

Letters

THE SEMIANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF THE ROBERT PENN WARREN CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES
VOL. 20, NO. 2 • SPRING 2012 • VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

Landscapes of the Delhi Durbar, 1903: Ritual and Politics

Leo C. Coleman

The landscape around Delhi, India, is marked out by old walls and gates which once protected important settlements and royal centers, and by the monuments of the various governments that have occupied this capital city over centuries. The gates of what is called the “old city” of Delhi still stand, now breached by the modern city built up since the nineteenth century. The old city, in its earlier incarnation as Shahjahanabad, was further protected by a low ridge which bound the northwestern approach to the city. The ridge also provided a redoubt, of sorts, for the British when their occupation of North India came under attack in the so-called Mutiny of 1857. It was on the ridge that the British later built a memorial to the “defense” of the city. Now visitors are reminded by plaques in Hindi, Urdu, and English that “The enemy of the inscriptions on this monument were those who rose against colonial rule and fought bravely for national liberation.”

After the bloody trial of four months of battle in 1857, the walls of Delhi could not serve to protect the city from the depredations of reconquest. Large sections of the walls were dynamited in the following years, to make way for railways and to clear defensible areas, as well as to provide space for new accommodations. The sacred spaces of Indian sovereignty, in the Red Fort or Lal Qila, were taken over as barracks, and later transformed into ballrooms and banquet halls for assemblages of Imperial notables.

On New Year's Day, 1903, under the direction of the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, one of these great ceremonial gatherings was staged near Delhi on plains dotted with villages but, for the occasion, cleared, platted, and filled with tents. The event was called a Durbar, after the Persian term for a royal audience used by the Mughal Emperors of Delhi, and it was held to celebrate



Delhi Mutiny Memorial plaque with new inscriptions (1972)

the coronation in England the previous summer of Edward VII as King of Great Britain and Emperor of India. Away from the modern city of Delhi, then fitfully expanding, throwing out suburbs and developing civic institutions and infrastructures (Gupta 1981), the British built a tent-city and a ceremonial amphitheater of lathe and plaster, to accommodate the celebrants and provide a dramatic backdrop for their rite of sovereignty over the Orient.

In keeping with colonial notions about utility and pomp—favoring the former and denigrating the latter—the Durbar settlements were not just decorative appendages to a meaningless ritual, but rather served as a massive demonstration of technical skill and thereby sovereign right. A power plant for producing electricity was specially imported from England, and a network of underground wires piped clean, efficient electric power throughout the tent-city. Meanwhile, camps were arranged for

Indian Princes, notables, and visitors. These were placed from four to seven miles away from the Central (European) Camps, for “reasons of space and public health” as one colonial observer described it.

Of course, Indian participation, and presence, in this ritual of colonial display was indispensable for its spectacular effect, and the officials of the Native States, which were an integral part of the British Indian political structure, were encouraged to constitute their encampments as a kind of ethnological museum. Some, while keeping with the colonial logic of sumptuous display, mounted their own counter-display of modern technique and efficiency. The representatives from the state of Baroda, for instance, were housed in a splendid teak-wood bungalow, elaborately illuminated inside and out with electric light, topped by a huge dome some fifty feet high, with an electric beacon at its top that could be seen for miles. Around the Baroda encampment, ceremonial archways and large reception tents were all fitted with electric signs proclaiming the long life of the King Emperor and welcoming guests. The encampment of Kashmir's Maharaja, Sir Pratap Singh, was likewise fitted with electric lights, to a

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reported total of 120,000 candlepower.

Though the tents, electric lights, railway, and amphitheater installed for the Durbar were all taken down at the end of the event, the grid of roads and expansion of the city to the northwest remained as traces on the land. The Durbar grounds combined the memory of British conquest with the ornaments of a longer, indigenous Imperial past and the technological imperatives of the twentieth century. It is not incidental that Lord Curzon's appointment book for the event had bound inside the front cover a map of the position of British troops around Delhi during the battles of 1857, nor that the Central Camp of the assemblage on the Western side of the Ridge was laid out in just the same spot where the occupying army had been housed some 45 years before.

The events of the Durbar and the shaping of the city of Delhi through such political rituals, in which particular cultural and technological resources are deployed to mark, transform, and make socially meaningful a set of relations in space and time, are the subject of my book-in-progress, "Delhi in the Electrical Age." Based on ethnographic research in contemporary Delhi, and historical materials about the experience of the city and its transformation into a modern, techno-political space through electrification and planning, I tell a story about the modern state, its urban techniques and technologies of rule, and how people are able to participate in politics and modernity in and through the state's rituals. We can trace a line from the plat of the Durbar camps to the rigorously ordered, separated, and meaningfully marked spaces for each rank or category of person that typified the bureaucratic regulation of space in Delhi.

To give a sense of how that bureaucratic regulation of space was experienced, the Bengali memoirist Nirad Chaudhuri provides an example of a comical encounter he had in the 1940s:

Passing along a line of buildings [in New Delhi] which looked like stables, I asked an elderly Bengali whether the clerk whose house I wanted to find lived in that row. He angrily pointed to the letter "D" carved on the top of the building and said: "Do you not see that these are D-class quarters, and the person you have come to see lives in E-class quarters?" (1987: 690).

Chaudhuri adds that "even my very superior clothes . . . did not protect me from the D-class

disdain I brought on myself by being on visiting terms with a clerk who was living in E-class quarters." Such distinctions and discriminations, drawn from the pay-grades of civil servants, thus provided the lingua franca for much of the administration of Delhi throughout the



Leo C. Coleman

twentieth century, across changes in regime—and indeed the same is true of almost any modern city, though to varying degrees and drawing on different repertoires of distinction. It is the ritual organization, in urban landscapes and political consciousness, of such distinctions and discriminations that I am studying further as a fellow in this year's Fellows Program at the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities. In particular, I am embarking on new research on the politics of urban citizenship in contemporary global cities.

This year, the Warren Center Fellows are investigating "Sacred Ecology," human relations with the land, and with representations and projections of landscape, in which the sacred, the supramundane, and ritual practices affect both the real and the imagined terrain of human occupation. As a political anthropologist and an urbanist, this topic provides me with a framework for thinking through contemporary struggles over identity and citizenship in globalization. As global cities such as Delhi grow in population, and also become important sites of residence for a rising affluent class, how are spaces made and remade to give expression to new communities and to exclude others? Comparatively, I am also interested in how recent conflicts over mosques and other religious buildings at key sites in the United States represent struggles to understand the American political community, and how disputes over such religious sites offer another forum in which to pursue a wider public conversation about immigration and citizenship. More generally, the seminar encourages me to reflect on how abstract political and policy issues are worked out and transformed in everyday struggles to occupy a particular place, live in a community, and give meaning to place, livelihood, and identity. What role, I ask, do landscapes play in everyday consciousness, and how are new presences in them—big religious buildings for new immigrant populations or minor practices like a domestic shrine or a backyard garden growing exotic products—dealt with ritually, pragmatically, and politically?

As I develop materials to address such questions, I aim to expand our ability within political anthropology to understand political rituals as more than sideshows, or mere reflections or performances of political texts already set down. Rituals, whether the personal and private or the great public rites of political life, work with meanings and material conditions in ways which are highly formal, set apart from and yet necessary to everyday life, often though not necessarily religiously sanctioned, and by definition effective. Ritual collapses distinctions between cause and effect and intention and action, transforms space and time, and marks the physical world with its traces, its temporary occupations producing powerful sites of return, memory, and concern. The sites of memory which mark Delhi to this day, though recoded to remember different aspects of long-ago political struggles, are such because of constant and renewed ritual attention to them, connecting them with great transcendent and justificatory stories about who counts in the "we" of political communities.

Political anthropology has become, over the past thirty years or so, predominantly the study of how differences between groups of people are made and marked. Classically defined as the study of ordering institutions of a society, and of behavior in contexts defined as about power and control, and therefore political, this subfield of cultural anthropology has more and more focused on what the theorist Judith Butler has called the "ground of politics," the making (and remaking) of the common-sense world of categories and distinctions in terms of which strategies can be formulated and tactics are effective. Responding, indeed, to the constricted range of conclusions possible in studies of councils, committees, and local disputes, and more importantly under the influence of Foucauldian definitions of power as "productive" (as opposed to repressive), political anthropology has focused on the apparatuses of knowledge and power through which people come to be particular kinds of bodies, selves, and subjects. Many political anthropological studies now begin with the "discursive field" of a particular expertise—whether colonial accounts of native "difference" or scientific claims about genetics. They explore how certain forms of self-knowledge, and ways of being authentically in the world defined by power and knowledge, are made possible and others are made impossible.

Thus, caste in India has been shown to be a topic that obsessed colonial administrators, and scholars have recently emphasized how caste was transformed from a practice to a "system" by British attempts to treat it as a fixed and immu-

table guide to Indian society. Caste cannot be reduced to a “colonial construction,” since an important part of this story is the work of caste-groups to reorganize themselves for colonial recognition. Still, in recent scholarship caste is rethought less as an indigenous system and more as an effect of British practices of tabulation, ordering, and ranking in service of colonial control (see Dirks 2001). Likewise, the patterns of land-holding or of agricultural technique that an earlier political anthropology might have taken as the subject of a survey, attempting to understand this or that local distribution of power and political system, might now be studied through the lens of nineteenth-century practices of surveying, recording property, or legislating land-tenure, in which the “system” as we know now it was produced (see Mitchell 2001).

Yet there is a problem, now being widely recognized, with these sorts of studies. Once we recognize that such ordering social and legal institutions are the result of a past political practice—whether colonial or not—we may have “denaturalized” them but we haven’t really provided any insight into the pull that they have on people, which to my mind is the key anthropological question. The philosopher of language Ludwig Wittgenstein once pointed out that hypotheses about the ancient origins of everyday rituals cannot explain the pull that they exert on even the most casually involved observer. Interpretations of rituals, such as those by Sir James Frazer in his magnum opus *The Golden Bough*, that stress their putative origins in human sacrifices or similarly terrifying encounters with the numinous and the supramundane world of forces, imply that terrifying origins can explain contemporary dramatic power. But, Wittgenstein argued, trying to explain the power of a ritual through its historical origins misses the most important problem of all—that of the observer confronted by something that compels, but which he or she cannot wholly understand conceptually. There must be an element, drawn from our human experience of the world, which rituals and their symbols touch, unconnected with fantastic myths of origin or retrospective attempts to ground them in “primitive” realities, and which explains their recurrent fascination. “If I tried to invent a festival,” Wittgenstein notes, “it would very soon die out or else be so modified that it corresponded to a general inclination in people.” Invented rituals and historically-rooted ones can both be equally powerful, and interpreting either requires drawing upon all their symbolic equipment and the meanings of the performance, “including such evidence as

does not seem directly connected with them—from the thought of man and his past, from the strangeness of what I see in myself and in others, what I have seen and heard” (Wittgenstein 1979: 16-18).

Thus, in trying to understand the contemporary divisions of identity and interest which mark global cities, and the violence, variously submerged and quiet, or overt and deathful, that provides the contours of identities and structures access to space, hypotheses of colonial origins or accounts of technocratic domination through planning and its exclusions, are less useful than the recurrent dramas of politics which link the past with the present in moments of interpretation. Such dramas can be quite daily and mundane, like the encounter with D- and E-Class residences recorded by Nirad Chaudhuri, but they still require our attention and interpretation. How are people organizing to meet their situation, in their present, and what forces of distinction, competition, and challenge do they feel shaping their lives? As the anthropologist Jonathan Spencer (2007) has lately pointed out, attention to ritual performances, to the symbolism of mundane objects when they are connected with important events where new meanings are made, is what distinguishes anthropological interpretation from other approaches to politics that strip it of everything unique, specific to a place and time, and treat it as an abstract play of strategy and interest. Importantly, these events in which we find the kernel of cultural meaning, including distinctions and discriminations, run the gamut from the apparently secular, such as elections, to the overtly ritual, such as state funerals (Banerjee 2008; Borneman 2003).

The British in India held a theory of power which separated the real, utilitarian calculation of everyday political control from the pageantry and pomp by which they tried to garb their rule in ancient custom and thus sway the emotions of those over whom they ruled. Commentators spoke about the technical and organizational genius of a man like Curzon, able to conjure a living city from what they took—wrongly—to be the “desert” plains of Delhi; they likewise praised his “invaluable and very un-English” ability to take himself seriously in the midst of “Oriental pageantry.” And yet the ritual practices of the colonial state were something more than window-dressing. They staged, reproduced, reinforced, and indeed motivated the very principles of colonial rule, not least the rigorous racial separation on the grounds of “fitness” for rule which made the whole enterprise possible, and which has since marked the world politics

of the twentieth century and beyond (Arendt 1968). These ritual assemblages of Imperial pomp were a very British device, in both their medieval symbolism and technical efficiency. Yet their effect and perdurance in historical and postcolonial memory cannot be explained away by any reading of them simply in terms of their connection to older models, or indeed lack thereof as “invented traditions.” An anthropological interpretation of their meaningfulness and the call to participation which was differently experienced by different actors is, at least, a start toward understanding their evidential power and factuality in the life of the Imperial state and afterlife in the postcolonial one.

In particular, the transformations that were achieved in the landscape of Delhi and in the lived experience of the city are among the most important evidence we can draw upon when considering the effects and effectiveness of these imperial rituals. These landscape transformations for ritual practice were only partly unique to the great concentration of the Durbar; meanwhile, the electrical installations for that event are only part of a larger story of technological transformation, with many actors, that changed the tempo and style of daily life in Delhi. However, in their connection in and through the Durbar, they become a significant part of wider symbolic politics and struggles over the future.

The Delhi nationalist politician and lawyer Mohammed Asaf Ali was barely a teenager when the 1903 Durbar happened; a few years later he went to Europe to study for the Bar and was impressed by the sight of “the common use of mechanical devices and appliances . . . and the blaze of light in the evenings,” as he recounted in autobiographical notes made in the 1940s. Seeing the ways in which the British treated Delhi as a show-place and a site of only temporary and symbolic improvements, however, he would later “make his emotional break with Britain,” and resolved to bring together the “dazzling effect” of Western technique with the “richness of poetry” of the “old” world where he had been born and raised. The novelist Ahmed Ali, too, writing on the cusp of Independence in the early 1940s, imagined the effect that the colonial pomp of the Durbar and its occupation of the city with light, and parades, and shows, must have had on those who witnessed it. His characters in *Twilight in Delhi*, set in the beginning of the twentieth century, indict the imperial power which is both founded on the violence of conquest and yet invests in such mighty, and always temporary, displays while demanding a permanent loyalty: “Life goes on with a heartless continuity, trampling ideas and

Spring Symposium “Spanish Theater: Text And Performance”



“La familia,” *Bestia contra bestia*, courtesy of José Luis Raymond.

During the first week of April, 2012, the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities will host a symposium on “Spanish Theater: Text and Performance,” funded by a Research Scholars Grant from Vanderbilt University. In addition to the Warren Center, cosponsors of the symposium include the Max Kade Center for European and German Studies and the Spanish Ministry of Culture. The events will feature talks by four distinguished scholars and theater practitioners—two from Spain and two from the United States—as well as several short dramatic performances by Vanderbilt students, including graduate students in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and participants in the Master of Liberal Arts and Science program.

The invited speakers include Valerie Hegstrom, professor of Spanish at Brigham Young University; Vincent Martin, professor of Spanish at San Diego State University; José Luis Raymond, artist, photographer, set designer, and

professor at Madrid’s Royal School of Dramatic Art (Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático); and Mar Zubieta, theater scholar and historian, editor, and director of cultural activities at the National Company of Classical Theater (Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico), based in Madrid.

Valerie Hegstrom has written extensively on early modern Spanish theater. She has concentrated on female playwrights of the period, including nuns who wrote plays for convent audiences. She also has been active in staging and directing plays from the Spanish Golden Age repertoire. Vincent Martin has focused his research on theater, on ties between drama and philosophy, and on questions of performance. He has published a number of studies on Pedro Calderón de la Barca, the author of the most renowned Spanish play, *La vida es sueño* (Life Is a Dream). Professor Martin is managing editor of the journal *Bulletin of the Comediantes*. An artist who cultivates a variety of fields, José Luis

Raymond has designed sets for many plays in Spain and internationally. In 2010, he was the set designer for Lope de Vega’s *El caballero de Olmedo* (The Knight from Olmedo), an early seventeenth-century play, staged at the Gala Hispanic Theatre in Washington, D.C., and in the spring semester of 2011, his photography exhibit “Bestia contra bestia” (Beast versus Beast), was on display at Vanderbilt’s Fine Arts Gallery. Mar Zubieta coauthored the adaptation of *El caballero de Olmedo* for the D.C. performance, and she is involved at all levels of the production process in her administrative role in Spain’s national classical theater company.

“Spanish Theater: Text and Performance” should be of interest to students and faculty in Spanish, theater, literature, and culture in general. All events will be free and open to the public. The schedule will appear on the Warren Center website.

Representation and Social Change Symposium

The 2010/2011 Faculty Fellows Program at the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities will host a symposium titled “Representation and Social Change” on February 23 and 24, 2012. The symposium serves as the culminating project of the Fellows’ year-long seminar. The symposium will take place in the auditorium of the Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center. The tentative schedule follows. Please check our website for the final program.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23

6:30 P.M. **Carl Deal and Tia Lessin**

Screening of *Trouble the Water* documentary and discussion

Deal and Lessin directed and produced this 2009 Academy Award®-nominated documentary about Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. The film is the winner of the Gotham Independent Film Award and the Sundance Film Festival’s Grand Jury Prize. They were also producers of Michael Moore’s films *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *Bowling for Columbine*, and, more recently, *Capitalism: A Love Story*.

Introduction: Edward Wright-Rios, Associate Professor of History, Vanderbilt University, 2010/2011 Warren Center Fellow.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24

8:45-9:00 A.M. WELCOMING COMMENTS, ARTS AND SCIENCE DEAN’S OFFICE

9:00-10:30 A.M. **Sarah Sobieraj**

“Covered: Activists, Journalists, and News in a Shifting Media Landscape”

Sobieraj is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Tufts University. She is a specialist in media, politics, and culture, and is the author of *Soundbitten: The Perils of Media-Centered Political Activism*. Sobieraj’s current project examines the remarkable expansion of political opinion media, focusing on political blogs, talk radio, and cable news programming.

Introduction: Laura Carpenter, Associate Professor of Sociology, Vanderbilt University, 2010/2011 Jacque Voegeli Fellow, and co-director of the Warren Center Fellows Program.

10:30-10:45 A.M. COFFEE BREAK

10:45 A.M.-12:15 P.M. **Farhad Manjoo**

“True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society”

Manjoo is the technology columnist at *Slate* and *Fast Company*, and he is a regular contributor to the *New York Times* and *National Public Radio* where he discusses technology, new media, politics, and journalism.

Introduction: Terence McDonnell, Kellogg Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Notre Dame, 2010/2011 Warren Center Fellow.

12:15-1:30 P.M. LUNCH BREAK

1:30-3:00 P.M. **J. Robert Cox**

“Climate Change, Media Convergence, and Public Uncertainty”

Cox is Professor Emeritus of Communication Studies and the Curriculum in the Environment and Ecology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*. Cox has also served three times as the President of the Sierra Club.

Introduction: Bonnie Dow, Associate Professor and Chair of Communication Studies, Vanderbilt University, 2010/2011 Spence and Rebecca Webb Wilson Fellow, and co-director of the Warren Center Fellows Program.

3:00-3:15 P.M. COFFEE BREAK

3:15-4:45 P.M. **Camilo José Vergara**

“Detroit: The Eternal City of the Industrial Age”

Vergara is a photographer, writer, and documentarian. He is a 2002 MacArthur Fellow whose books include *American Ruins* and *How the Other Half Worships*. Vergara has been called the “Archivist of Decline,” having documented the American inner city for the past 41 years in his collection, the New American Ghetto Archive.

Introduction: Anne Morey, Associate Professor of English, Texas A&M University, 2010/2011 William S. Vaughn Visiting Fellow.

4:45-5:30 P.M. RECEPTION

All I Need to Know I Learned from *Don Quixote*

Edward H. Friedman

One of the pleasures of teaching at Vanderbilt is having the privilege of entering into dialogue with outstanding students, colleagues, and other members of the university community, including the many good people who come in and out of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities. The following is a meditation of sorts on that experience.

The study of literature has always been complicated, because fictional texts are complex, rich in ambiguity, and certainly open to interpretation. There is a stability to the printed word and an accompanying instability to analysis, to what one could label the activity of word processing. The discipline (and the art) of rhetoric focuses on the ways in which speakers and writers can manage and manipulate words, and thus ideas and messages. Those who teach writing and communication studies (formerly often called speech) rely on the tools of rhetoric to convey the fine points, and perhaps less-than-subtle points, of their trade. Rhetoric is not far removed from “spin,” and “spin” is a two-way street, dependent on the sender and the receiver of discourse. The poststructuralist enterprise echoed a message borrowed from the rhetoric of classical antiquity: that what we say or write is a function of how we say it, and that every utterance or written word bears an inflection. In the humanities—and, by citing the humanities, I am not excluding other areas of knowledge or other disciplines—we teach our students how to contemplate and analyze multiple forms of speech and writing. That interest in producing good readers, and good listeners, is part of our collective venture.

Recent theory has emphasized what has been classified as the “constructedness” of texts. We train ourselves and our students to discern, scrutinize, describe, investigate, and interrogate formal and conceptual structures, and to note the convergence of form and concept. Instruction in literature often used to be more of an exposition than a practicum, more self-illuminating than interactive. Flashes of professorial brilliance can be wonderful to behold and effective as learning tools, perhaps more subliminally than directly; they are built on finished products. In contrast to product-oriented approaches, the give-and-take method, as it were, is more likely to concentrate on process. An analogue might be the prospect of seeing Al Pacino on stage as Shylock or Judi Dench as Lady Macbeth versus taking an acting lesson from Mr. Pacino or Dame Judi. Which

would be more beneficial? If forced to decide, I know what I would say, but the preferable solution, here and elsewhere, would be to select both/and over either/or, that is, to unite *process* and *product*. I would want to understand the “stages” of preparation for performance—the juxtaposition of the director’s vision and the actor’s collaboration and individual style—and ultimately to observe the results of the pre-rehearsal and rehearsal periods. And, as a budding thespian, I would want the expert to assess my personal work and to give me tips for improvement.

The classroom can, and arguably should, lend itself to the dialectics of process and product. Teachers may enjoy sharing the inner workings of their disciplines and of their own research, and presumably this will facilitate the distribution and acquisition of knowledge. To take the theater analogy a step further, one could submit that the classroom is a stage and

sat in classrooms praying that I would not get called on, I am strong on empathy, but I must note that my students at Vanderbilt have been uniformly excellent in contributing to class discussion and in tackling difficult material with vigor and skill. The students deserve the lion’s share of the accolades, yet Vanderbilt’s dedication to undergraduate education has attuned the faculty to the pedagogical challenges, the rewards, and the potential for creativity in teaching. Learning hardly takes place in a vacuum, and every faculty member ponders on how best to organize classes and to promote student achievement and advancement. We and our students profit from a diversity of instructional strategies and from methodologies that suit a particular target audience.

When I teach literature, I find that I have much in common with the Russian Formalists of the early part of the twentieth century. These critics and theorists highlight texts that



Don Quixote illustration from the 18th-century artist Honoré Daumier

that we must maintain the attention of—if not entertain—our audiences. At times, I wish that I were a song-and-dance man, but I cannot sing (in English or in Spanish), and my dancing has gone downhill since I left the Bar Mitzvah party circuit some decades ago. I have had to make up in enthusiasm what I lack in talent, with the goal of encouraging students—for most of whom Spanish is not their native language—to comprehend the material and to find a comfort zone for participation. On occasion having

proclaim, rather than hide, their status as literature, that flaunt their “literariness.” Literature offers a vehicle for ideas and ideologies and for examination from infinite perspectives, and a literary work is also, and always, an art object, with some type of aesthetic function. Literature has ties to the so-called real world and to literary tradition. It is bidirectional, shifting as its openings and its interpreters allow, and forever mutable. I am drawn to texts that display their fictional identities, their seams, their ambigu-

ties, and—conspicuously, almost palpably—their designation of an honored and inevitable place for the reader. Forms of expression, style, and language put the narrative wheels in motion, and, led by the text and their own dispositions, readers can expand the frame, and insert new frames, as they choose. Texts can become pretexts for limitless readings, contextualizations, and transformations, but they do not cease to belong to the realm of art.

As I think about the origins and growth of the novel, I locate a decisive moment in early modern Spain, in the middle of the sixteenth century, with the publication of an anonymous and relatively brief work of fiction titled *Lazarillo de Tormes*, commonly described as the first picaresque narrative. The picaresque generally features a first-person narrator from the bottom rungs of the social ladder. The *pícaro* (or *pícaro*) seeks upward mobility in a rigidly hierarchical society, and the efforts go for naught, although the satire is double-edged, aimed, through ricocheting irony, at the self-incriminating storyteller and at the hypocrisy and obsession with appearances that dominate social protocol. The picaresque texts of the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century narratives—which include Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache*, Francisco de Quevedo's *La vida del buscón*, and Francisco López de Úbeda's *La pícaro Justina*—are intriguing cultural artifacts on a number of levels, and they are sophisticated cases of literary ventriloquism, in which the author puts words into the narrators' mouths in a less than subtle manner. Wayne C. Booth's term *the implied author*, which refers to signs of the "presence" of the writer in the narrative structure, as an interpretive voice-over, captures the give-and-take quality of the picaresque. Picaresque narrative falls into the category of pseudo-autobiography, so that the refashioning of a "life" into a text is complemented by the subversion of the authority by the creator of the fiction. The reader can see agents of textual production at work—and the author's usurpation of the narrator/protagonist's space—as ironic distance presents the story in another light. What may be the most fascinating, and paradoxical, aspect of the discursive battle for control is the protagonist's ability to project a personality of his or her own; there is a psyche behind the manipulation, pronounced character development despite the high degree of mediation, and a causal connection between the beginning and the end of the story. Something is going on here that is new and different, and that takes narrative from the stasis of idealistic models to the domain of realism. Significantly, this early instance of realism includes what might be deemed a meta-fictional twist, given that the narrators reinvent

themselves in their accounts and that the implied authors add, as it were, a third dimension. Narrative realism is born, then, alongside self-referentiality. The predominant mode will be one or the other, but realism and metafiction will coexist. The picaresque narratives help to establish the paradigm, and Cervantes will raise the ante in *Don Quixote* by multiplying the narrators—and hence the perspectives—and by exploring and exploiting the open spaces revealed in the picaresque.

**“Cervantes did not write
a theory of a novel.
Don Quixote is his theory
in practice, a synthetic
document on reading,
writing, life, and art.”**

The errant knight Don Quixote and his squire Sancho Panza are iconic. They are known to those who have not and may never read the novel, or, actually, the two novels in which they appear, published ten years apart, in 1605 and 1615, but now generally considered as a single unit. The contents of *Don Quixote* undoubtedly will surprise readers who believe that the windmill episode stands at its center. Part I of *Don Quixote* begins with a prologue in which the author of the manuscript discusses with a friend his reluctance to write a prologue. The friend recommends bypassing the traditional allusions to renowned writers of the past and throwing in anything that occurs to him. There are hefty doses of rebellion, of humor, of parody, and of metacommentary in these first pages, as the act of composition becomes an organizing principle of the narrative trajectory. Writing is, in a word, *inscribed* into the narrative, and so, obviously, is reading. In a brilliant stroke, Cervantes elects to have the initial narrator—one of a corps of narrative personas—insist that the episodes being recounted constitute the “true history” of Don Quixote, thereby acknowledging and refuting, from the start, the Aristotelian distinction between the objectivity of history and the subjectivity of fiction. The narrator is an advocate of the absolute truth, whereas every sign indicates that truth is relative, at best.

A man whose exact name seems to be in doubt—he is a small landowner and an *hidalgo*, or lesser nobleman—reads romances of chivalry in his leisure time, and, from that mental exertion, his brain “dries up.” He decides to sally forth as a knight, renaming himself Don Quixote de la Mancha. As soon as he sets out on his quest to right wrongs and to protect damsels

in distress, Don Quixote exhibits a sense of his historical role. He imagines his heroic deeds and envisions the chronicle that will record his chivalric feats before an adventure presents itself. His time lapse, here and throughout the text, gives Cervantes the opportunity to play with chronology and with the mechanisms of perception, thought, and expression. Don Quixote's mind games become the grist for his creator's exceptionally comprehensive agenda, which moves from the literary past to an anticipated future and from literary territories to the real world and back. At the end of the eighth chapter—with Don Quixote caught in mid-battle with a Basque squire—the narrator informs the reader that he cannot continue the reporting because he has run out of data. The continuation shows up in the next chapter, when the narrative figure comes across a manuscript in Arabic in a marketplace in Toledo and has it translated into Castilian. The manuscript serendipitously begins where the first section ended. Consequently, the remainder of the “true history” will be transmitted through the intervention of a Morisco translator, who relies on the original by a Muslim historian, Cide Hamete Benengeli, within an atmosphere in which old enmities with the Catholic Spaniards remain. By means of this precociously deconstructive turn of events, Cervantes shows his awareness that much will be lost in translation. He winks at readers and involves them in the negotiation of meaning. He brings them into the frame, as Diego Velázquez does with an array of spectators a half-century later in his painting *Las Meninas*, which, not coincidentally, places the artist (amid members of Spain's royal family) in the work of art.

Along with its nostalgia for—and undermining of—chivalric romance, *Don Quixote* is populated by characters emblematic of picaresque, pastoral, theatrical, and poetic precedents. The illiterate Sancho Panza is an exemplum of the legacy of oral culture. Don Quixote's niece and housekeeper, along with his friends the priest and the barber, evaluate the books in the knight's library and burn those that they judge to be offensive, in effect, a joint exercise in literary criticism and allegory of the Inquisition. In great proliferation, characters, including a soldier who (like Cervantes) was held captive in Algiers, narrate their stories. A novella (written by Cervantes) is read aloud. There is a debate about the value of histories and biographies as compared with works of fiction. In this profoundly *meta-* universe, Don Quixote meets a madman and comments on his actions, and shortly thereafter announces that he will imitate the madness of Amadís of Gaul, for him the archetypal knight errant. Part I concludes, in essence, when the

intercalated tales are completed and Don Quixote promises to return home for a spell, escorted by the priest and the barber, who have taken to the road to retrieve him. The narrator is again short of material, but he vows to keep searching for the rest of the (hi)story.

Much of the reception of Part 2 of *Don Quixote* rests on an unexpected intrusion into the knight's history and literary history: the publication in 1614 of a sequel by the pseudonymous Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, whose identity is still unknown. Cervantes likely had written the major portion of his second part when the spurious continuation appeared. He speaks of Avellaneda in the prologue and brings him into the narrative proper as of chapter 59 (of 74). Cervantes's own plan for Part 2 is nothing if not inspired. The book about Don Quixote has been published. It is a success, and he is a celebrity. When a character named Sansón Carrasco notifies Don Quixote of public and critical reaction, the knight wonders aloud if there might be a sequel in the making. Don Quixote becomes concerned about the ability of an Arab historian to transfer his accomplishments to the page. In Part 2, Cervantes replicates the literary critique of Part 1, but now it is Cervantes's work, and/or Cide Hamete Benengeli's, that is being appraised. On the road once again, he encounters readers of Part 1 who know him and his story, and he is in danger of being marginalized by his fame. A devious duke and duchess—avid readers—invite him to their palace, which becomes a theater in which they make Don Quixote and Sancho Panza their jesters. Relegated to the role of actor in the drama of his hosts, the knight ceases to be a metaphorical playwright and stage director. The altered circumstances threaten to deflate his energy and his drive. He

is animated, fortunately, by the discovery that there is a false sequel in print; the bad news puts him on the defensive, and he is ready to do battle. A character from the invasive tome appears in the “real” second part and certifies before a notary that the genuine Don Quixote is the one who stands before him. As if ingeniously scripted by Cervantes, the author is forced to align himself with the Arab historian, whom fate has cast in the role of the “true” historian, therein reconfiguring the irony. Sansón Carrasco poses as an enemy knight in order to defeat Don Quixote and to force him to return home. Back in his village, Don Quixote has an *ex-machina* conversion, and he renounces his chivalric persona, dying shortly afterwards. The novel—this one and its successors—does not die with him, needless to say.

Cervantes did not write a theory of the novel. *Don Quixote* is his theory in practice, a synthetic document on reading, writing, life, and art. Cervantes recognizes the cultural past—the intertext—and foresees the future of the novel and of theory. He blends realism with metafiction and comedy with serious reflection on perception, perspective, and the nature of truth. *Don Quixote* provides a mirror to early modern Spain: its push for political and religious unity, its obsession with blood purity and rules regarding honor, its rigid censorship of speech and art, its social and class divisions, its economic woes, its treatment of women and minorities, and its projection of a baroque sensibility, among other elements. The New World, the new science, and a new religious crisis (the Reformation against a Counter Reformation) bring change and increased complexity to society. These are all aspects of Don Quixote's extended environment, and they are all encoded within the text, in one way or an-

other. A reading of *Don Quixote* is perforce a practicum in literature, rhetoric, poetics, history, theology, ethics, race and ethnicity, satire, and the power of the imagination. My stance may seem, well, quixotic, but, trust me, this remnant from early seventeenth-century Spain covers those things, and more.

We all have our bouncing-off places. *Don Quixote*, which I have taught thirteen times since I came to Vanderbilt in 2000, is one of mine, and, without a doubt, the main one. Even when it is not on a syllabus or among the texts that I am using for a particular research project, it is present symbolically and emphatically. Whenever I teach a course in contemporary theory, I find myself apologizing for citing *Don Quixote* too frequently as an example. Because my teaching philosophy, if I may be so bold as to call it a philosophy, stresses engagement with texts, contexts, and colleagues, recourse to what, for me, is the novel of engagement par excellence seems appropriate. It is my most desired goal for students to leave my classes feeling that they have learned important subject matter and that they have learned to approach texts—to read—with new insights, critical acumen, and confidence. We all seek method in our pedagogical madness. As a student, I knew that *Don Quixote* was special—substantial, intricate, adaptable, dazzlingly comic, deeply serious, inexhaustibly ironic, and so forth—but it dawned on me a bit later that Cervantes's novel had become my instructor's manual. I hope that everyone chances upon such a guide.

Edward H. Friedman is Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of Spanish and Professor of Comparative Literature at Vanderbilt University, and director of the Warren Center.



2011/2012 Warren Center Faculty Fellows. Pictured from left to right: Tony K. Stewart, Tracy G. Miller, Roger E. Moore, Leo C. Coleman, Helena Simonett, William R. Fowler, Robert F. Campany, Betsey A. Robinson, John W. Janusek, Bronwen L. Wickkiser. Not pictured: Jane G. Landers

What We Are Writing

What books are our colleagues in the humanities and social sciences writing and editing? LETTERS has asked Vanderbilt University's scholars to share their 2011 publications. Their answers show an active and diverse mix of scholarly interests.

Lewis V. Baldwin, editor. *"Thou, Dear God": Prayers that Open Hearts and Spirits—The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* Beacon Press.

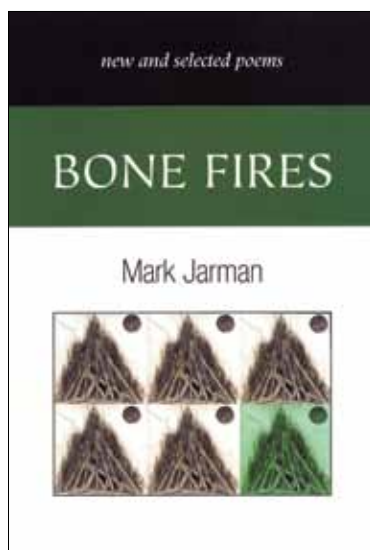
Tracy Barrett. *Dark of the Moon*. Harcourt Children's Books.

Robert F. Barsky. *Zellig Harris: From American Linguistics to Socialist Zionism*. MIT Press.

Colin Dayan. *The Law is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons*. Princeton University Press.

Edward H. Friedman. *Into the Mist. A Play Based on Miguel de Unamuno's Niebla*. Juan de la Cuesta.

Mark Jarman. *Bone Fires: New and Selected Poems*. Sarabande Books.



Claire Sisco King. *Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma, and the Cinema*. Rutgers University Press.

Douglas A. Knight. *Law, Power, and Justice in Ancient Israel*. Westminster John Knox Press.

Douglas A. Knight and Amy-Jill Levine. *The Meaning of the Bible: What the Jewish Scriptures and Christian Old Testament Can Teach Us*. HarperOne.

Peter Lake and Michael Questier. *The Trials of Margaret Clitherow: Persecution, Martyrdom and the Politics of Sanctity in Elizabethan England*. Continuum International Publishing Group.

Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z. Brettler, co-editors. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. Oxford University Press.

Lorraine M. López. *The Realm of Hungry Spirits*. Grand Central Publishing.

Peter Lorge. *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge University Press.

Peter Lorge, editor. *Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms*. The Chinese University Press.

Wendy Martin and Cecelia Tichi, co-editors. *Best of Times, Worst of Times: Contemporary American Stories from the New Gilded Age*. New York University Press.

John S. McClure. *Mashup Religion: Pop Music and Theological Invention*. Baylor University Press.

Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore. *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*. Wiley/Blackwell.

Betsey A. Robinson. *Histories of Peirene: A Corinthian Fountain in Three Millennia*. Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

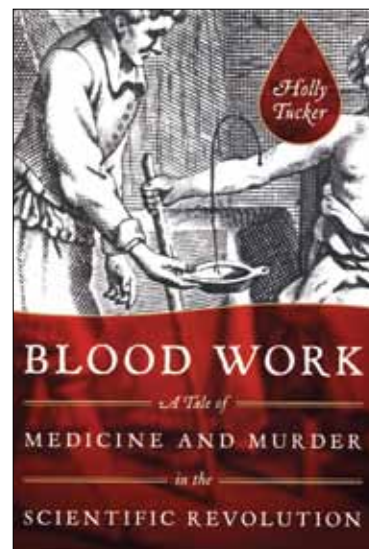
Allison Schachter. *Diasporic Modernisms: Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford University Press.

Kathryn Schwarz. *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Daniel J. Sharfstein. *The Invisible Line: Three American Families and the Secret Journey from Black to White*. Penguin Press.

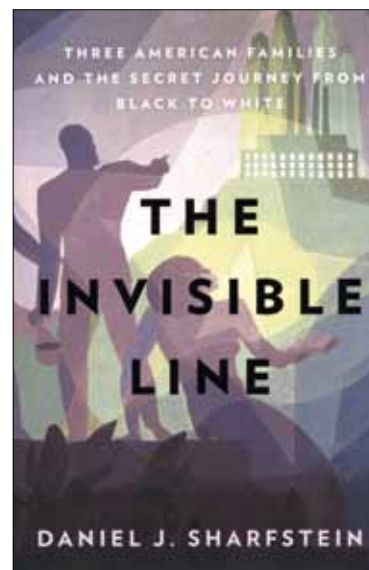
Helmut Walser Smith, editor. *Oxford Handbook of Modern German History*. Oxford University Press.

Holly Tucker. *Blood Work: A Tale of Medicine and Murder in the Scientific Revolution*. W. W. Norton & Company.



Martina Urban and Christian Wiese, co-editors. *German-Jewish Thought Between Religion and Politics*. Walter de Gruyter.

Francis W. Wcislo. *Tales of Imperial Russia: The Life and Times of Sergei Witte, 1849-1915*. Oxford University Press.



2011/2012 Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities Seminars

The following is a list of seminars and reading groups that will be hosted by the Warren Center in the spring semester. For more detailed information please contact the seminar coordinators or the Warren Center.

Art of Narrative Workshop: The purpose of this workshop is to gather together writers interested in the art of narrative non-fiction and, in particular, in the possibilities of bringing together scholarship and narrative non-fiction techniques. The group will meet to workshop members' writings, read and discuss works of narrative non-fiction and pieces dealing with craft, and invite visiting speakers known for their narrative non-fiction to address the group and the larger campus community. *Seminar coordinator: Paul Kramer (history), paul.a.kramer@vanderbilt.edu.*

Circum-Atlantic Studies Seminar: This group reads and treats scholarship that is interdisciplinary in nature, focuses on at least two of the following regions—Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, and North America—and treats some aspect of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, and/or postcolonialism. Upcoming guest speakers include Eric Hinderaker (history, University of Utah) on January 25 and the Black Atlantic Seminar on February 2. *Seminar coordinators: Celso Castilho (history), celso.t.castilho@vanderbilt.edu and Jane Landers (history), jane.landiers@vanderbilt.edu.*

Digital Humanities Discussion Group: Digital humanities projects are rich new additions to the intellectual life of humanities scholars. If you are currently working on a digital humanities project or hope to do so in the near future, please join this discussion group to learn more about resources and innovations in this area. The group will be hosting a Digital Humanities Roundtable Event with visiting scholars on February 3. *Seminar coordinators: Lynn Ramey (French), lynn.ramey@vanderbilt.edu and Mona Frederick (Warren Center), mona.frederick@vanderbilt.edu.*

Film Theory & Visual Culture Seminar: This seminar aims to foster dialogue among faculty and graduate students across campus working in film, visual culture, art history, literature, and cultural studies interested in theories of the image, philosophies of perception, aesthetic and critical theory, media histories, and the history of vision. The group will meet monthly to discuss readings, share work, and engage the research of invited scholars. Upcoming guest speakers include Jacques Khalip (English, Brown University) on January 27 and David L. Clark (English, McMaster University) on March 16. *Seminar coordinators: Jennifer Fay (Film Studies and English), jennifer.m.fay@vanderbilt.edu, James McFarland (German), james.mcfarland@vanderbilt.edu, and Paul Young (Film Studies and English), paul.d.young@vanderbilt.edu.*

Food Politics Seminar: This graduate-led seminar aims to continue a transdisciplinary conversation about the political, economic, ecological, cultural, spiritual, and nutritional dimensions of foodways, agricultural practices, and consumption habits. Each month will include a meeting focused on a discussion of selected readings, as well as a second meeting oriented toward praxis, engaging with the principles discussed through shared physical or community activities. *Seminar coordinators: Tristan Call (anthropology), tristan.p.call@vanderbilt.edu and Wade Archer (Divinity School), wade.w.archer@vanderbilt.edu.*

Group for Pre-modern Cultural Studies: The purpose of the group is serve as a forum for those with interests in pre-modern studies, including not only history but language and literature, chiefly, though not exclusively, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, as well as music, art, and culture. The group meets monthly to discuss ongoing research by a faculty member, recent publications in the field, or the work of a visiting scholar. *Seminar coordinators: Leah Marcus (English), leah.s.marcus@vanderbilt.edu and Bill Caferro (history), william.p.caferro@vanderbilt.edu.*

Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life: The Warren Center and the American Studies Program are co-sponsoring this group to provide opportunities for exchange among faculty members and graduate students who are interested in or who are currently involved in projects that engage public scholarship. Vanderbilt is a member of the national organization, "Imagining America," a consortium of colleges and universities committed to public scholarship in the arts, humanities, and design. *Seminar coordinators: Teresa Goddu (American Studies), teresa.a.goddu@vanderbilt.edu and Mona Frederick (Warren Center), mona.frederick@vanderbilt.edu.*

Modernism, Emergence, and Critiques: A Twentieth Century Literature and Culture Seminar: This graduate-led seminar group seeks to explore the visual and print culture of the twentieth century with respect to various national, regional, and transnational traditions, including but not limited to literature and the arts from Europe and the Americas. Meetings will provide those whose interests involve twentieth-century literature and culture with a formal group setting in which to workshop their writing, read and discuss the work of their colleagues and mentors, and engage with recent developments in relevant scholarship (modernism, postmodernism, postcolonial studies, film studies, American studies, identity studies, philosophy, etc.). *Seminar coordinators: Andy Hines (English), andrew.j.hines@vanderbilt.edu and Aubrey Porterfield (English), aubrey.k.porterfield@vanderbilt.edu.*

Literature and Law Seminar: This reading group will meet to discuss current approaches, new challenges, and new possibilities that are offered to legal and literary scholars when they use insights from both fields to illuminate their work. The seminar welcomes anyone interested in the many topics now addressed in this field, including the use of obscenity laws to regulate creative work, the representation of law in literature, law as literature, the application of literary methods to legal texts, the challenges of constructing "characters" appropriate to literary and legal settings, and the revitalization of law through reference to humanistic texts and approaches. *Seminar coordinator: Robert Barsky (French and Italian), robert.barsky@vanderbilt.edu.*

Mexican Studies Seminar: The goal of this group is to raise the profile of research related to Mexico on the Vanderbilt campus and support members' individual scholarly endeavors regarding this important nation bordering the United States. The group brings together faculty and graduate students from history, political science, literature, sociology, art, anthropology, music, and Latin American studies. At monthly meetings the group will discuss work-in-progress authored by members and invited scholars from beyond Vanderbilt. *Seminar coordinator: Helena Simonett (Latin American Studies), helena.simonett@vanderbilt.edu.*

Political Culture in Practice: This graduate-led seminar intends to facilitate an interdisciplinary conversation about the implications of, and methodologies for, interpreting and understanding political culture in all its forms. Meetings will incorporate discussions of specific source and methodological issues through pre-circulated readings, while also providing participants with opportunities to workshop papers-in-progress and raise questions relevant to their own research. *Seminar coordinators: Lance Ingvewsen (history), lance.ingwersen@vanderbilt.edu, Alexander Jacobs (history), alexander.i.jacobs@vanderbilt.edu, and Sonja Ostrow (history), sonja.g.ostrow@vanderbilt.edu.*

Science Studies Seminar: This interdisciplinary group is comprised of faculty from the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities with a shared interest in the history and sociology of scientific thought and practice, issues of scientific methodology and its application across disciplines, and the social functions of scientific knowledge. *Seminar coordinator: Dablia Porter (English), dablia.porter@vanderbilt.edu.*

The Heart of the Matter: This graduate-led seminar will explore the intersections of social ethics and sociology as they relate to classism, racism, and sexism. Through incorporating social justice frameworks, this seminar provides a platform for social ethicists and sociologists to engage each other in discussions of social inequality, theories that explain it, and how to apply knowledge to construct more equitable societies. *Seminar coordinators: Christophe Ringer (religion), christophe.d.ringer@vanderbilt.edu and Nakia Collins (sociology), nakia.v.collins@vanderbilt.edu.*

18th-/19th-Century Colloquium: The colloquium brings together faculty, graduate students, and visiting scholars to explore ground-breaking scholarship on the arts, cultures, and histories of the 18th and 19th centuries. While loosely focused around British culture, the group also invites scholars from other linguistic and geographic fields to share work and join in the discussion. Upcoming guest speakers include Jacques Khalip (English, Brown University) on January 27, Markman Ellis (history, University of London) on February 24, Wolfram Schmidgen (English, Washington University) on March 16, and Sara Maurer (English, Notre Dame University) on March 30. *Seminar Coordinators: Gabriel Cervantes (English), gabriel.cervantes@vanderbilt.edu and Rachel Teukolsky (English), rachel.teukolsky@vanderbilt.edu.*

2011/2012 Warren Center Graduate Student Fellows Lecture Series

Now in its sixth year, the Warren Center's annual Graduate Student Fellows Program currently sponsors eight outstanding Vanderbilt graduate students in the humanities and qualitative social sciences in a year-long fellowship program. These awards are designed to support innovation and excellence in graduate student research and allow the students a service-free year of support to enable full-time work on the dissertation. It is expected that students who receive this award will complete the dissertation during the fellowship term. Additionally, one graduate student from Queen's University in Belfast is selected to participate in the Graduate Student Fellows Program.

As part of their affiliation with the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, Fellows are integrated into the center's interdisciplinary scholarly community through participation in a weekly seminar, occasional seminars with visiting speakers, and special events. The capstone of the fellowship is the delivery of a public lecture during the spring term. The Graduate Student Fellows Lecture Series is an intellectually invigorating time at the Warren Center and we encourage you to plan to attend one or more of these talks by these outstanding young scholars.

Following is the schedule for this year's talks which **will all take place at 4:10 p.m. in the Warren Center's conference room.** Lecture titles will be posted soon on the Warren Center's website; the listing below includes the titles of the Fellows' dissertations.

- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28 **Alison Suen**, Ethel Mae Wilson Fellow
Department of Philosophy
"The Kinship of Language: Reworking the Human-Animal Divide"
- MONDAY, APRIL 2 **Tara E. Plunkett**
Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Queen's University (Belfast)
"Self and Desire: Surrealism in the Images and Texts of Federico García Lorca, Rafael Alberti, Remedios Varo, and Leonora Carrington"
- TUESDAY, APRIL 10 **Diana E. Bellonby**, Elizabeth E. Fleming Fellow
Department of English
"Magic Portraits: Visual Culture, Ekphrasis, and the Novel, 1850-1930"
- WEDNESDAY, APRIL 11 **William L. Bishop**
Department of History
"Diplomacy in Black and White: America and the Search for Zimbabwean Independence, 1965-1980"
- THURSDAY, APRIL 19 **Anna-Lisa Halling**, Joe and Mary Harper Fellow
Department of Spanish and Portuguese
"Feminine Voice and Space in Early Modern Iberian Convent Theatre"
- FRIDAY, APRIL 20 **Robert J. Watson**
Department of French and Italian
"Cities of Origin, Cities of Exile: The Literary Emergence of Maghrebi Jewish Diasporic Consciousness, 1985-2010"
- TUESDAY, APRIL 24 **Matthew E. Duquès**, American Studies Fellow
Department of English
"To a Certain Degree': Northern Education Reform and Early U.S. Literature, 1781-1867"
- WEDNESDAY, APRIL 25 **Matthew L. Eatough**
Department of English
"Narrating the Ends of Class: Imperialism and Affect in the Twentieth-Century British World-System"
- THURSDAY, APRIL 26 **Joanna M. Mazurska**, George J. Graham Jr. Fellow
Department of History
"Making Sense of Czesław Miłosz: A Twentieth-Century Intellectual's Dialogue with His Transnational Audiences"

2011/2012 Warren Center Graduate Student Fellows

Pictured from left to right: Tara E. Plunkett, William L. Bishop, Diana E. Bellonby, Matthew L. Eatough, Anna-Lisa Halling, Matthew E. Duquès, Alison Suen, Joanna M. Mazurska, Robert J. Watson.



Landscapes of the Delhi Durbar, 1903: Ritual and Politics

continued from page 3

worlds under its ruthless feet, always in search of the new, destroying, building, and demolishing once again with the meaningless petulance of a child who builds a house of sand only to raze it to the ground" (Ali 1994 [1940]: 110).

In such rituals, and by living amidst the changed landscape—of imagination and memory—that they help to produce, people may come to understand themselves and others in new ways, though not necessarily in better or more civil ones. The kinds of distinctions and discriminations that Nirad Chaudhuri experienced were, in one sense, the everyday, bureaucratic transcription of the catalogues of ethnological diversity and official rank that were a central part of the performance of the Durbar. Accounts of the ceremony are replete with lists of "Ghoorkas and Sikhs, Mahrattas and Mahomedans," or, on the other side, "District Officers and Magistrates, Knight Commanders and Companions of the Order of the Star of India," as both the audience for and celebrants of the ritual. Meanwhile, however, it also provided an occasion for technological displays that cut across these boundaries, and provided an alternative scale on which to assert oneself, if still in the service of the kinds of sumptuary distinctions drawn upon elsewhere.

Such multiple scales of identity and rank are, in the complex situation of a stately ritual, simultaneously in play as the materials with which people seek to recognize and order their own place in it. The more deeply and permanently such distinctions are crafted into the space of everyday life, and the more stern the separations, the more we enter the modern world of tabulated identities, and even the regulation and ordering of life-potentials on the basis not of humanity, but of actuarial calculations. This ordering and inscription in space is the topic of many studies of "governmentality" in Delhi and elsewhere (Legg 2007). Once we have accounted for all the permutations of all this governmental, statistical, and abstract knowledge, however, there remains that element of meaning and experience which is equally present but differently "evidenced" within the ritual and the routine, and which anthropological interpretation tries to elucidate. As the anthropologist Wendy James has put it, "it is in the public life

of cities that we find ceremonial enactments at their most condensed, and most political, and most potentially dramatic—even literally explosive" (James 2003: 249). This power and potential of urban life, this concatenation of meanings and possibilities, multiplied by the number of participants, viewers, passersby and interested parties, is what makes it and its rituals important to any contemporary grasp of politics in its global extent, and which links investigations of long-ago colonial rituals to the struggles, practices, and self-understandings of the present.

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- Professor Leo C. Coleman is the 2011/2012 William S. Vaughn Visiting Faculty Fellow from The Ohio State University.

THE ROBERT PENN WARREN CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

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Letters is the semiannual newsletter of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities at Vanderbilt University, VU Station B #351534, 2301 Vanderbilt Place, Nashville, Tennessee 37235-1534. (615) 343-6060, Fax (615) 343-2248.

For a listing of Warren Center programs and activities, please contact the above address or visit our Web site at www.vanderbilt.edu/rpw_center.

Statement of Purpose

Established under the sponsorship of the College of Arts and Science in 1987 and named the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities in 1989 in honor of Robert Penn Warren, Vanderbilt alumnus class of 1925, the Center promotes interdisciplinary research and study in the humanities, social sciences, and, when appropriate, natural sciences. Members of the Vanderbilt community representing a wide variety of specializations take part in the Warren Center's programs, which are designed to intensify and increase interdisciplinary discussion of academic, social, and cultural issues.

Vanderbilt University is committed to principles of equal opportunity and affirmative action.

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