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Interviews: Neil Chudgar

An interview with the English Department's newest Assistant Professor.

By Jens Tamang '11

In many ways it would seem that Neil Chudgar was born to be an English major. He grew up in Reading, Pennsylvania, which—little did he know until he started studying literature—was the birthplace of Wallace Stevens.

Prof. Chudgar didn't study English until much later in his academic career—after majoring in Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh. In between graduate school and college, he took a year off temping at the United Jewish Federation of Pittsburgh and

doing consulting work for a communications firm. It was only in graduate school, at the University of Chicago, that he decided to study literature.

Though he entertained the thought of becoming an English major as an undergraduate Prof. Chudgar abandoned the idea because he refused to take one of the department's required courses: 18th Century British Literature. Ironically, he finds himself teaching this very class to Macalester students this semester. What is more, when asked what his favorite literary period is, he replied, "18th century, baby."

When I asked him why he switched his focus from Philosophy to Literature, he told me that he felt he wasn't reading correctly. "Philosopher's read straight," he said. "I was



reading Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* at the time, and thinking about the kinds of questions philosophers were asking. I realized that I didn't want to ask the kinds of questions they were asking, because I felt as though the philosopher asks questions he can't answer."

"I chose to study Philoso-

Childlike Feelings Rediscovered at the Book Festival



A bustling crowd at the Twin Cities Book Festival

Psychology major Zoe Jacobson '11, a student in Jeff Shott's Literary Publishing course, volunteered to staff a booth at the Twin Cities Book Festival in Minneapolis on October 10.

As soon as I walked into the Twin Cities Book Festival I was reminded of the book fairs that my elementary school used to have. For one day a

Early-Music Workshop Enriches Study of Literature



On Tuesday, October 6, Prof. Krier's Major British Writers class hosted members of the early-music group The Rose Ensemble in a fascinating multi-media presentation on St. Francis of Assisi, who pioneered the use of vernacular Italian in an artistic context. The Rose Ensemble specializes in the historical reconstruction of medieval and renaissance music on period instruments and leads workshops to educate the public about the rich and interwoven culture that produced the likes of Chaucer and Boccaccio.

The English Department first started working with the Rose Ensemble in 2003, when Theresa Krier joined the Macalester faculty. She'd just come from eighteen years' teaching at Notre Dame, and

wanted to give something to the Macalester and Twin Cities communities that would draw on her work in Shakespeare, music, and poetry. So she gathered together a few faculty members from other colleges in the ACTC. They wrote a grant proposal and marshalled the Rose Ensemble and also a fine local jazz vocalist, Christine Rosholt, to do concerts and workshops based on songs in Shakespeare's plays (see photo, left).

The Rose did a number of workshops for the College that year, and their Shakespeare concert was a great addition to the Cities' holiday-season musical scene. Christine Rosholt's jazz concert

was a great success – perhaps even more popular with the music fans in the Cities than with Macalester itself – and Terry was even asked by a jazz singer or two if she would become their producer! (She wisely decided not to pursue this career.)

Not all cities can boast an early-music ensemble, much less an ensemble of the Rose's high quality; it takes a mature and concentrated musical culture to provide the performers, the historical depth, and the audience interest to make an early-music ensemble work. The Twin Cities has all of those.

"Not all cities can boast an early-music ensemble, much less an ensemble of the Rose's high quality..."

We Like to Read



Evan Radeen '11
What I'm reading now:

The Autograph Man,
Zadie Smith

Suzy Chen '11
Top 5 Book List
In no particular order:

1. *Antic Hay*, Aldous Huxley
2. *Nabokov's Dozen*
3. *The Colossus*, Sylvia Plath
4. *Everything is Illuminated*, Jonathan Safran Foer
5. *Jacob's Room*, Virginia Woolf
6. AND HARRY POTTER!!!



Debriefs: The Twin Cities Book Festival

year the gym would be turned into something between a party and a bookstore. I don't remember much from those early book festivals, but I do remember the feeling of potential that filled the air. So many books! That was the feeling I got when I entered the Twin Cities Book Festival.

My particular volunteer post was the storytelling circle. Separated from the rest of the floor by a circle of waist-high planters, there

were rug squares on the floor and a box of mini-books for kids to take. I volunteered for three hours, and during that time I watched kids listen to stories with rapt attention, talked to children's book authors who came by to do readings and book signings, and played with the dog that came for the sole purpose of having kids read to her.

After my shift ended I wandered up and down the rows of tables. I wanted to

run my hand along all the books and pick up the ones that looked interesting—but that would have taken an impossibly long time. Instead I meandered around, looking at the interesting people nearly as much as the books themselves. By the time I left the festival I had already decided to come back next year, whether as volunteer, customer, or observer.

"After my shift ended I wandered up and down the rows of tables."

Career Panel

On Friday, October 23, the English Department hosted a group of accomplished Macalester English major alumni who came to campus for "Front Row at Macalester"—an annual event sponsored by the Advancement Office to help alumni stay connected to the life of their old depart-

ment. English students took advantage of a wonderful opportunity to speak with these successful professionals at a career panel lunch.



Ben Voigt '10 talks with notable author Charles Baxter '69

A big thank you to Jonathan Bernstein '11, Jeffrey Henebury '11, and Hannah Lamb '10 for representing the English Department at the annual Major Fair on October 20. Many eager prospective majors stopped by their table to get the inside scoop.

Notes from Abroad: Morocco



By Anna Joranger '10

One of the many great things about attending a liberal arts college—especially one that places so much emphasis on cross-culturalism and learning across academic disciplines—is that I did not feel particularly obligated to link my study abroad experience to my major. I am a Creative Writing major and Anthropology minor, and purely out of interest, completely divorced from English-y thinking, I decided to spend a semester in Morocco.

In retrospect I find this funny, because I did not encounter very many Moroccans who even *spoke* English.

Communication with my home stay family was limited to my 20 words of Moroccan Arabic and my host mother's 20 words of Spanish. Needless to say, the communication skills that I spent so much time finessing during Mac English classes did not translate directly to Morocco, where my livelihood was dependent on sign language.

I participated in an SIT (School for International Training) program called Morocco: Culture and Society. My group was huge as SIT programs go; there were 29 of us. We spent the semester living with Moroccan families in the median (old city) of Morocco's capital, Rabat, taking Arabic classes, traveling a ton, and completing independent study projects. Going to Morocco was one of the more random, but also one of the best, decisions of my life. I gained a much more acute understanding of Arab and Muslim culture, made enormous strides in my thoughts concerning gender issues (my independent research focused on Moroccan women's experiences under

Islamic family law), and felt generally humbled. There are plenty of things about Morocco that I desperately miss now that I'm back home.

In short, it was a fantastic semester. And it had nothing to do with English. But it definitely rejuvenated my love for Macalester and the English department—I came to miss both, and now I'm happier than ever with my major, and perfectly content that this semester 11 of my 12 credits are in the English department (the other 1 credit is yoga).

Of course, spending a semester in an English-speaking country and studying literature is also wonderful. I tend to think that you should study abroad wherever you want, whether it pertains to your major or not. Having literally the entire world available to you is an opportunity worth taking advantage of. And if you're an English major, chances are you can write a persuasive enough application essay to convince Macalester to send you wherever your heart desires.



November Babes

November 1, 1871-Stephen Crane

November 5, 1943-Sam Shepard

November 11, 1922-Kurt Vonnegut

November 13, 1850- Robert Louis Stevenson

November 21, 1694-Voltaire

November 26, 1912-Eugene Ionesco

November 27, 1909-James Agee

November 29, 1898-C.S. Lewis

November 29, 1832-Louisa May Alcott

November 27, 1942- Jimi Hendrix,

November 30, 1947-David Mamet

November 30, 1835-Mark Twain

November 30, 1667-Johnathan Swift

Journals: The River is Dying

Leigh Bercaw, '13

Editor's note: *Last month, we told you about the ways in which students in Wang Ping and Martin Gunderson's poetry class explored the history and meaning of the Minnesota River during an extended canoe and camping expedition at the beginning of term. Over the rest of the academic year, we are very pleased to be able to share with you the beautiful and sometimes heart-breaking thoughts of Leigh Bercaw, '13, which she recorded in her journal during the trip. We will feature one journal entry per issue, so check back here next month for day 2...*

9.11

So the real irony of this river is that it's dying because it has too much life in it. The phosphorus in the fertilizer runs off into the river, causing more algae to grow. The bacteria following the algae use up all the dissolved oxygen in the river and the fish suffocate. There are a lot of fish here though! Big, too. The only way you know they're here is when they jump. Otherwise, they're hidden in curtains of green, folded gently into the water to suffocate. It's called eutrophication. A fish jumping is such a timeless

thing. The ripple is the only thing you see, usually. Just the sound and then the ripple.

DIRECTORAL DEBUT:

English major Nathan Young '11 is directing a new play written by Mac classmate Russel Schneider '10. The play, *Code 21*, examines how mental health, mental "illness," and the treatments for both are imagined and executed through a semi-fictional account of experiences within an inpatient psychiatric facility. Performances will be on Friday and Saturday, Nov. 20 and 21 at 10 pm and Sunday, Nov. 22 at 9pm on the MGO stage.

HALLOWEEN PARTY

All the usual suspects turned out for our first annual Literary Reference Halloween Costume Party in the Literary Lounge. Students and faculty had a blast playing our new, non-improved, non-electronic version of Boggle. The hands-down winner of our prize for best literary reference was the dynamic duo, Katie Willingham and Kaja Bergen (both '11) for the awesome and fabulous personification of the heroic couplet. They will have to figure out how to share the

prize: *Poe's Children: The New Horror, an Anthology*, ed. Peter Straub.



English Majors Intern

Are you interested in getting department credit for an internship? Many of our English majors have had or currently have an internship in the Twin Cities during the school year. With the help of the Macalester Internship Office and a good resume, you can have one as well.



Internship: Redleaf Press: non-profit publishing house which provides resources for early childhood providers

Job: Editorial Intern

Hours/Week: 16 hrs.

Tasks: Reading manuscripts-giving summaries; writing a calendar keeper for kids- recipes/activities for childcare providers; fact checking

Jeff was able to get an internship with the Redleaf Press by simply going to the Internship office and building a resume. He buses to Downtown Saint Paul on Tuesdays/Thursdays and carpools to the office. Jeff said that he is learning a lot and now realizes how much work is put into making a book.

Chat with Jeff about his internship at the English Department Internship Info Panel November 17!

See back page for details

Interviews: Neil Chudgar, cont.

phy because I thought philosophers were asking the most *profound* questions,” he said, twirling his hand in the air as though cradling a wine glass. “At the same time, I knew that scholars of literature read everything with an understanding that the thing they were reading was *made* of language.”

“Studying literature,” he said, “will teach you how to become a responsible steward of the cultural environment, just as we can be responsible stewards of the biological environment.”

Prof. Chudgar then touched upon some interesting literary nuances of the 18th century. “It was a time when people wanted to be immensely clear about what they were writing...it was also a time of great optimism, an optimism that the world would get better,” he said.

“It was a time of hope.”

He went on to suggest how this optimism perhaps had some connection to the advent of cotton underwear. “Before cotton underwear people wore wool against their skin. Imagine! Wool! Of course we now know where they *got* the cotton. Still, it was things like this that led to the optimism of the times.”

So far Prof. Chudgar has genuinely enjoyed his teaching experience at Macalester. “Mac students are so generous with their intellect,” he said. “There just isn’t a sense of competition in the classroom...and they’re willing to ask questions most graduate students will not.”

Prof. Chudgar is currently working on a book about the sense of touch in early eighteenth-century British literature, paying particular attention to the

tactile preoccupations of Locke, Defoe, Pope, and Swift. He accredits his father—an Indian immigrant and textile engineer who managed an acrylic sock factory—for helping him hone his “touchy” tastes.

CHECK IT OUT
Professor James Dawes talks about interviewing Japanese war criminals in the latest MacTalks Podcast. Listen to the interview at the Mac home page or the English Department news page.

Evidence: The Exquisite Corpse

In the 1920s, a group of French surrealist artists and writers, including André Breton and Marcel Duchamp, played a version of the parlor game “Consequence,” in which the participants took turns writing a phrase on a piece of paper, folding it over to hide it, and then passing it to the next writer. The resulting patchwork text was seen as the expression of the group’s collective poetic unconscious that produced lines of a bizarre logic and beauty almost of its own accord. The name of this surrealist exercise was “Exquisite Corpse,” from the memorable line: “The exquisite corpse will drink the young wine.” On Wednesday, October 14, a group of English majors gathered in the lounge to create some verbal collages worthy of the originators of the game. Check out the hilarious results right here. Different typefaces represent the contributions of different participants.

He was wearing an anachronistic wide-brimmed hat, quite inappropriate for the occasion. She, on the other hand had a head full of birds, sparrows, robins and Baltimore orioles darting about. They went on to the middle school and perched upon the roof, where they anxiously awaited their next meal. When they finally received dinner, they jumped upon it, rubbing food on each other. They felt that although they were hungry, they felt a bigger need to create Food Art than they had a need to eat. And so they sat on the floor and made whirls of ketchup and mayo until Timothy got bored of it. Then he made a tuna fish sandwich with lots of celery and raisins, and ate the whole thing in one big bite. The cherry pie was delectable, and the orioles went on with their day, smacking their lips with satisfaction. The judges loved the dish but decided the secret ingredient wasn't quite strong enough. They were going with the top chef once again.



Field Trip: “Radio Golf”

Live Performance Puts Course Reading in Different Perspective

by Autumn Hickam '13

On October 14, my first-year course, Introduction to African-American Literature, went as a class to see August Wilson's play *Radio Golf*, directed by Lou Bellamy, at the Penumbra in St. Paul. Reading and then seeing the play sparked in-depth discussions the next day in class about how an actor or director's choices can influence the mean-

ing of a work. For example, Bellamy recorded radio clips discussing current events from 1997, when the play is set, and played them at the beginning of every scene. Our class came to a consensus that this addition brought the time more into the forefront and made us think about why August Wilson chose it in particular. Bellamy, or perhaps the actor, also made an interesting choice in the portrayal of Harmond Wilks, the protagonist. When reading the play, the class saw Harmond as fairly level-headed and normal. But in the Penumbra por-

trayal, he is at first desperate to see everything as a joke and then nearing the climax, intensely emotional and upset. Overall, seeing *Radio Golf* as a class field trip made our class consider the aspects of putting on a play and led to engaging discussions about the form and meaning of plays as a whole.

ENGLISH

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Happenings

- **INTERNSHIP INFO PANEL:** Want to know where English students can intern? Come to the English Department Internship Info Panel, featuring student panelists Anna Joranger (Consortium Book Sales & Distribution), Jeff Henebury (Redleaf Press), and Tatiana Craine (Hennepin Theatre Trust) and AmeriCorps program coordinator and alumnus Julia Quanrund, '09. Michael Porter, director of the Mac Internship Program, will give tips about how to find and land the internship that's perfect for you; and Professor James Dawes will speak about requirements for academic credit.

TUESDAY, NOV. 17, 11:30 - 1:00

IN OLD MAIN III

PIZZA WILL BE SERVED

- **ENGLISH, IT'S MMM, MMM, GOOD:** Food and games in the English department lounge every Wednesday from 5-7PM
- **SUBMIT! SUBMIT! SUBMIT!** Did you do something interesting, unusual or fun this month? Tell us about it! Write to abrailov@macalester.edu with your story ideas or post them on the wall of our Facebook page

Keep up to date at www.macalester.edu/english/news

We *will* make you feel cozy



Hi, we're still Jens and Meghan.

We still need your help. We realize that you're overanalyzing this. That's OK! If you feel the need to contact us, you should. Don't be shy to wave hello. We're not as grumpy and/or sassy as we look.

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