

English Symposium Archive 1994–2000

Open to the Public: Introduction to the Symposium

As a matter of custom, writers at the height of the Roman empire first made their ideas “public” by reading their “papers” to small informal gatherings of friends and colleagues. It was the easiest way to make their works known—linking “publish” and “public”—and it was also the best way to obtain advice for improvement. It seems that some, like Pliny the Younger, even went so far as to arrange a whole series of readings in order to refine several related ideas.

In this spirit groups of students and teachers in the modern university still meet, in an extra-curricular forum, to listen to presentations of ideas and to debate their merit and force. This practice from old has been a part of our young department almost continuously since it was formed in 1968 when the Virginia General Assembly chartered the Commonwealth’s university, Virginia Commonwealth University, by uniting two academic institutions that traced their histories back as far as 1838. In its modest way our current Faculty Symposium honors this ancient practice. It also builds on the earlier departmental series, many of which featured faculty still in the department. Several of these colleagues have also participated in the current series, and so are embodiments of a continuum which, this coming year, will round out our first thirty years of such public engagement.

In the fall of 1973, a faculty member with training in African literatures established our first series of presentations, a “brown bag luncheon symposium.” Fresh from the University of Texas at Austin, Richard Priebe, just one of the department’s several new faculty members with terminal degrees, took advantage of the young university’s burgeoning intellectual spirit and organized the series three times a semester to foster exchange across a range of topics. Presentations were balanced, with teaching, including the teaching of composition, and research equally stressed. One of the first presentations was Professor Priebe’s own, which centered on the question of non-Western literature in the literary canon. By the mid-’70s and extending to 1978, the symposium was being cosponsored by the college and was renamed the College of Humanities and Sciences Symposium. Still organized by Professor Priebe it had become university-wide in scope, involving faculty in such disciplines as history, political science and the medical sciences as well as in various areas within the English department. Regulars numbered 15–25 and included several other young department members—Charlotte Morse, Bo Berry and Bryant Mangum. The meetings were in late afternoons and evenings, and benefited from a social hour with refreshments furnished by the college.

Four years earlier, in 1969, only one year after its founding, the department had begun to publish a departmental newsletter, *The English Exchange*. It appeared once a semester more or less regularly, continuing into the mid-'80s, and from the outset it served many of the same purposes as the first symposium series. Early on edited by Professors Bo Berry and David Latané, it sometimes featured summaries of the symposium discussions and reports on research of a general nature. Its regular focus, however, was on teaching and on successes in the classroom using particular modes of interpretation with specific literary works. It specialized in composition pedagogy and sophomore literature. Occasionally these issues were highlighted by poetry written by colleagues in the department's creative writing curriculum. A signal feature of the last few issues of *The English Exchange* is that it was produced using the (then) state-of-the-art mainframe computer text-editing program, WYLBUR.

Soon after the College of Humanities and Sciences Symposium ended, a few department faculty launched a new series, highly informal in structure but more formal than ever in content. Resident memory is that this series continued into the early '80s meeting on Friday afternoons and that it had no collective title but was determinedly theoretical in nature. By consensus these presentations were organized around a central theme each year, like "realism" or deconstruction. Meetings were moderated by discussion leaders who distributed in advance lists of selected readings for people to prepare for the lively discussions that ensued.

Briefly, for two or three years in the mid- and late-'80s, a departmental discussion group devoted to composition theory took shape. Without title or formal leader and meeting irregularly, it drew features from some of its predecessors by focusing on an assigned book each session. Participants informally prepared position papers on the theory and application advanced by the author of each work.

In the fall of 1990 and continuing to the spring of 1996, Professor Marcel Cornis-Pop with the help of Professor Bill Griffin, put together a "Theory Across the Curriculum" faculty discussion group. As with its forebears its home was the English department but it brought together colleagues from various other departments like philosophy, foreign languages and literatures, history, sociology, and anthropology. In monthly meetings, its participants addressed current theoretical approaches (poststructuralism, postmodernism, new historicism, postcolonialism) that are encouraging a rethinking of the boundaries and practices of traditional disciplines. Discussions were in response either to a formal presentation or to a set of texts read by all, and they included a healthy dose of practicality since an objective was to see how theory influenced practice in the various fields. One year, 1995-6, the series opened its discussion to a group from the nearby University of Richmond, and meetings alternated between the two campuses.

Also around this time Professor Latané established two groups focusing on his special interest, nineteenth-century British literature. In 1995 he organized a series of talks with lectures by faculty from several other Virginia colleges—Hampden-Sydney, James Madison, and the University of Richmond. He is planning a repeat of this for the coming year with people from William and Mary and, crossing the state line, the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill. This past spring Professor Latané convened an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literature reading group which featured, in addition to himself, Professor Catherine Ingrassia from our department and advanced graduate students from Indiana, Chapel Hill, and the University of Virginia.

In the fall of 1994 I initiated the current Faculty Symposium as a way of providing department faculty with an opportunity to discuss their research and writing in convocations open to the public. As soon as the series was announced in the spring of 1994, two-thirds of the full-time faculty of 36 asked to be included—more than three years of presentations at the rate of three a semester. This broad department participation has, naturally, produced presentations which are widely inclusive, reflective of the interdisciplinary nature of English studies— linguistics, literature, rhetoric, bibliography, textual studies, pedagogy, literary theory. In its format, this series draws upon all the previous departmental discussion programs—it meets during the lunch hour and “brown bag” lunches are encouraged; usually a formal paper is read, but not infrequently a presentation is “talked”; occasionally a handout is distributed for close study; about twenty people attend usually, often including students and colleagues from other departments. This website comprises a list of all who have participated so far. Most of the faculty have been able to include abstracts of their presentations, and many have supplied the full text of their talks and in some cases even more, like a chapter of the book they are writing or a description of the project they are working on. Most entries also include faculty members’ email addresses and in a few cases their websites, too, so please feel welcome to contact us about our work and your interests.

Since our department’s beginning, a scant few years here and there have passed without one kind of public intellectual exchange or another. More than once, two series have succeeded concurrently. Collectively, the current series and its predecessors amount to a departmental symposium of the whole, virtually every faculty member presenting, attending and discussing theory and practice within the broad field of English studies.

Please browse through our offerings, and enjoy.

Terry Oggel

Spring 2000

Richard Priebe with David Latané

“Writing and Getting an NEH Grant: Two Perspectives”
(February)

Catherine Ingrassia

“Gendered Discourse and the Early Novel: *Pamela*, *Shamela* and *Anti-Pamela*”
(March)

Janet Winston

“From the Diamond Jubilee to the Silver Screen: Queen Victoria’s
Imperial Image and Nazi Cinema”
(April)

Fall 1999

Charlotte Morse

“Griselda Reads Philippa de Coucy”
(September)

Elizabeth Savage

“How to Do Things with Words: Reading Riding’s and Retallack’s Poetics”
(October)

Jonathan Silverman

“Re-Imagining America: Marginal Group Expression Between the Wars”
(November)Spring 1999

Elizabeth Cooper

“[Native and Non-Native Hypertext](#)”
(February)

Nicholas Frankel

“The Meaning of Margin: White Space and Disagreement in Whistler’s ‘The Gentle Art of

Making Enemies'”

(March)

Terry Hummer

“The Boundaries of Poetry: Contemporary American Poetics and the New Regionalism”

(April)

Fall 1998

Richard Priebe

“Interpretation and Misinterpretation of African Literature in the American Classroom”

(September)

Marita Golden

“[Autobiography as Mirror and Shadow: The Seductions of the Self](#)”

(October)

Bill Griffin

“[Good Students Reading Shakespeare](#)”

(November)

Spring 1998

John Pendergast

“[Language Acquisition and Shakespeare’s Early Comedies](#)”

(February)

Larry Laban

“[Of True Greatness: An Inquiry into the Rhetoric of Henry Fielding, as Illustrated in the Characterization of the Hero](#)”

(March)

Ann Woodlief

“[Creating a \(Virtual\) Interpretive Community](#)”

(April)

Fall 1997

Richard Fine

[“Who Owns What Writers Write? American Authors and Intellectual Property”](#)
(September)

Gary Sange

[“Originality and Imitation: The Dynamics of Poetry”](#)
(October)

Walter Coppedge

[“Robinson Crusoe in Hollywood”](#)
(November)

Spring 1997

Elisabeth Kuhn

[“Cross-Cultural Challenges for German Women Professors in the United States Classroom”](#)
(February)

George Longest

[“The Green Gate of Genius: Charles F. Gillette and the Changing Face of Virginia”](#)
(March)

David Latané

[“Some Intertextual Instances”](#)
(April)

Fall 1996

Bill Griffin

[“Teaching Shakespeare: A Report”](#)
(September)

Patricia Perry

[“Beyond Naming Writing: Freirian Conscientization in the College Composition](#)

Classroom”

(October)

Carmen Gillespie

“(Re)member the Present: African–American Narratives at the Cross–roads”

(November)

Spring 1996

Bryant Mangum

“A Reader’s Guide to the Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Work in Progress”

(February)

Richard Priebe

“Making the Invisible Visible: What We Can Learn From African Popular Writing”

(March)

Greg Donovan

“Poetry as Fiction—What Will Suffice?”

(April)

Fall 1995

Charlotte Morse

“The Modern Griselda”

(September)

Marguerite Harkness

“Engendering the Apocalypse: Contemporary Visions of the Apocalypse”

(October)

James Kinney

“Joel Chandler Harris and the New South Movement: ‘Free Joe’ and the Race Issue”

(November)

Spring 1995

Laura Browder

[“Imaginary Jews’: Elizabeth Stern’s Autobiography as Amnesia”](#)

(February)

Tom DeHaven

“Don’t Change Anything / Change Everything: Adapting Fiction to Film”

(March)

Catherine Ingrassia

[“Text, Lies and the Marketplace: Eliza Haywood and the Literary Marketplace at Mid-Century”](#)

(April)

Fall 1994

Maurice Duke

[“How to Write Someone Else’s Book”](#)

(September)

Boyd Berry

[“Everything Happened in the 1590’s; or Ventriloquizing the Homeless and Women in Early Modern England”](#)

(October)

Nick Sharp

[“Rhetoric of the Jacobean Court \(1603-1625\)”](#)

(November)