The Prairie Connect Fall 2015

English Discipline, University of Minnesota, Morris

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Painting title: "Morris Wetlands."

Judy (Collins) Flicker graduated from UMM in 1974 with degrees in English and Psychology. She is a retired Early Childhood Special Educator and lives in Morris with her husband Kevin.
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Editor's Introduction by Michael Lackey

One of the great joys of being a professor is that wonderful encounter with former students. Hearing where life has taken them; learning about the former students’ struggles, successes, and adventures; and listening to their future plans—all this information brings back memories of those years when students were here on campus experiencing a form of intense intellectual engagement. But, inevitably, these conversations turn to other students who attended UMM at roughly the same time, and it is discovering the interconnected lives of so many former students that evokes those feelings that are so closely connected with a particular group of students at a specific time.

This newsletter is a modest attempt to keep those magical feelings alive, to keep faculty and students connected, and to relive those moments when so many people came together in order to cultivate the life of the mind. Our lives are richer because of those meaningful moments of connection. To put this in the words of William Wordsworth:

For thou art with me, here, upon the banks
Of this fair river; thou, my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend, and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once.

Reliving those past moments with others empowers us to move forward into the future. To put this in the words of Alfred Tennyson:

‘Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho’ much is taken, much abides; and tho’
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,—
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

We take our inspiration for this newsletter from E.M. Forster: “only connect.”
News

Alumni News

Britney Appier (2009), who majored in political science and philosophy and minored in English, is currently working in behavior with the special needs population. She is in an applied behavior analysis program at Simmons College in Boston.

Sara Butterfass (2013) completed a Masters in Literary Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison with an emphasis on medieval literature (specifically, Old English and Old Norse). She recently began a Master’s program in Library and Information Science at the University of St. Catherine with the intention of specializing in archives and rare books. Currently, she is working as a Library Assistant at the State of Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development’s library in St. Paul and as a Human Resources Team Member at Target in Minneapolis.

Jessie Hennen (2010) spent a year and a half living in Munich, Germany, where she worked as a project manager for a word-of-mouth marketing company called “trnd.” She was subsequently accepted into the Iowa Writers’ Workshop for fiction; graduated successfully, and now has an agent for her as-yet-untitled first novel about a fictional school bus crash in central Minnesota. Earlier this year, she taught a fiction workshop at the International Institute of Modern Letters in Wellington, New Zealand as part of a writing fellowship.

Faculty News

Vicki Graham went to the Western Literature Association conference in Reno, October 14–17, where she presented her work from her writing residency at the Andrews Experimental Forest. Her talk was titled “Debris,” which was part of the panel “Ecological Reflections: East and West.”


Tisha Turk recently published a multimodal essay titled “A Partial Taxonomy of Technological Professional Development” in Showcasing the Best of CIWIC/DMAC: Approaches to Teaching and Learning in Digital Environments. She also presented at the Gendered Politics of Production symposium (Middlesex University, London, UK) and the Fan Studies Network conference (University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK) in June.
Kate Novotny Owen

When Kate Novotny Owen graduated from UMM in the spring of 2010 with an English major and Philosophy minor, she had a clear concept of her immediate future. In addition to accepting a position teaching composition and literature classes at Ohio State University, she entered their combined MA/PhD English program. Upon completion of her MA in the spring of 2012, Kate passed her candidacy exams and had begun research for her dissertation. This fall, Kate has a fellowship that releases her from her teaching so that she can do her research on understanding literary form and its impact on representations of the human body in eighteenth-century English texts. She is looking at different modes of eighteenth-century literature, such as allegorical and gothic works, and identifying the distinct ways they represent the form and materiality of the human body. Kate is using this research to identify the interconnections between those modes and the developing realist novel, as well as gaining new insight into the relationship between literary representation and reality. While Kate may have known exactly where she was going after college, she encourages students not to worry if they do not. She firmly believes that the ambiguity in careers with an English major is not a token for “poor prospects,” but rather “a failure of imagination.” Kate feels that she is now in the same place as current students, for even though she “can’t predict where [she’ll] be in a year” she believes that this is a “product of too many possibilities, not too few.”

Kate her freshman year (2006)

Kate in a recent head shot (2015)
Kelsey Jopp
Student Profile

Kelsey Jopp holds many roles on campus as her involvement includes, but is not limited to: being a member of Sigma Tau Delta, being the editor in chief and writer for Floating World, working as a Writing Center consultant, and working as the Hall Director for Spooner Hall. In addition to holding both English and Management majors, Kelsey has held two internships and a Morris Academic Partnership that have all complemented her education and prepared her for a future career in the publishing industry. Her first internship sent her to the coast of Washington in the summer of 2014 to work at Andrea Hurst and Associates Literary Agency. While there, Kelsey responded to queries, edited manuscripts, and marketed for independent authors. It was also during this summer that Kelsey worked on her Morris Academic Partnership with Prof. Chrissy Kolaya, researching small and independent presses across the country. As both a creative writer and future publishing professional, this project helped Kelsey “get a feel” for the publishing options available for writers. Her second internship was in the summer of 2015 at Redleaf Press in St. Paul, a nonprofit publisher that specializes in early childhood professional texts. Here Kelsey worked with the sales manager to communicate with independent booksellers, wrote proposal summaries, and participated in meetings about the acquisition, launch, transmittal, and design of upcoming books. Kelsey plans to use the skills she has accumulated from her undergraduate career after she graduates in the spring of 2016 when she serves on the Minnesota Reading Corps as a tutor for elementary-age children.

Kelsey in Seattle for her internship
Gabi Crain keeps busy at UMM with her studies for her English major and Communications, Media, & Rhetoric minor and her involvement on campus. In addition to participating in organizations such as Sigma Tau Delta, Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship, and KUMM, Gabi presented at the 2015 Undergraduate Research Symposium with her self-made video “Writing is the Wurst,” a film that “likens the writing process to sausage making.” Her presentation discussed how the academic community should not limit itself to using only academic writing and should instead embrace different styles, such as the “digital writing” found in her film, to “get academic ideas across.” Gabi’s undergraduate career is not restricted to the UMM campus, for in the spring of 2014 she left Minnesota to work at the Library of Congress through the Internship at the Library of Congress program. While there, Gabi directed congressional calls to different corners of the library and aided various members of the Congressional Relations office with their work. Gabi also assisted at the Congressional Dialogues on Great American Presidents, during which historians, such as David McCullough and A. Scott Berg, would present on a president and Gabi would direct congressional members and their guests around the library. She encourages students interested in politics, metropolitan life, and “anything with libraries” to talk to either a professor or the ACE office for more information about the program. All of these experiences have left Gabi confident as she prepares to graduate UMM in the spring of 2016 and move back to Washington D.C. with the long term goal of becoming a librarian.
Creative Writing

A couple years ago we sent a survey to UMM students to gauge the desire for a creative writing minor. Just over a hundred people responded, and 62% of those said they would pursue or would have pursued a minor if it were available. Admittedly, the survey was unsound, but we listened to those sixty or so students and this fall the creative writing minor and English major subplan are a reality.

Alexandra Asche, a current English major with a creative writing subplan, describes what many students must feel about the new minor/subplan: “An activity that was normally reserved for personal time and extracurricular activities can now be an integral part of my academic career; it's exciting to have that recognition, to know that my passion can actually earn me a degree.”

Andrew Johnson, who is also pursuing the subplan, articulates the connection between creative writing and the liberal arts: “I've learned more about myself after a couple years of writing than I did in 18 years of not writing. Creative writing can be liberating. A sense of self, independence, and writing skill are all improved if you take creative writing classes.” There are also practical reasons for the new minor/subplan. “The creative writing track will make me a more confident writer. It will make me an adaptable writer,” says Logan Bender, a creative writing minor.

The minor and subplan require three writing classes, Introduction to Creative Writing and two others, at least one of which must be at the 3000-level. Every year we'll offer Advanced Fiction, Writing Poetry for the 21st Century, and The Environmental Imagination. Other classes will be offered as need requires or opportunity arises.

Students must also take Literary Studies and one other readings class. Together these course requirements engage students as both writers and as critical readers with a sense of the ongoing literary conversation.

There's one other requirement that might come as a surprise to some: students must also give a reading of their creative work in the semester in which they finish the minor or subplan. Standing up before an audience to read your work can bring on the shivers, but reading aloud is also a way of bringing flesh and electricity to the word. And a reading is an occasion of celebration.

Of course, we hope that all creative writing students will submit to the campus literary magazine and to the annual sonnet contest, get involved with the Prairie Gate Literary Festival, write for the newspaper—that is, become citizens of the literary arts.

Current students in the minor/subplan have big visions for where the program can go. Kasha Wallace wants “courses dedicated to different genres, or maybe a single course that has sections dedicated to different genre mechanics and the effects they have.” Logan Bender imagines a course that “tackle[s] big literary themes in fiction. .. topics might range from things like racial issues, religious apathy, k-12 education reform, politics, rising trends of technology in children under ten, etc.” Andrew Johnson, in his usual direct way, says simply, “More classes!”

NO MORE WORDS
Louis Kunesh, 2016

No more words but an afterglow
left inside of me – a feeling I
cannot make for myself, cannot
discover as if at first lost, cannot
awake as though but slumbering
cannot begin or end by any act
I might hope commit, might hope
to replicate surrounding circumstances;
that bird’s call at this hour while that
orange street lamps inspire flight
in moths and in turn hungry birds and
in turn a song as one thing compliments another;
first your voice, now mine. Now cool after
the exhausted sun has set, now a light
unfixed to a point, now a blushing purple
and red where nothing was, nothing before
there was you inspire a feeling I
cannot make for myself, cannot
discover as if at first lost, cannot
awake as though but slumbering
cannot begin or end by any act
I might hope commit.
The Subterranean Pillar
Logan Bender, 2017

In the valley at the beginning of the world,
The landscape was barren, the sky was darkened.
And giants hurtled boulders across the mountains;
And thunder gods battled leviathans out at sea;
And volcanic plumes bathed the atmosphere in fire.
The air electric, billowing in sulfur stench,
But I smelled you (your ripe human sweat)
Alone and afraid, abused by primal elements.
I emerged, summoned, from a rocky riverbed
To elope you away like a thief in the night —
When raindrops fell in ash-filled downpours,
They left tearful trails smearing down your dirty cheeks.
I braced us along a cliff and dug out a cave,
A safeguarded shelter to house your fragile form
And I, a protector, held my guard at the door.

You lit a fire, a spark in bitter blackness,
Your hanging face aglow against the cavern walls.
While excavating deeper, I made you a maze —
Placed you, my royalty, in an entombed castle;
Placed you, the jeweled cache, at the labyrinth’s center.
That lonely spark from before popped and crackled and
Threatened to blaze as a terra-bound bonfire.
But your form flared spent, needing strength beyond your own;
So from behind, I braced your soft lithe arm
And clasped our arms against your bosom and shoulder
And placed my right arm around your willowy waist.

We became a pillar made of earth, you daughter of dirt,
Crafted on the ninth day for man, of dust and clay.
And I, your guardian, an animated golem,
A construct of rock and soil from the potter’s wheel,
Stroked the sensual fires of a feminine muse —
You who carved charcoal pictures on the grotto’s facade;
You who inscribed inky tattoos on my dull frame.
And you who aligned the cavern with fantastical scenes
Of still terraces, expended of nature’s wrath;
An open sky, a trajectory of calm seas.
But the world turned, and with you at the center
You heard Adam call your name out in the dark,
Call out for the prime woman born to this earth.
In our pillar, cracks spider-webbed, and we shifted
Round us, the ceiling faltered, the foundation slipped.
And I the golem became corrupted
To match the primal earth from which I was born —
Sprung from rock, anointed in ash, from a world of fire.
We broke apart, and you quelled from my rage-filled form.
My shadow gutted out the fire as I enraged,
Tipsy, and stoned, I chased you through the maze until
I lost Her, the human, my muse, the pillar-half,
And a golem with nothing to protect is lost.

When I emerged empty-handed from the cavern,
The dismal landscape of the world had changed
Into a new myriad array of greenery.
And I the diaspora from my network of caves
Could not find my way in such a foreign landscape
Twisted away from its cruel nature — quelled and tamed.
Did wilderness resist its Eden conversion?
Over and over in the garden I pleaded
Where are you, my human? Where is your legacy?
Over and over I searched the caverns, our maze,
And heard the laughs and whispers of phantom children.
All I ever found was a broken stalagmite
Forged of salt and twisted, fearful, to look back inside.