



Et Cetera

Hope College English Department Newsletter

Fall Visiting Writers Series Recap!

This semester's Jack Ridl Visiting Writers Series pulled talents from around the globe and proved that no matter the genre, crafted words can delight and connect to an audience. We were proud to host such writers as follows:

Chris Dombrowski, our first poet of the season, opened his personal life to the Visiting Writers Series, in the Sixth Annual Tom Andrews Reading, both in casual conversation at dinner as well as in his vocabulary-rich poetry. His works create in readers a visceral response at his vivid descriptions of everyday life in Montana. Each poem connects listeners to the place of that poem, a solid and specific place in the world, a place everyone in the audience longs to visit again. One poem, "Fire's Bride" was particularly engaging. This poem about an ecosystem guilt chip is humorous yet encourages listeners to question the size of the dent one makes on the world. This poem, read by Dombrowski in a slightly robotic or monotonous voice, encouraged the audience to ponder the idea of a chip-driven society.

Mira Bartok visited with Chris Dombrowski in the Sixth Annual Tom Andrews Reading, and read from her memoir *The Memory Palace*, which reveals an honest picture of growing up with a brilliant but schizophrenic mother. This memoir, complete with Bartók's poign-

ant illustrations, depicts a life fraught with sadness, tragedy, and misunderstanding but also lit with moments of joy. The author makes use of a woven framework, braiding her mother's voice along with her own. The chapter of *The Memory Palace* she read included detailed images of two Tibetan Buddhist monks making a sand mandala in a museum where she worked. The mandala, an art which symbolizes the impermanence of everything in the world, helped Mira find a semblance of forgiveness and realization amidst her own tragic experiences in interactions with

"Even while working with the characters created by another author, her writing stoked the fires of every imagination in the audience."

her mother. For the conclusion of her reading, Bartók read two essays on alternative fates for literary figures such as Madame Bovary. In Bartók's vision for a surviving Madame Bovary, the character thrives even into old age, when she can watch the world at a café. Even while working with the characters created by another author, her writing stoked the fires of every imagination in the audience.

In early November, **Jaimy Gordon** entertained our lunch table with stories of her whimsical life and snippets of her cavernous supply of knowledge. Our conversation drifted to the meaning of names and how a name can shape a person. Gordon and I share a common fascination with encyclopedias and dictionaries. She collects such tomes because she never knows when they might be useful for her novels. She is also a collector of dialects not often presented in literature, as was revealed to the audience in her reading of her National Book Award winner, *Lord of Misrule*. Her characters, especially the horses, demand careful listening. Hearing the voices of characters such as Medicine Ed and Deucey Glifford from Gordon herself was thoroughly engaging. She even sang when the story called for it! It was a truly magical reading.

Jennifer Grotz read first at the final VWS reading this semester, in mid November. Her poems spanned the world; they took the audience from a parking lot in Texas to a monastery in southern France. Each poem engaged the senses. She led the audience to smell a newly peeled orange or taste a freshly picked cherry. On the ride from the airport, Jennifer Grotz informed us that she and **Adam Zagajewski** had been friends for a while, and at dinner she reminisced on one of the ques-

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Special points of interest:

- **Holy Smokes, it's almost December!**
There's absolutely nothing going on in December, except, of course, your last classes of the semester, exams, papers, reading, writing, arithmetic (if you got stuck in a GEMS course this semester, not that there's anything wrong with that) and, of course, the pilgrimage home to celebrate the holiday season. Happy Holidays to you all, from the English Department at Hope College! May your days be filled with softly falling snow.

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Fall VWS Recap!

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tions Adam had asked as an introduction to a graduate course she took: "What is poetry?" Apparently he listened to each student's response and then gave his own answer at dinner: "I don't know." Their friendship was revealed in full when the glow from Adam's poem entitled "Sunrise over Cassis" was answered by Jennifer's own "Sunrise in Cassis." It was wonderful to hear two original voices describing the same natural phenomenon. Jennifer's gentle and lilting voice gave the audience a description of the world with verisimilitude, letting readers view the world from her kaleidoscope perspective. Adam's voice, accented by his native Polish, revealed to the audience a man of

the world who connects historical and biblical allusions into his pieces and speaks many languages. Zagajewski ended the VWS this semester with his poetry on topics including travel, his mother, and a love of language. In answer to Adam's response to the question "What is poetry?," we also do not know. It may indeed be undefinable. Perhaps that is why we keep listening, and why we could not accept his repetitive assertion that he would only read two or three more. We did not want the reading to end.

Alyssa Brillinger, Elizabeth Gerometta, and Julie Oosterink authored the above work. They made use of a woven framework in emulation of Mira Bartók's style in *The Memory Palace*. They did not include illustrations as all three are artistically challenged.

What Faculty Have Learned From Teaching

When asked what teaching has taught them, here's what a few faculty had to say...

Beth Trembley:

Every day I teach I am grateful that I had so much theatre training while growing up (lots of it right here at Hope College). Knowing how to stand, move, and project. Knowing how to inhabit my material. Knowing how to gauge my audience. Understanding that the best of what can happen in a class is not in my head or in their heads but in the unseen things that we give to each other.

Hydrate. I drink more water during a two-hour class than I do the rest of the day combined.

Every single student is smarter than I am about something.

Whiteboard markers sprout legs and run away. Or invisible elves come out at night and steal them from my bag.

Bill Pannacker:

When teaching at 8:30 it is important to turn up the lights and turn down the thermostat. Also, select a room with uncomfortable chairs.

John Cox:

A person might well think that teaching Shakespeare every semester involves saying the same things over and over again. For me, it's just the opposite. I've been teaching Shakespeare for almost forty years, and I teach the course very differently from the way I did at first—in fact, from the way I did even five years ago. I learn from students' comments, I learn from trying out new ideas about the plays, I learn from trying out new assignments.

Heather Sellers:

For me, the most important thing is to create an environment

"Listen to each other and like each other. That's what they've taught me."

where we can be, as teacher and students, authentic, open, honest, vulnerable, "real." My work is to try to "see" the student. I don't think I

have a chance to help her bring forward her best work unless I am able to see inside of her.

When my students are laughing, talking, intent on the poems before them, changing their minds mid-sentence, passing around cookies and hollering and losing all track of time, and I'm not really doing anything at all, that's great teaching.

Listen to each other and like each other. That's what they've taught me.

Marla Lunderberg:

Sometimes the student who asks the most aggressive question about your assignment is just your future favorite student waiting for you to respond with patience and grace.

Time keeps on marching, and so should my current-events examples. Even though I can remember where I was and what I was teaching when 9/11 happened, this event and others like it are not so immediate for my current cohort of students.

Jan Aslanian:

I have learned that no matter how "hip" and "with it" I think I am regarding the latest technology, my students will say, "Prof. A, that is sooooo yesterday".

I have learned that the students can become my teacher. Their comments often cause me to perceive course subject matter in ways that never occurred to me. I love that!

Featured Faculty Ernest Cole: Giving Back: the intersection of Gratitude and Destiny



Each month, we feature a different faculty member and ask him or her to write a little something for you.

By Ernest Cole

I met Oumar Cherif Diop in the summer of 2002 while I was teaching at the University of The Gambia. The summer 2002 marked my 6th year of living in that country where I sought refuge with my wife at the height of the civil war in my native Sierra Leone. Initially, what was considered a brief stay away from home ended up lasting 7 years. Needless to say that those years of isolation, of being an outsider in a strange and culturally different society, coupled with the anxieties of separation from loved ones back home and the continuing ravage of the brutal civil war gradually took its toll on me. I became an angry man and as I watched my dreams literally evaporating in the heat of the desert climate in The Gambia, I became frustrated, lonely and alienated from society. Looking for an outlet to vent my anger, I took up freelance journalism and began writing biting satires and scathing commentaries about the corrupt political regime in my homeland. I wrote articles for the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and West Africa Magazine, some of which won me attractive prizes. I was a daily contributor to the BBC's Network Africa Program and my satirical pieces were broadcasted almost daily over the airwaves. Nonetheless, I was restless, anxious, impatient, hurt, and mad. It was clear to me that something was lacking. I decided to channel my anger and frustrations into a more productive medium.

“In giving back, I was actually stepping into my destiny!”

It wasn't difficult for me to realize that even in my suffering and isolation, I was still better off than the average Gambian. In a country where 90% of government revenue comes from the export of peanuts, a professor in the university is well placed. I realized that the average student goes to school without textbooks. In addition, the parents of most students in the municipality work as cleaners in offices at the city of Banjul. It struck me that if I can buy a column in the daily newspaper that is circulated freely in every government department and do something like a cliff notes summary of the Literature and English language syllabi for high school students, their parents can, at the end of the day, take the newspapers home to their kids for free and they can have access to quality materials. I discussed the idea

with the Editor of the newspaper, The Daily Observer, and he agreed. Every Tuesday, I publish, with a small photo of mine at the upper right hand corner of the page, a whole section of critical analysis of content on various aspects of specific literature texts. It was an immediate success! By 12 noon every Tuesday, the paper was sold out! The Editor, pleased with the economic success, gave me an additional page free of cost. I continued writing for two years free of charge! It was my idea of giving back to the community, The Gambia, my land of refuge in my time of need. Little did I know it was my point of destiny. And that's how I came to meet Oumar Cherif Diop!

In the summer of 2002, I had just completed my application to Cheikh Anta Diop University in Senegal for a PhD program. I was required to put together a project proposal that would be developed into the dissertation. I was looking for an independent reader and was not sure who to approach. However, an opportunity arose from a most unexpected quarter. At one of the conferences organized by my university, I presented a paper on Gambia-Senegal relations through exploring similar themes in the novels of two prominent writers from both societies. A member of the audience, who later turned out to be Cherif Diop, ripped my paper into shreds during the Q and A session. Over lunch, I approached him, thanked him for his comments, and requested his review of my project proposal. To my surprise, he commended my work, and more especially what he referred to as my extraordinary patriotism. I was confused. The point: he had been reading my column regularly for the past two years! I sent him the proposal by email and he promised to get back to me in a day or two. The next day he gave me a call with directions to his home for a brief discussion. After settling down, he asked me: “Do you want to study in the United States?” I replied: “I don't have that amount of money to pay tuition fees in the States.” He seemed annoyed but he patiently rephrased the question after a long pause: “I am not asking you whether you have the money to do so. I am asking whether you would like to study at the University of Connecticut for a PhD in English.” I was shaking and I started crying. The rest is history. Oumar Cherif Diop was an outstanding graduate of UConn and he recommended me to his former advisor who read my PhD proposal and in turn recommended that I be granted a teaching assistantship to study at UConn. In giving back, I was actually stepping into my destiny!

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College
English
Department
Newsletter*

Lubbers 338
126 E. 10th St.
Holland, MI 49423

Phone: 616-395-7620
Fax: 616-395-7134
E-mail: baar@hope.edu
<http://www.hope.edu/academic/english/>

Word of the Day

fascicle \FASS-ih-kul\
Noun

Noun

1: A small or slender bundle (as of pine needles or nerve fibers)

2: One of the divisions of a book published in parts

The Baar's in the Back: White Christmas

For those of you new to Et Cetera, this column is where your favorite English Department Office Manager, Sarah Baar, (okay, so she's the only English Department Office Manager) gives "advice", or really, just talks about whatever she wants to talk about and hopes that you find it interesting.

By Sarah Baar

White Christmas is the only holiday movie I will watch. I've never seen *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, the claymation *Rudolf*, or anything. Okay, I lied. I saw *The Christmas Story*, in high school, once, and I've always regretted it.

And, sure, I get sucked into those dumb ABC Family movies where my favorite stars from the nineties are now handcuffing themselves to men in order to survive the holidays (don't ask), but everyone does. Right?

BUT, my point is, that I love *White Christmas*. I watch it when I decorate the tree, I watch it when I make Christmas cookies, I watch it because I can't quite remember what comes after "in all kinds of weather, we stick together..." for when my sister and I recreate the Haynes sisters' act. Trust me, there were never such devoted sisters.

Most of all, I watch it because it's the movie I always watched growing up. Bing and Rosemary crooning together says Christmas to me. It's tradition.

My family has always been big on Christmas traditions. We make Christmas cookies and peanut butter balls (the best). On Christmas Eve, we have fondue for dinner, then go to the Christmas even candlelight service at church. After, we drive around and look at all the pretty Christmas lights.

Christmas Day we go to my in-laws for brunch and presents. Then we lounge around all day, playing games or watching movies, just enjoying being together. In the evening, we have another fabulous meal and sit around again, talking and enjoying the lights on the Christmas tree.

So what's the point? What's the little lesson I think I'm sharing with you all? Well, there isn't one. Just wishing you all a lovely holiday season and a white Christmas.

