UT Humanities Center Fellows 2020-2021

Faculty Fellows

Harriet Wood Bowden
Associate Professor

Department: Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures

Project Title: Second Language Acquisition: Elicited Imitation and Metacognitive Instruction

Project Details

Project 1 is a book entitled *Elicited Imitation in Second Language Acquisition research*, an invited contribution to the Routledge Press series on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. The book will provide a comprehensive review of elicited imitation, a language testing technique consisting of a repetition task, including its theoretical foundations and its application—both past and present—in the field of SLA. Project 2 is a collaborative (multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary) project on metacognitive instruction in active-learning (“flipped”) classes including Spanish, Math, and Philosophy. The project investigates whether and how giving learners metacognitive instruction on how to provide peer feedback during group classroom tasks can, in fact, benefit their learning and engagement.

Dawn Coleman
Associate Professor

Department: English

Project Title: Secular Intimations: American Women and New Spiritual Narratives, 1840-1885

Project Details

New challenges to Christianity and proliferating spiritual possibilities in the mid-nineteenth century US created urgent problems of identity for women who doubted or disbelieved Protestant creeds. Female piety had long been considered integral to women’s personal worth and to the nation’s moral exceptionalism, and women who erred met with sharp rebuke. This project maps the gendered experience of emergent secularity in the US by re-investigating the midcentury literary archive. It recovers numerous riveting narratives of women who turned away from Protestantism and forged new spiritual paths. Defying the critical commonplace that US women’s writing of this period was sentimental and conformist, these long-neglected stories pioneered new plots, character types, and moods to represent how women might reimagine themselves and their social value in a newly secular age.
Stephen Collins-Elliott  
Assistant Professor  

Department: Classics  

Project Title: *Imitative Structures and the Logic of Empire in the Ancient Mediterranean*  

**Project Details**  

*Imitative Structures* will provide a novel analysis of the role of individual and group mimesis in shaping the political, cultural, and material record of Rome’s growing empire in the last four centuries BCE. Emulation, the act of surpassing a rival in a certain domain, was a common topos for ancient historians describing the rise of the Roman empire. Romans are often typified both in antiquity and modernity as imitative and adaptive, taking on the tactics and methods of their opponents: Etruscans, Samnites, Carthaginians, and Greeks. Emulation, however, does not just speak to a superficial adoption of traits. It is instead part of a deeper socio-behavioral dialogue apparent in a variety of contexts in the central Mediterranean from the Archaic period onward. Emulation is moreover intricately bound within a nexus of envy, desire, imitation, and appropriation.

Christopher Magra  
Professor  

Department: History  

Project Title: *Chocolate Works: Food Production and Slavery in a Vast Early America*  

**Project Details**  

During the eighteenth century, the increased availability of slave labor in the Western Hemisphere made possible the mass production of chocolate in North America. Enslaved people in the Caribbean and in South America cultivated cacao trees and produced cocoa beans in bulk quantities that reduced prices. Their counterparts in North America ground cocoa beans into chocolate for manufacturers who took advantage of lower prices for raw materials. The transhemispheric chocolate commodity chain linked the lives of enslaved people on two continents. If we widen our understanding of early American workers to include slaves in a vast early America, then it is clear that historians’ current assumptions that a shortage of labor and a dearth of manufacturing limited the mass production of food are incorrect.
Victor Petrov  
Assistant Professor  

**Department:** History  

**Project Title:** Welcome to Cyberia: Bulgarian Modernization, Computers, and the World 1967-1989  

**Project Details**  
The failure to enter the information age has been touted as one of the reasons for the fall of communism in Europe. This study uses the prism of the communist world’s biggest computer industry to show how societies enter the information age unevenly, and to show what effects technology had on political and economic thinking in the small Balkan state. Utilizing Bulgarian, Indian, and Russian archives and interviews, this book project breaks down temporal and spatial boundaries that often dominate thinking about the Cold War: the Iron Curtain as an impenetrable barrier to exchange, the Global South as a site of development rather than a rich ground for business interaction, 1989 as a convenient end point. The Bulgarian case shows how utopian dreams of the end of labor could, even in their failure, constitute a rich world of economic interaction, political philosophy, and social engineering.

Maria Stehle  
Associate Professor  

**Department:** Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures  

**Project Title:** Gender Discord: Adolescent Aesthetics in Experimental Literature, Film, and Art  

**Project Details**  
This project develops the concept of “adolescent aesthetics” as a way to highlight the political interventions of performance and visual arts. Experimental texts, films, and art works challenge gender, social, and aesthetic norms in order to explore worldly concerns. Artists’ aesthetic choices are intentional and political, while affective responses are multifaceted and multidimensional. Artworks purposefully create mobile viewing postings that ask us to re-think our relationships to the worlds that surround us and to create new ways of thinking and expressing concepts of bodies, nature, and belonging.
Digital Humanities Faculty Fellow – Spring 2021

Hilary Havens
Associate Professor

**Department:** English

**Project Title:** *Maria Edgeworth Letters*

**Project Details**

The British author Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) was “the most commercially successful novelist of her age,” and yet a comparatively small number of her letters have been published. There are at least 10,000 extant sheets of Edgeworth’s correspondence, and this fact – coupled with the increasing reluctance of scholarly presses to underwrite major editorial projects – means that Edgeworth’s letters will almost certainly never appear in a complete print edition. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary and historical scholars have thus been deprived of an important female literary voice. The Maria Edgeworth Letters project ([https://mariaedgeworth.org/](https://mariaedgeworth.org/)) seeks to remedy this gap in scholarship by creating a digital space where Edgeworth’s full correspondence is made available, searchable, and is eventually annotated through a collaborative open-access project grounded in the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI).

Graduate Fellows

Jordan Amspacher

Sixth-Year Doctoral Student (in 2020-21)

**Department:** History

**Project Title:** “*Troya Victa*: Empire, Identity, and Apocalypse in Frankish Chronicles of the Fourth Crusade”

**Project Details**

Thirteenth-century Latin authors and scribes understood the events of the Fourth Crusade (1198-1204) and the Latin conquest of Christian Constantinople in unique ways. Twelfth-century understandings of imperial history, Frankish identity, and eschatology guided the actions of the Fourth Crusaders, who saw themselves both as the dispossessed heirs of Troy and as the champions of Christian orthodoxy. They therefore justified their conquest of the Greek East by presenting it as a long-delayed homecoming, one which usher in a new era in salvation history. This reading of the Latin Conquest proved so commensurate with contemporary thought processes that, even in the wake of the Greek reconquest of Constantinople in 1261, Latin audiences continued to interpret the events of 1204 through the lens of sacred time and Trojan inheritance.
Lorraine Dias Herbon

Sixth-Year Doctoral Student (in 2020-21)

Department: History

Project Title: Public Wife: The Life of Jessie Benton Frémont

Project Details

The daughter of Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton and the wife of a military officer/explorer/politician, Jessie Benton Frémont earned money by writing and served as the politician, the breadwinner, and the engine that kept her family afloat after her husband’s various failures. As a popular writer, Jessie was the architect of the image of herself and her husband that predominates in historiography and popular culture; she was also an authoritative voice in crafting the narrative of U.S. westward expansion and the “conquest” of California. Examining the idea of a “public wife,” one who lent credibility to (or even diminished the credibility of) her husband, sheds new light not only on Jessie but may help future historians illuminate the lives of many other prominent nineteenth-century wives.

Victoria Lane

Fifth-Year Doctoral Student (in 2020-21)

Department: English

Project Title: Queer Embodiments: An Auto-Ethnographic Study of Contemporary Queer Poetry

Project Details

The poetry of contemporary queer poets Andrea Gibson, Buddy Wakefield, and Danez Smith sit at the intersections of spirituality, activism and community building. Exploring the sites of the graduate seminar, poetry readings, and online workshops, and synthesizing a wide range of personal experiences and encounters with poems, poets,
and theorists, this project turns to these poets as it navigates higher education. Working from theories of queer identity and affect, the project engages in a phenomenological and post-critical methodology; it explores the usefulness of poetry and studying poetry, and thinks deeply and carefully about what it means to be queer and embodied and how that creates culture(s).

**Lucas Nossaman**

Fifth-Year Doctoral Student (in 2020-21)

**Department:** English

**Project Title:** These Objects Make a World: Religion and Emergent Ecology in Nineteenth-Century America

**Project Details**

Scholarly accounts of mid-nineteenth-century America tell a story familiar to many: a Darwinian revolution transformed the relationship between natural science and religion. Yet scientists and literary writers were reconceptualizing nature itself in the decades before Darwin’s 1859 *Origin of Species*, and inspired by German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt and his scientific network, they were doing so by reimagining natural theology, a tradition of finding God in nature’s design. Literary works by Susan Fenimore Cooper, William Gilmore Simms, and Henry David Thoreau dramatize the shifts within natural theology that clinched the emergent ecological perspective of nature at this time.

**Marco Haslam Dissertation Fellow**

**Kelsey Blake**

Sixth-Year Doctoral Student (in 2020-21)

**Department:** History

**Project Title:** The Experience of Illness, Healing, and the Body in the Carolingian World

**Project Details**

Spiritual and physical healthcare in the ninth-century Carolingian world was complicated by the fact that illnesses were sometimes attributed to imbalances in the humoral forces thought to govern the body or to the displeasure of God. The ninth-century Franks also saw political forces—a civil war, the deaths of numerous kings, and the beginnings of the Viking raids—operating through bodies. Accounts from the period show the sick and suffering seeking relief and salvation through the healing powers ascribed to saints. Examining saints’ lives, annals, biblical commentaries, and medical manuscripts helps us to consider the healing miracles attributed to saints and relics alongside the remedies
of the medicus—the humoral practitioner of the ninth century—as sources of healthcare in the Early Middle Ages.