

GAG MAG

The World is



Not Flat



April Issue



This Issue

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EDITORIAL

Now that you have all stuffed yourselves with easter eggs and other goodies during Easter, you might have some difficulty to move anywhere, let alone into another country... So we decided to do some of that work for you and put together an issue of GAG_MAG that is all about going abroad! After all, the world is round, like an Easter egg, and with every moment you're not going after your travels, your chances -unlike you- are slimming.

Okay, enough with the puns. We have in store for you teachers contributions by Astrid Böger, who's sending us greetings from Hamburg, where she recently moved, and by Pieter de Haan, coordinator of exchange programmes in Europe for students of English. We bring you an interview with Daniel Morris, who's here as an exchange Professor, if you like. Ex-GAG-chairman Roel Hesp, currently residing in England, shares some of his thoughts, and it seems like the realisation of ultimately having to leave London is getting to Christopher Cusack. Then, there's one impressive poetic city you should visit, brought to you by Marguërite Corporaal's Creative Writing pupils, and even Stormrider is somewhat out of place this time. The Pop-corner passes by a parallel America in 1985 and eighteenth century England. So, all packed and ready? Then have a great trip through this April issue!

Thomas Lansink and Elke Rietveld
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A WORD FROM GAG

Dear all,

April will be our international month and this theme will develop throughout the weeks, preparing us for the highlight of every GAG year: The Study Trip! As the trip will be in Ireland, we have decided to sprinkle a little Irish fairy dust on our regular events. Our pub quiz is filled with questions on Ireland and the movie night features *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* with an introduction by dr. Marguërite Corporaal.

Internationalization has become very important in this day and age and we, as students of English will have to adapt. Fortunately, this tendency may also provide us with future (career) possibilities. We will put together some activities to help you make the most of these possibilities.

We've been busy as bees trying to balance our social input with our GAG output. We've been trying to adjust to board life, moving from constitutional drinks into a 9-meetings-a-week week, while keeping our headliners in check. This year's RAG week we'll be hosting not one but **TWO** events; our annual **Open Stage Night (23 April)** as well as a **fancy dress (masked) party (20 April)**. We hope to see you there and good luck with all your exams!

*May your pens be swift
And your teachers merciful*

Best regards,
Judith Valeton, Chairwoman
Dominique Wobben, Secretary
Michelle Verkoelen, Treasurer



Ragweek



Gag, Sigma & Tacitus
Present:

Masked Ball



Monday April 20st

Boogie Wonderland

21.00h Door closes at 23.00h

€2,50 Dresscode: Masked

Open Stage Night

Do you sing, dance,
play an instrument,
recite or do something
else? Show us!

Mail: gag@student.ru.nl

Thursday April 23rd

20.00h €2,50

Gewoon Nijmeegs

Theatercafe



gag.ruhosting.nl

GREETINGS FROM HAMBURG

An (ex-)teacher's contribution by Astid Böger

After regrettably having failed to submit a piece to either GAG or TAKE 5 magazine before leaving Nijmegen due to my frantic schedule during those final weeks in January, I am pleased to let everyone know who cares to find out that I have meanwhile made it safely to Hamburg. As one can imagine, it was no small logistical feat to turn three households (Nijmegen – Düsseldorf – Hamburg) into just one – and how is that for simplifying your life? In Hamburg, I am joining my partner, who has managed to transfer to the Hamburg branch of his law firm, so this is a new experience for us all around after having practiced a commuting life-style for years.

With the given space restrictions of this piece, I am torn between continuing in the shamelessly autobiographical mode, or else getting into the more academic matters connected with my recent move. Well, actually, there is one aspect linking both areas of my life, which is the idea of going back. As most of you know, I worked in Düsseldorf, Germany, before coming to Nijmegen in the fall of 2005. And returning to Germany after several years is of course very interesting. In some ways, I feel like a contemporary female version of good old Rip van Winkle: in the course of the past three years, German universities have finally introduced the BA/MA structure all too familiar to students and colleagues in the Netherlands. In fact, over here I have received more than a few comments in awe of the pace with which Dutch universities have been reformed and reformed again. Personally, I am simply resigned to continual revision for as long as the present system will be with us, wherever in Europe one chooses to work. Over here in Hamburg, any shortcomings of the new system seem to be intensified by the fact that this is a huge university (at around 40.000 students); any problems due to administrative glitches or even intended curricular changes are bound to affect multitudes who, unsurprisingly, are prone to protest. In fact, this was one of the first impressions I got when coming to the Hamburg campus: even though on the whole students strike me as very friendly and helpful, some of them do vent their frustration rather explicitly, especially on walls such as those of elevators anywhere on campus, some of which reveal invectives against the university management I would not consider repeating in print. Instead, I am including a relatively harmless example of typical student graffiti, in this case, protesting against the closing of a particular cafeteria in our building:



"Philosophercaphe bleibt offen"

Speaking of the building I am in – aptly named the ‘Philosophenturm’, for where else would a self-respecting academic want to be but in a philosopher’s tower? – there is precious little difference to the situation of the Erasmusgebouw: it is once more the tallest building on campus, with six elevators going up, double-tasking as vertical communication superhighways. The main difference is personal perspective and – quite literally – outlook, as my office happens to be on the 12th floor and is thus located roughly twice as high up as my Nijmegen office was. The view is almost too nice, as my window looks out on the scenic river Alster, and I have been warned that it poses a

serious source of distraction once all those sailing boats start going by... On the next page, in any case, you can see a picture of the philosopher’s tower, though you’ll have to use your imagination for the sailing boats, alas.

Generally speaking, German students seem to feel differently about their university environment. For one, they rather tend to take it for granted, which has only recently changed with the (much-embattled) introduction of study fees – moderate though those are, at about € 500 per semester. Also, by all appearances there are far fewer international students here (though I should add that I arrived in the middle of the semester break, so this might change once everyone returns for courses). In Nijmegen, I could not help but notice the growing presence of German students along with those from elsewhere. No comparison over here! For whatever reason, it is clearly less attractive for students from abroad to come to a large German university like Hamburg’s than, say, Radboud University in spite of the latter’s considerably higher fees. Of course, this may have to do with the lack of close-knit counseling such as RU staff – as I know – is so good at providing. Also, over here there is no ‘voorlichting’ for German high school students, let alone those abroad, which means



Philosophenturm

anyone who finds his or her way to this university will have done so largely on his or her own initiative. As quite a lot of them actually do – again, there are about 40.000 registered students – perhaps understandably no-one seems to be particularly concerned with how to recruit even more students.

Some of you may be curious about my new appointment and the teaching I will be doing in particular. In brief, I have the typical teaching load of a German university professor, which is eight to nine hours per week, or four courses. More precisely I have been asked to offer a course on literature and two on topics related to my other field of expertise, i.e. visual and popular culture, as well as a lecture course on American literary genres. Regarding the latter, I have to admit that I was stunned to find out that apparently German students are willing to listen to a weekly ninety-minute lecture on genre, and indeed remain curious (as well as somewhat anxious) as to how this is going to play out in reality. I guess we will find out soon enough, as the new semester over here starts just before Easter! The other courses sound like a lot of fun, though: one will be on The Woman's Film of the 1930s to the Present, another on Photographic Icons of 20th Century America. The literature course, geared toward more advanced students, will treat American Poetry & Affect after 1945. If you compare these topics with the courses usually taught at Radboud University,

it is immediately striking that they tend to be much more thematically focused rather than survey-oriented. Personally, I think a good balance between survey courses and more thematically oriented ones would be ideal, and that's just what I will be working toward in my future attempts at curricular revision.

Regardless of where I happen to be teaching American Studies, I am thrilled to see confirmed what many colleagues have expected in view of the elections last November, namely a re-kindled interest in, and genuine curiosity about, the United States. I do consider myself lucky that my start here in Hamburg coincides with that precious sense of a new beginning. On the whole, though, German students – at least those I have encountered in the past – have been less critical of the U.S. than Dutch students, so perhaps the change will be less noticeable over here – too early to tell, really.

Toward the end of this piece, let me briefly return to the question of returning. All things considered, coming to Hamburg seems like it was meant to be. After all, this is the city where my family moved just after I was born and where I spent the first six years of my life before moving to a rural area outside of Bremen. After leaving Hamburg I rarely came back, making for a rather intriguing experience of reconnecting with a phase of my life almost too remote to remember. Thus, I am now finding myself revisiting the past even as I move toward the future. Speaking of which, I would like to end by thanking everyone I had the privilege of working with at Radboud University and wishing you my very best for your own future endeavors. Of course, I do hope that some of those endeavors will be mutual and collaborative – for why not start exchanging ideas and people between our universities?

Born in Bremen, Germany, in 1967, Astrid Böger spent her first year in the United States when she was sixteen, on a government scholarship, and having there and then decided to become an Americanist, she studied at the Universities of Bremen and Düsseldorf as well as Duke University, North Carolina, between 1987 and 1993. As a doctoral candidate at Düsseldorf University she started her career teaching American Studies, and after receiving her doctorate in 2000 she continued work in Düsseldorf as an assistant professor. From 2005 until early 2009 Astrid Böger was hired to teach American Studies at Radboud University Nijmegen in 2005. Trading Nijmegen for a full professorship at the University of Hamburg in early 2009, Astrid welcomes the change but regrets leaving behind the people she has worked and lived with as well as learned from over the years.

LONDON LOVE LETTER I: WRITING AND WALKING, OR CHERISHING THE CITY

By Christopher Cusack

One of the greatest delights of London is the continuing importance the city has (had) for literature. I am talking not so much about the literary infrastructure – even though London is still one of the foremost literary centres in the world – but rather about the role the metropolis has played in so many works of literature. Living in London has offered me a wonderful new perspective on all those classics you non-Londoners – whose geographic disability I pity – also read. For instance, as you become more familiar with the city’s make-up, a book such as Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (marvellous by any standard) gains a new appeal, as the perambulatory tendencies of the novel’s dramatis personae find a hitherto lacking context in the reader’s own engagement with London as a wanderlust walkhalla. Being familiar with the places described, you will often be able to divine what else is afoot when following the characters’ routes¹.

Admittedly, unlike Clarissa Dalloway and her chums most people nowadays omit the article from *the* Euston Road, but apart from that, hardly anything has changed since the time Woolf and other street-savvy scribblers digested their metropolitan marchings in their writings (peripatetic peristalsis, if you will), despite the efforts of Adolf Hitler and his merry band of frisky fighter pilots to level the city². Many of the streets from Shakespeare’s day still exist, and sometimes the flâneur will quite unexpectedly happen upon a well-hidden alley or an unfamiliar road that he recalls from his reading and other forays into fiction – and I am not talking here about the haplessly named Knightbridge Street in the City, a rather unassuming street you come across when heading for the famous Millennium Bridge, which takes you from St Paul’s Cathedral to the ever-enchanted Tate Modern³ and offers you a stunning view across the river Thames.

1 Yes, I realise this is a rather poor pun to use when talking about walking and literature.

2 Except for Senate House at Malet Street, where the dictator wanted to set up headquarters had the Blitz been successful. Nowadays, Senate House is home to a number of libraries and institutions of the University of London. It is one of my favourite buildings in London, which is not surprising since it is a grand example of Art Deco architecture (see note 3). Interestingly, it also served as the model for Orwell’s Ministry of Truth – indeed, it is a very imposing and slightly terrifying edifice.

3 Tate Modern, the Art Deco power station turned museum, was drawn by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, the architect who also designed the stunningly beautiful Battersea Power Station (which features on the album cover of Pink Floyd’s *Animals*) and the well-known red telephone box (an example of which can [editor’s note: no longer] be found on the Erasmusplein).

However, more exciting than the streets of London is the river itself. Having always had a soft spot for the aquatic presence in literature⁴ and for water in general, the Thames was my favourite bit of London even before I moved here. Since then, that mighty stream has further consolidated its hold upon me, swaying me with its gentle undulations and exciting tides. Whenever I alight at London Bridge station – which I do regularly, it being so close to the Globe Theatre and Tate Modern – I am reminded of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, with its borrowings from Spenser's "Prothalamion" ("Sweet Thames run softly till I end my song") and the famous nursery rhyme "London Bridge is Falling Down" ("London Bridge is falling down down down"). In fact, Spenser's murmuring pentameter is one of my favourite lines of poetry, and the repetition of "down" makes Eliot's recycling of the nursery rhyme particularly haunting. Fortunately, London Bridge has never actually collapsed onto my head⁵.

Then, when I stroll upstream from Bankside – in Southwark, whence Chaucer's pilgrims set out for Canterbury – towards Millbank, my eye is invariably drawn to the litter sieves (or whatever they are called – does it matter?) that were installed to intercept plastic bags and other flotsam floating out towards sea, and which proudly proclaim their sanitary success on placards that list the annual tonnage of fished-up rubbish. Here Eliot once again surfaces in my stream of consciousness, and I silently repeat to myself his description of (absent) waste (not) washing away in the river⁶:

The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. (ll. 177-79)

If we are to take Eliot at his word, the rubbish receptacles have been very effective for at least eighty-seven years.

My interest in exploring the city on foot not only echoes Baudelaire's idea of the flâneur and the theories of Walter Benjamin, but also resonates with

4 My interest in fictional fleuvisism and other waterwriting partly explains my affection for the work of Virginia Woolf ("The waves broke on the shore.") and is also one of the reasons why I find the Anna Livia Plurabelle chapter of *Mighty Jim's Finnegans Wake* less mind-combusting than the rest of that fearsome book. (I recommend the reader to google the recording of the Fearful Jesuit reading the chapter – his stab at impersonating two Dublin washerwomen is delightful.)

5 Touch wood.

6 Here, I am always reminded of Levi Weemoedt's poem "Vlaardings roem," particularly its similarly nostalgic yet hilarious final line "Slechts een condoom / dreef goedgemutst het zeegat uit." Weemoedt's short poem seems to take its inspiration from Eliot's masterpiece.

Will Self's writings on psychogeography. Will Self, who incidentally lives just around the corner from me and whom I therefore spot crossing the street every now and again, believes that modern forms of transport do not permit us to experience space anymore. As cars, trains, airplanes, and other motorised forms of transportation allow us to move from A to B without any physical exertion, our body no longer registers distance, and as a result we are no longer aware of the condition of space; our lives have become largely sedentary, and as most of our excursions into the outdoor world only involve getting to and from the bus stop or our cars, we have lost touch with the world around us. In a fascinating talk delivered at the Google headquarters, Self explains his philosophy by drawing upon the idea that whenever we moderns travel, we actually go from one isolated bubble to another. Even if we explore the individual bubbles, we have no awareness of the relation of one bubble to another, and life becomes a set of parallel microcosms rather than a shifting position in a macrocosm that contains hubs linking all the places we visit. By reverting to walking and possibly cycling as main modes of transport, we will reestablish our connection with the phenomenon of space and thus gain a better understanding of what is outside our minds; the relationship between the internal and the external will be restored.

In a sense, perambulation, i.e. negotiating the city with a continuous openness to literary precedents, can be seen as an expression of psychogeographic awareness. As it is not just the act of physically gauging space (I'm tempted to call it "performing spatiality"), it can be more inspiring because it works in two directions. On the one hand, you are made aware of your metropolitan surroundings and you will realise that in the darkness of the Underground distances seem much longer than they really are, whilst simultaneously, you can project your reading upon your own experiences. This may result in deeper insights into literary works as you become familiar with some of the place-related sensations literary characters undergo and will be able to contextualise a work more easily, and at the same time your interest and pleasure in your surroundings increase because sensing your surroundings enables you to identify more readily with a literary work – and thus also gain cultural capital which you can show off to your less well-travelled friends. In a sense, this particular phenomenon is similar to the Japanese film camera effect – I was there, look, I filmed it – but then in a more textual sense.

Now I can, say, praise Woolf's impressions of Hyde Park in *Mrs Dalloway*, and point out how the City has changed since *Jacob's Room*, yet has in fact not changed at all. Should I feel so inclined, I could follow Henry James (whose London seems a furry cuddly monster, a playful Moloch kitten) around town,

using his *English Hours* as a guidebook, and I now know that the title of Patrick Hamilton's *Hangover Square* is a clever pun on Hanover Square, which is situated between Oxford Street, Regent Street and New Bond Street. Johnny Depp as *Sweeney Todd* is less terrifying now I am familiar with Fleet Street, which is a bit more upmarket these days. Harry Potter and King's Cross? I've been there, and between you and me, there is no such thing as a Platform 9 3/4 (not really, at least). Nijmegen's Spoor 35a is more exciting, in fact. And you wouldn't believe how incredible it has been to finally be able to make sense of my dad's ancient Monopoly set, which time and again marked my siblings' Waterloo/Trafalgar in our younger years⁷. Partly because of London's omnipresence in Western culture and literature, my urban ramblings have proven immensely gratifying.

Much of this letter was written in the Rare Books reading room at the British Library. I love going there, especially in the evening, when most visitors have left and only the most devoted readers remain. Now the days are getting longer, the sky outside is still blue when I leave at closing time. I actually wanted to write my first true London Love Letter at the British Museum reading room, which used to house the British Library before it relocated to St. Pancras and where generations of authors and scholars including Virginia Woolf researched and wrote their works, but alas, the reading room is currently in use as an exhibition room, so I had to seek my inspiration elsewhere. Not that that was particularly difficult, yet now my year here in London is more than half over, I am already starting to feel sad that I will have to leave eventually. Although I shouldn't want to spend the rest of my life here, I wouldn't mind adding another year to my time in the metropolis. The city has so much to offer. I am going to miss the wonderful museums and the delights of speaking English. Even though my father is English, I have never been as immersed in the language as I am now. Even so, I am only just beginning to feel as if I know the city; I can feel its rhythm and feel fully at home wandering about Bloomsbury or fencing off tourists outside the Houses of Parliament, despite the noise and the smog, despite the crowds and the rush hours. Yes, I can understand the love-hate relationship authors have always had with London, and some day, perhaps, I will enshrine this glorious place in my own way – perhaps in its own quiet way this letter can give you an inkling of the storybook city that is my London.

Christopher Cusack

⁷ If possible, I tried to be the Bank, because by virtue of its pecuniary power, the Bank is allowed to cheat. I knew that long before the Credit Crunch, when the rest of the world discovered that heinous truth.

POETOPOLIS

A poem by Brigitte Berends, Ilke Corsten, Marieke van Eijk, Jacqueline Grosman, Anouk Hofland, Natchai Leenders, Els Lunding, Gerben Tichelaar and Iris Vandeberg

I. The Haunting past

Moans behind the crooked cross
Is there anybody out there?
The Ghost Division answers
"Just another brick in the wall."

Ghosts? Preposterous
Definitely not
"We're haunted by what's past."
"Tell me the story."

Allies wanted to liberate us from the Germans
Who were indoctrinated by supremacy sermons.
Europe had some operations which went well
But others turned cities into an urban hell.

It is a stain, dark brown
Six inches diameter
Hand shaped
But the story says hands in blood

Americans made an error but didn't get another trial.
Innocent citizens had to pay the price of missed miles.
Loud peace talks and louder battle cries
Were the only sounds that would never die.

Those were the killers;
No doubt there.
The archives prove it
But so many?

Shells shock citizens after sixty-five springs.
They still think about death by blinded wings.
They wonder how many lives this miss takes
And want to pay their last respects at wakes

For those who suffered,
Those who feared their doom.
About their history you don't care
The church holds its secrets here

An old man, he asks what you hear.
Well, pedestrians for one, and...
"No, no," he says, "the flutter!"
"Not me, not any bird at all."

The shadow of a wing glides
Through the windows of colour'd light
Now you hear the flutter
The church bell chimes.

II. Pathways

Click clack click
Never wear heels in the city
Far too loud and far too cold
Slippery on the wet red tiles
Going down, going down

Don't draw attention
Against the backdrop of the crowd
But all the ads are aimed
At you and only you

Sweaters on the mannequins
And suddenly you're cold
Because the buildings catch the wind
And blow it through you

Someone grabs your arm
Tries to capture your attention
"Free newspaper with this subscription"
I don't think so

And signs say **sale sale sale**
So I buy, buy, buy
I forgot the way back home
So I have to stay the night
The sun sinks behind buildings,
sure sign of cycle change.
Pivotal instant on the sloping path
of 3pm to 3am.

Crossing the crimson coloured cobwebs,
sun's light fragmenting into beams
of dusk's special spectrum.
Golden reds and grimy purples.

A magnificent magical moment,
Where everything's joined together
by that cape of compelling colours.
The church and the junkyard,
the casino's and the cafés.

And then, the instant's gone
And the city moves into that next phase
Where humans control the light.
Bright neon, diffuse street lamps,

A lone car's headlights, finding its way.
Thin strips of home shining through
cracks in the curtains,

And the change of traffic lights,
red
green
and red again.

Deafening noise at 3 pm
honking horns, shards of conversation, crossing the street
From deadened buildings to green trees
In this city, life and lifeless are just a street apart.

The park is life, green and vibrant,
even at night, grass and trees and shrubs
and even fallen leaves and broken branches tell of life.
Life in the city.
Always Green.

Still there's something so ironic
About a park inside a city
Is it really nature if it's hemmed in?
There's the smell of cultured flowers
But the walls still reek of urine
The birds seem bored, with all they see

Stoplights through the trees
Look like apples between leaves
Still holding on
While dead leaves swirl around
Trode by countless feet and the noise of traffic coming at me
again.

PHOTOGAPHIQUE

Photo: Connie van Doorn

I

Selection: Dominique Wobben

*Photo available at:
gag.ruhosting.nl*



PROFILE: PROF. DANIEL MORRIS

Questions by Thomas Lansink and Elke Rietveld



Full name: Daniel Charles Morris

Sex: Male

Date and place of birth: New York City,
December 27, 1962

Marital state: married

Pet(s): none

Occupation(s): Professor of Literature

Degree(s)/Title: BA, MA, PHD,

Full Professor of English, Purdue

University, Visiting Fulbright Professor,
Radboud.

Editors' note: due to prof. Morris's enthusiastic answers and our limited space, we've had to make cuts in the interview. Read it in full at: gag.ruhosting.nl/gagmag.html

Let's start at the beginning. Where do you come from, and how/when/why did you make your way here?

I am here as the visiting Fulbright professor in American Studies. The Fulbright program has for years fostered exchanges between U.S. and international universities. I feel lucky to have received a grant to teach at Radboud for this spring semester. I am a Professor of English at Purdue University, Indiana USA. Purdue is a large, public research institution and one of the so-called Big Ten universities, which is actually a consortium of eleven large public Midwestern research universities. I came to Radboud with my wife Joy and our three young children, ages 4, 6, and 8. We thought it would be a great learning experience for all of us to live in another country, and we thought the Netherlands was a perfect choice.

How do you like it here? Do you feel quite at home?

We have been in the Netherlands now for about two months. I think we are as a family starting to feel quite settled here so that day to day life is, strangely enough, not so radically different from daily life back in Indiana. We are living in South Arnhem, and I enjoy bicycling with my children to their International School, then taking the Intercity train the short way to Nijmegen. The rhythm of my life, which combines teaching, parenting, and research and writing is, by now, corresponding to my rhythm when school is in session in Purdue.

Of course the situation is somewhat uncanny, by which I mean an admixture of the familiar and the strange. While I can by now get along on a basic level of survival – I can buy my train tickets at the kiosk, know which bus to take to get to the university, can check out library books, and shop at the local AH for my favorite foods – I am also made aware that I am also a stranger who can't understand what is going on around him because he doesn't know Dutch.

Is there anything you especially miss about the States, or some aspect of it of which you are glad to be freed?

I am embarrassed to admit it, but I guess I do really miss the million channels on our High Definition cable TV back home. Purdue just won the Big Ten basketball tournament, and I would have loved to watch that game. I realize I am something of a TV addict, so maybe being away from “the idiot box” for six months is a blessing. I suppose I am going through withdrawal!

As far as I am glad to be freed of anything, I would say it would be the myopia (near sightedness) that I experienced as a classic American type who thought East meant New York City and West meant California. I think even two months away from the U.S. has begun to introduce me to the fact that there is a big complex world outside the U.S. borders that I need and want to better understand. At the same time, I am “freed” from taking for granted the quality of life I do enjoy back in Indiana. I realize now what an interesting group of people I know back in the States, and I hope when I return to pay more attention to colleagues and friends that perhaps I have taken for granted.

How do you like the courses you are teaching here? And is there anything you would very much have liked to teach?

I am really enjoying my teaching here. The students are amazing to me, and make me humble. English is my main language and American literature my main subject, but many students show a grasp of American literature that rivals the students I teach in America, and the writing I have seen by the students so far is very good. In fact, I think one benefit of teaching for a semester away from my home institution is to refresh my own appreciation for my subject and for my role as an instructor as I begin to see the literature a bit through the eyes of students who care for American literature, but don't live in the United States.

Your Purdue University page mentions no less than ten different fields of interest. That's quite impressive! Where would you say your main focus currently lies?

I think my interests have changed as I have changed as a person. My current interest in Jewish American culture stems from my own exploration of

my identity as a middle-aged Jewish man who is trying to understand what it means to be Jewish in America, especially in the context of the primarily secular and non-Jewish culture in which I live and work. As I have three young children, I am interested in introducing them to their Jewish background. While “being Jewish” is not the only way I define myself, somehow I have found this aspect of my identity to be one that I am interested in understanding in my scholarship and teaching.

Have you always wanted to become a professor?

I think it must be unusual for someone to pursue an academic career in literary studies as a pragmatic choice, but that was the case for me. I was living the life of the “starving artist, trying to write “the Great American Novel” as I worked as a janitor in a medical building outside Boston. I was encouraged by a creative writing teacher to pursue a PhD as a way of making a living while I wrote my novel. (Secretly I think that creative writing teacher suspected I may not have been the candidate to write that “Great American Novel”!). So I found myself in a PhD program in English and American literature. I think at that point I realized I was probably more likely to succeed as a critic than as a novelist, and I stayed with the PhD program and eventually my desires to write long fiction became (as Freud would say) displaced into literary theory and scholarship. I do still write poetry, and I have a second book of my own poems forthcoming next year.

What do you do to counter all this intellectual activity?

I love to take a nap. I have really enjoyed bicycling here in the Netherlands. This morning after dropping my kids at school I took a nice bike ride through a park near where we live in Arnhem.

Your web page mentions popular culture as one of your research interests. Do you ever watch television without the academic goggles on? What do you like to watch?

It is funny. My family and I had never watched *The Simpsons* back in the U.S., but it has become a ritual for us to gather together each evening and watch an episode before the kids start their bedtime routine. Last night I enjoyed an episode in which a clown turns out to have had a religious Jewish father who disowned him because he chose to be a clown and not a Jewish scholar. The episode was a take off on the famous movie *The Jazz Singer*, but was especially ironic because so many Jews have become “clowns,” that is, comedians. It is a double irony that a comment from the autobiography of a famous black Jew, Sammy Davis Jr., convinces the father to accept his son as a clown. I guess I can’t watch without academic goggles.

What about film? What kind of films do you like? And which films have left an everlasting impact on you? Is there any film which you think is strangely underrated or unpopular?

Because I have three young children, most of the movies we watch are animated, which isn't to say they are all bad. I like a lot of the Dream Works movies such as *The Incredibles*. It is fun to introduce my kids to movies I liked when I was younger. Just this morning I was telling my eight year old that we have to see *This is Spinal Tap*. The other day we went on You Tube to catch Charlton Heston streamming "It's People....Soylent Green is made out of People" and also "They did it. They really did it. Those Maniacs...they blew it up" from the end of *Planet of the Apes*, which I saw when I was six years old and it made a lasting impact on me. You Tube is like a repository of cultural memory that allows one to relive moment that I had assumed would be lost, like snippets from *Soylent Green*. I really liked Jack Black in *School of Rock* and I drive my kids crazy singing "Touch Me" by The Doors, which is one of the songs Jack Black tries to teach his keyboard player in the movie.

Have you got any other 'guilty pleasures'?

I would have to say that the fact I have been buying the prepackaged American cheese slices here in the NL instead of sampling the world class cheese would have to be a "guilty pleasure." I do like my gooey yellow fake tasting grilled cheese!

Have you got a favourite song/album/artist/band/musical genre?

Right now I'm intrigued by Anthony and the Johnsons, whose transvestite lead singer has a voice like Brian Ferry of Roxy Music. I like his over the top emotionalism, but his lyrics are not in the same league as my heroes such as Lennon/McCartney, Dylan, Neil Young, Van Morrison, and later figures such as Elvis Costello and David Byrne. I did enjoy Anthony's moving version of Lou Reed's "Candy Says," which is available on YouTube.

Last question. Now that you've made it to our wonderful department of English, there is obviously little more to achieve. Have you got any ambitions left?

Seriously this has been a great honor and highlight to be here. I am at mid-career and I truly am debating what to do next. I think I would like to try to write a biography or some kind of work that would have an appeal to a general audience, but I don't know yet. Also I have been working on scholarship on photographers, but maybe I could learn to take pictures myself.

That's all. Thanks for so openly sharing all this with us!

STORMRIDER IV

COVERT WARRIOR (part 1 of 2)

By Thies N.R. Reebosch

McGrath leaned back on his chair, and turned his gaze away from the desktop on his computer to the real-life one. A day's work had turned it into a complete chaos. Pens, post-its, staples, reports, memos all lay scattered around indiscriminately. Indeed, the only thing orderly on McGrath's desk were the ranks of small light dots made by beams of late afternoon sunshine piercing the tiny holes in the Venetian blinds.

McGrath sighed. It was Friday, 4.44 PM. In sixteen minutes most people would return home to their families. In sixteen minutes they would enjoy the first evening of their weekend. 4.45 PM. In fifteen minutes most people would enjoy steaks and mashed potatoes, the Wizards-Knicks game, and above all: their freedom. However, their freedom is not free, and for that reason CIA agent McGrath would not be able to enjoy HIS freedom. Nor would he be able to enjoy any of the other things, because he was tasked with finding a substitute for the Company's new weapon in the War on Drugs, the GES-1.

During the tests earlier that week, the prototype GES-1 again failed to meet their standards; a muscle tissue malfunction caused it to hamper when dealing with the dummy suicide bomber. The flaw proved fatal, and the GenTec scientists were sent back to the drawing board. The Company was becoming antsy. They needed the GES-1 in Operation Lawnmower, which was scheduled to take place in four days. So, they sent Agent Shawn McGrath to find an alternative ASAP.

After another fruitless 15 minutes of contemplation McGrath decided to see if his team had come up with an alternative. He had his senior agent Eliza Johnson make some phone calls to other companies, sent Correlli to Arizona where GenTec's greatest competitor was working on a similar weapon, and, for lack of a better idea, he told Zanovich to simply scavenge the Internet for anything that might help them.

He now approached the unsuspecting junior agent's cubicle. He was watching a Youtube video of what seemed to be a prison riot.

"Zanovich! You had better tell me you already found some extraordinary alternative to the GES-1, because nothing less will account for your using

Company material to watch this crap!”

“Sir... I... with all due respect, sir. This is research.”

“O really?” said McGrath agitatedly, at first fuelling himself for a rant at the junior agent, but then deciding to give the boy a shot. After all it was for his unorthodox, yet often effective methods that he wanted Zanovich on his team.

“Yes sir. If you’ll just sit down for a moment and watch this video. I think it shows exactly what we need. Here, wait, I’ll restart it so you can watch the whole thing.”

Zanovich stood up from his chair, and McGrath took place to watch the video. The quality was poor, but the images were clear enough to make out what was happening. It lasted only 4 minutes, but in that short amount of time it showed what might have been a scene from a bad Steven Seagal movie.

In a prison courtyard, a big, longhaired, muscular prisoner is threatened by his fellow inmates, and then kills fifteen of them by merely punching, kicking, and strangling them. When the guards open fire, the inmate appears to be impervious to their bullets, and manages to take out some of them as well.

“Come on, this is a fake!” McGrath said agitatedly. “No one can take out that many assailants, and suck five bullets. Now, stop wasting your fucking time!”

“But it is REAL, sir! It happened this afternoon in a prison in Newfoundland, one of the guards filmed it with his cell phone.”

“Really? You verified it?”

“Yes, sir. I got off the phone with the prison warden a few minutes ago, and he confirmed the whole thing. He said it took 10 guards to restrain this guy. He is in isolation now.”

“I still can’t believe it...but then again, we are probably not the only ones trying to breed a super soldier.”

“You’re saying someone else might have created this guy, sir? The Chinese or Al Qaida?”

“I don’t know, Zanovich,” said McGrath without taking his eyes off the footage. “Could’ve been the Chinese. But it’s obvious he’s working for himself now. He wouldn’t attract this much attention if he weren’t. Bring him in.”

“Yes sir,” said Zanovich, and he quickly phoned their superior to request a classified operation.

One classified extraction mission that never happened on Canadian soil later, the big muscular inmate was in an interrogation room at the CIA headquarters

in Langley. Johnson and Zanovich were looking at him from the observation room.

“Even with those titanium cuffs on, he still scares the crap out of me,” said Zanovich.

“Relax, he can’t do anything,” said Johnson.

Then McGrath entered the interrogation room.

“There’s the boss,” said Zanovich. “My guess is he’s going for his ‘straight to business’ approach.”

“Let’s cut the crap,” McGrath started.

“Told ya,” Zanovich smiled.

“The Canadian authorities have no record of you. Matter of fact, no government in the world has a record of you,” McGrath continued. “That means either you don’t exist, or you’re very good at covering your tracks. The point is I still need to know who I am working with if I’m going to offer you a job. So, why don’t you start with your name?”

“My name?” asked the muscular captive.

“Yes, what’s your name?”

“Stormrider.”

“PFFF...HAHAH!” laughed Zanovich. “He can’t be serious!”

“It’s obviously a codename, or a call sign, Zanovich,” said Johnson.

“Yeah, but seriously: ‘Stormrider’! That sounds like something from a crappy fantasy story.”

“Hush!”

In the other room, the interrogation continued.

“Okay, Mr. Stormrider, as you might’ve noticed we are not the police or the FBI. So I don’t need to know why you infiltrated that Canadian Viking re-enactment society, and gored that 35-five-year-old computer programmer in full view of the crowd.”

“What are you speaking of? Are you a fool like Magnus?”

“This Magnus. You referred to him earlier. Is he your accomplice?”

“He follows me wherever I go, yet I never asked him to do so.”

“I see,” said McGrath. “As I was saying I don’t need to know about your background. I just want you to do something I think is right up your alley. Because from what I saw on Youtube, I understood you have no problem with killing people. Neither morally, nor physically. Indeed you possess strength of seemingly inhuman proportions, which you probably obtained through bionic strength enhancers or genetic manipulation...”

“Again you speak in riddles! You are starting to make me angry, little man!”

“Okay, I’ll cut to the chase: I want you to take out a Columbian drug lord and his private army.”

“You mean an army of weaklings, like the ones from that barred fortress?”

“These are going to be tougher, but I’ll fill you in on the details soon enough. Right now, I just need a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’.”

“What do I get out of slaughtering this army?”

“Whatever you want. Money, power, a big mansion on Rhode Island or one of the Florida Keys, a tax-free life... anything”

“I just want to go home.”

“Then we will get you home, right after you’ve accomplished your assignment. So, are you up for the job, ‘yes’ or ‘no’?”

“Aye!”

How will this episode of Stormrider end? Find out in the next issue of GAG_MAG!

PHOTOGAPHIQUE

Photo: Connie van Doorn

II

Selection: Dominique Wobben

*Photo available at:
gag.ruhosting.nl*



POPCORNER

By Lia Albers and Jorrit Maes



Springtime is upon us and we love the smell of Easter eggs in the morning! We have almost forgotten about the Academy Awards mess up (Sean Penn who?) and will thus not dwell on the fact that perhaps other nominees such as Mickey Rourke should have won that Best Actor award. As you can tell, we hold no grudge and have already moved forward. Besides, with this fine weather we are having, we'd much rather spend our time in dark theaters jotting down notes while devouring family size bags of popcorn. Make no mistake people, this is a dirty job. However, our hard work has paid off, as this Popcorner will bring you reviews of Keira Knightley in yet another corset; a dangling blue penis; a more-dirty-than-ever Harry; and twelve aggravated men. So, let's spring into action! Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy ride...

The Duchess

Saul Dibb's *The Duchess* is a gripping period drama based on the biography *Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire* by Amanda Foreman. It tells the story of Georgiana Cavendish, who is initially flattered when the Duke of Devonshire wishes to marry her, but quickly discovers that this cold hearted man wants nothing but a male heir from her. He even goes as far as taking another woman, Bess Foster, into their home and in his bedroom. The fact that there were thus three people in Georgiana's marriage obviously gave the production team a field day, as the trailer and posters all prominently featured images of Lady Diana, whose life story indeed shows some strong comparisons. Therefore, the link is understandable but unnecessary, and lead actress Keira Knightley was quick to dismiss the comparisons, insisting Georgiana's story is interesting enough on its own.

While Georgiana indeed makes for an interesting character, the film is rather slow-paste at times, mostly revolving around the many love affairs and intricate relationships in Georgiana's life. The art department did an amazing job though, as the film looks absolutely stunning. The beautiful houses (some of which also featured in *Pride and Prejudice*), decor and especially the costumes create the perfect atmosphere for this late Eighteenth century period drama. It is no wonder the film won an Academy Award for best costume design.

The Duchess relies heavily on the acting performances which -thankfully- do not disappoint in the slightest. Ralph Fiennes plays the Duke of Devonshire to perfection, making him a character one would wish to hate but simply cannot, for he shows he has a heart as well. Dominic Cooper is cast as Charles Grey (the soon-to-be Prime Minister) and even though his performance comes nowhere near that of Fiennes, he does manage to leave an impression, most notably in the scene where he tries to convince Georgiana to run away with him. Charlotte Rampling has not been given that much to work with as Georgiana's mother, but proves that she does not need much screen time to make a lasting impression. Lady Bess Foster is played by the gorgeous Hayley Atwell, who



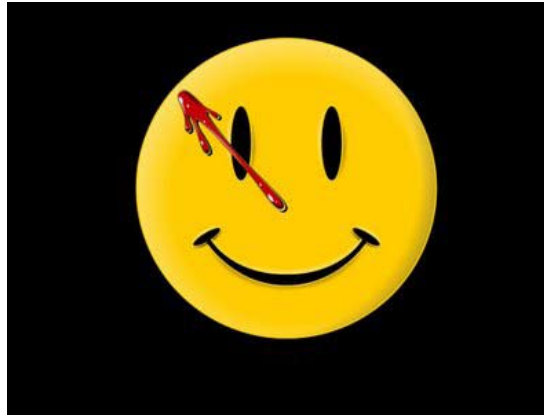
unfortunately only manages to look gorgeous, but does not sound the least convincing when she opens her mouth. However, it is Keira Knightley who carries the film on her bony shoulders and does so with verve. Her portrayal of Georgiana Cavendish is believable, intense and quite frankly, very impressive.

Ultimately, *The Duchess* is by no means one of 2009's finest films, nor is it a truly outstanding period drama. It is, however, a beautiful portrayal of Eighteenth century England and an opportunity for some truly remarkable actors to show what they are made of. Even though we will still make fun of Keira's previous work, it is obvious that pirate girl has come a long way.

Watchmen

Ever since its release in 1986, Moore and Gibbons' *Watchmen* has been touted as the greatest and most influential graphic novel of all time. It is no wonder then that film producers have been standing in line to adapt it to film. Yet, *Watchmen* is not an easy graphic novel to adapt as there are many different story lines, newspaper articles and even a comic within the comic, making it quite the challenge. Luckily, Zack Snyder, a devoted fan of the comic who had previously worked on *300*, took over the reins and delivered the much anticipated film version of *Watchmen*.

Now, not everyone will be familiar with the comic and, like some of us, have only seen the cover with the yellow smiley face and will have no idea what to expect, except for perhaps a fat Patrick Wilson. Fear not if this is the case. It is quite possible to enjoy the film without having read the graphic novel beforehand. For you unfortunate ones, let us explain the essence of the story. *Watchmen* takes place in a parallel world of 1985, in which Nixon is still president, and the US on the brink of a nuclear war. A disbanded group of outlawed superheroes reunites after one of them -the Comedian- is brutally murdered, and the gang sets out to find out why this happened and who was responsible. Yet Moore and Gibbons take their story further than creating a simple whodunit; they have provided their characters with real depth and psychology, while at the same time giving their view on superheroes and themes common to the comics, proposing some interesting questions and observations.



Snyder has made an almost literal translation of *Watchmen*, with a little help from a superb casting director. Not only do the characters look identical to those in the comic; certain scenes look like exact copies of the graphics as well. The opening credits are most exciting and provide vital information on the superheroes in this parallel world. Even though the film takes a stunning 3 hours to complete, Snyder is able to keep a good pace and create an excellent mood in the film. It is a shame that the movie falters in the last 30 minutes, as the ending-though much improved from the one in the novel- takes too long

and does not feel as compelling and confronting as the rest of the film.

Fortunately, the actors were not only cast on accordance of their looks, and especially Jackie Earle Haley and Jeffrey Dean Morgan give stellar performances as Rorschach and The Comedian, respectively. James Earl Healy (who was exceptionally good in *Little Children*) steals every scene he is in and his voice-over gives an extra dimension of eeriness to the film.

Watchmen will certainly draw you in completely, whether you are a fan of the comic or not. It is a most compelling film, proposing some interesting questions while offering breathtaking special effects and battle scenes. If you have not seen it yet, watch the *Watchmen*.

Gran Torino

Clint Eastwood is one of very few directors who never fail to deliver high quality films -- a dying breed, one might say. This year, Clint was feeling lucky again, for only a few months after his last film *Changeling* was shown in cinemas, a new Eastwood film was released: the wonderful *Gran Torino*.

Gran Torino features Clint Eastwood himself as a disgruntled and old Korean veteran, Walt Kowalski. He has just lost his wife, is estranged from his children and grandchildren, and hates the fact that his neighbourhood is taken over by Koreans. He wants to be left alone, and gets his sole fulfilment from washing his Gran Torino. However, when the neighbour's son Thao tries to steal his beloved car, he decides to take the boy under his wings, which also involves taking care of the Korean gang that forced Thao to steal the car.

Eastwood is absolutely brilliant as Kowalski, who is definitely not your average happy camper. He refers to Thao as a toad and uses racial slurs throughout the film. However, Eastwood has created a character that is sympathetic as well. Also, after all these years, Eastwood is still as intimidating as he was in *Dirty Harry* and *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. As everyone can guess, Kowalski's character slowly develops and a bond is created between him and Thao. Yet Eastwood knows how to cleverly circumnavigate clichés, which makes that the film never becomes overly sentimental.

Gran Torino is thus not as dramatic as one might initially think, for although there is drama and violence, most of the time you will find yourself laughing out loud. Clint sets the tone in the beginning of the movie, as he does not say a word for the first five minutes of the film, but just grunts disapprovingly to everyone and everything; from the very young priest stating silly things about life and death, to his granddaughter walking into church in a revealing outfit. A grunt from Clint speaks louder than a thousand words.

With *Gran Torino*, Clint Eastwood has once again delivered an interesting, thoughtful and gripping film and it is highly unfortunate that it will be his last acting role. However, he probably could not have found a better role to end his great career with. *Gran Torino* will definitely make your day.

OUR CLASSIC PICK: 12 Angry Men



When one thinks of classic movies there are always a few that immediately spring to mind. Yet choosing one particular favourite is like choosing a favourite Ben & Jerry's flavour: simply impossible to do. Therefore, we feel fortunate to be able to pick one of our favourite films for each new episode of the Popcorner. However, we have to say, if *12 Angry Men* were a flavour, it would definitely be Strawberry Cheesecake: pretty hard to top. Released in 1957 and directed by the great Sidney Lumet, *12 Angry Men* is widely considered to be one of the greatest movies of all time. What is so fascinating about that is that the film revolves entirely around... you guessed it: twelve angry men in a room. What is so deeply captivating about that? Well, let us explain.

The twelve men in question are members of the jury for a day and have to determine whether or not a young boy is guilty of murdering his father. Eleven of the men think the boy is guilty, but jury number eight, played by the magnificent Henry Fonda, disagrees and is determined to convince the others of their faulty judgement. Each jury member has completely different values and



opinions; some just want the abnormally hot day to end quickly, yet Fonda is able to make each of the men question their initial beliefs.

Forget special effects, impressive car chases or striking settings. We never even get to see the inside of the courtroom or the face of the accused boy. For 90 minutes, this movie is all about its amazingly strong script and acting performances. Set in just one room with twelve people, *12 Angry Men* never loses its pace and is probably the most exciting film you will ever see.

WHY STAY AT HOME? THERE IS SO MUCH TO LEARN ABROAD!

A teacher's contribution by Pieter de Haan

If you have ever considered spending some time abroad, you should know that the best time to do it is probably now, while you are at university. Not only do universities provide an excellent infrastructure for international experiences, including financial support, but your time at university probably coincides with a phase in your life in which you are not (yet) bound to a partner or a job, so there is no one or nothing to keep you here.

Let me start with a little bit of history. International student exchange programmes have been around for a good many years now. The idea behind international exchange programmes is of course that it helps students to broaden their horizon; that it enables them to make international contacts; and that it generally helps them to become more inventive, more independent, and more mature. The major international exchange programme in Europe is the EU's LifeLong Learning Programme, of which the Erasmus scheme is probably the best-known.

Students used to spend time abroad before the EU launched LLP, of course, but they usually had to arrange everything themselves. This was not easy, and only the most persevering students managed to get things organised. The first hurdle to be taken was determining where they wanted to go. It was often on a professor's advice and personal recommendation that a student could apply for a stay at a university abroad. What was even more forbidding was the tremendous costs involved. There were hardly any grants or scholarships, so anyone wishing to go abroad had to secure their own funds.

The earliest more or less organised internationalisation scheme as we know it today was launched shortly after the Second World War by Professor Harting, who was professor of English in Amsterdam. His ambition was to hand-pick the most talented students and have them experience "a year abroad", to study English for a year at a British university, and to learn British academic life from the inside.

Professor Harting managed to persuade a number of British universities to accept Dutch students while waiving any fees, and secured additional funds by begging for money from large international companies, which enabled him to give Harting Scholarships to the students. The “Harting scheme,” as it got to be called, gradually expanded, persuading more and more British universities to participate, thus making it possible for more and more students to go abroad, not only from Amsterdam.

The strength of the scheme was that the British universities that accepted the “Harting Scholars” knew that they only got the best Dutch students, who they knew were fully able to adapt to British academic life and to cope with the demands placed on them. Another advantage of having Dutch scholars around was that they could serve as teaching assistants of Dutch in the departments or language institutes where Dutch was taught. Many students of German in Britain took Dutch as a subsidiary course, and it was especially the Dutch Harting Scholars who did the basic Dutch grammar and fluency teaching.

So much for early history. The Harting Scheme still exists, but at a much more modest level than in its heyday in the 1990s, when around thirty-five Dutch Harting Scholars were sent abroad each year. International student exchange programmes were initiated by the EU by the end of the 1980s, enabling a far larger group of students to experience a stay abroad. The idea behind what was called the Erasmus scheme was that students would benefit from the experience because they might take courses abroad that were not available at the home university. Students would also benefit financially from this scheme, because ideally they would simply swap places, so that no additional tuition or registration fees would have to be paid, and even student rooms could be swapped so that no extra money would have to be spent on accommodation, so that, in fact, the only additional expenses were travelling expenses. In reality, there were hardly any direct one-to-one student exchanges, and of course not every student was able to sublet their own room, but on the whole the numbers of incoming students and outgoing students made it possible for the scheme to work.

How is all this relevant to me, you might think? Well, first of all, it always helps you to understand current situations better if you know something about their history. Secondly, the terms *inventive*, *independent*, and *mature* have been used earlier in this text. Probably the most valuable aspect of the stay abroad is the “ripening” aspect. A stay abroad makes you a less vulnerable person, because you will get into situations where you will have to cope on your own, and there is no one from your familiar circle around to help you.

Your landlord may not be as pleasant a person as you had anticipated; the student accommodation service may have given you a less pleasant room than you had hoped, or are willing to pay for; courses you were hoping to take have been overbooked and you are not allowed in so you have to work out a substitute course. These and other things you will have to (learn to) deal with yourself.

Naturally, you will also make new friends to whom you can turn in the case of potential problems. In fact, it is vital to do so, for the last thing you would want when you are abroad is to sit in your own room all the time and get lonely. Making new friends is therefore the second most important aspect of the stay abroad. Some friends that Erasmus students or Harting Scholars have made during their stay abroad have been for life, and some students have decided to seek a career abroad after they graduated.

For student of English, the most obvious choice for a stay abroad will be an English speaking country, for one of the advantages is the opportunity to practice the language of their study in real life conditions. This is undeniably true, for it will give you an amount of practice which is beyond compare with anything that you can experience here. But there may also be something to be said for a stay in a non-English speaking country. As it happens, most of the Erasmus contacts that I have are with non-English speaking countries, ranging from very close to home (Duisburg-Essen, Germany) to more exotic (Jyväskylä Yliopisto in Jyväskylä, Finland, or Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem in Budapest, Hungary). There are two good reasons for staying in a non-English speaking country. First, there is an opportunity of getting a better command of the language of the country you stay in, which may be an additional advantage for some (at the moment, I have Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Spanish, and Swedish, but if you decide to go via another exchange contract you may find more languages). Secondly, you will experience studying English in an academic tradition which may be different from the Dutch or the British. After all, the Spanish may have a different attitude to 17th century British literature than the Dutch.

Some students are a little concerned about the consequences that a stay abroad may have for their study progress. In my experience most students or Scholars have returned from the university abroad with good results and very high grades. The study advisers and the Examination board do their utmost to accommodate students' individual course choices into the curriculum at Radboud University. If you have any concerns about this, do not hesitate to contact Monique van der Haagen or myself to discuss your individual choices. We

place a high value on a stay abroad, and we always try to facilitate students wishing to go abroad as much as we can. The only strict requirement is that you have passed your Propedeuse exam before you go. Most students find the third year the best time to go. Harting is always for a full year; Erasmus is usually for five months (one term).

In the thirteen years that I have been responsible for international student exchanges, I have seen only one student who was slightly disappointed. All the others have been more than enthusiastic about their experience, and would not have missed it for the world. Please visit my website for more detailed information about the universities participating in LLP or Harting at www.let.ru.nl/p.dehaan. Each year, shortly before the autumn break, there is a regular information meeting about studying abroad, especially for second year students.

Pieter de Haan is a member of the Editorial Board of The International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching (IRAL). He is a Consulting Editor of The Journal of English Linguistics. He is chairman of the Examination Board of the Department of English. He is the departmental co-ordinator for the Lifelong Learning Programme - Erasmus student exchanges as well as the HARTING scheme for students of English. And he is the IT co-ordinator for the Department of English. For more information on any of these topics, visit his personal web page at <http://www.let.ru.nl/p.dehaan/index.php>

ABOUT ENGLAND, ITS WEATHER, AND ITS POLITENESS

A consideration by Roel Hesp

As a former GAG chairman who is currently actually abroad in the context of his studies, apparently the editors of GAG_MAG felt I am *the* person to share with you my experiences with going abroad in this thematic issue. Of course, I like to make use of this opportunity to somewhat re-connect with the place I am so fond of, namely our precious Nijmegen.

When I thought about going to Britain I imagined a country not unlike the Netherlands. A country that does not have the warmest of climates and where you would need your raincoat more than your summer jacket. However, nothing seemed further from the truth. I have been here now for more than 2 months and only four days of these months have seen a drop of rain!

Going to London last week was really the first weekend where I was able to leave my coat at home. We could not have chosen a better weekend to go. Walking past Buckingham Palace, the sun shining in my face, it felt like summer – in March! Lunch across from the Big Ben was just lovely! Surrounded by history I could not help but imagine what it would be like to live in London myself. I have always thought about moving to England, I do not know why. Probably the same reason why I chose to study English Language and Culture, there is something about England that fascinates me. The history, the country and now I can honestly also say the people. Everyone I have met so far has been nothing but kind and extremely polite! Sometimes a bit too polite to my taste but I have been assured that they actually do not really mean it.

What I have noticed, when moving to another country, is that you do start to miss your own, even though England and the Netherlands are very much the same. Sitting in a train, looking out over the landscape, you see the same housing projects you see in the Netherlands, although here they are built in a countryside that is not as flat as it is in Holland!

But you do start to miss the people and the bluntness of the Dutch. As I said, the Brits can be a bit too polite from time to time and you do sometimes miss the directness of the Dutch people. I do not know how many times I have heard people say the words ‘sorry’, ‘no worries’ and ‘thank you’. Whenever you bump into someone in the supermarket in the Netherlands you just grump and move on, here people apologise to you as if they have just run you over with their car!

Nevertheless, the way it is looking now I think that I will be able to enjoy myself for the next four months. I still have plans to see, well, almost the entire country by train - and write my BA thesis in the meantime - so I do not think I will get bored any time soon!

Rest me to say that I really miss you all very much! I would like to have been there at the gala and the ‘constitutie borrel’ of the new board but we will make up for this in Dublin, won’t we ladies? ;)

Hope to see you all very soon!
Kind regards,

Roel

READING SUGGESTIONS

By our contributors

Lia Albers

Raymond Chandler. *The Big Sleep*. Vintage Crime/Black Lizard Edition, 1992. 231 pp.

Raymond Chandler's finest work *The Big Sleep* introduces detective Philip Marlowe to a highly fascinating, intricate world of crime and corruption in Los Angeles. With deeply interesting characters and a plot to die for, *The Big Sleep* is truly impressive.

Astrid Böger

Dave Eggers. *What is the What*. Penguin, 2006. 539 pp.

Having always been drawn to quasi-documentary works of literature, I would like to recommend *What is the What*. It's about a boy from Sudan named Valentino Achak Deng who narrowly escapes death by migrating to the U.S., where he finds himself violated all over before starting a process of recovery through finding a voice, which is simultaneously the author's. To me, this is *The Grapes of Wrath* for a globalizing world, and just as impressive.

Ilke Corsten

Hugh Laurie. *The Gun Seller*. Arrow Books Ltd, 2004. 352 pp.

Former *Blackadder* member and current *House MD* star, Laurie published this one novel (though he's writing a second one). *The Gun Seller* revolves around assassin Tom Lang, who, by choosing not to follow through on killing an American industrialist, gets sucked into a web of international criminals trying to stop an act of terrorism. Might sound dodgy, but Laurie hits home with a sense of humour we came to expect from this English comedian.

Christopher Cusack

Mina Loy. *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, selected and edited by Roger L. Conover. Carcanet Press, 1997. xx + 236 pp.

Continuing my tradition of unearthing obscure female Modernists, here is another one: Mina Loy, (al)littérateuse par excellence. Although not her entire oeuvre is as interesting, the woman sure knew how to turn a phrase, and her best poems rank amongst the finest examples of Modernism. The terrifying beauty of poems such as "Lunar Baedeker" and "Der Blinde Junge" is remarkable, and her characterisation of Gertrude Stein as "Curie / of the laboratory / of vocabulary" has never been surpassed. Scrumdiddlyumptious indeed.

Marieke van Eijck

Miranda July. *No one belongs here more than you*. Canongate, 2007. 201 pp.

July's short stories are at once alienating and heartbreaking. None of her characters seem comfortable in their lives, but are unable to do anything about. It is this, the friction between the many protagonists and their surroundings, and the way they deal with this friction, that makes her stories so "blisteringly good," as *The Guardian* says. The stories are effectively about finding love and dealing with its difficulties, and, though not exactly uplifting, make for an enchanting read.

Jacqueline Grosman

Margaret Atwood. *The Tent*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2006. 155 pp.

This volume with very short stories is full of humour. You can read them for instance while traveling or in between

classes or exams. The story "It's not easy being half-divine" covers only three pages and is based on the Greek story about Helen of Troy, but this time Helen is a contemporary queen bee figure. Her neighbour tells in a conversational tone how Helen followed her heart... Atwood, who made nice illustrations for this one, won the Booker prize with *Alias Grace* in 2000.

Pieter de Haan

Martha MacPhee. *Bright Angel Time*. Random House, 1997. 242 pp.

This is a story set in the early 1970s, about three young girls, told by the youngest, eight-year-old Kate. Their father has left them, and their mother has taken her daughters with her to follow a therapist with five children of his own to California. There the two adults and eight children start a seemingly aimless tour in a camper van. The book reads like a child's travel report, with naïve, but hilariously cynical remarks about the adults' behaviour.

Robin Heesters

Garth Ennis, Darick Robertson, Tom Palmer. *The Punisher: Born*. Marvel Comics, 2003. 88 pp.

In war torn Vietnam, marine captain Frank Castle decides that his mission is to punish - i.e. kill - everyone who fails to do the right thing. Thus, the Punisher is born. In this limited series Garth Ennis put his own spin on the Punisher's origin by retelling his last days in Vietnam. The comic combines the typical 'Nam era issues - dirty war, low morale, drug use, fragging of officers etc. - with the grimness and uncompromising Frank Castle. Very interesting for any comic book reader, but a definite must have for the all-round Punisher fan.

Anouk Hofland

Don DeLillo. *Falling Man*. Scribner, 2007. 316 pp.

I read this book after it was mentioned in a lecture about Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Starting in the ruins of the World Trade Center, this is the story of a man surviving 9/11 and the impact this horrible day has on his life and his family. The story is gripping from the very first page and crammed with emotions; I could not put the book down until I had finished the last page.

Jorrit Maes

Philip K. Dick *A Scanner Darkly*. Orion Publishing Book 1977. 219 pages.

An undercover narcotics agent has to find the supplier for a deadly drug, fittingly known as Death, and finds himself as the main suspect. *A Scanner Darkly* is Philip K. Dick's take on the world of drugs as it shows the devastating effects drugs have on a physical and psychological level. Dick is able to create a sometimes confusing and paranoid story that makes for one disturbing but compelling read.

Daniel Morris

Ian Buruma. *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance*. Penguin, 2006. 278 pp.

I had vaguely heard of the murders of filmmaker Theo van Gogh and politician Pim Fortuyn, but Dutch-born American journalist Ian Burma offers the complex back story of these events, which have in part defined the conflicts between nationalism and multiculturalism in 21st Century Europe.

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ACADEMIC AGENDA

Tuesday 14 April 2009: "Memories of Memory". Professor emeritus Johannes Fabian (University of Amsterdam) will discuss the shifting place of memory in the history of anthropology, particularly its relationship to shifting concepts of culture. Part of a series of lectures on the dynamics of cultural remembrance. The next event in this series will be on Postcolonial Memory on 20 May 2009. Utrecht, Kromme Nieuwegracht 80, Stijlkamer van Ravesteyn (1.06), 15:00-17:00.

Wednesday 15 April: "How does Literature contribute to Freedom?" Peter Bieri (1944), philospher and author of four novels, will be discussing the exact merit of literature to personal freedom. Groningen, Academiegebouw, Broerstraat 5. Admission: €2,50.

Monday 20 April: "100 dagen Obama". Ever since Franklin D. Roosevelt became president of the US in 1933, the newly elected president would be assessed by the American media after a period of a 100 days. NOS reporter Eelco Bosch van Rosenthal will give his audience a little taste of this in his lecture "100 dagen Obama". Rotterdam, Erasmus University, Woudestein room A-1, 16:00-17:30.

Tuesday 21 April: "De ontdekking van de recensent". Reviews have a great, guiding influence in the literary field, in their various ways. But are reviewers and their tactics fair? 'Recensieweb' interviews Elsbeth Etty (NRC Handelsblad, Vrije Universiteit), Marja Pruis (De Groene Amsterdammer) and Arie Storm (Het Parool) about their experiences as both reviewers and authors. Amsterdam, Spui 25-27, 20:00 - 22:00. Free admission, subscription required.

Wednesday 22 april: "Lustrum Academisch Schrijfcentrum". The Academisch Schrijfcentrum Nijmegen's (ASN) first lustrum will be celebrated with a festive symposium.

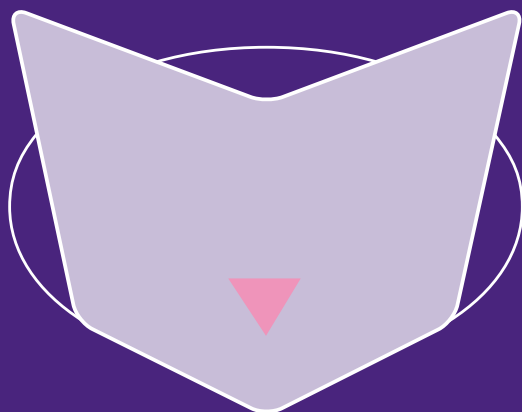
ASN tutors will be giving various workshops, for both students and teachers. In addition, there will be a discussion with prof. dr. Frits van Oostrom, a remarkable author managing to combine eminent science with being readable for great audiences. Nijmegen, UB 1.45 and CC4, 14:00-18:00. Subscribe at www.ru.nl/asn/lustrum.

Friday 15 May: "'The Child Father of the Man': Childhood Trauma and Adult Personality, from Rushdie to Homer and Back." Public lecture by Glenn Most: "Philosophically problematic and interesting is not only emotion per se, but especially inappropriate emotion [...] usually explained as the result of childhood experiences, usually traumatic, repressed then and in later life; and they are often treated by leading the patient to imagine that he is discovering a truth about his early experiences which thereby liberates him from them. This is a curious notion, and it is worth investigating where it came from." 'Borrel' afterwards. Nijmegen, CC3 16:00-17:00. Free admission.

Saturday 16 May: "Mastervoorlichting Universiteit van Tilburg". Information and instructions on doing a master's course at Universiteit van Tilburg. Various informational rounds from 11:00 to 15:30, and an information market from 13:00 to 14:30. Tilburg, various locations. Lunch included, subscription recommended. Full programme at www.uvt.nl.

Thursday 11 June: "Lecture Roger Scruton". British philosopher, author and musician Roger Scruton is one of today's most influential conservative thinkers on culture and society. During his visit to Nijmegen, Roger Scruton will give a lecture and attend a seminar. He will speak on the philosophical concept of beauty and on the importance of music and poetry as a gateway to religious experience. Nijmegen, Aula, 20:00-22:00.

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