

The Faculty of Arts in Review

# WORK *of* ARTS

Spring 2005



## THINKING SPACE

Exploring the  
Social Dimension



FACULTY OF  
**ARTS**

## Greetings *from the Dean*

From the research and fine art produced by our world-class faculty and students to the contributions made to community organizations, government, and business by our alumni, the work of people in the Arts community is phenomenal. As one of my predecessors, Patricia Clements, once wrote, “graduates of the liberal arts have great impact on our lives—cultural, social, and economic. If you were to pull all of Alberta’s BAs off the job for a week, newspapers wouldn’t be written, governments would shut down, schools would close.” I take great pride in the fact that our graduates are vital to the cultural and economic viability of Canadian society. It’s time we celebrated and shared the importance of this work in all of its variety.

Here in the Faculty of Arts, we continue with our work of providing broad, foundational Arts education to our students, who now number nearly 6000. With 14 departments and several interdisciplinary programs, the University of Alberta’s Faculty of Arts offers one of the most expansive and diverse educational experiences in the country. Our faculty continue to win prestigious teaching awards and research grants. Our students are sought after in organizations and graduate schools all over Canada and the world.

This spring, we are celebrating the retirements of several long-time members of the Faculty, all of whom have given students and colleagues remarkable service over the years. There is one member, though, I would like to single out: Patricia Clements. I have already referred to her enthusiasm for the Arts, but her contributions go much further. She has served this University since 1970 as a professor in the English department, and for 10 years was Dean of the Faculty of Arts. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, a past president of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences and the founder and director of the internationally recognized Orlando Project. Her career, in many ways, encompasses the full range of academic work in the Arts—teaching, research, and service to our communities.

Enjoy our first edition of *Work of Arts: The Faculty of Arts in Review*.

DANIEL WOOLF, BA, DPhil, FRHistS, FSA  
Professor, Department of History & Classics, and Dean, Faculty of Arts

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# In This Issue

**W**ork of Arts: *The Faculty of Arts in Review* is a new vehicle for any member of the Faculty of Arts community, including students, faculty, staff, and alumni, to showcase their work. It promises to be a provocative mix of features, poetry, fiction, and art. *Work of Arts* will be published twice a year: in May and November.

The publication will focus on the place of the Arts in our lives—Arts on campus, in the community, and in history. The inaugural issue looks at the place of the Arts through the lens of space. Our cover story explores the theory of space, both concrete and virtual, through the work of sociologist Rob Shields. A Fine Arts alumnus, Ryan McCourt, incorporates his thoughts on space and spatial connections into steel sculptures, many of them life-sized. Tara Taylor’s musings on the place of cultural identity in our lives won her the 2004 Mactaggart Award, \$10,000 towards travel costs—exploring space—anywhere in the world.

We are proud to feature one of the Faculty’s long-term retiring professors, Larry McKill. His story is set along the continuum of growth at the University and within the Faculty over the past 44 years. Alumnus Frank Peers has kept his memories of his space and time at the Faculty of Arts alive, and translated these memories into a meaningful and tangible gift to today’s students. Our look at the Centre for Ethnomusicology highlights the space the Centre creates for music and cultural collaboration.

Scattered throughout the issue you will see a variety of poems and art submitted by our faculty and students. We hope you enjoy this small glimpse of an amazing pool of talent and thought.

Our Faculty is huge and diverse. Our publication aims to bring a piece of the Faculty of Arts to you, our reader, with each issue. We hope it will reinforce the place—and space—of the Arts in your life.

**KATHY CLASSEN**

Editor and Director of External Relations

## 4 Thinking Space: Exploring the Social Dimension

New Tory Chair, Rob Shields, brings his research on space to the Faculty of Arts



4

## 6 A Passionate Vocation

Larry McKill’s term of service in the Faculty of Arts spans over 40 years



12

## 8 Sculpting a Career

Alumnus Ryan McCourt has built a successful career around his degrees in Art & Design

## 14 Lunch by the Books

New community outreach introduces Faculty lectures to downtown audiences

## 15 The Spaces Between the Tents

The Canadian Centre for Ethnomusicology preserves a rich and varied audio culture



6

## 16 Be()longing

Tara Taylor muses on cultural identity in her Mactaggart Award winning essay

## ART

### 5 Pool and Tent in Pool by Sean Caulfield

## POETRY

### 11 Destiny by Sandra Ellerbeck

### 13 Ballad of the Brown Pill Bottle by Robin Light



16

## 7 Faculty Retirements

## 10 Distinguished Visitors

## 12 Campaign 2008

Profiles of Frank Peers, donor, and scholarship recipient, Hang Hyunh





# THINKING SPACE

Exploring the  
Social Dimension

BY ANNE BAILEY

Always interested in the form and design of space, Rob Shields, newly appointed Henry Marshall Tory Chair and Professor in the Departments of Sociology and Art and Design, began his academic career studying architecture, but it was when he began to ask such questions as *Who uses buildings?* and *What do they think of them?* that his life took a turn into the social sciences and eventually to sociology.

Most of us would probably connect the exploration of space to physicists, astronomers, and astronauts on the one hand, or architects, planners, and geographers on the other. At first glance, few of us would think of space as a subject of sociological inquiry. After all, isn't sociology interested in human society and its various functions?

To see space as an object of social, rather than only scientific inquiry, we need to become aware of the underlying structures of everyday life that are so pervasive that we are often unconscious of them. As Shields says, concepts of space are integral to "the real fabric of how people live their lives" (*Places on the Margins*, 7). One of the aims of his work is to help us see that space is not only a location or container of human culture but is itself a cultural object. The spaces we live in—our homes or key local landmarks such as Edmonton's Churchill Square or Calgary's Olympic Plaza—are sites of all kinds of human culture, from the minutia of table manners to the public spectacle of centennial celebrations. The physical shape and location of our homes and our cities determine to a large degree how we move and relate to others in our families and communities. If a family of four shares only one bathroom, careful planning of the morning routine is needed.

Space, and our experience of it, however, is not only physical. Shields contends that it is also always to some degree imaginary, or "virtual." Spaces may be defined by walls,

streets, or national borders, but they are also conceived of and formed by the ideas, myths, and stereotypes associated with them. As Shields points out in his first book, *Places on the Margins*, spaces like Niagara Falls or the Canadian North have a cultural shape that far exceeds the physical. Depending upon the historical moment in which these spaces are perceived or experienced, they change shape. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, for instance, Niagara Falls was connected to the sublime—a popular philosophical and aesthetic concept at the time.

Travellers from all over Europe who had both the means and ability to travel through fairly difficult terrain were rewarded by the sublime—an overwhelming feeling of God’s grandeur and their own insignificance in the face of the Falls. As more and more people were able to make the trip, the Falls changed shape, from being “pure” nature to being “pure” schtick. Although we might think that the Falls have only recently been corrupted by 20th century marketing and hype, from the very beginning of human contact with the Falls, their physical shape has been understood through cultural values, myths, and imaginings. Separating the physical from the social is, as Shields says, impossible.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the notion of space as something more than physical—indeed something that may not be physical at all—is becoming more apparent with the prevalence of various technologies that create virtual realities. In his latest book, *The Virtual*, Shields takes his exploration of space a step forward. He examines the virtual spaces that are created through technology such as telephone lines, the Internet, video cams, and so forth. These spaces of human contact are obviously intangible, rather than physical, and yet they are also obviously “real” spaces of human contact.

This digital, virtual reality is not different, says Shield, than the virtual conceptions we hold and have held in our memories and imaginations of all of the spaces we inhabit. Even when we enter a physical space, we enter a virtual space as well; we cannot experience or comprehend any space without the filter of memory

and consciousness. It is also, according to Shields, difficult to “imagine futures which are other than the way things are.” How can the sociologist help in this process?

When the warp and weave of the fabric of our lives becomes visible to us, we are able to see more clearly the values, power structures, rituals, and myths at play even in the supposed “empty” spaces in which we circulate and live our lives. Then, Shields argues, we have a better understanding of where we, as individuals and as communities, stand in relation to those

competing discourses, values, and power systems and how we are defined by them. Armed with this understanding of the virtual spaces in which we exist, we can be empowered to engage, resist and alter them, and perhaps then imagine a future which is just a little bit different than the way things are today.

But, is the alteration only virtual? Can we make use of our understanding of space as virtual in more than intellectual or philosophical ways? Can we use it to plan, build, and develop the concrete, physical spaces in which we live our lives or will in the future? According to Shields, one of the most important things to remember is that spaces, both concrete and virtual, exist in relation to other spaces and cultural forces, and that any innovative spatial change must involve a change in those relations.

Any urban neighbourhood, for example, has a stereotyped “reputation” that evolves out of various factors: its location, the age, size and condition of the houses, the economic class of its inhabitants, the quality of its schools, etc. Even years after a neighbourhood has been “cleaned up” or “yuppified,” an old reputation can linger and degrade real estate values. Then, suddenly it seems, there is a change and the

price of homes in the area jumps. Such a change, Shields suggests, is possible not because of significant changes in the concrete spaces of the neighbourhood—although home renovations definitely play a part—but because of the neighbourhood’s shift in its spatial, economic, and social relation to the city as a whole. Sociological analysis and understanding of these spatial relations have the potential to enable quicker and more innovative urban renewal in all of our cities, something of significant political concern at the moment.

As a new member of U of A’s community, Rob Shields is already working to help the Faculty of Arts understand its own spatial relationship with the rest of campus and with Edmonton, Alberta, and Canada. The Faculty is in the process of assessing its existing space, measuring and accounting for each square inch. At the same time, the Faculty is also becoming aware of how these concrete spaces have a virtual shape in relation to the rest of campus, a shape which, Shields says, both “enables and disables” the work that is done there. Any future change to the existing space of the Arts will not only involve the construction of new buildings or renovations of old ones, contends Shields, but also “the transformation of the public’s conceptions of the Arts in relation to other

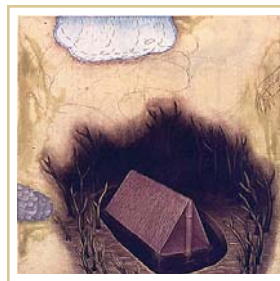
kinds of knowledge and other post-secondary institutions.”

Campus buildings, urban neighbourhoods, Niagara Falls: all of these spaces have stories that transform them into places of human significance. Analyzing this significance through sociological methods and research, Rob Shields and others working

in his field show how space is much more than a physical entity. It is also a set of intangible social and cultural forces that intertwine, creating a reality which is more than a sum of its parts. As Frank Lloyd Wright once observed, “the space within becomes the reality of the building.”



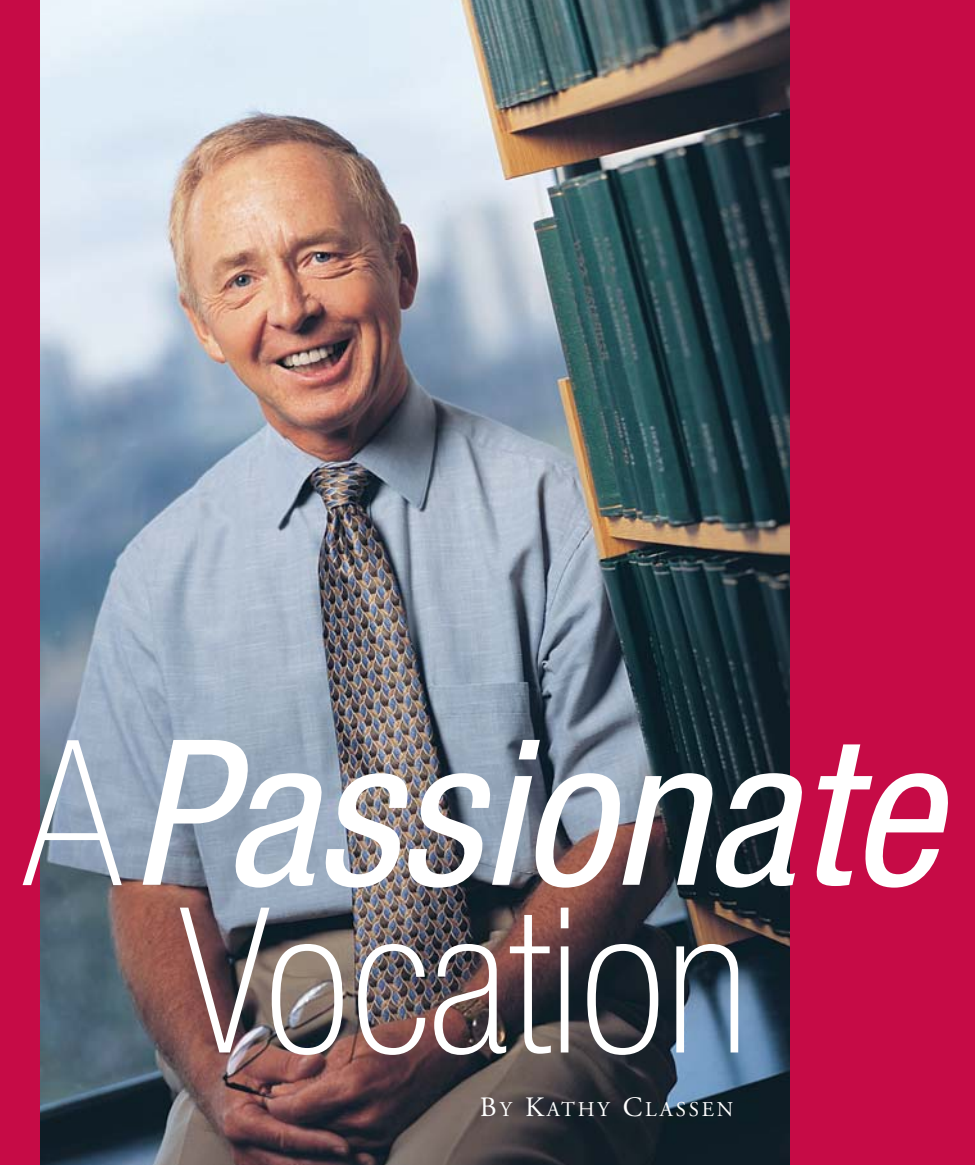
*Pool*, Etching, Mezzotint, Chine Colle, 11.5” x 11.5”, 2003



*Tent in Pool*, Etching, Mezzotint, Chine Colle, 11.5” x 11.5”, 2003

Both “Pool” and “Tent in Pool” are part of a larger series of prints exploring the themes of mutation and transformation. At the beginning of his project, Sean Caulfield, Canada Research Chair in Printmaking, made drawings of industrial objects and spaces in and around Edmonton. Then he researched literary works, such as Dante’s *Inferno*, with a focus upon metamorphosis. Then, by combining his field research, reading, and personal memories, he created these two prints which transform and twist familiar spaces and objects into images which are entirely different and surprising.





# A Passionate Vocation

BY KATHY CLASSEN

In 1961, as a 17-year-old U of A undergrad from Lethbridge, Larry McKill began a remarkable relationship with the University of Alberta.

From those early years as a resident on campus, to his lengthy term as a professor of English beginning in 1970, and his years of service to the Faculty in various other capacities, McKill has clung to a personal vision of the value of education. He has maintained a contagious enthusiasm for the U of A, even in the final months before his retirement as Associate Dean, Student Programs, on July 1, 2005.

During his early days at the U of A, McKill lived in Assiniboia Hall. In those days, breakfast was served in Athabasca Hall on a first-come, first-served basis, with the back-up of fresh baked cinnamon buns and coffee available in the Tuck Shop or in an old Tudor style building in the

center of campus now occupied by CAB. The evening meal was an entirely different experience, where a tie and jacket were required dress, grace was said in Latin, and tea or coffee were from silver-service. For all the formality, though, McKill remembers the fierce pace imposed to finish the first serving: with 12 at a table, the whole table had to eat quickly to obtain any available “seconds.”

The campus of 1961 was markedly different from the U of A today. Student enrolment was just 10,000. There were relatively few buildings and lots of space in between these. Private homes stood where HUB and the University buildings east of it now sit. Room and board in the three student residences—Pembina,

Athabasca and Assiniboia—was a mere \$75 per month. Tuition was \$250 per year plus modest Students’ Union fees.

Something that has remained constant, McKill notes, between 1961 and now is the gulf between the high school experience and expectations at University: “The gap between high school and University is immense: it took me until October of my third year to really figure out what education was about: reading more than required texts, doing more than ‘homework,’ exploring, engaging with the material we were studying.” McKill sees students struggling with the same adjustments. He is acutely aware of the challenges many face—some successfully, others not so.

After three years at the University of Alberta, McKill moved to Waterloo Lutheran University where his career plans changed once he encountered the “most exciting English teacher possible.” It was Flora Roy, Chair for 30 years, who turned McKill on to English, and cut through red tape to move him well beyond deadlines into the Honours program. Another professor at WLU, Nada Schultz, was the inspiration for McKill’s specialization in Old English. She taught a “killer” course in Old English but one that changed his life. The program ended with a comprehensive three-hour test on the full historical spectrum of required courses: “It was a wonderful exercise in synthesizing the knowledge you had learned over the years.”

McKill’s sense of history as a living thing, and his awareness of how the ancient informs the modern, infuses his teaching. It is this perspective which brings Old English alive for his students and helps them find relevance in a now drastically changed language. Amanda Lim, in her final year of Honours English, can still recite some original lines of poetry she learned in her second year Old English class, with McKill (lacking a harp) tapping out the beat. She has a much greater understanding of how English has developed as a language, and is fascinated by the progression of our vocabulary over the centuries. (She also recalls McKill’s gifts of baked goods for the students on some quiz days: “to sweeten the bitterness of the quiz,” McKill would explain).

Garrett Epp, current Chair of the Department of English and Film Studies,

has always been impressed by the extraordinarily high student evaluations McKill received over the years, even from students he may have been failing. “He makes students want to continue, and to feel that they have learned something of value.” For his excellence in teaching, McKill was honoured in 1992 with a Faculty of Arts teaching award.

**“Our structures must be open to change—we can get better at what we do. It is the changes and commitment to change that make the University such an exciting workplace.”**

His skill with students led to his appointment as Associate Chair, Instruction, in the Department of English from 1996 to 2000, and as Associate Dean, Student Programs, in 2000. Both of these appointments were a “wonderful opportunity to make changes so that learning can go on in a better way.” Good administrators, as good teachers, must be open to change, McKill believes: “Our structures must be open to change—we can get better at what we do. It is the changes and commitment to change that make the University such an exciting workplace.”

It is as Associate Dean, Student Programs, that McKill has had the most effect on the overall student experience in the Faculty of Arts. He has tackled the growing issue of plagiarism head-on during his tenure. Dean Woolf believes that Arts Faculty professors know they have the full support of administration in any question of plagiarism; McKill has set and enforced very clear guidelines in this area. Clear rules and follow-through are essential when dealing with issues of plagiarism and cheating on campus. Compassion with the affected student is just as important. He explains decisions clearly, and aims to help students learn from their experience. Ultimately, it comes down to being fair to all.

McKill has also targeted the issue of the growing number of students in the Faculty and across campus for whom English is not

a first language. How can the University help the students whose English skills are not up to par find their way? He has proposed that these students be permitted to count their native language in fulfillment of the BA’s requirement of one course in a language other than English. By granting this credit, ESL students can free up a space in their course load to pursue the remedial help in English they need. The first step is in place: students who receive their secondary or postsecondary education in a language other than English (LOE) now have an automatic waiver of the requirement. The next phase is to grant the waiver to students who can demonstrate language proficiency through tests administered on campus.

McKill’s desire to help ESL students extends to all students who are keen on pursuing their education. In 2002, Darrell Reid wrote a letter of petition to McKill, requesting acceptance into the Faculty of Arts. Reid had earlier been denied acceptance based on his previous academic performance. McKill reviewed the letter, and granted admission to the former student to study political science and economics. Reid achieved standing on the Dean’s Honours List that year, and went on to an Executive MBA program in the Faculty of Business where he has maintained a GPA of 4.0 over three terms. Recently, Reid wrote to McKill to let him know that he had made the right decision: “I wanted you to know that your acceptance of my petition has had a major impact on the direction of my career. I truly appreciate the fact that you gave me a second chance academically, and just wanted you to know that I have made the most of it.” A result like that is what makes McKill’s work so worthwhile and rewarding.

It is a mark of the man that, at the end of a lifetime of service to the University and to the Faculty of Arts, his thoughts on departure are focused not on his own achievements but on students. “I don’t see the joy of being at the University in students now,” says McKill, who notes that the students today work hard to cover the cost of their education and try to finish it as quickly as possible. “I would like to say to them—refresh yourself, slow down, enjoy your University years. An education is not just an accumulation of credits.” ♦



## Faculty Retirements

*The active custodial role of interpretation, explanation, and clarification is something very special... That's one reason we teach... languages—and something about cultures and civilizations... because if universities fail to do that, and we begin to forget the variety and richness of what human beings have created, we will simply lose a vast proportion of what we need to know in order to understand what humankind really is.*

~ NEIL RUDENSTINE, President Emeritus, Harvard University

Our thanks to the following faculty who will be retiring this year:

**DOUGLAS BARBOUR**  
*English & Film Studies*

**PATRICIA CLEMENTS**  
*English & Film Studies*

**NEIL FIERTEL**  
*Art & Design*

**JORGE FRASCARA**  
*Art & Design*

**GREG HOLLINGSHEAD**  
*English & Film Studies*

**PAUL JOHNSTON**  
*Political Science*

**JURIS LEJNIEKS**  
*Political Science*

**ROD MACLEOD**  
*History & Classics*

**LARRY MCKILL**  
*English & Film Studies*

**URI MARGOLIN**  
*Modern Languages & Cultural Studies*

**REGULA QURESHI**  
*Music*

**MICHAEL ROEDER**  
*Music*

**SHMUEL SHARIR**  
*Economics*

**JETSKE SYBESMA**  
*Art & Design*

**TERRENCE VEEMAN**  
*Economics*

**ROBERT WILCOCKS**  
*Modern Languages & Cultural Studies*

# Sculpting a Career

BY JEFFREY STERR

For many University students, choosing academic programs and deciding on a career often means pursuing trends, seeking financial stability, and fulfilling parental and social expectations.

But for full-time sculptor Ryan McCourt (1997 BFA, Sculpture and Photography; 1999 MFA, Sculpture), pursuing his education and career has never been about any of that.

Twelve years ago, as a first-year archaeology student, McCourt asked himself questions that led to his decision to pursue a career as an artist. “While archaeologists are digging up the treasures of the ancients, who’s making artifacts for future generations to admire? Will

those future people look back favourably on the same great cultures that we do, and what will their judgment be of the culture of our time? What art are we leaving behind?”

Inspired to leave something of note behind, McCourt changed his major. But he concedes that becoming a sculptor hasn’t been just about trying to affect other people’s lives, nor has it solely been a noble attempt at deepening cultural activity. Sculpting has also been, he says, a matter of personal fulfillment, individual freedom, and self-definition.

“Altruism aside,” he explains, “making sculpture is intellectually stimulating work, requiring creativity and critical thinking.” He adds, “Making art is also generally a solitary endeavour, and whether I choose to work independently or collaboratively, I’m always my own boss, and I work on my own schedule.”

Oxy-acetylene torches, chop saws, and MIG welders are essential to his

creations; McCourt uses them as tools to sculpt mild steel and various other metals—from cast iron to stainless steel and even brass—into public and private artwork, selling them to make a living.

McCourt says his current sculptures are developing along two paths: architectural and figurative. His architectural works are literal references to everyday objects such as musical instruments, buildings, machines, and furniture, which are blended and abstracted, resulting in ambiguous, multi-referential works. His figurative works, on the other hand, refer to traditional sculpture from a variety of cultures. Some small-scaled works, for example, have been inspired by Hindu sculpture, which represent the elephant-headed Ganesha, he says.

McCourt’s larger works have taken the form of the head and shoulders bust, presenting figurative frontal features changing dramatically to abstraction when viewed from the rear. He adds that his largest works have been life-sized figures representing archetypal characters, with a



*Dreamer*, Ryan McCourt, 2003



current work in progress that will eventually represent a horse and mounted rider. These figurative works, often consisting of industrial parts that he scavenges, retain some of the character of their former industrial usage.

Yet at the same time, these industrial elements have been transformed into something uniquely human: “My works tend to be on a scale that relates to the human figure, which makes the sculptures approachable, even interactive. Invariably with larger pieces, people tend to be impressed by the size and weight of the sculptures and amount of labour that obviously went into them.”

Reflecting on his educational experience at the U of A, McCourt recalls his thesis exhibition as especially memorable. During the installation of the show, he had to drive a forklift and a few tons’ worth of sculptures through HUB mall one Sunday afternoon, sawing through a carpeted wheelchair ramp to get close enough to the gallery. Then he had to drop the sculptures into the gallery through the window. When he was done, he had to make it appear as though none of it had ever happened.

Over the years, McCourt has come to realize the value of his BFA and MFA despite the fact that he could have taken a different route.

“These degrees represent important developmental periods of intense study, experimentation, and focus on the nature of art. Anyone can be an artist, with or without a degree, but to me, my MFA signifies the serious commitment and level of accomplishment that anyone holding a master’s degree in any field brings to their profession.”

“A Modern Outlook,” McCourt’s latest commissioned piece, was recently installed at the Edmonton head office of All Weather Windows (18550-118A Ave) (see photo). His North Edmonton Sculpture Workshop is located at 10549-116 St. and various works are on virtual display at [www.telusplanet.net/public/rmccourt](http://www.telusplanet.net/public/rmccourt).

*A Modern Outlook, Ryan McCourt, 2004*



# Briefs on Distinguished Visitors

Each year, the office of the Vice-President (Academic) funds the campus visits of distinguished artists and thinkers. Any official “Distinguished Visitor” must be of such significant reputation that his or her visit will be of interest to students and faculty across campus as well as to the general public. Distinguished Visitors engage with both the campus and general community in many different forums throughout their time at the University. During the 2004/2005 academic term, the Faculty of Arts hosted dozens of guest lecturers, musicians, and artists; the following were funded by the VP’s Distinguished Visitor Fund.

## J. Hillis Miller

*Modern Languages & Cultural Studies, October 16-29, 2004*

A Distinguished Research Professor at the University of California, Irvine, J. Hillis Miller is one of the most important literary critics and theorists of the late 20th century. Miller gave five public lectures at the U of A on the theme of literature and globalization. He was also the keynote speaker of a three-day conference inspired by his visit called “Legacies of Theory,” which attracted scholars from all over Canada and the U.S. Each event was filled beyond capacity. However, for some, the one-on-one advice and collegial exchange gained during one of the many office hours held by J. Hillis Miller was the most important consequence of his visit.

## Sharon Pollock

*Drama, Oct 26-Dec 12, 2004*

One of Canada’s pre-eminent playwrights, Sharon Pollock brought her theatrical expertise to the Drama Department this past fall. A 10-day run of her latest play, *Moving Pictures*, in which Pollock played the leading role, was the highlight of her visit. In the weeks before the play opened, Pollock rehearsed daily with student actors and visited many classes to discuss issues related to playwriting, directing, feminism,

and theatre advocacy in Canada. Pollock conducted interviews with the media, held a post-play discussion and reception with the general public, and led a panel with leading scholars of her work. Rarely are students treated to such an opportunity to interact and learn from an artist’s full repertoire of skills as they were during Sharon Pollock’s visit.

## Catherine M. Soussloff

*Art & Design, March 14-18, 2005*

Catherine Soussloff is an internationally renowned art historian who has written three seminal books on how identity is represented in art. Professor of the History of Art & Visual Culture at the University of California, Santa Cruz, she gave lectures and seminars on campus and at the Edmonton Art Gallery about Jewish identity in modern art and visual representations of modern subjectivity in pre-World War I Vienna. Catherine Soussloff’s work draws upon interdisciplinary research, and students in disciplines ranging from Art & Design, Human Ecology, Philosophy, History, and Art Education attended her presentations.

## Gauri Viswanathan

*English & Film Studies, March 18-24, 2005*

While at the U of A, Columbia

University Professor of English and Comparative Literature Gauri Viswanathan met with graduate students and faculty and gave three public lectures focused on the role played by religion in modernity. Viswanathan’s groundbreaking assessment of religious conversion as a political force is particularly timely in a period of world history in which various religious fundamentalisms are in conflict. In her studies of India, most particularly in her award-winning *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief* (1999), Gauri Viswanathan demonstrates how religious conversion, although often represented as a highly personal act, has very powerful political ramifications—most obviously as an act of resistance against colonializing forces.

## Jean-Marie Londeix

*Music, February 1-9, 2005*

Often acclaimed as “the Paganini of the Saxophone,” Jean-Marie Londeix is well-known in Edmonton, and throughout the world, as a concert artist, teacher, lecturer, and author. One of the first wind instrumentalists to perform full recitals, Londeix has performed more than 600 times as a soloist and produced 19 major recordings. While on campus, Londeix not only performed in concert, but also conducted several master classes with high school, undergraduate, and graduate students. He also gave a public lecture at the Muttart Hall on “Today’s Musical Aesthetics.”

## Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy

*Music, Centre for Ethnomusicology, March 7-17, 2005*

Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy is an Egyptian master of the traditional Arabo-Islamic vocal arts and a highly versatile artist. Besides being widely acclaimed in the arts of Qu’ranic recitation (tajwid) and the call to prayer

(adhan), he also excels in the venerable art of religious hymnody (inshad dini). During his 10-day visit, Shaykh Mohamed el-Helbawy was involved in lecture-demonstrations, classroom visits, workshops, performances, and daily rehearsals, all open to the public. He also visited local religious communities across the city and performed a public concert with the Inshad Ensemble in Convocation Hall.

## Other Guest Lecturers

### Christopher Browning

*Frank Porter Graham Professor of History University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

As a historian of the Holocaust, Christopher Browning has spent a career pondering troubling questions: “How did human beings do these things? How can we explain such extreme behaviour?” On March 13, 2005, he shared some of his insights in the inaugural Toby & Saul Reichert Holocaust Lecture in the Faculty of Arts. Entitled “Explaining Holocaust Perpetrators,” Browning’s lecture dealt with the thorny problems faced by all historians of the Holocaust, but most especially those, like himself, who attempt to understand the psycho-social motivations of mass murderers.

In contrast to historians and writers who examine the Holocaust from the perspective of the victims, Browning has taken the sometimes controversial stance of looking at it from the perspective of the perpetrators. His work has detailed the thoughts and actions of people from every rank of German society during the Second World War, from the ordinary policeman to the highest political official. “It is very important to



realize that the Holocaust was a man-made event, not a natural catastrophe like the recent tsunami,” Browning explains.

Since the 1992 publication of *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, Browning’s books have received international attention and added enormously to knowledge of the Holocaust. Winner of the 2004 National Jewish Book Award in the Holocaust category, his most recent work, *The Origins of the Final Solution*, “is by far the most incisive analysis of the decisions that gave rise to the annihilation of the Jews in Nazi Europe,” according to Raul Hilberg, author of *The Destruction of the Jews*. In March 2004, the *New York Times Literary Supplement* reported that “it is difficult to see this work being superseded in the foreseeable future.”

### Jack Corbett

2004 Canada-U.S. Fulbright Distinguished Chair

The Faculty of Arts has been pleased to welcome Jack Corbett to the Department of Political Science as a Canada-U.S. Fulbright Distinguished Chair. Each year, the Fulbright Program, a joint initiative of the Canadian and U.S. governments, promotes cross-border research and exchange by funding scholars whose work is relevant to both Canadian and U.S. studies. Jack Corbett comes to the University of Alberta from Portland State University, where he is a professor in the College of Urban and Public Affairs. For over 30 years, he has taught Canadian politics and public policy and has been involved in research, teaching, and service in the international arena. During his year in Edmonton, Corbett has been examining resource management in Canada’s First Nations, as part of a larger project on aboriginal communities and resource

management in Mexico, Canada, and the U.S.

Jack Corbett also holds faculty status at the Oaxaca Institute of Technology, a federally-funded science and engineering university in southern Mexico. There he has spent the last 10 years assisting with the development of graduate programs and facilitating international exchange programs. Because of his work, more than 150 Mexican students and faculty have participated in specialized visits to Oregon, and over 400 Americans and Canadians have travelled to Mexico.

### James DeFelice

Mary Mooney Distinguished Artists’ Fund

James DeFelice, retired Professor of Drama, returned to direct *The Beaux’ Stratagem* at Studio Theatre. The play ran from March 31- April 9, 2005 in the Timms Theatre.

This Restoration-period play provided a unique opportunity for the acting company to expand their craft in classical theatre. It also provided Studio Theatre audiences with a rare opportunity to see George Farquhar’s 1707 comedy brought to life. *The Beaux’ Stratagem* was one of the last plays of the Restoration. DeFelice respected the integrity of the time and the place of the play as much as possible. His approach with the company brought them into the period of the early 1700s; politics, geography, art, music, and social fabric of the time were all explored.

The Director’s visit was funded through the Mary Mooney Distinguished Artists’ Fund. The Shaw Cable Distinguished Visiting Artists’ Endowment Fund was created by a \$100,000 gift from Shaw Communications Inc. The Fund annually supports one or more Mary Mooney Distinguished Visiting Artists within the Department of Drama.

## Destiny

BY SANDRA ELLERBECK

*Soporific abstruse presageful  
emissary petrel  
Amalgamation  
ambiance euphony  
inflections innuendo  
indecipherable*

*word after word  
randomly  
c t e e  
S a t r d*

*(word)  
intact in meaning like our names  
our selves  
yet fails to find p u r p o s e  
without place in schema*

*Hypothetical polysemous parody  
signifies apotheosis  
Celestial advertence adduced  
numinous abalone  
leitmotiv mendicant  
embolden*

Sandra Ellerbeck is a student in Write 494 (Advanced Creative Writing: Poetry).



# tangible gifts

BY JEFFREY STERR



When U of A alumnus Frank Peers (1936 BA, History; 1937 Diploma in Education; 1943 BEd) attended university in Alberta's drought-stricken 1930s, scholarship assistance was scarce.

One year in particular, he recalls, "the University insisted on cash payment of my tuition, even though my family, like many others, was waiting for our harvest to generate much needed income." His father resorted to borrowing money from welfare farmers to get Peers through his graduation year.

But after graduating from the U of A and working in Alberta's secondary school system for six years, Peers finally won a scholarship at the University of Toronto,

where he completed an MA in Political Science in 1948.

Knowing what scholarship funding can do for students, in September 2004 Peers donated \$126,000 to the Faculty of Arts, establishing twin Frank Peers Graduate Research Scholarships in the Departments of Political Science and History & Classics. He wanted to give back to the University that helped him succeed throughout his adult life, and assist future generations of students.

"Some students," Peers says, "are obviously bright enough to continue graduate studies but are unable to do so for financial reasons. So I'm very keen now that deserving students are able to continue their studies at the graduate level."

According to Dean of Arts Daniel Woolf, Peers's donation will have a large impact on students' lives. "Students who receive the scholarships are clearly going to go on to be either academic or community leaders of the future," Woolf says. "So this will be a very important part of their career preparation for whatever they do."

Peers's own life is an excellent example of what can be achieved. While earning his

## On a Clear Path

*Scholarships Make Education Possible*

BY ANNE BAILEY



Hang Huynh (Psychology '05). Winner of a Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Award (2005), MacEachern Scholarship (2004), Scotiabank Bursary (2003), Jason Lang Scholarship (2001-2005), Arts & Sciences Division Scholarship (2002), and the Golden Key Award.

Several years ago, Hang Huynh's mother suffered a stroke. As she prayed for her mother's recovery, Huynh decided to change the direction of her life and find a way to make a difference in her mother's future. A high school dropout, she was convinced that she wasn't smart enough for university. But, she returned to school and discovered that she was wrong—very wrong.

After her mother's recovery, Huynh

quickly rose from high school dropout to academic powerhouse, earning a 4.0 average throughout her first three years in post-secondary education. She eventually found her perfect niche in the Faculty of Arts, studying neuro-psychology, where she studies brain injuries in stroke victims. She's won many scholarships and bursaries, all of which have made it possible for her to attend college and university, while also raising her six-year old daughter, Jasmine.

Huynh's is a remarkable story, not typical of most students. She has faced significant obstacles, but she has overcome them all. "This sounds corny," she says, "but when you love somebody, like I love my mother and daughter, love can motivate you to do anything."

MA at U of T, Peers began working for the CBC where he remained for over 15 years. He rose through the ranks to General Supervisor of Public Affairs and was involved in developing new broadcasting standards for radio and television. In 1963, he ended his career with CBC in Ottawa as Director of Information Programming, and then transformed his broadcasting experience into a fascinating academic career. He received his PhD specializing in Canadian broadcasting policy and went on to be one of our country's leading thinkers in this field.

For Woolf, donations like Peers's reveal the intimate connection that the Faculty's alumni in general seem to have with their Arts experience at the U of A.

"Anytime I go to an alumni event," Woolf says, "I'm struck by the chronological spread of attendees, between those who've graduated last year and those who graduated 60 years ago; it's one of the most wonderful things. They all still feel in many ways very connected to this place where their adult lives began."

Scholarships have also played a crucial role. Without them, financing her education would have been much more difficult, if not impossible.

Thanks to the support she's received, Huynh looks forward to a future full of possibilities. She may choose to head off to graduate school to continue her research or to become a psychologist. Or, she may choose medical school. Whatever the future holds, Huynh has already decided that she would like to give someone else the kind of support she has received from donors, who have created scholarships and bursaries for students.

"If ever I'm in a place where I'm comfortable," says Huynh, "I want to repay them by helping someone else. I really admire them for helping people they hardly know."

The University of Alberta recently launched Campaign 2008. Student scholarships are a top priority. In the Faculty of Arts, our campaign goal is to raise \$2.3 million in undergraduate and graduate scholarships so that we can continue to attract and support bright and accomplished students like Hang Huynh.



## Ballad of the Brown Pill Bottle

BY ROBIN LIGHT

*in the bathroom cupboard*

*among the jumble of 2 for 1 eyeliners*

*bags of bath salts*

*bottles of different shampoos and conditioners*

*in a small wicker basket shoved in the back left corner*

*is a pile of brown plastic pill bottles heaped together like a miniature lumberyard*

*when it's suggested that i throw them out i say*

*'no i'll do something with them someday' and think that*

*no of course you don't understand*

*you don't know how to count*

*my calendar of ups and downs a journal of my moods read by dates*

*numbers of refills*

*one day i will build a pyramid seventy stories tall*

*tourists will come peer and take pictures*

*just making out my shape through the brown round walls*

*shadows flickering across the room as i lay my head down and sleep*

Robin Light is a student in Write 494 (Advanced Creative Writing: Poetry). She will graduate in 2005 with a BA (Honours) in Native Studies.

# LUNCHBYTHEBOOKS

*brings Arts Faculty Downtown*

BY JEFFREY STERR



A block away from the scene that inspired her talk, University of Alberta historian Frances Swyripa delivered the final Lunch by the Books session of the season, “Jasper Avenue: The Road to Edmonton’s Growth and Identity” on March 3, 2005.

Examining war protests and funeral processions, festive parades and royal visits over the last 125 years, Swyripa identifies Jasper Avenue as a key symbol in Edmontonians’ imaginations, rituals, and ceremonies. “Special events [held on Jasper Avenue] reinforce the notion of Edmonton and its citizens as an imagined community, built around community values and experiences,” she says.

“They and their attendant traditions then form a link between Edmonton as one imagined community and a series of other imagined communities that are provincial, national, and international in scope. Thus, as a physical site, the avenue itself acquires symbolic importance.”

Klondike Days and long-gone Santa Claus parades, Swyripa says, are events that express Edmonton’s organized and officially encouraged or sanctioned identity. Events like the Vietnam and Iraq war demonstrations, by contrast, reflect grassroots ideals that may have, to some extent, opposed the mainstream. “From the perspective of protestors’ agendas,” says Swyripa, “it’s imperative that they go down Jasper Avenue to assert their claim to public space at its most symbolic.”

Each of us probably imagines Edmonton’s downtown region - its boundaries and landmarks - differently, and Swyripa notes that the area is being challenged on several fronts by suburban shopping malls and Whyte Avenue in Old Strathcona.

Yet her sense is that Jasper Avenue will remain the psychological centre of the city, as its most visible public space. It is a place “where Edmontonians can gather publicly to mourn, to celebrate, to entertain and be entertained, to protest, to remember.”

Swyripa’s session concluded the inaugural Lunch by the Books 2004-05 program, a partnership between the Edmonton Public Library, Stanley A. Milner Branch, and the Faculty of Arts. The event began in October 2004 as a free, interactive noon-hour learning series for the general public, focusing on topics ranging from economics and music to drama and politics.

Valerie McNiven, the assistant manager of EPL’s Centre for Reading and the Arts, is already looking forward to next season. “I would like to see the program have a permanent fit in the library,” she said. “The variety and immediacy of the topics were great. Those who attended were fascinated by the talks, and the questions from the public showed their keen interest.”

*Other*  
**LUNCHBYTHEBOOKS**  
*presentations included:*

## **Celebrating Edmonton: Who Writes Her Story?**

*October 2004, Heather Zwicker, Department of English & Film Studies.*

Zwicker’s session focused on Edmonton as a literary and historical subject, paying particular attention to the many new books which have been published on the occasion of Edmonton’s 100th anniversary.

## **What Was Modern Art?**

*November 2004, Steven Harris, Department of Art & Design.*

Harris talked about some of the reasons behind the formal and ethical choices made by artists in the modern industrial era.

## **How Should Alberta Cope With Provincial Government Surpluses?**

*December 2004, Melville McMillan, Department of Economics.*

McMillan discussed Alberta’s enviable position as Canada’s first debt-free province, looking at how the government might spend the money wisely and also plan for a future without resource revenues.

## **The ABCs of Symphony Strings: The Function of Violins in a Symphony Orchestra**

*January 2005, Guillaume Tardif, Department of Music.*

Tardif outlined the roles and functions of this largest—and often most prominent—section of the orchestra from the standpoint of composers, audiences, other musicians, managers, conductors, and violinists themselves.

## **On the Fringe, In the Mainstream: Edmonton’s Live Theatre Scene**

*February 2005, Alex Hawkins, Department of Drama.*

Hawkins addressed how “mainstream” and “fringe” theatre have constantly intermingled over the years in Edmonton.

For information on the 2005–06 Lunch by the Books sessions, check the Faculty of Arts website.



# The Spaces Between the Tents

*The Canadian Centre for Ethnomusicology* BY ZANNE CAMERON

Jessica Keyes has recently been spending hours cataloguing over 2000 classic jazz albums, a gift to the Canadian Centre for Ethnomusicology by local jazz collector Kellogg Wilson.

“Until the collection is digitized, I have to really restrict access,” says Keyes, Masters student in Ethnomusicology.

Nonetheless, she relents and lets two local jazz musicians fondle out-of-print classics from jazz greats such as Ornette Coleman, Bill Evans and Miles Davis, like kids in a candy store.

The candy store, in this case, is the Canadian Centre for Ethnomusicology, housed in the Old Arts Building at the University of Alberta. In addition to this newest donation of jazz, the Centre houses a significant collection of all genres of 20th-century folk music, from Woody Guthrie to aboriginal chants to American jazz. The heart of its collection to date is Moses Asch’s complete collection of Folkways recordings donated to the University in 1985. Folkways itself was a company committed to recording the rich variety of sounds and music of people from around the world. Continuing that work, the Centre for Ethnomusicology is actively working to preserve and record indigenous music of all cultures.

Although housed on a university campus, the Centre aims to be a place where the conventional barriers between scholar, musician, and devoted listener have broken down. While graduate students, like Jessica Keyes, have found a home for their research at the Centre, amateur collectors like Wilson also find the Centre a place where they can contribute.

Wilson, who commonly uses words and phrases such as “wild impulse” and “unbridled lust” when he talks of his love of jazz, felt it was important to him that his collection be housed in the

Centre. “I felt that my collection would complement the Asch collection,” he says, because “jazz is an amazing language.” Although an academic, his interest in music is not professional nor is it guided by research methods. He freely admits that “the underlying philosophy of my collection is that I did not have one.”

Yet, Wilson’s collection, which covers 40 years of jazz evolution, is remarkable. The albums are in excellent condition—evidence of the kind of care that a true audiophile takes not to scratch the vinyl. But the record covers are dog-eared and worn, a sign that these recordings have been listened to many times, the liner notes read and pondered.

Like the local jazz musicians who dropped in on Keyes while she was cataloguing and begged for a look at Wilson’s collection, many visitors of the Centre will be interested in just having the chance to hear hard-to-find recordings. But academic researchers of the Centre may also have a more anthropological interest in the collection. Its scope reflects the particularity of the mind of Kellogg Wilson—an American and a scholar of computing science and linguistics. In a way, the collection is itself an artifact, telling the life of the scholar and collector. It also tells the story of American society, voiced in part through jazz. According to Regula Qureshi, Director of the Centre, jazz music is “the quintessential American music. That alone makes Wilson’s collection important. Jazz opens the door to an amazing part of human life in the 20th century. Kellogg Wilson’s life is itself a part of that history.”

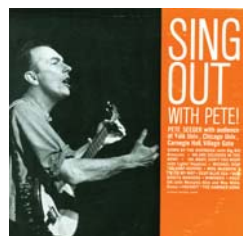
The incorporation of Wilson’s collection into the Centre’s archives is just one example of the breakdown of traditional barriers between community and university that is encouraged by the Centre. Another example can be found in the Centre’s ongoing project to digitize its collections so that anyone can access it from anywhere in the world. Undoubtedly, this digitized archive will become an important research tool, but it will also be a digital space where musicians and audiences can come together to share and fuse musical interests and styles.

From Qureshi’s perspective, a Centre with this sort of global, multicultural vision has the perfect home in Edmonton. A city full of diverse cultures, languages, and traditions, it celebrates all kinds of music in hundreds of concerts and annual festivals. Edmonton’s Heritage Days, Qureshi says, serves as a wonderful example of how culture is both preserved and recreated here in Edmonton. “Folk music is the music of families, of communities, religions, and ethnic groups. It is used to try to preserve culture, to make sure that it is passed down to new generations. But it is also the terrain for meeting other cultures. In the spaces between the tents,” she remarks, “there is new music. There is fusion, a negotiation between cultures.”

Likewise, the role of the Centre is to facilitate fusions of all sorts: between musical genres, between academics and amateurs, between Edmonton and the rest of the world. The Centre itself has become a sort of “space between the tents” where audio culture is collected, remixed, and recreated on an ongoing basis.

*The Canadian Centre for Ethnomusicology has found its permanent home in the U of A’s signature Old Arts building. It will open its doors to the public in May with demonstrations of the music, digital technology, art, and historical artifacts that make up the Canadian Centre for Ethnomusicology.*

City of Edmonton Archives



# Be( )longing

BY TARA TAYLOR

*They are dancing on blades that cannot cut. Long grass waves with the wind around their ankles, and the heat and light of many bonfires makes everyone red. Strong voices sing out in a myriad of languages, all telling stories. The adults gather around the largest fire and share their meal while the children romp in the farm fields, learning new games. Their delighted laughter needs no translation. The only boundaries here are the cattle fences at the edges of the land. Tonight, they are all the same, singing and talking and dancing. Tonight, regardless of the colour of their skin, they are all red.*

It is not my memory. I know it only through shared stories, through the genes given to me by one who sang and danced and rejoiced that night at my great-grandfather's farm. His neighbours would turn foreign travellers away, but he welcomed visitors onto

his land and into his home. Meals were shared, stories were told, and new friends were made, all by light of moon, fire, and stars. Often, he'd let his children stay outside in tents with their Aboriginal guests, so they could learn about their visitors' culture. The guests were always grateful for his hospitality and respect, and he appreciated the chance to share his good fortune with others. The farm is divvied up now, but ghosts remain—spirits of people singing and dancing and glowing fire-red with happiness.

§

*"Mum, what's that?" My awed breath fogs the otherwise flawless glass. My pudgy fingers are splayed against the angular display case like barnacles. Strategically placed spotlights blossom from the sterile ceiling—haloing glass, metal, and skin with hot yellow-white, casting an alluring gleam on gold and shimmer on silver.*

*Both taught and taunted by the promise of commission, a shrewd clerk brings the white velveteen tray out before the glass can clear or my mother can object. "It's a Star of David. Here." The saleswoman's smile looks alien under the barrage of light as she places the delicate gold pendant in the fleshy crater of my palm.*

*The novelty of holding a star in my hand is not lost on me. The flesh of my thumb swells purple and indignant around one of the star's six points as I hold it up and peer through it like a looking glass. "It's so pretty! Mum, can I have one for Christmas? Pretty please?"*

*"No." Her answer is immediate and resolute, but not harsh. She quickly takes the pendant out of my grasp and gives it back to the clerk, whose smile falters; she senses the sale passing her by. "You're not Jewish."*

*I'm too young and unworldly to follow this line of logic. What does that mean? Surely our money is as good as Jewish money. Why do I need to be Jewish (whatever THAT is . . . a club? a family?) to have a Star of David? Who is this David anyway? Why does he get his own star—one with an extra point, no less? Is it like the pens they sell in the drug store, the ones with people's*



Tara Taylor

The Mactaggart Writing Award is a \$10,000 prize awarded to the best original essay written by a student or faculty member in the Faculty of Arts. Established in 1999 by Sandy and Cecile Mactaggart, the \$10,000 prize is to be used to fund travel that will provide a stimulating educational and cultural experience.

Each year the competition alternates between students and faculty. In 2004, the competition

focused on student writing and was awarded to Tara Taylor, a third-year Honours English and Creative Writing student. Her essay was selected unanimously by a panel of six judges from a pool of 54 submissions.

In addition to providing the award, the Mactaggarts funded a one-day creative writing workshop for the six short-listed finalists with Greg Hollingshead, an award-winning novelist and retiring English professor in the Faculty of Arts. "These were keen, bright students who were curious to learn," said Hollingshead. "It was a privilege to spend the day with them."

*names on them? They never have mine, not even the alternate spelling. "So?" So indeed. So much petulance and ignorance loaded into that defiant reply.*

*"How about this unicorn, sweetie? Isn't she pretty?" Thanks to my mother's keen negotiating skills, I don't leave the jewellery store bare-necked: a lovely crystal heart is nestled in the hollow of my throat, with a rainbow-coloured unicorn head at its centre. As we head to the parking lot, I watch the sunlight bounce off the unicorn's horn, but the ghost of the star still haunts my palm; I can feel the bite of each point against my skin as if they had marked me. I wonder what 'Jewish' is, what makes this David so different than me that he has a defining symbol and I do not.*

*Where the curves of the heart rest against me, safe and smooth, I imagine the insistence of the star's sharp points. They fit better.*

*Tabula rasa.* Clean slate. It sounded like such a promising concept back in high school social studies classes. But what good is it to be empty, untethered? I was raised without a religious or ethnic context, with no external definitions other than 'white Canadian female'. Some consider that a privilege, a blessing; they say I should be grateful for the opportunities the blankness of my skin will inadvertently provide for me. *Tabula rasa.* Any markings on my canvas, be they masterpieces or mistakes, have been completely of my own making. I had no choice but to define myself. Yet, in truth, as politically incorrect as it might be, I have always envied anyone with a strong cultural heritage. I wanted admittance to that exclusivity; I wanted exotic customs and foods; I wanted to have family to visit overseas and another language to speak at home. I craved a shared history. I needed context and subtext. I wanted my bloodline to be deep enough to drown in.

§

*"Aw, sweetie. Did you behead Miko AGAIN?" My father stabs his freshly-lit cigarette into the ashtray, then gruffly grabs the headless doll out of my reverent hands.*

*"I didn't do it on purpose!" Scowling, I watch him like a hawk to make sure he treats Miko well.*

*He makes a few halfhearted attempts at replacing the doll's head, but to no avail. "Sorry, Munchkin. I don't think she can be fixed anymore." He wipes away the web-like residue of glue that provides a lacy background for the cracks in her neck.*

*I stand my ground, positioning myself petulantly in front of the garbage can. I won't let him throw her away. "Well, then . . . give her a brace!"*

*My father looks at the impudent, pouting child in front of him and chuckles to himself. (I'm certainly not laughing; I can barely see through my unshed tears.) "She's just a doll. You have plenty more."*

*He tries to nudge me back to my room, but I'm no Cindy Lou Who: I will not be placated by a pat on the head. "Those are Barbies—"*

*"They're all the same—"*

*"THEY ARE NOT!" Come not between a girl and her favourite doll. "Barbie's always blonde. Miko's not!" I don't yet realize that my beloved Miko is simply a Barbie with black hair instead of blonde, brown eyes instead of blue. But there is a slight slant to her eyes, and it intrigues me. "She's different!"*

*My father realizes he can't win, so he puts Miko on the table and, muttering something about Frankenstein's bride (Who is Frankenstein? Does he know David?), gets the glue out of the junk drawer. I stomp back to my room, its floor strewn with blonde Barbie heads. Some almost have black hair, courtesy of my Mr. Sketch felts; others bear the scars of my early attempts at hair styling. But none of them are a Miko. She embodies something special. Something to be cherished. Something I will never relegate to my bedroom floor.*

Jem was the lead singer of Jem and the Holograms but, unlike many toy-crazed young girls in the 1980s, I wanted to be Aja or Shana instead. Not only did they have better hair colours—blue and purple, respectively, compared to Jem's glaringly girly pink—and play cooler instruments, they were different. Aja, perhaps playing off her name, was Asian, and Shana was dark-skinned. Both had lovely voices, kind souls, and interesting clothes, but it was more than that: they were imbued with an alluring otherness—even if it was glossed over. In hindsight, I realize the creators were probably just trying to be savvy and appeal to as many markets as possible, but their capitalistic crass had an unexpected effect on me. I wanted Aja to be front and centre; I thought Shana ought to be in the spotlight. Whenever I played the Concert Clash board game, I was always Aja, with no fuss; my friends all squabbled over who would be Jem. Their loss.

§

Longboat, Robert's hero, was an Indian. He ran the marathon. He won things. Then he smiled and was silent. Robert smiled and was silent, too. He'd go upstairs into the attic, when he was ten, and take off his clothes in front of an old, dark mirror and wish that he was red. Or black. Or



yellow. Any colour but pink. Smiling and silence didn't seem to go with pink.

—from Timothy Findley's *The Wars*

When I was in Kindergarten, a classmate ran into the room in tears one day. *They won't let my daddy come get me no more!* she wailed. I asked why and she said a single word, thick and resonant. I didn't know what it was then, but I later learned that it referred to her father's ceremonial Sikh dagger. *It scares the children*, the principal explained. *Which children?* I wanted to demand. Certainly not me. I had smiled at him each day on my way home, and he would smile back. I was curious about what the elaborate sheath held, but never frightened of it. Its name, which would have tangled my tongue, held hints of heady incense and bold colours, not fear.

Other cultures have always captivated me, both in my studies and in the world around me. I see such beauty in the deceptively delicate facial features of my Asian friends, and hear such richness in the lyrical voices of my African and Aboriginal classmates. My ears delight to hear the fiery passion of Spanish or Italian, or the sturdiness of Scandinavian languages as I walk through a mall. When my religious studies class went to a synagogue, I was humbled by the sense of community and devotion: when a toddler ran up to the front, the rabbi did not send her back to her parents, but rather picked her up and carried her for the rest of his sermon. What must it be like to be raised not just by a family, but an entire community?

National mythologies, ancient deities, mysterious symbols—I adore them all. But learning about them brings my lack of personal cultural background into painful focus, reminding me of what I am not, of what I do not have. Canada may be multicultural, allowing other cultures to thrive, but it has yet to develop a distinctive culture of its own—as have I. Is this why I love fantasy literature so much? Because it shows that a culture can indeed be created? J.R.R. Tolkien wanted a mythology for Britain. My goals are more humble: I just want a mythology for me.

§

“You look different, Pique. It's your hair. Why braids?”

Pique drew one of her long black elastic-held braids over her shoulder and stroked it lightly.

“Cooler. Keeps it away from my face in this weather. Also, I'm part-Indian—it's suitable, isn't it?”

“I'm not sure I'm hearing you very accurately. What're you trying to say?”

“I don't know,” Pique said. “I don't want to be split. I want to be together. But I'm not. I don't know where I belong.”

—from Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*

Being afflicted with ethnic envy is not easy. I've been accused of disrespecting the cultures I admire, and am constantly told I ought to “appreciate how good I have it”. How good indeed. All my traditions have been invented; I spent a lot of angsty teenage years trying to discover my spiritual path, stumbling often since I had no starting point. I've seen people who wear a bindi or dreadlocks be accused of ‘culture vulturing’. I understand the concerns—if I had a defined culture, I certainly wouldn't want its symbols to be sold at Zellers—but if the intentions are good, where is the harm? Exposure breeds awareness, or at least curiosity, which can lead to knowledge. By learning the customs and cultures of others, our own experience is enriched, as well as our understanding of those around us.

For a long time I denied facets of my heritage, not out of shame but because I thought it would be easier to immerse myself in only one heritage. Since I'm predominantly German, it won out. I never considered the disservice I was doing to my Scottish grandfather or my Polish grandmother; I didn't worry myself with the unaddressed Belgian, British, Irish, and Austrian parts of my ancestry. I just wanted to belong. I was finally beginning to understand the allure of gangs, sororities, and social clubs: to belong was, in a sense, simply to be. My attempts, however, failed spectacularly. I never did gain fluency in German, despite taking numerous courses. My last name remained unrepentantly Scottish. I was often mistaken for French. But I never “looked the part”—any part. After all, what ethnicity is known for brown hair?

§

*Anna laughs when I see my name as an acronym on the digital display of a produce scale. “That's quite odd. Your name is rare here.”*

*‘Here’ is Schwerin, Germany. I had won a German essay-writing contest in grade eleven and was granted a month-long educational trip to Germany, including a two week stay with a family in Schwerin. The immersion is both daunting and exhilarating. “I guessed as much.” No one pronounces my name properly here: German accents make it sound rich and exotic, and I take pleasure in it every time it's invoked. “It's common in Canada.”*

*My house-mother smiles as we unload the grocery cart at the checkout counter. “It's very pretty. It's one of the reasons we chose to host you instead of Ulrike.”*

*Since Ulrike, another Canadian winner, said my host family is nicer than hers, my curiosity is piqued. “Oh? I thought we were randomly assigned.” I school my voice to be deliberately light and disinterested: there is a certain cachet to being chosen, one I'm not accustomed to. I want to savour it, but at the same time, I don't want to preen.*

*“Oh, not at all.” Anna pushes the cart into the return bay, then gets her chequebook ready. “We didn’t want a German. What would be the fun in that? No, no. Ludwig and I wanted a real Canadian, and with a name like yours, we know you couldn’t possibly be German, right?”*

To a seventeen year old me, Germany was paradise. I’d been on school-related trips before, but they never lasted longer than a week, and I had never gone farther than Vancouver. Now, I was in Europe, sans family; I was part of an organized educational tour group, but the fact remained that I was free of the umbrella of parental jurisdiction for a month. Four blessed weeks. I didn’t have to share the nerves of my first plane ride with anyone else, or the delight of my first train trip; all the experiences were fully my own. Life just didn’t get better for a teenager.

I prepared myself for jarring culture shock, but found none. There were differences, to be sure—children running naked in public parks, the lower drinking ages, centuries-old castles at seemingly every turn—but it all felt right, like I was supposed to be there.

There were five other Canadians in my group, and though they were wonderful people, I didn’t spend much time with them. The Portuguese delegation captured my heart early on with their infectious warmth and effervescence. During train rides between cities, we would share a car—eight of them with their sun-kissed skin and one pale, pasty me—and talk endlessly. They often slipped into Portuguese and asked me questions, and at my blank-faced reply, I’d be enveloped in multiple hugs and apologies and told, “We forgot you aren’t Portuguese!” Those moments of belonging meant more than any tours through royal gardens or trips to museums.

I loved my time in Germany and the friends I made there. After our teary farewells, we wrote back and forth faithfully; my mailbox was a veritable United Nations of envelopes and elaborate postage stamps. At the end of one such letter, a single word jarred me out of the communal memories of crazy hostels and exhausting treks. Kate. I couldn’t remember a Kate. Then I looked on the other side of the stationery, following a wavy arrow, and felt my idealistic heart deflate.

Katja, a lovely girl from Russia, was learning English, and was practicing the Anglicized name her teacher made her use in class. *How horrible*, I thought. Reduced from Katja, so melodic and sensuous, to generic *Kate*. I wanted to tell her to cherish her name and its beauty, not forsake it to blend into the bland English sphere. But I didn’t. When I wrote back, I kept to safe topics: school, family, my poetry. But I addressed it to Katja.

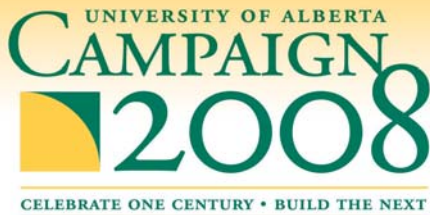
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My mother, in the spirit of all parents who have ever tried to soothe their children, insists that I look German. How so, I wonder? Is it the thickness of my hair? The deep set of my eyes? My sturdy jaw, ‘big bones’, or wide hips? How do I manage to look more German than Polish or Scottish? To what extent can looks define cultural identity? I have friends born in Canada to Japanese families who consider themselves purely Canadian—no hyphens required. Conversely, I know people whose families have lived in North America for generations, yet still identify themselves as Kenyan, Spanish, Ukrainian.

I will never have Aja’s enchantingly slanted eyes or Miko’s sleek black hair. I can’t lay cultural claim to St. Patrick’s Day or the Trojan War. But that doesn’t mean I appreciate them any less. Like Canada, I am growing; I am a composite of cultures—and I’m slowly realizing that everyone is. Identification starts, literally and figuratively, with I—with the self, whether it’s a nation in question or an individual. I will always admire and envy those with an inherited culture, but I’m beginning to respect my mutability as well. I get to create my life in so many ways. When I follow a tradition, I know it will be out of choice, not obligation. My spiritual path is one I found, not one I was steered toward. I will take all the truths I discover and mould them into a mosaic of stories and beliefs. Perhaps to be born with no culture is a cultural identity unto itself, and exploration is my birthright.

§

*In the morning, breakfast is shared under the rising sun. Children go in groups to fetch water from the well while the adults prepare the food. Both open flame and stove are used for cooking, and recipes are shared with voices and gestures, not pen and paper. All the horses are released into the far field to graze, and perhaps they are sharing stories too. When the visitors leave, smiling with gratitude and promising to return, the sun is high and the blades that cannot cut give way to foot, hoof, and wheel. Though the glare of sunlight may imply differently, they are all still red.*



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