

# English Department News

Editor: Catherine Colmerauer



## Poet Brian Turner Visits Campus

On Wednesday, February 18th, SUNY Fredonia welcomed renowned poet Brian Turner to campus. Turner is the author of *Here, Bullet*, a best-selling book of poems reflecting on the seven years that Turner served in the United States Army. The poems specifically focus on the year that Turner spent in Iraq as an infantry team leader.

Upon his arrival at Fredonia, Turner was interviewed by students Ann Marie Trietley, and Alexander Durringer. In the interview, Turner mentioned his deep connection with the landscape of Iraq. "There is a living connection to the land, and history is alive there," explained Turner. *Here, Bullet* contains many scenes of death and destruction. In the interview, Turner elaborated that, "I wasn't thinking of global politics, I was just moved by some of the men and wanted to put it down on paper."

From 2pm to 3pm,

Turner led a craft talk in Fenton 127. The room was packed with students and faculty as Turner held them captive with the stories behind his poems. Turner took the time to give a brief lesson on writing an ode, and led the room in a writing exercise. He collected all the writing and hopes to use it all in a collaborative poetry project. The students in the room were exhilarated at the prospect of being published in Turner's future books.

At 7pm, Turner gave a poetry reading in Rosch Recital Hall. He read selected poems from *Here, Bullet* as well as new, unpublished poems that are still under revision.

English Professor James Stevens, who was instrumental in bringing Turner to campus, was thoroughly pleased over the night's turnout. "I was thrilled to finally have poet, Brian Turner, here on campus," says Stevens. "The care he showed to students was

exemplary. I have never known a poet to take ten minutes with each student whose book he signed, discussing with them their own friends and family in the military. Students saw him as a true unbiased voice, strong in his opinions, but wanting to tell the stories of ALL involved in the war in Iraq. His commitment to helping both Iraq War veterans and Iraqi people is truly amazing."

Following Turner's reading, Assistant Professor of Music, Robert Deemer, led a performance he composed, which was inspired by Turner's poem, "2000 lbs." The night was an opportunity for the Department of Music and the Department of English to share a wonderful interdisciplinary experience.

### Inside this issue:

Albert A. Dunn Memorial Scholarship	2
S.T.D. helps with Big Read event	3
MLW Book Fund Recipients announced	3
MLW helps Student Teachers	3
"On Literary London" by Susan Kornacki	4
"Q&A" with Professor Aimee Nezhukumatathil	6
Call for Alumni Submissions	8

## English National Honors Society Currently Accepting Members

The SUNY Fredonia chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the English National Honors Society, is currently accepting new members. Applicants must have taken at least 4 semesters of college, as well as four courses in the English Department (beyond English Composition) to be considered. Students must also have a minimum 3.5 GPA in the major. Both graduate students and undergraduate students are encouraged to apply, and the induction ceremony will take place towards the end of the Spring Semester. Sigma Tau Delta is recognized on campus for hosting Coffee Talks, open mic nights, and the annual "Bedtime Stories" event. Application forms are available in the English Department Office. Questions about the Honor Society should be emailed to Dr. VanDette (Emily.VanDette@fredonia.edu) or Dr. Siegle-Drege (Ann.SiegleDrege@fredonia.edu).



### Albert A. Dunn Memorial Scholarship

April is National Poetry Month. On April 2nd, 2009, in room S104 of the Williams Center, a "Day of Poetry and Prose" will be held to honor the memory of Professor Albert A. Dunn. The event will last from 2pm to 5pm. All are welcome to attend and/or participate. Those interested in reading a piece of poetry or prose should pick up the sign-up flyer in the English Department office. A reading should not exceed 5 to 10 minutes.

The proceeds of this event will go to the Albert A. Dunn Memorial Scholarship/Book Grant Endowment. Students who plan to read are

required to make a \$5 donation to the scholarship, and all other participants are asked to give \$25 per reading. Monetary gifts will be accepted from those who do not want to read, but still want to donate to the scholarship. The first \$500 raised will be reserved for the book fund, which will help a selected student with his or her purchases of primary texts of fiction, poetry, and drama. Any additional money raised will benefit the Dunn scholarship fund.

Professor Albert Dunn taught at SUNY Fredonia from 1972, until shortly before his death in June of 2007. Some of the courses that Professor Dunn loved to teach include Victorian Literature, Russian Literature, and the work of William Butler Yeats. Adrienne McCormick, Chair of

the English Department, remembers that Dunn had the ability to "coax students to really engage directly primary texts in their study of literature." According to Professor Bruce Simon, Professor Dunn "possessed a dry sense of humor," and was very well-liked. Through the efforts of the Fredonia College Foundation, and Professor Dunn's widow, Linda Dunn, it is hoped that this scholarship will become an annual event.

To send a donation, mail a check to 272 Central Avenue Fredonia, NY 14063, with "Albert Dunn Scholarship" on the noteline.

## Recipients of the annual Mary Louise White Book Award Announced

Every year, the English Department is able to grant two freshmen with a scholarship to help aid in their textbook purchases. The winners receive \$200 dollars per semester for four semesters. This year the scholarship was awarded to Tomi Stratton and Casey Takacs.

On receiving the award, Stratton noted, "I feel very honored to be chosen as the recipient of this

scholarship over the many students who applied. It not only helped me pay for my textbooks; it gave me confidence in my ability to write."

The topic of Stratton's award winning essay was: "If you were given \$200 to spend on books not for school, what would they be, and why?"

All entering freshmen are eligi-

ble to apply for this scholarship. Entry information is provided in the Freshmen Orientation Packets.

## Sigma Tau Delta hosts Dunkirk High School Visit

*"It was a great experience to see our local high school community get as excited about literature as we do!" -Dan Lewandowski, Sigma Tau Delta volunteer*

On Friday, February 13th, Juniors and Seniors from Dunkirk High School took a field trip to SUNY Fredonia as an event for The Big Read. Students took a walking tour of the campus, followed by a luncheon with Sigma Tau Delta in the Horizon Room in the Williams Center. Sigma Tau Delta answered questions that the students had about the hon-

ors society, the school, and college life in general. Following the lunch, Sigma Tau Delta accompanied the high school students to Reed Library, where they were given a tour of the Emmett Till exhibit led by Senior Assistant Librarian Darryl Coleman and his docents. While Dunkirk High students were asking questions

regarding the exhibit and looking at all the attractions the exhibit offered, Sigma Tau Delta handed out parting gifts funded by the Mary Louise White fund. The students were encouraged to contact Sigma Tau Delta if they ever had questions regarding the college application process or SUNY Fredonia.

## MLW Funds help Student Teachers with Travel Cost

For the second year in a row, English department students completing their student teaching requirement have been granted financial aid. A portion of the Mary Louise White fund has been allocated to help these students with the cost of gas. On average, the department was able

to grant \$120 per student teacher, of which there are 24 this semester.

Liz Koehler, a senior English Adolescent Education major, is grateful for the funds. "The English Department's decision to use the Mary Louise White Fund to help student teachers pay for gas is a great example of the

faculty really caring about the students' well-being," says Koehler. "They even gave a little extra to those of us who have two placements that are farther away. I know that I speak for all of this year's student teachers when I say that we really appreciate the personal care that we are given by the English

Department faculty."

The English Department plans to continue helping its student teachers as long as they are able to.

## “On ‘Literary London’”

By: Susan Kornacki

The Literary London program was a life-changing experience for me. How could it not be? It was my first transatlantic flight, my first non-American city (other than Canada, which doesn't count), and my introduction to not one new culture, but several. This trip was an intellectual epiphany, too: it allowed us to contextualize the writing of Virginia Woolf, who we studied with Dr. McVicker, and the work of contemporary British writers such as Caryl Churchill, Zadie Smith, and Sarah Waters in Dr. McCormick's *Gender and Literature in London* course. We literally walked down the streets Virginia Woolf and her characters trod on; visited Brick Lane, an Indian district in London where Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* is set; and explored the Docklands, where portions of both Sarah Water's novel *The Night Watch* and Penelope Lively's novel, *The City of the Mind* take place.

Our two week trip to Britain was a trip through time as well as space. On our first weekend we traveled to Stonehenge and went on a guided sunrise tour of the 3,000 year old mystic place that has baffled, intrigued and mesmerized people for generations upon generations. We touched the stones! No one I've ever talked to who has visited this site has been able to. That was one of the most incredible parts of this trip for me.

When the week began, so did our classes. For four hours a day, Monday through Friday, we studied the work of Virginia Woolf and various contemporary authors in Britain. We took a break between each class, and would use the time to walk around the block to a bistro for some coffee and a bagel, or simply to cross the street and visit one of London's many small parks that break up the grid of ancient buildings and modern structures. After classes, we would break for lunch and then reconvene at some locale that augmented our subjects of study for that day. After discussing a book about a family surviving the Blitz in London, we visited the Imperial War Museum and walked into actual three dimensional recreations of the Blitz experience. On a visit to the Women's Library, we met an archivist and flipped through old newspaper clippings about Virginia Woolf, her family and friends. We held and read letters to and from the author whose books we analyzed and discussed! We saw photos, newspaper clippings and first editions of books. We gained a deeper and more dimensional understanding than could ever



be achieved in America, an ocean away from the city that shaped the stories we studied.

Other highlights were a visit to the British Museum, where we saw an entire sarcophagus, beautiful Greek statues, hieroglyphics carved into Egyptian tomb walls and the Rosetta Stone itself; the British Library, where I listened to a recording of Yeats reading his poetry and a BBC interview with Woolf, and saw ancient illuminated Bibles, Korans and Torahs; a private viewing of the British suffragette archive in the British Museum, guided by an expert who had helped one of the authors we studied with her research for her book; a trip to Westminster Abbey; shopping on Portobello Road, in the open air markets; a ride on the London Eye (one of the world's biggest ferris wheels!) and, of course, Big Ben!

At the beginning of our second week in London, we took a break from the city and visited Oxford, staying overnight in an exquisite bed-and-breakfast. Classes were held outside, in a rose garden, with our hosts' three year old son peeking out at us from behind the flowering trellis. We went punting (a combination of kayaking and gondola riding) along the Cherwell river that cuts through the town of Oxford, toured the various colleges that comprise the University, saw the dorm where Bill Clinton stayed during his semester abroad, and visited the Eagle and Child, the pub that C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien frequented.

Anyone who says English cuisine is terrible has never been to London. Like any big city, London is a conglomerate of many different cultures, leading to a glorious variety of restaurant choices. We enjoyed pan-Asian dishes at Wagamama, had some great Indian food on a side street near Keats's house, discovered a few excellent Italian restaurants and enjoyed hearty Irish meals at O'Neill's.

We had plenty of free time too. Everyone spent it differently: some chose to visit the Tate Modern to see the latest in contemporary art; some visited Oxford Street (the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue of London) to shop; others wandered over to Buckingham Palace or watched "football" games with locals at the pub.

The Literary London program introduced me to a grand, historical and beautiful city that I would've been baffled by had I attempted to visit it on my own. I would recommend this program to anyone, especially to a first-timer like myself: being a primarily English-speaking city, London is an approachable, clean and diverse place that you can get a very satisfying taste of in two weeks, while getting course credit and advancing your academic career. If you'd like to travel to London with Dr. McCormick in July 2009, get your application in now – late applications are still being accepted.

## *SAVE YOUR PAPERS!!!*

**The English Department will soon be collecting submissions for the scholarships given at the annual English Department awards ceremony.**

Scholarships Include:

- The Freshman Writing Award
- Undergraduate Writing Beyond the First Year
  - Laura Foster Award
  - Mary Louise White Poetry Award
  - Mary Louise White Fiction Award
  - Graduate Research Award
  - 1929 Graduate Fund Award

**More information on these scholarships will be provided in future issues.**

## **Earn 1.5 credits in NEW YORK CITY!**

**Page and Stage Drama ENGL 399**

**Instructor: Dr. Ann Siegle-Drege**

- **Dates: Monday, May 18—Thursday, May 21**
- **Students read 3 plays on campus, then travel to NYC to see the plays live, and to experience the culture and history of the city**
- **Total Cost = \$1047.60 ( Factoring Tuition + Mandatory Fees + Course Fees. This includes round-trip train transportation from Buffalo to New York City, housing, Metrocard, and three theater tickets. Transportation to Buffalo, meals, and spending money not included.**
- **For more information contact Dr. Ann Siegle-Drege, 256 Fenton Hall, Fredonia (716) 673-3849**



## One-on-One with Professor Aimee Nezhukumatathil

SUNY Fredonia English Professor Aimee Nezhukumatathil has been recently honored as a 2009 Fellow for the National Endowment for the Arts. The following is a Question and Answer session between Professor Nezhukumatathil and the editor of the newsletter.

**Q: Was there a definitive point when you realized that teaching and writing poetry was what you wanted to do for a career?**

**A:** All during elementary school and high school, I felt like I had to explain so much of my culture to my friends/ boyfriends/etc. They knew I was American—had no accent whatsoever, but yet I was still different in lots of ways to them. It's funny, because my writing is still a lot of that "explaining" I think. Why I couldn't do this or that, why we eat this or that, etc. But I guess it opened my eyes to two whole other cultures that are not being as heard in mainstream literature and I wanted that to change. My parents were floored when I told them I didn't want to be a doctor (horrified, actually)—but now they are very supportive and love it when they find a smidge of one of their stories in my poems.

I think because my sister and I were raised in suburban neighborhoods where my family was the ONLY family of color, I was so used to having to 'explain' my (then) unusual packed lunches of lumpia and fried rice. Or having fish for breakfast. So I think in some ways, you could say I spent my whole childhood and teen years building a language that is, I hope, accessible yet colorful.

**Q: Is there a favorite subject that you like to write about? Or a subject that you find most inspiring?**

**A:** The one thing I never hid while I was growing up was my curiosity and love of language and story. So even though I may be writing about elements of my Filipina and South Indian background, I hope to do so in ways that make it accessible and meaningful to anyone. I'm very much drawn to classical poetic forms like the

haibun and the ghazal, and try to use them to tell mini-stories in verse form.

I'm very particular when it comes to describing a landscape. For me, as both a reader and a writer, landscape is the very anchor (or at least one of them) for the whole poem to stand. Much of my writing comes from a life unsettled (having lived in seven different states since childhood) and to write about what a slice of land looks like or feels like is perhaps my way of mooring myself within the white space of a poem. The nature writer Gretel Erlich said that part of what helped shed her outsider status was to become a part of a place where "a person's life is a slow accumulation of days, seasons, and years, anchored by a land-bound sense of place." I have something very close to that "slow accumulation" here in Western NY, thank goodness, but at heart, there is still a wanderer in me.

**Q: Do you have any tips/advice for those who want to make a career out of creative writing?**

**A:** Except for a few lucky people (Billy Collins, Mary Oliver, etc), most writers I know do something else besides write to actually make a living. I know doctors, attorneys, cooks, editors, etc. who all write poetry and I know the one thing they (and I) would say if someone wanted to take writing poems seriously is to read often and a lot. But there's more: Floss. Invest in a good pair of shoes and write letters more often. Say "Please" and "Thank You" to your editors. Politeness goes a long way in the literary world. Listen to the paper take the ink when you sign your name.

**WHEN WEAVER ANTS CUT (A VALENTINE)**



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