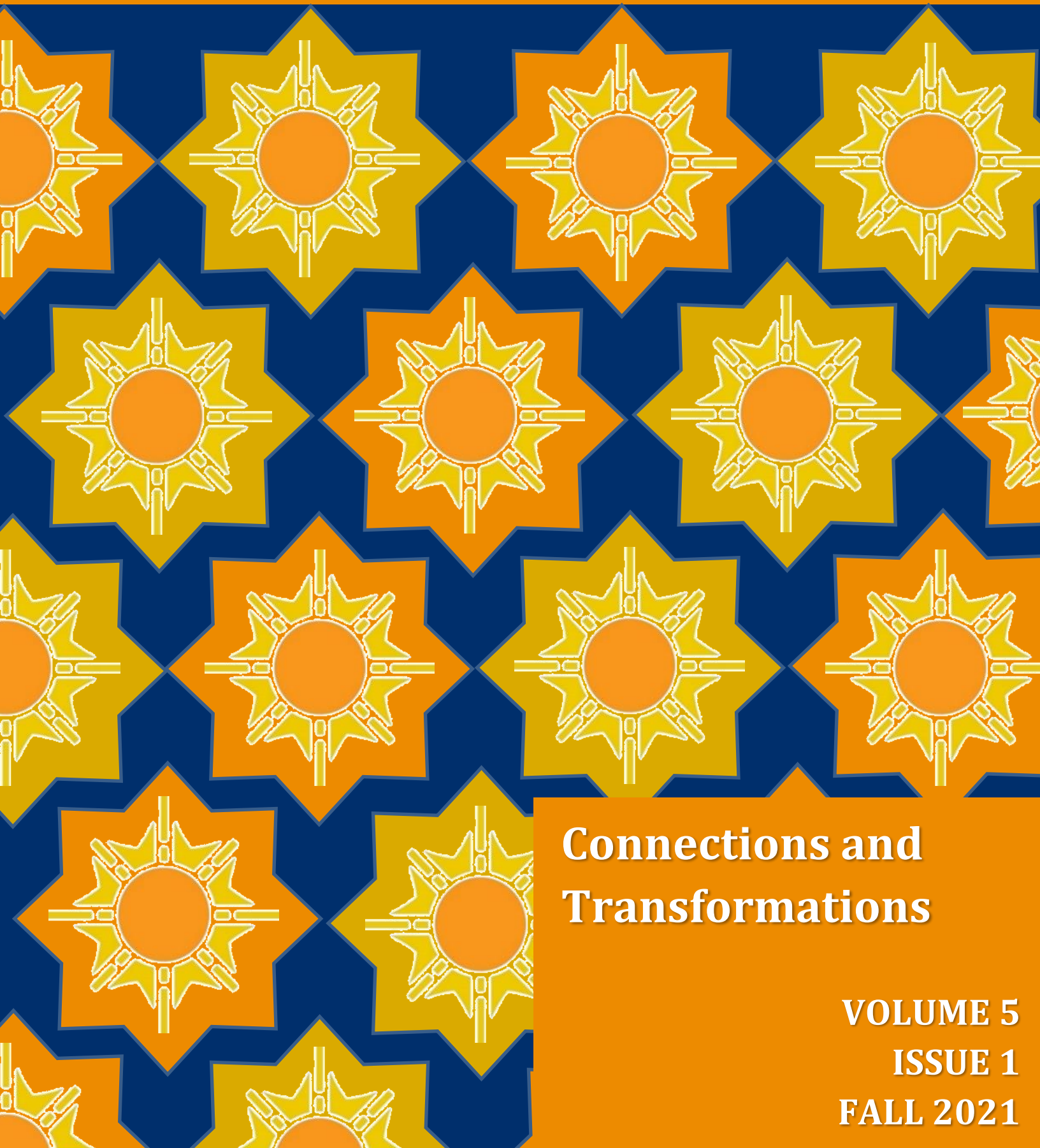


ENGLISH DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

Eugenio María de Hostos Community College,
The City University of New York



Connections and Transformations

**VOLUME 5
ISSUE 1
FALL 2021**

Reading Philip Roth in the Age of COVID-19

By Professor Andy Connolly

Professor Andy Connolly, recipient of the 2020 Henry Wasser Award for Outstanding Assistant Professors in CUNY, writes about reading the works of Philip Roth during the COVID-19 pandemic and the current crisis of public distrust and misinformation.



Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* has been summoned for heroic purposes over the past few years, in an effort by 'bookish' people to unsheathe a book that might slay the monster of Trumpism. HBO went a tad bit further, using TV in order to re-purpose and re-deploy the same book in the war of HBO subscriber-types against American crypto-fascism.

Roth has played the coy villain in a recent spate of biographies, the latest of which goes as far as to claim that all distinctions between the author (any author?) and the literary text simply don't exist, and that any claim otherwise is just the kind of weak defense that a creepo misogynist like Roth would use. So, carbon dating, genetic test-kits, anecdote, celebrity gossip, and

shopping lists (see Nietzsche) are now the official standard of literary criticism. I'm off to Bard College (where Roth is buried) with a spade, by the way: "Alas, poor Roth-ick. I knew him ... Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your songs?"

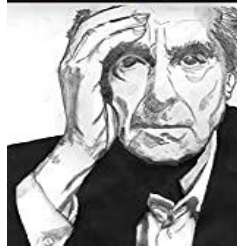
But hey, if there's a worthwhile exhumation (and don't forget the corpse is still fresh enough) of Roth for our times, I would suggest to colleagues and friends that a read (or re-read) of his final novel, *Nemesis* (2010) is a highly worthwhile activity during our ongoing struggles with the pandemic.

Set amid a polio epidemic in Newark during 1944, this novel, a bit like Camus' *The Plague*, allegorizes the effects of public hysteria and social breakdown in the face of an over-whelming and idiopathic catastrophe. *Nemesis'* analogies to our present situation are most strikingly demonstrated by the efforts of 'responsible' social leaders in the text to play down the epidemiological disaster, in an attempt to affect a return to normalcy as soon as possible. What arises is a tragic scenario, defined by the refusal of Roth's protagonist, Bucky Cantor to adjust the seemingly respectable, altruistic virtues of his 'old normal' to the 'new normal' caused by the polio outbreak. This conflict has a number of uncanny resemblances to our own times, as spelled out by the failures of politicians and economies across the globe to re-think the deep problems of our pre-existing norms and their co-morbidities of poverty, racism, sexism, and so forth in the face of the great shock and disaster of Covid 19.

In short, *Nemesis* is a very interesting final installment in the Roth canon in so far as it offers a host of interesting ways of thinking about how "Covid 19 exhibits all the characteristics of a class, gendered, and racialized pandemic," which demands that "we come out of this crisis creating an entirely different kind of social order" (David Harvey, *The Anti-Capitalist Chronicles*, 2020).

Bucky's tragedy, like that of Oedipus, is a failure to see that his old powers of moral leadership and hyper-rational problem solving are not only no longer viable, but are in fact the cause of increased pestilence and misery. Like the King of Thebes, Bucky fails to get beyond his own hubris, and therefore does not realize that he himself, or what he represents in terms of *tired* and trusted solutions to public problems, embodies a failed approach to handling the shock of a new catastrophe. Like those leading our neoliberal governments, for whom 'there is no alternative' in the face of a crisis but to restore the old principles of free-market individualism (see 2008's bank bailouts), Bucky is someone whose recuperative actions can only make things worse so long as there is no real moral reckoning with the the pressing societal demands arising out of his pandemic experience—the urgency to face up to the many tasks of dealing with a 'new normal.'

PHILIP ROTH
AND THE AMERICAN
LIBERAL TRADITION
ANDY CONNOLLY



Professor Connolly is the author of *Philip Roth and the American Liberal Tradition* (Lexington Books, 2017). He is currently working on a second book about reading Philip Roth in the age of Trumpism.

English Department Quarantine Reading List



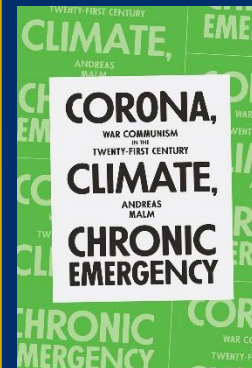
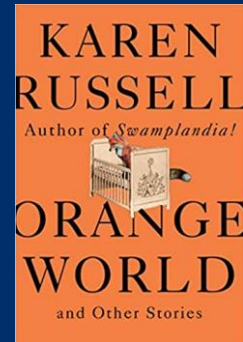
Jenny Erpenbeck,
Go, Went, Gone
(2017)

"a brilliant, sensitive novelization of ethical encounters with refugees and asylum seekers"
- Prof. Nguyen

Karen Russell,
Orange World
(2019)

"Short stories. Unique and original voice; she creates worlds you never knew you wanted to read about."

- Prof. Widney

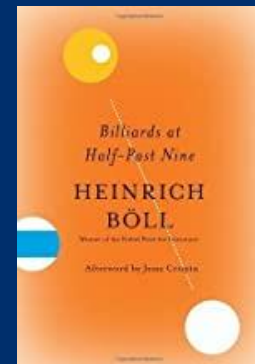


Heinrich Boll,
Billiards at Half-Past Nine (orig. 1965)

"A classic and dryly funny about German society."
- Prof. Nguyen

Corona, Climate,
Chronic Emergency:
War Communism in
the Twenty-First
Century (2021)

"mixes biology, epidemiology, climate science, & Marxism in order to show that a return to 'normal' is the path of no re-turn at all. Instead, to save the future, we need to go back to a largely forgotten past."
- Prof. Connolly



Rivers Solomon, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017)

"a slave narrative interestingly retold in space."

- Prof. Nguyen

Reflections from the Writing Center's Interim Director
Professor Craig Bernardini



As likely all of you know by now, I have stepped into Tram's dauntingly large shoes as the interim Writing Center director for the 2021-22 AY while Tram enjoys an unjustly-deferred sabbatical.

Happily for all of us, our Writing Center is so fabulously constructed, of such sturdy yet lithe materials, that it would take an enormous amount of effort on my part to destroy it. This is largely due to the fantastic administrative team I have inherited: Program Manager Shaneka Crossman, Faculty Advisor Victoria Muñoz, Poet-in-Practice Sarah Key, and administrators Ashley Thomas, Jenifer Vivar, Marilyn Rios, and Adelyn Castro.



And did I mention our tutors? A mix of professional and peer, veteran and newish, they are standing by to help your students with ALL their reading and writing needs—from unpacking texts and prompts to researching, developing, organizing, and proofreading their work. They're available Monday through Friday, synchronously or asynchronously. Just remember to tell your students to select the right modality: e-tutoring is asynchronous, and students need to upload their drafts to receive written feedback. Please also tell your students they're tutors—not editors!

We're also continuing our amazing series of writing seminars, reading meetups, and open mic poetry events begun under Tram's leadership. If you haven't been spammed by us, you're not checking your email!

Pandemic Courses Outcomes Data

By Professor Jason Buchanan

The English Department undertook a data analysis of online teaching during the past year. The analysis examined course outcomes from the Spring 2020, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021 semesters. The data showed that English 100 and English 111 both improved during the time period. Online English 10 has been less successful.

Figure 1. Online ENG 111 Outcomes by Term (2810 students)

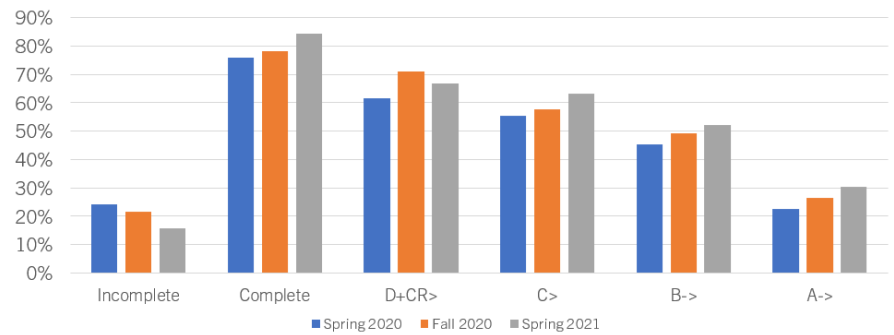


Figure 2. Online ENG 100 Outcomes by Term (575 students)

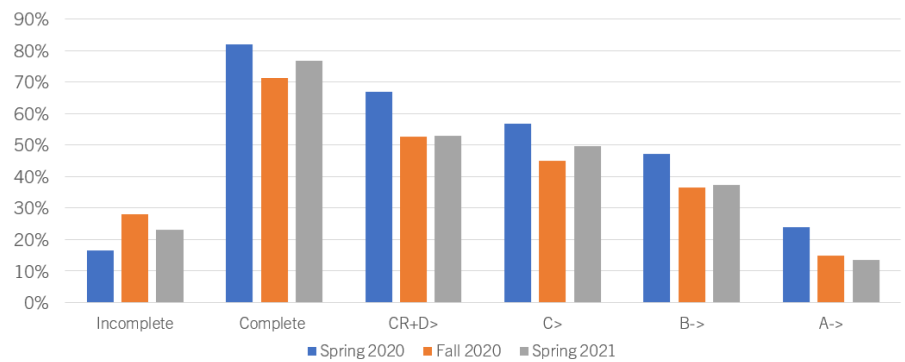


Figure 3. Online ENG 110/10 Outcomes by Term (280 students)

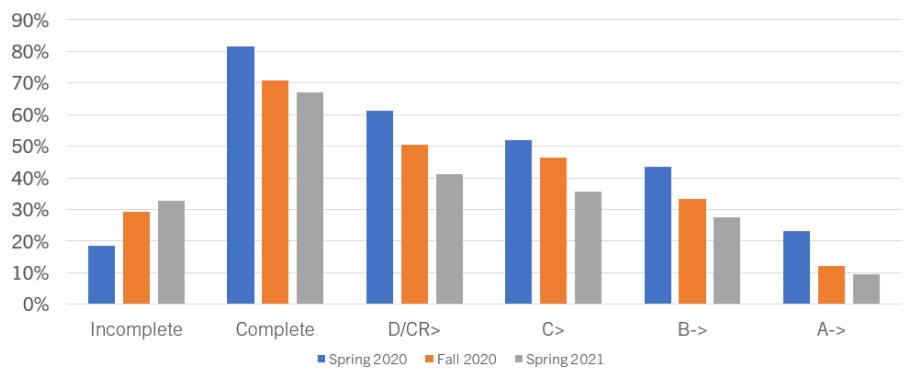
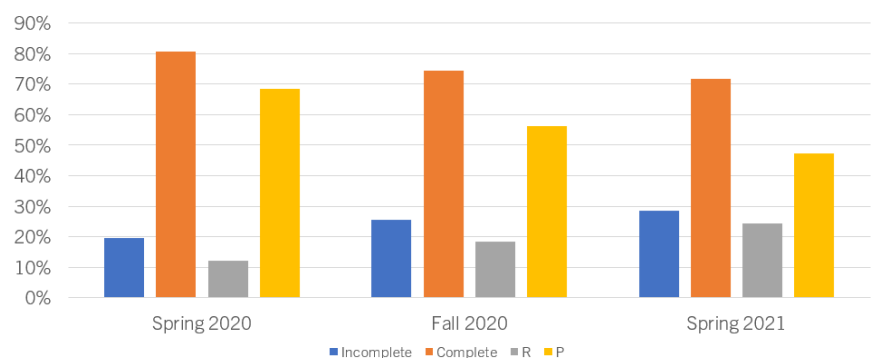


Figure 4. Online ENG 10 Outcomes by Term (280 students)



On retiring as Coordinator of Women's and Gender Studies

By Professor Jerilyn Fisher



Birthright WGS involved 13 years of slow incubation and so, its official entry into our curriculum in 2002, under the leadership of then-Provost Daisy Cocco de Filippis, is one accomplishment during my 31 years at Hostos of which I am most proud. The program started with just Introduction to WGS (WGS 100) and Women in Literature (ENG 223/WGS 223). As other interdisciplinary courses were subsequently developed, those of us who have been fortunate to teach them regularly hear our students express with enthusiasm and appreciation how vital they find critical gendered perspectives that expand intellectual discoveries and impact our everyday lives. Courses in WGS have the potential to make the world a better, more just and compassionate place. Studying facts and myths surrounding gender identity, sexuality, intersectional analyses of oppression, and feminism encourages students to see themselves as social change agents as they become informed spokespeople for equality in their families and communities. Discovering histories of oppression and achievement against the odds gives students pride in their roots and leads them to further research about lesser-known change-makers and movements.

I'm delighted that Professor Porter has agreed to take the reins of WGS. From her arrival at Hostos, Liz has put effort into learning about our program. She has taught, both in person and online, Introduction to WGS, and another course in our Option, The Female Detective Novel. I've been thrilled to see Liz's enthusiasm for teaching these two courses, and now, in her new role, she impresses me with her commitment to further develop the WGS offerings while maintaining the program's extra curricular successes. For example, I know that Liz wants to re-create, post pandemic, The WGS FALL FILM FESTIVAL, "Breaking Boundaries/Daring Borders" and our spectacular array of Women's History Month events held each March. Up until 2020, these had included the much-loved WHM essay contest, and presentations by such superstars as author and organizer Rachel Lloyd (2013), singer Abby Dobson (2016) who has performed with Kimberlé Crenshaw during her Ted Talks, Ben Atherton-Zeman (2015) who did skits and talks about the gendering of men and Kayhan Irani, White House Champion of Change, who led us in a workshop, "Women with Wings-Telling Stories to Break Free from Sexism". Regularly, we hosted plays by, for instance, The American Place Theater -"Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" (2006), Eve Ensler (2015), Julia Alvarez (2017), Looking for Lilith (2011), Paula Cizmar (2012), Ann Timmons (2020), and the Big Apple Playback Theater (2014), and in 2018, we had the pleasures of experiencing a poetry reading and talk by the now-internationally-celebrated Amanda Gorman.

On starting as Coordinator of Women's and Gender Studies

By Professor Liz Porter



It is an honor to take on the role of WGS Coordinator. Since I started at Hostos, I have felt consistently supported and welcomed by Professor Jerilyn Fisher as I developed WGS courses (WGS 100 and ENG/WGS 251) and participated in the WGS Faculty Council. Jerilyn developed a WGS curriculum that approaches the topic of gender from an intersectional perspective. The program is meaningful for students and can influence the course of their personal and professional lives. As a member of the WGS Faculty Council, I have appreciated the opportunity to witness thoughtful collaboration across discipline when

planning events such as the Fall Film Festival and Women's History month programming. As WGS Coordinator, I am excited to work with students, and to collaborate with faculty who currently teach or are interested in teaching WGS-specific courses, as well as subject-specific courses that are cross-listed or affiliated with WGS. The [WGS Option](#) within Liberal Arts offers students a rich program of study where students "strengthen critical thinking skills by questioning commonly held assumptions about gender roles and identity, sexuality, race, and class, examining intersections among different forms of oppression." I am also delighted to chair the college-wide WGS Faculty Council. The Council develops and oversees the WGS curriculum and collaborates on programming. Stay tuned for WGS announcements, including film recommendations that could be used in class or suggested for student viewing. Thank you again to Prof. Jerilyn Fisher for creating a program that has been so important to the Department and the College community.

An Aphoristic Poem On Tutoring Prepared by Sarah Key

At the first Tutor PD event on September 24th, Poet-in-Practice Sarah Key led a group creation of aphorisms on tutoring. The result was the following poem:

Reading Is a Doorway

Crack open the dialogue
that tutoring inspires.

Tutoring aspires
to turn the confused
the unenlightened to
better feathers.

When it gets too dark
birth your own light.

You reap what you sow.
It's not necessarily so.

Language is the first technology.
Sometimes not everything
you need can be
communicated in language.

Of course it's hard.
It's a new language
from the world to your mind.

Don't be afraid
of practice and patience and time
and creativity
to find answers together,
birds of a feather.
Rome was not built in a day.
Words get in the way.

To write is to release
fear itself and
your spirit into the world
like a much-needed breath.

--a collaborative
poem by Genesis, Jenifer, Victoria,
Titus, Eva, Siera, Kevan, Nyuma,
Rosangella, Khalid, Craig, Julia,
Jazzy, Damien, Ashley, Shaneka,
Yvonne, Maya

READING MEET-UPS

Reading:

Du Bois's "The Souls of Black Folk"
Forward & Chapter 1

Discussion:

The Pursuit of Equality

Tuesday 10/26

@ 3:30 PM

Via Zoom



WRITING SEMINAR

A Story for the Season:
A Creative Non-Fiction Workshop

Thursday 10/28

@ 4 PM

Via Zoom

READING MEET-UPS

Reading:

Du Bois's "The Souls of Black Folk"
Chapter 1 & 2

Discussion:

The Pursuit of Happiness

Tuesday 11/2

@ 3:30 PM

Via Zoom



Departmental Accolades

Publications

- Bernardini, Craig. "Mater Marginalia," *AGN/93* (Spring 2021), 108-123. Print.
- Connolly, Andy. "[Canceling Roth in the Name of Progressive Neoliberalism](#)." Review of Jacques Berlinerblau's *The Philip Roth We Don't Know: Sex, Race, and Autobiography*. Voegelin View. 3 Oct. 2021. Online.
- Connolly, Andy. "Class Politics." Maggie McKinley, ed. *Philip Roth in Context* (Cambridge UP, 2021), 311-322.
- Gerrity, Sean. "[Marronage as the Past, Present, and Future of Liberation](#)." *sx salon* 36, Feb. 2021. Online.
- Gerrity, Sean. "Maroons and Marronage in Nineteenth-Century African American Literature." Harilaos Stecopoulos, ed. *A History of the Literature of the US South*. (Cambridge UP, 2021). Print.
- Milsom, Alexandra. "[Assessing and Transgressing: On the Racist Origins of Academic Standardization](#)." *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 17.1 (Spring 2021). Online.
- Porter, Elizabeth. [Review of Ingrid Horrocks' Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814](#). *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830*, 11.1 (Summer 2021).
- Rice-González, Charles. "Point Memories." María Fernández and Rachelle Fernández, eds. *The Point 25 Years! The Story of Where Community and Creativity Connect* (Point Press, 2021).

Presentations & Performances

- Muñoz, Victoria. "De Oriana a Gloriana y de Claridiana a Belpheobe: Personajes caballerescos ibéricos en ficciones inglesas" II Jornadas de Literatura Caballerescas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. 7 May 2021. Online.
- Muñoz, Victoria. "The Curious Case of California: Peter Heylyn's (Mis)Reading of Spanish Romance." RSA Americas Seminar. Renaissance Society of America Virtual Conference 2021. 13 April 2021. Pre-recorded online presentation and live seminar.
- Muñoz, Victoria. "Seneca's English Avengers: Orientalizing Ibéricos on the Early Modern Stage." "Revisiting Orientalism." Shakespeare Association of America Virtual Conference 2021, 2 April 2021.
- Porter, Elizabeth. "From Correspondence to the Conduct Book: Women's Travels in Text." American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS) Annual Meeting, April 7, 2021, online via Zoom. Conference Presentation.
- Porter, Elizabeth. "A Hardcore Funeral: Clarissa's Return to Harlowe Place." American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS) Annual Meeting, April 8, 2021, online via Zoom. Conference Presentation.
- Rice-González, Charles. "Black Hair is Free." Shear Pandemic. Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance, NY, NY., March 28, 2021 (virtual).
- Rice-González, Charles. Intersections of an Afro-Latinx Queer Bronxie. Gibney Center. NY, NY. February 26, 2021 (virtual).
- Rice-Gonzalez, Charles. "El Yunque." Contemporary Queer Writing in the Americas/Special Issue of *Hostos Review Revista Hostosiana*, (eds. Claudia Salazar Jiménez & Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes), Latin American Writers Institute, October 2020.
- Soto-Franco, Juan. "Media and Technology for English Language Teaching" Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Walisongo, Semarang, Indonesia. Sept. 24th, Oct. 1st & Oct. 8th, 2021. Invited lectures.
- Widney, Chris. "My Little Guy." Ten-minute play. New Jersey Theatre Alliance Healing Voices Project. Two River Theatre, Red Bank, NJ. Feb. 2021. Zoom production.
- Widney, Chris. "The Guy Who Jumped Into The Zoo." Ten-minute play.

B3 Productions Play Festival. B3 Theatre, Phoenix, AZ. March 2021. Zoom production.

Congratulations

To Elizabeth Porter, for being one of 20 CUNY Faculty Fellows selected to participate in a Summer 2021 Poverty & Humanities Institute, an NEH-funded subproject of Voices and Experiences Experiences of Poverty—A New Interdisciplinary Humanities Curriculum.

To Lou Bury, for his book contract with Punctum Books for *The Way Things Go*.

To the following faculty members for their recent promotions:

Full Professor: Craig Bernardini, Andrea Fabrizio, Gregory Marks
Associate Professor: Jason Buchanan, Heidi Bollinger, Lou Bury, Andy Connolly, Tram Nguyen, Anne Rounds

Special Thanks

To English Department Faculty, Writing Center staff and tutors for participating in the August 24th PD "Envisioning Co-Req Collaborations with Peer Tutors and Faculty." Profs. Nguyen, Porter, & Genzale planned the event. Profs. Porter and Genzale moderated the sessions and provided context for the Coreq curriculum. Profs. Bernardini and Muñoz set a collaborative tone between the Department and Writing Center. Profs. Garcia de Souza and Michael gave helpful presentations. Writing Center tutors and staff, Sarah Key, Victor Valerio, Maya Abdoussala, Rosangella Cruz Dominguez, and Jazzy Saini, offered insightful and compassionate perspectives. Prof. Fabrizio gave welcoming remarks. In Spring 2021, the Strong Start to Finish (SSTF) grant period ended. Since 2018, this grant has provided invaluable support to the develop and implement our new co-req courses, ENG 10 and ENG 100. Based on the success of these courses and of our ongoing professional development, the English Department's proposal to apply for additional funds was approved. In summer 2021, we were awarded an additional \$10,000 for continued support of our curricular and professional development and to further align the Writing Center with co-requisite courses. This award speaks to our department-wide commitment to our developmental students and to curricular innovation.

News & Announcements

Join the Big English Book Club, an asynchronous book club using Manifold, the open-access platform developed at CUNY for annotating texts. Interested? Email Craig and/or Krystyna at cbernardini@hostos.cuny.edu / kmichael@hostos.cuny.edu.

Upcoming Events

Course-level Meetings | 3:30 PM via Zoom

Developmental: Oct. 28th; Dec. 7th

ENG 110: Oct. 25th; Nov. 22nd

ENG 111: Oct. 25th; Nov. 17th; Dec. 2nd

Electives: Oct. 20th; Nov. 29th

Tuesday, October 26 at 7:30pm via Zoom. A reading of [THE HAPPY HOUR by Charles Rice-González](#) | This new play is set in a bar/lounge in Harlem at the crossroads of reality & history. It originated in 1934 as a jazz club called The Big Apple, & became a gay bar in the 1980s. It is currently a Popeye's Chicken. Here meet two characters, Taher, a 15-year old orphan who is often bullied for being gay, and Seeker, a 50-year old doctor looking for answers from the ghosts of his friends who died from AIDS.

WRITING SEMINAR

Literature Review

Thursday 11/11

@ 4 PM

Via Zoom

WRITING SEMINAR

Resumé, Cover Letters & Personal Statements

Thursday 11/18

@ 4 PM

Via Zoom

WRITING SEMINAR

Finals got you stressed?

Come join us for strategies on how to finish strong.

Thursday 12/2

@ 4PM

Via Zoom

