

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE HUMANITIES CENTER FELLOWS
2015 – 2016

FACULTY FELLOWS

Stephen Collins-Elliott

Assistant Professor

Department of Classics

Ph.D., Florida State University

Project: *The Table of the Transient World: Roman Imperialism and the Culture of Consumption, 600 BCE – 100 CE*

Roman imperialism has been seen as a primary cause of cultural and economic changes in ancient Italy. Yet, this view is based on a handful of cultural activities among the ruling elite, such as monumental architecture, art, and literature. To provide a novel approach that considers the rest of society, *The Table of the Transient World* places food consumption and its material effects at the forefront of history, in order to chart long-term social trends among the mass population. This study challenges the traditional interpretation in proposing that large-scale cultural shifts provided the formative context for Rome's empire to take root in Italy, rather than the reverse. Central to this thesis is the argument that destabilization of the status of wine and olive oil as elite commodities in the Tyrrhenian littoral just after the Archaic period, and their mass commodification, led to formative trends in agricultural production in Italy and impacted the Roman economy well into the Empire.

Mary Dzon

Associate Professor

Department of English

Ph.D., University of Toronto

Project: *A Study of Mary's Vitae within the Devotional and Scholastic Culture of the Later Middle Ages*

This study, edition, and translation of an extensive biography of the Virgin Mary occupying the entirety of a fourteenth-century illustrated manuscript will show how an encyclopedic mentality impelled the reconstruction of the life of Mary in the high Middle Ages. While the Virgin was the most important saint within medieval Christianity, in Europe it took quite some time before extensive biographical accounts of her life were composed. The *vita Mariae* that is the focus of this study is a detailed account that weaves together a wide assortment of apocryphal traditions and a large amount of material from scholarly texts. Dealing with the mundane aspects of Mary's life as well as the speculative and practical questions it raised, the illustrated narrative of Mary's life likely served as a multi-purpose compendium for Christians of varying levels of education and in different states of life. Besides making available a substantial and influential text, this project will also consider the relationship between Mary's life-story and other types of *vitae* circulating in the later medieval West.

Kristina Gehrman

Assistant Professor

Department of Philosophy
Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles
Project: *Ethics By Nature: Aristotelian Ethics for Modern Times*

Could ordinary facts about human nature possibly provide a secular, objective basis for the differences between right and wrong? If they can, then ethics has a substantial, common core; something we all share simply in virtue of our shared humanity. Not long before her death in 2010, philosopher Philippa Foot drew on Aristotle's ethics to defend precisely this view. But Foot, by all accounts, did not succeed in making her case. *Ethics by Nature* is an attempt to make a fresh case in favor of an Aristotelian, human-nature-based approach to ethics, in the spirit of Philippa Foot. The book will be a work in two parts. Part I gives a history of 20th century ethics that reveals implicit anthropocentrism at work in arguments both for and against Foot's Aristotelian ethics. In so doing, the argument of Part I removes the most significant source of resistance to Foot's approach. Then, Part II gives an account of values in nature that avoids human bias. It then explains the role of values thus-construed in a Foot-style Aristotelian approach to ethics. The argument of the book thus opens the way for Aristotelian ethics to receive the serious consideration that it deserves.

Anne-Hélène Miller
Assistant Professor of French and Francophone Studies
Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures
Ph.D., University of Washington
Project: *The Literary Status of French and Cultural Boundaries in the Fourteenth-Century*

While French served as a primary vernacular transnational literary language in Europe in the Middle Ages, this book project considers the various tensions generated by this literary status during the "long Fourteenth-Century." It examines texts that attest to a preoccupation by contemporary authors with the existence of a medieval *francophonia* and the various forms of resistance to its predominance outside but also within France, which is traditionally considered as emerging as a linguistic nation during this period.

Tore Olsson
Assistant Professor
Department of History
Ph.D., University of Georgia, Athens, GA
Project: *Remaking the Rural World: The American South and Mexico during the Twentieth Century*

Remaking the Rural World bridges the fields of twentieth-century U.S. and Latin American history by weaving together the agrarian history of two places seldom discussed in common context: the U.S. Cotton Belt and Mexico. On one hand, the book project illustrates how U.S. southerners and Mexicans in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century confronted similar problems in their countryside, such as concentrated landownership, rural poverty, and plantation monoculture. More importantly, though, it reveals how cosmopolitan reformers in each place acknowledged their common struggle and fostered a lively transnational dialogue about land, agriculture, and rural life that would reshape both regions.

Jay Rubenstein

Alvin and Sally Beaman Professor of History
Ph.D., University of California at Berkeley

Project: *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream: Crusade, Prophecy, and the Twelfth-Century Discovery of the West*

This project represents the culmination of fifteen years of research devoted to the First Crusade and its impact on European culture in the twelfth century and beyond. To determine exactly where the First Crusade fit into the course of salvation history, twelfth-century writers turned to one of the most enigmatic passages of the Bible: the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. As described in the second chapter of the Book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon saw a statue constructed from head to foot of four distinct metals—gold, silver, bronze, and iron, with feet made of iron and clay. The original meaning of the dream pointed toward the eventual return of the Israelites to the Promised Land and to their wars against the Seleucid Kings who would for a time rule them. In the twelfth century, more and more historians and theologians believed that the dream referred instead to the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099. As the readings of Nebuchadnezzar's dream became increasingly refined, European intellectuals developed some of the basic vocabulary still in use today to talk about Europe, Western Civilization, and the engagement between Christianity and Islam in the Middle East.

GRADUATE FELLOWS

Devon Bryson

Sixth-Year (in 2015-16) Doctoral Student, Department of Philosophy

Project: *The Beauty of Understanding: Aesthetic Criteria of Theory Selection*

In philosophy, as in the natural sciences, *theories* are the best tools we have for achieving understanding of a given subject. A theory delivers understanding by attempting to fully explain and systematize the domain it ranges over. But we often have more than one plausible theory of an important domain; in our quest for understanding, we are often forced to adjudicate between competing theories. Philosophers, like natural scientists, have a variety of criteria with which they evaluate theories. There are some puzzling criteria of theory selection that are regularly deployed. Some natural scientists, perhaps most notably Einstein and Dirac, claimed that a theory's being *beautiful* was a chief mark of success. Philosophers often say that a theory that is *unified* or *elegant* is superior to the alternative. Why are such aesthetic criteria relevant to theory selection? This dissertation explores how aesthetic criteria might be legitimate criteria of theory selection. This will be done, specifically, by analyzing two important criteria of theory selection that philosophers regularly use— *reflective equilibrium* and *simplicity*— and arguing that both of these criteria are best understood as partially aesthetic. This conclusion will be a relatively modest one— two important criteria of theory selection are partially aesthetic— but it will be an important first step in understanding how aesthetic criteria can be relevant to evaluating theories.

Robert Glaze

Fifth-Year (in 2015-16) Doctoral Student, Department of History

Project: *The Army of Tennessee in War and Memory, 1861-1930*

This project explores the memory of the Civil War in the South by examining white Southerners' perceptions of the Army of Tennessee—the Confederacy's primary field army in the western theater. It will unite two recent trends in Civil War historiography: military historians' increased emphasis on the centrality of the west and the proliferation of memory studies. With few exceptions, works pertaining to the memory of the Confederate military experience have been focused on Robert E. Lee and his eastern theater army. Through analyzing this unstudied aspect of Confederate memory this dissertation will add greater nuance to our understanding of Lost Cause mythology, as well as how societies process defeat.

Andrew Lallier

Fifth-Year (in 2015-16) Doctoral Student, Department of English

Project: *Sketches, Impressions and Romances: Literature as Experiment in the Nineteenth Century*

This project examines works by Thomas De Quincey, Charles Dickens, George Eliot and George MacDonald in connection with German Romantic aesthetic theory. More particularly, it investigates the conceptualization and practical development of an experimental understanding of literature across literary, critical and philosophical texts in the long nineteenth century. Literature, according to this understanding, consists not in a collection of fixed aesthetic forms and objects, but rather as space for generic reconfiguration and unpredictable productivity. Starting from ideals of aesthetic play and activity in Kant and the *Frühromantiker*, this study then moves on to the practical realization, testing and adaptation of these ideals in the experimental literary sketches, impressions and romances by the authors mentioned above. In examining works such as George MacDonald's *Phantastes* and George Eliot's *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, I am seeking both to complicate our understandings of familiar writers and to argue for the literary value of under-read or critically neglected works. The nineteenth century has long been recognized as a period decisively influential on the cultural conceptions and values that would shape English literature as an academic field. In this dissertation, I trace a literary and philosophical development without a defined institutional legacy, but with a presence in the works examined and direct relevance to contemporary issues of methodology and motivation in literary studies.

John Stromski

Fifth-Year (in 2015-16) Doctoral Student, Department of English

Project: *Breaking the Supply Chains: Ethics and Economics in Northern Literature, 1840-1900*

Recent scholarship on Southern capitalism emphasizes the role of slavery in developing economic institutions. This work also prioritizes slavery's role in formulating American capitalism, but focuses on Northern capitalism, arguing that Northern sites and concepts of labor were used to mediate the relationship between Northern culture and southern slavery. The project begins by treating attempts after the Panic of 1837 to distinguish Northern from Southern capitalism, apparent in abolitionist periodicals and utopian communities, and moves through textile mills and artisanal societies, which provided the space for conceptualizing a Northern labor force. It argues that canonical literature written from the perspective of Northern laborers and texts written by advocates for Northern workers navigate the relationship between slavery and capitalism by reconfiguring the ethical standards applicable to wage labor. This dissertation shows the ways in which slavery mediated Northern labor culture in a different way than it did in the South, formulating a distinct and independent regional economy.



Stephen Collins-Elliott



Mary Dzon



Kristina Gehrman



Anne-Hélène Miller



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