a bench full of questions,  
I saw a glittering seabird scanning, and drifting past  
as if the path were only sheet-ice on a river thickening.

Then it wheeled in toward my heart's sail and rigging,

curved through a sea of shadows and light-shafts—  
the long questions of this end, and that beginning.

It banked, hovered, as if over a line yet to be written,  
measuring our given worlds for what might last  
longer than drift-ice melting on a river thickening.

Day of signs and omens, but minus predictions—  
Wings at first, then mist of light at the back of class.  
It was second month's end, and third's beginning—  
The river flowing was named the long-been-hidden.

### **Other Happenings**

Promotions and Sabbaticals: Prof. Gerald Richman has been promoted to (full) professor and Prof. Da Zheng is now an associate professor. On sabbatical leave to pursue their many academic interests are Prof. Zheng and (during the spring semester) Prof. Fred Marchant.

### **Student Activities:**

The members of Sigma Tau Delta, the English honor society, attended the annual convention in Savannah, GA, where senior Tina Dent was selected by a national panel to read four of her poems to the assembly. As usual, the student-faculty poetry reading was a great success, as was the special issue of Venture, the literary magazine.

### **Publications and Presentations**

Gail Coffler continues her devotion to Herman Melville, presenting "Ahab and His Crew" as part of the panel for the first Melville Institute of the Melville Society; and she traveled to Mystic Seaport, CT, to chair a session on the novel White-Jacket. She was also a member of a committee that brought the Nathaniel Hawthorne Summer Conference to Suffolk last June. Among soon-to-be-published articles are analyses of Billy Budd and White-Jacket.

Tom Connolly has two books in circulation: *George Jean Nathan and the Making of Modern American Drama Criticism*, and *British Aisles: Studies in British Drama and Theatre...* He continues to serve as Visiting Professor of American Literature at the University of Ostrava in the Czech Republic.

Among Kathleen Grathwol's presentations are a paper on "Female Wits in the Scandal Chronicles" for a conference on 18th century women at Texas Tech University and a paper, "The Traffic of Desire....," at the Humanities Center of Harvard University.

Marilyn Jurich has had an extremely productive year, with five of her poems selected for inclusion in *Uncommon Places: Poems of the Fantastic*. She read papers at the 10th International Congress on the Enlightenment in Dublin, Ireland, and at a meeting of the Semiotic Society in Pittsburgh, PA. Her article on "The Female Trickster—Known as Trickstar..." was published in the *Journal of American Culture*.

Bette Mandl's many activities include several reviews for *Theatre Studies International* and *The Eugene O'Neill Review*, as well as a paper, "Writing Across the Curriculum ..." presented at the Paralegal Studies Conference, Boston. She also coordinated a reception for Fred Wilkins at the Monte Cristo Cottage, New London, CT, for Suffolk and for the Eugene O'Neill Society.

Fred Marchant is engaged in so many activities that the following is just an indication of his recent work as a poet and for poetry. His book, *Full Moon Boat*, is currently being published, and he contributed entries on three poets and on the prose poem in *America to The Ungar Encyclopedia of American Literature*. He served on the President's Panel of the Midwest Modern Language Association, using the occasion to further his explication of Vietnamese poetry. Finally, he recently taught a workshop at the Writers' Conference of the William Joiner Center for the Study of War and Social Consequences.

In addition to being the department's expert on integrating the computer into the teaching of composition and literature courses, Gerry Richman carried out the difficult task of chairing the committee that selected the three new faculty members from over five hundred applicants. He used his sabbatical break to publish two articles, "Thucydides and The Battle of Maldon," and "Poet and Scop in Beowulf," as well as presenting a paper, "Time's Up: Scyld Scefing, Grendel, and Beowulf" at a meeting of the Medieval Forum, Plymouth State College, NH.

Da Zheng is on a year-long sabbatical involving travels to The People's Republic of China and Taiwan to gather research for his upcoming publications. Before he emplaned, he lectured at Beaver College, PA, on "Chinese Painter, Travel Literature, and Cultural Interpretation," and then presented another version of this paper at a meeting of the Popular Culture Association at New Orleans.