

Humanities Center Fellows
2016-2017

FACULTY FELLOWS

Katy Chiles

Associate Professor

Department of English

Ph.D., Northwestern University

Project: *Raced Collaboration in Antebellum America: The Idea of Authorship and Early African American and Native American Literature*

Raced Collaboration is the first comprehensive study of the crucial role that collaboration played in early African American and Native American literatures. This project tells the rich story of how African Americans and Native Americans—often against significant odds—produced English language texts, such as memoirs, novels, and slave narratives, through collaboration with persons of many races in antebellum America. *Raced Collaboration* investigates the remarkable ways that these writers collaborated—including dictating, editing, transcribing, compiling, translating, and printing. This project opens up new understandings of primary works whose collaborative form has become a constraint on further literary study. It reconstructs the composition and publication histories of these texts; examines how the material form of their publication shaped their meaning; and interprets how the texts comment on their existence as collaborative works. In addressing the broader issue of authorship, this project deepens our appreciation of the role of African Americans and Native Americans in antebellum American print culture.

Hilary Havens

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Ph.D., McGill University

Project: *From Manuscript to Print: Revising the Eighteenth-Century Novel*

Criticism of the eighteenth-century novel and even work in the burgeoning field of print culture has often neglected the importance of the process of revision, perhaps because the “actual sight of...revisions,” according to D. A. Miller, can be “nonetheless as disturbing as if, at the bottom of a vase filled with beautifully arranged flowers, we had caught a glimpse of thin filigrees of blood where the stems had been cut.” But these “disturbing” acts of revision – which in the eighteenth century often occur in complex response to family and friends, to readers and editors, and to an author’s own previous texts – are central aspects of the composition process. This project allows us to think about these authorial decisions in new ways, and many of the insights arise from Dr. Haven’s development of new digital paleographical methodologies to recover deleted text.

Daniel Magilow

Associate Professor of German

Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures

Ph.D., Princeton University

Project: *The Absolute Realist: The Photographic Theory of Albert Renger-Patzsch*

This project is a scholarly edition with a monograph-length introduction to the photographic theory of Albert Renger-Patzsch. Although Thomas Mann lauded him as “Germany’s Greatest Photographer” in the 1920s, other thinkers, notably Walter Benjamin, László Moholy-Nagy, and other partisans of the avant-garde attacked his realist aesthetic. Due to the lack of an English-language edition of his writings, Renger-Patzsch has become one side of a reductive “realism vs. avant-garde” debate. This project argues, however, that Renger-Patzsch rejected the idea of a singular photographic realism in favor of an infinite array of *realisms*, each unique to the photographed object and that representation’s purpose. Renger-Patzsch’s concept of multiple realisms can help us understand realism not as the avant-garde’s “other” but as central to it and to German modernism.

Denise Phillips

Associate Professor

Department of History

Ph.D., Harvard University

Project: *The Rural Socrates: Agricultural Knowledge, Experiment and the Enlightenment*

This project is a book about Kleinjogg, the eighteenth century’s most famous peasant. This skilled Swiss farmer was “discovered” by a Zurich doctor in the late 1750s, and he quickly became a celebrity in enlightened circles across Europe. Portraits of his family life and farming practices appeared in German, French, English, and American editions. This work uses Kleinjogg to explore the role of agriculture improvement in the pan-European enlightenment, and particularly what the figure of Kleinjogg can reveal about how eighteenth-century elites dealt with the role of social status and the specificities of place in the production of knowledge. Agricultural improvement was a prominent enlightened cause, but elites interested in agriculture faced several challenges. Effective agricultural knowledge was strongly dependent on knowledge about specific locales, and gaining this kind of knowledge often meant engaging in new ways with rural inhabitants. Kleinjogg, both as an image and as an actual person, served as a kind of thought experiment about the level of exchange that might be possible across wide gaps in social status.

Alison Vacca

Assistant Professor

Department of History

Ph.D., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Project: *Manuscripts of a Mediterranean Polemic*

Alison Vacca uses Arabic and Armenian sources to explore the circumstances of Islamic rule in the medieval Caucasus and Muslim-Christian relations in the Islamic world. During her time at the UT Humanities Center, she will be working on an annotated translation, edition, and analysis of a purported epistolary exchange between the leader of the Islamic world, the Umayyad caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 717 – 720), and the leader of the Christian East, the Byzantine emperor Leo the Isaurian (r. 717 – 741). Five versions of the ‘Umar-Leo correspondence exist today in Arabic, Armenian, Aljamiado (Romance or Spanish in Arabic alphabet), and Latin. They form a distinct set of texts that range from the southern Caucasus, across Syria, into the Sinai, and through Spain and the south of France. They demonstrate that Muslims and Christians engaged in in-depth discussions about topics like the divinity

of Jesus, the nature of Scripture, and the veneration of icons. Rather than seeing such religious polemics as proof of religious antagonism, these letters demonstrate sustained discussion and a broad education about religious matters. Christian authors cite the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* (sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad) and Muslim authors similarly demonstrate knowledge of Christian scripture.

Brandon Winford

Assistant Professor

Department of History

Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Project: *Building New South Prosperity: John Hervey Wheeler, Black Banking, and the Economic Struggle for Civil Rights*

Building New South Prosperity will argue that there is no justice without economic opportunity. By combining black business and civil rights history, the book project reexamines the contributions black businesspeople such as banker and civil rights lawyer John Hervey Wheeler made to the civil rights movement. As one of the nation's savviest behind-the-scenes black power brokers, Wheeler worked to prioritize racial and economic equality for black people in the South. He led in so many arenas, which meant he brought the full weight of his institutional and organizational affiliations—an expansive network of resources—to bear in all of his civil rights activism. As a "black business activist," Wheeler offered a bold vision of regional prosperity, which could only be achieved if blacks obtained full citizenship rights without delay. This economic vision of "New South Prosperity," centered on his ultimate concern for the economic welfare of the South after WWII. Wheeler believed the movement to be as much about the survival and expansion of black enterprise as much as anything else. As a banker, this was also important because of the potential it had on black businesses being able to compete and "reenter the larger marketplace."

ADDITIONAL FACULTY FELLOWS

Megan Bryson

Assistant Professor

Department of Religious Studies

Ph.D., Stanford University

American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Fellowship

Project: *Esoteric Networks: Transregional Buddhism in the Dali Kingdom*

The Dali kingdom (937-1253) in what is now southwest China was a hub in a religious network extending to the neighboring regions of Song-dynasty China, Tibet, India, and Southeast Asia. These regions had in common the politico-religious system of Esoteric (or Tantric) Buddhism. This project shows how Buddhism circulated beyond the confines of regional traditions by tracing how esoteric Buddhist texts, images, and objects entered the Dali kingdom. Dr. Bryson uses network theory to understand both the documented networks that consist of textual, visual, and archaeological records and the ways in which Dali-kingdom Buddhists represented the networks that brought these materials to the region. She argues that these two kinds of networks must be mapped in relation to each other to understand esoteric Buddhism in transregional perspective.

Christine (Tina) Shepardson
Lindsay Young Professor
Department of Religious Studies
Ph.D., Duke University
National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Fellowship
Project: *A Memory of Violence: The Radicalization of Religious Difference in the Middle East (ca. 431-750 CE)*

Religious violence flared up in the eastern Mediterranean. Religious leaders were kidnapped, exiled, and sometimes killed; government officials chose sides; and religious minorities faced persecution. In the fifth century a theological controversy over the relation of the divine and human aspects of the second Person of the Christian Trinity became sharply politicized. The emperor Marcian called the empire's bishops to the ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, but many Christians rejected its outcome and political favor vacillated as subsequent emperors sought a compromise. By the late sixth century, the church was permanently divided in schism, fueled by decades of political rivalries, hostile propaganda, and sporadic persecution. Today the Syrian, Coptic (Egyptian), Armenian, and Ethiopian Orthodox churches reject the outcome of the Council of Chalcedon, which is accepted by the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and most Protestant churches. This intra-Christian conflict and its crystallization into permanent schism is the subject of Dr. Shepardson's third book, which will argue that the writings of 5th- and 6th-century Syriac-speaking leaders constructed a shared memory of persecution and resistance that equipped their anti-Chalcedonian Christian community to survive decades of imperial hostility.

GRADUATE FELLOWS

Kerri Ann Considine
Sixth-Year Doctoral Student (in 2016-17), Department of English
Project: *Mediating Machines: Human Mechanisms and the Modern Stage*

In the wake of the industrial revolution, modern theatre artists wrestled with the implications of the mechanization of modern life by staging the relationship between live and mechanical bodies in a variety of plays and theatrical experiments. Most critical examinations of these works view the mechanical bodies as displacing the human bodies; in doing so they implicitly argue that machines become the primary mediator of human experience. In many of these works, however, the live performing body onstage resists this narrative of displacement, since the live actor's body is still physically present even when it has been metaphorically or representationally subsumed. This project focuses on plays and theatrical experiments that cast live human bodies in the roles of machines or mechanized bodies (automatons, puppets, robots, etc.), considering what happens when human bodies insist on their presence in a new mechanically-oriented world. As this dissertation argues, the modern theatre's focus on mechanical bodies directs attention to the role of the live performing body, ultimately re-claiming the live body's role as the primary mediator of human experience.

Jeremy Pearson
Sixth-Year Doctoral Student (in 2016-17), Department of History
Project: *William of Tripoli and his Eastern Context: Reconsidering the Cultural Milieu of the Latin East*

For nearly two centuries after the First Crusade, Latin Christians controlled significant parts of the eastern Mediterranean, home to a diverse array of Christians, Muslims, and Jews. While seemingly a rich context for inter-religious cultural exchange, the dominant historical narrative has called this society a form of proto-Apartheid, with Frankish rulers successfully erecting impermeable boundaries between themselves and their largely Arabic-speaking subjects.

This dissertation challenges this narrative through an investigation of the life and work of William of Tripoli, a thirteenth-century Dominican born in modern Lebanon, who spent his career evangelizing Muslims from a priory in Akko (modern Acre). William wrote two treatises on Islam that have been called “peculiar”, because of their positive portrayal of both the Qur’an and the Prophet Muhammad. This project argues that the “peculiar” elements in William’s work were borrowed from Arabic-Christian and Muslim sources, and that they informed his rhetorical approach to Islam. William of Tripoli is representative of an important religious exchange between Latin and Arabic culture that until now has been misunderstood.

Hope Smith

Sixth-year doctoral student (in 2016-2017), Department of Anthropology

Project: *The Embodiment of Identity: an Archaeological Perspective on Race and Self-Representation in 18th -century Virginia*

Institutionalized slavery helped to create the concept of race in the American mind and forced people into new social categories based on superficial bodily characteristics. These new social categories resulted in the formation of identities that were continuously negotiated, reinforced or challenged through daily bodily practices of self-presentation that included ways of dress, adornment and physical action. Because slavery was defined by the body, an embodiment approach to plantation archaeology can shed new light on the construction of racial identities. This interdisciplinary project combines an archaeological analysis of personal adornment artifacts with a close reading of mass-produced satirical illustrations, runaway slave advertisements and shopkeepers’ records. Through these textual, visual and material sources this project will trace the daily practices of presentation of self in 18th-century rural Virginia, revealing how plantation owners and the enslaved negotiated multiple identities within the confines of this system.

Matthew Smith

Fifth-Year (in 2016-17) Doctoral Student, Department of English

Project: *The Grave and the Angelus: Misreading Local Color Louisiana, 1865-1914*

In the aftermath of the American Civil War, national periodicals such as *Harper’s*, *The Century*, and *The Atlantic Monthly* eagerly solicited and published literature depicting small, often isolated regional communities within the United States – literature collectively referred to as local color. This project addresses the following question about that body of literature: If part of local color’s aesthetic goal depended upon making local communities at least partially visible and legible to a national readership, what is at stake when that readership misinterprets the folkways, traditions, linguistic peculiarities, and racial formations represented within these texts? This dissertation moves towards answering this question by examining how limits – the limits of local knowledge and the limits of literary interpretation – functioned for both the authors and readers of local color literature. As a case study, this project

focuses on local color texts depicting South Louisiana by authors such as George Washington Cable, Lafcadio Hearn, and Alice Dunbar-Nelson.

ADDITIONAL GRADUATE FELLOW

James Stewart

Sixth-year doctoral student (in 2016-2017), Department of English

Marco Haslam Dissertation Fellowship

Project: *Middle English Romance and Noblemen in Need*

The knight in medieval England rarely worked alone. Whether he served under a magnate or at the head of a regiment, a knight was almost always a part of a much larger company of men. This study explores how medieval English romances portray ideals of nobility in light of the social circumstances of English noblemen, particularly their interdependent relationships with their retainers. This dissertation argues that English romance poets, as they imagined ideals of nobility, expanded their conceptions of chivalry beyond a hero's displays of exceptional prowess and looked as well to his ability to work with a retinue in order to show how medieval noblemen should exercise their power.

Faculty Fellows:



Katy Chiles



Hilary Havens



Daniel Magilow



Denise Phillips



Alison Vacca



Brandon Winford

Additional Faculty Fellows:



Megan Bryson



Christine (Tina) Shepardson

Graduate Fellows:



Kerri Considine



Jeremy Pearson



Hope Smith



Matthew Smith