On Reading Milton and Encountering the Sublime: A Conversation with Noel Sugimura

Noel Sugimura is assistant professor of English literature at Georgetown University where her writing and teaching focus on 17th- and 18th-century literature and culture, the history of emotions, and readerly practices. Her first book “Matter of Glorious Trial”: Spiritual and Material Substance in “Paradise Lost” appeared in 2009 from Yale University Press. This year, as the Fellows’ Fellow, she has been exploring Milton’s passionate depictions and the responses they inspired in his early readers.

Q: From the very first passage of Paradise Lost, Milton sets out an incredibly ambitious agenda as he beseeches the muse to help him “justify the ways of God to men.” This seems like not just an ambitious project, but one that’s nearly overwrought.

SUGIMURA: Well, the term “theodicy”—trying to explain why a good God would allow evil—comes in later, with Leibniz, but this is the idea here, and you can read that syntactically in two different ways. Justify the ways of God—the way God is—to man, or justify the ways of God to man. The latter is an easier thing to do, as opposed to justifying the way God is—which is mysterious to mankind—and to us as the readers of Paradise Lost.

So, yes, the opening lines of Paradise Lost—and the project—are absolutely overwrought. Because, on the one hand, Milton’s claiming to “justify” the relationship between God and man; on the other, he claims he’ll “justify” God himself—a far more audacious thought since, theologically, God justifies man.

Q: How is this effort—to describe and account for the divine—a part of what has come to be known as the Miltonic sublime?

SUGIMURA: Well, the Miltonic sublime has largely been associated with the sublime in terms of metaphysically great objects—God is going to be one of them—but also physically great objects. As early as 1675, Thomas Burnet is writing about the shape of the world and geological upheavals as being sublime.

continued on page 4
The National Humanities Center, while gloriously unique, is one of a number of independent research institutes scattered around the world. I visited one of these recently and found many points of resemblance to the Center: residential fellowships for an international cohort of scholars, excellent library and IT resources, a congenial setting with nice offices and great coffee. A fine cosmopolitan environment, one you could find anywhere. But there were little localizing markers of difference as well: the surrounding vegetation, the accents of the staff—and the baboons.

When I awoke in the morning and opened the window in the guesthouse, I heard a distant howling. Baboons, I was told, in the hills. “You’re in Africa, after all.”

The Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study, or STIAS, was founded in 1998 as part of a general reorganization of South African institutions following the end of apartheid and the election of Nelson Mandela as president in 1994. Leading educational institutions were compelled to make an abrupt pivot in which they renounced their long-standing support for the apartheid policies of the Afrikaner government and dedicated themselves to working on behalf of a democratic South Africa. STIAS was created as an international institute in part to try to address the moral isolation of the country and speed the process of integrating South Africa into the rest of Africa and the community of nations.

No other research institute labors under such a burden. It is tempting, for this reason, to see STIAS as an outlier, the “variation” on the “theme” established by more established centers such as the NHC. But what if we reversed the perspective and tried to see STIAS as a clarified version of the concept of the research institute, without the historical accretions and contingencies that might obscure the fundamental ideas behind such institutes?

I think the results would be revealing.

Among the first fruits of this exercise would be a new perspective on the issue of “apartness.” All research institutes try to create a little zone of enchantment, an unworl'dly world typically set off to the side of an urban or university setting, in which the pressures and obligations of ordinary life are, for a few and for a time, magically suspended. This apartness has led grateful scholars to describe such institutions as utopian, heavenly, or, most frequently, “paradisical.” STIAS is no exception, situated on six beautifully landscaped acres, with its own vineyard. (Fellows pick the grapes.) I even heard unconfirmed reports of a serpent on the grounds—not an insinuating, fruit-bearing deceiver, however, but a cobra.

In mature democratic cultures, such privilege is exceptional but hardly sinister. But as the leaders of STIAS are acutely aware, the history of privileged apartness in South Africa is impossible to ignore; in fact, just a few minutes from STIAS are vast, sprawling townships where the world in all its grinding indifference bears in on hundreds of thousands of people who live, many without power, plumbing, or running water, in structures that hardly deserve the name of “house.”

At the National Humanities Center, the juxtaposition is not so sharp, but the issue of privilege cannot be altogether avoided; we must still challenge ourselves to ask what contribution a research institute makes to human flourishing or the larger community that justifies the extravagant freedoms provided to a few scholars.

At an institute devoted to the humanities, one might respond to this demand for justification by asserting that the fact that we are a historical species, living and hopefully advancing in time, imposes on us an imperative to retrieve, preserve, and reexamine the record of human accomplishment as evidence of what we are, for better or worse, capable of. This imperative was registered in South Africa immediately after the inauguration of President Mandela, when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created with the goal of enabling South Africans, in the words of the commission’s charter, “to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation.” I suspect that few scholars at the National Humanities Center understand their work in such ambitious and morally explicit terms, but what is the point of humanistic research if not to create a common
understanding of the past, and what is the point of this common understanding if not to moderate differences based on misunderstandings that might become destructive?

This leaves the question of how to justify the privileges of the scholar in residence at a research institute. If you ask scholars, they will tell you that they are more productive under such conditions. But so would anyone. What makes scholars special? And here, I would suggest, we must dig deeper for an adequate response, in the connection between independent scholarship and democracy.

There is a reason that authoritarian regimes typically constrain, silence, or incarcerate scholars. The struggles of the present are often waged on the battleground of the past, and whoever controls the past has an advantage that cannot easily be overcome. Independent research keeps the past open and thus preserves the openness of the future against the ever-present forces of centralization, orthodoxy, and consolidation of power.

For this reason, the scholar, and the humanistic scholar in particular, stands for something beyond him- or herself. Think of it this way: democracies are based on a concept of individual self-determination; the most fundamental freedom a democratic society can offer its citizens is freedom of thought; academic freedom is the most rigorous and highly developed form of this freedom; and a research institute such as the National Humanities Center represents the optimal environment for exercising that freedom.

NHC Fellows, like those in comparable settings, are, as it were, breathing pure oxygen, enjoying an essential form of freedom, albeit one that very few people even in the freest societies will ever experience. Scholars pick their own subjects, work on their own schedules, and write what they wish. Whether they want to be or not, scholars are exemplars of freedom itself. This freedom is primarily individual, but scholarship is rational, transparent in its use of sources, and published, and so the society implied by scholarship is characterized by interconnectedness, interdependence, and open conversation.

No scholar wants to be burdened with an obligation to exemplify large abstractions such as democracy or freedom. The point of freedom, after all, is to be free. But privileges of the kind scholars enjoy are rare and fragile, and those who understand this fact are more likely to use their privilege wisely. A research institute such as the NHC may feel like a world apart, but if it can help to increase the world’s stock of wisdom even a little, that apartness may be justified.

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New Fellowship Created in Honor of Center Founders

Gift from Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Establishes 30th Endowed Fellowship

The National Humanities Center is pleased to announce the establishment of the Founders’ Fellowship, the Center’s thirtieth endowed fellowship for scholarly work in the humanities. Made possible by a generous gift from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Founders’ Fellowship will be awarded annually to a distinguished scholar beginning with the 2014–15 fellowship year.

The Founders’ Fellowship honors Meyer H. Abrams, Morton Bloomfield, Frederick Burkhardt, Charles Frankel, Robert F. Goheen, Steven Marcus, Henry Nash Smith, Gregory Vlastos, and John Voss—the remarkable individuals who were instrumental in both conceiving and advocating for the establishment of a center of advanced study dedicated to the humanities. In addition to their work in bringing the Center to life, they each also made significant scholarly contributions—in literary studies, classics, history, philosophy, and American studies—and are widely recognized for their leadership inside the academy and in public life.

The endowment for the fellowship was included as part of a recent $2 million gift from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Over the past five years, as part of the Center’s current capital campaign, the Mellon Foundation has contributed gifts enabling the creation of five new endowed fellowships so far.

“In 2014, as we celebrate the Center’s first 35 years, it is fitting that our newest fellowship honors those whose vision and dedication brought the National Humanities Center to life,” says Geoffrey Harpham, president and director of the Center. “We are deeply grateful for the loyal support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; its leadership during this capital campaign has been crucial for strengthening the Center for the future.”
So, phenomenal natural events—like cataracts—are also sublime. In the Miltonic cosmos you have both. The war in heaven, depictions of God, the fall of the rebel angels—all of this constitutes a picture of the divine and the angelic world that is beyond our ken. Then there is the actual making of the physical world by the Son that Milton describes: the natural sublime. And, of course, the language through which this is conveyed is mostly what 18th-century readers are going to talk about when they discuss Milton’s grand style, and the sublimity attached to the way he describes it. This comes out of the recuperation of Longinus, who was a writer in the 1st century CE, who says that the way you elevate certain conceptions is by way of the manner you use in telling a story that matches the grandeur of the thought.

Q: One of those 18th-century readers, Edmund Burke, holds Milton up as the preeminent poet for depicting that which inspires awe. Why was the sublime such a subject of interest for Burke and his contemporaries?

SUGIMURA: A large part of it starts in 1675, with Boileau translating Longinus into French and writing a commentary about the sublime. That’s part of a larger conversation that’s happening, which we know as the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, or, as Swift would dub it, “The Battle of the Books,” which has to do with the supremacy of writers of antiquity as opposed to the “Moderns.” Milton occupies an interesting place in this controversy in the sense that his style, as is often commented, is Latinate, closer to something out of Homer or Virgil. They often refer to him as seeming like an “Ancient,” but of course as he publishes *Paradise Lost* in 1667—the second publication is in 1674—many scholars, like Richard Bentley, will want to mock him as “Modern.” So Milton poses an interesting problem for people who want to position him in terms of certain theological, political, and literary agendas.

What’s happening in France with the debate about the sublime is interesting because in France much of the focus on modern literature has to do with its precision and clarity—interestingly enough, the very things that Burke does not locate in Milton.

For Burke, what is sublime in Milton is that which is awesome in that original awe-inspiring sense. It is terrifying. So, it is that which is obscure, misty, murky. It’s the image of death. It’s the flight of Satan over the desolate regions of Hell.

And that idea also comes out in France, with those who promote the “Ancients” as having something sublime about their writing; it’s something that cannot be reduced to rational or mathematical demonstrations. It’s something that isn’t clear. It’s something—*a je ne sais quoi* of sorts—that exists beyond ideas of neoclassical decorum and conveys ideas of excess, excitement: enthusiasm, a word in itself loaded both in terms of literary culture, but also, of course, politically.

Milton also posed difficulties for 18th-century readers because, whereas you may love the poetry, you may hate the man and what he stands for politically. Remember, he defended the regicide in 1649. Yet, when the Act of Oblivion comes [in 1660], you’re supposed to forgive and forget, but moving into the 18th century this becomes increasingly complicated politically.

Milton, in the midst of all this, is appropriated—by radical thinkers like Toland—as one who champions freethinking, anticlericalism, and what it means to live in a British commonwealth. But because Milton’s remembered as a regicide, many turn totally against him: they identify him with politics that are antimonarchical, while others see in him a way in which to justify a commonwealth, maybe...
On April 7, 1979, as its first fellowship year was drawing to a close, the National Humanities Center held a dedication ceremony for its new building. Surrounded by the Center’s first class of Fellows, trustees, and other dignitaries, John Hope Franklin gave the dedicatory address. Thirty-five years later, the Center continues to thrive and we again take note of the adjuration offered by Charles Frankel, the Center’s founding director, on that day:

"Can we be arrested in our work for at least a moment and take thought about what it represents? Can we ask whether our faith, and our works, are as great as the faith that others have in us? I do not know. I think so. I hope so. But each year a company of scholars will gather here, and they will be the tests of this faith that others have shown in us. If we scholars can match it even a little, if we can do our work with passion and with sanity, with firmness about ideas, but also a power to imagine a world beyond our ideas, we shall perhaps do something to lift the vision of scholarship that scholars in general hold, and to lift the vision of this civilization."

(top to bottom): Fellow at work in her study; the inaugural class of NHC Fellows (1978–79); Founding Director Charles Frankel at building dedication; the Archie K. Davis building under construction; the Center’s longtime building engineer Corbett Capps.
Cindy Hahamovitch is the Class of ’38 Professor of History at The College of William & Mary where her research focuses on US labor history and international migration. Her most recent book, No Man’s Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor (2011), won the Merle Curti Award for the best book in social history, the James A. Rawley Award for the best book on race relations, and the Taft Labor History Book Award. She was recently appointed an Organization of American Historians Distinguished Lecturer. This year, as the John E. Sawyer Fellow at the National Humanities Center, she is working on That Same Old Snake: Coolies, Guestworkers, Slaves and the Global History of Human Trafficking.

Q: How are guestworker programs related to human trafficking?

HAHAMOVITCH: I’m interested in human trafficking in labor—how people have been moved around the world to meet employers’ labor needs, sometimes with their consent, but often without or under conditions of fraud. The classic definition of human trafficking is the movement of people through force or fraud. Since emancipation, coercion is sometimes employed but fraud is the real mover. Labor migrants consent to leave—these days they often line up to apply—but they have often been deceived about what things are really like where they are headed.

In my previous work I focused on Jamaican guestworkers in the US in a global comparative context. The plan for this new book is to develop that context into the main story. There are lots of books on guestworkers but no global history, despite the fact that these programs exist all over the world. In fact, a New York Times reporter named Jason DeParle wrote that if you took all the guestworkers and the six people each of them supports on average and put them all in one place, you’d have the third largest nation in the world. We’re talking a lot of people spread around the globe.

By guestworkers I mean people who are brought legally to another country on a temporary contract. They are brought to do work for a set period of time, and at the end of that period they are generally expected to leave or can be made to leave. They have no promise of what we now call a “pathway to citizenship” or any sort of permanent status.

This is a quintessentially modern phenomenon. It didn’t exist until a spate of immigration restrictions were created around the world at the turn of the twentieth century. Those regulations were a response to a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment but they set off a new wave of employer lobbying as employers demanded access to the workers they had been barred from importing. Guestworker programs were the way states resolved the problem. The programs gave employers the people they wanted while assuring citizens that foreign workers would enter only on a temporary basis; that they would be bound to particular employers; that those employers would send them back across the border at the contract’s end; and that the migrants wouldn’t be integrated, educated, or enfranchised. They were, in a word, deportable. The first of these programs were in Prussia, Australia, and Britain’s Northern Cape Colony in what became South Africa.

All of that was in my last book but I want to locate the global history of these modern programs in the much longer context of trafficking in bound labor. So, for example, when the British banned the slave trade in 1807, they permitted plantation owners in British colonies across the globe to import labor from India, China, Fiji, and elsewhere under indenture bonds. Like guestworkers, these ostensibly free laborers were moved under the rubric of contracts that bound them to particular employers. I’ve been spending my time exploring that comparison. And the more I read, the more struck I am by the similarities. In fact, I worked as an expert witness on a guestworker case involving Peruvian sheepherders in Colorado a few months ago. The plaintiffs, who were charging their employers with human trafficking, had a litany of complaints: the pay wasn’t what they had been promised; they were threatened with violence and occasionally beaten; they were denied medical care; given inadequate rations; a whole list of complaints. When I got back to my research after reading the depositions and participating in a court hearing, I dove into the testimony of a man named Bechu who was an indentured servant from India working in British Guiana in 1895. His list of grievances was precisely the same!

The fact that indentured workers signed contracts was supposed to distinguish them from their enslaved predecessors. Yet, so often, migrant workers didn’t understand their contract, couldn’t read it, never saw it, or even more commonly, no one enforced it. If indentured servants tried to quit or complain or strike, they’d be flogged or imprisoned. When guestworkers do, they are flown home on their own dime. It’s an old snake in a new skin, as Frederick Douglass said of indentured servitude.
Q: What is their standing under law? Is it similar across jurisdictions or does it differ from place to place?

HAHAMOVITCH: Guestworkers are subject to quite different rules depending on where they go and on paper they have different rights. But if you can’t invoke your rights or the protections of your contract without fear of deportation, the legal differences are meaningless. Very few guestworkers sue like the Peruvian shepherders I mentioned earlier. They depend on state enforcement, which is practically nonexistent everywhere.

I’m seeing similar sorts of commonalities across the globe in the era of the coolie trade, which lasted from the Slave Trade Ban until 1917. The British were the first to emancipate slaves in all of their territories (except for India—but that’s another story), and therefore they were the first to promote indentured servitude as a legal, more ethical alternative to slavery. But it very quickly became clear to abolitionists that indentured servitude had the potential to be a new system of slavery: death rates on coolie ships were comparable to death rates on slave ships; coolies jumped overboard to their deaths like slaves; they ran away; they were flogged; and were even housed in slave quarters. Because of the backlash in England and India, the British suspended indentured migration a few years after it began, restarting it a few years later only after creating a massive, regulatory apparatus designed to protect the migrants from abuses. So, for example, the British passed regulations in 1842 about how many people could be crammed into a ship, and how much food and water had to be on-board. They set the maximum length of a contract (although they relaxed those rules later) and stipulated that, after ten years in residence, say in British Guiana or Mauritius or Jamaica, you could get free return passage if you wanted to go home. British officials would do the recruiting, the medical exams, inspect plantations, and so on. The British Empire ran the show.

But the British Empire wasn’t a monolith. While the Colonial Office and the colonial Government of India were making rules from above to protect indentured servants, planter-dominated assemblies in the destination colonies were trying to make indentured servitude as much like slavery as they could get away with. So, everywhere in the empire, colonial assemblies passed master/servant codes that made shirking, drunkenness, absenteeism, not finishing a task, insolence, striking, etc., violations of law punishable by flogging, extensions of contracts, and imprisonment at hard labor. Pass laws enacted all over the British Empire prohibited indentured servants from traveling more than five miles from the plantation to which they were assigned, unless they had a pass from their “masters.” So much for free labor. So, the British simultaneously imposed reforms from above and very strict labor controls from below. Instead of planters or plantation overseers meting out punishments as they had as masters of slaves, colonial officials now held the lash. There were differences from colony to colony but, to me, the similarities are far more striking. I didn’t expect to go so deeply into the history of the coolie trade but this is what happens when you’ve got fabulous librarians at your elbow and time to read, read, read. I also get great feedback from other Fellows on my first stab at this stuff, so onward I go.

Despite the failure of the sort of benevolent bureaucracy that the British created, the coolie trade was still better regulated than guestworker programs are today. There is no comparable global system of regulation and little in the

 ► continued on page 16
Harvey J. Graff is Ohio Eminent Scholar in Literacy Studies and professor of English and history at The Ohio State University. A comparative social historian, Graff is noted internationally for his research and teaching on the history of literacy; the history of children, adolescents, and youth; and urban history and studies. He has also written on family history, criminality, social structure and population; education; and methodology and theory in history, social science, and the humanities. The recipient of numerous honors, awards, and fellowships in support of his research, he has been working this year on Undisciplining Knowledge: Pursuing the Dream of Interdisciplinarity in the 20th Century: A History as the Birkeland Fellow at the National Humanities Center.

Q: How do we account for the simultaneous enthusiasm and disdain with which emergent interdisciplinary fields are often met?

GRAFF: Any understanding of that is necessarily historical. First of all, different people mean different things by reference to interdisciplinarity. A common version traces its beginnings to the 1980s, during the age of, on the one hand, holistic liberal arts education, and on the other, big high-tech, highly specialized science. But most of those who have looked more closely into its history fall roughly into two camps. Each of them is problematic, conceptually and historically. People who’ve looked at the history of research and disciplines would date its beginnings closer to either immediately after World War II—for some it’s World War II multidisciplinary work that led to the Manhattan Project, creating nuclear fusion, and then fission, under the football field at the University of Chicago, and then moving off to New Mexico. Or at the same time, innovative work that leads to the modern computer, or efforts to calibrate antiaircraft guns and control of depth charge tonnage. The project has been a real voyage of discovery for me, in these terms, taking me into many fields across the sciences, humanities, social sciences, and professions. At the same time, the post–World War II G.I. Bill and the expansion of higher education leads to the refinement of the elective system at elite colleges, the “Red Book” at Harvard, Daniel Bell’s famous book on general education at Columbia, or the effort toward nondisciplinary, but later recalibrated as interdisciplinary, general education—particularly in expanding branch campuses of state schools and junior colleges. Those two opposites, each in its own way, become institutionalized with few people even asking whether they might both be accepted as practices of multi- or interdisciplinarity. They often can, despite our tendency to dichotomize specialization and so-called integrative or general education. That sense of opposition confuses our understanding of both disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, and importantly, their relationships.

From my research I see the origins of modern interdisciplinarity in the foundation of the modern university in the latter 19th century, largely because, like others who write about this, I see interdisciplinarity as inseparably interrelated to disciplines. This is so often missed.

One of my principal arguments is made by tracing the constantly shifting relationships between disciplines—between and among disciplines and interdisciplines. They’re not stable. Interdisciplines differ from disciplines partly because they seldom recognize their half-lives. They’re not seemingly forever the way disciplines in their canonical forms present themselves. I trace this through twelve case studies over one and a third centuries.

Part of the answer, too, is that interdisciplinarity necessarily varies across what I call disciplinary clusters. By that I mean simply the natural sciences constitute a cluster of closely related disciplines, the humanities do, the social sciences do, some of the professions do. It’s a wonderful story of shifting relationships, some of which take a semipermanent form and become at least partly institutionalized and organized. That’s part of the history of the modern university and its social, cultural, economic, and political relationships.

The story I find myself telling is a very different story than I expected. When I started the project I half expected to find a golden age of interdisciplinarity before disciplines. And, as appealing as that is romantically and idealistically, it’s nonsense; one cannot have interdisciplinarity before there are disciplines in a recognizable, institutional form.

Q: Is interdisciplinarity, then, a university– or research-driven phenomenon?

GRAFF: Yes and no. One of the thrusts of my project is to set interdisciplinarity—and by association, disciplinarity—at universities in a larger social, economic, political, and cultural context. The walls of the university, no matter how hard we often try, are permeable. And interdisciplinarity is often associated with responding to society’s needs, however we define them or have them thrust upon us. The big moments in standard histories of interdisciplinarity are in response to world wars, epidemic diseases, the whole succession of biological revolutions, the advent of nanotechnology. I look at the discipline of sociology as a field originating as an interdisciplinary, but because of the
pressures of professionalization and institutionalization, it shed many of those aspects. So, interdisciplines are always responses to the world around them. They differ, however, from time to time, from institution to institution. And they play out very differently in science than they do in the humanities.

One of the problems this gets us into is when we do not make these kinds of distinctions. We in the humanities, and sometimes in the social sciences as well, often have incomplete, sometimes fallacious images of interdisciplinarity in science. We try to imitate them, often to our detriment. This is something that the critics of interdisciplinarity rail against constantly. It’s based on ignorant borrowing, and sometimes they’re right.

This is particularly true, for instance, in one of my other fields, the history of literacy, where it’s become fashionable in studies of reading and writing to begin a sentence or paragraph or even a book by saying, “Cognitive science shows.” Cognitive science doesn’t show any one thing. Different experiments show different results. I don’t think a person in literature or education trying to learn from cognitive science is going to, or needs to, become a cognitive scientist, but she or he needs to learn enough of the basics to have a sense of what’s good research and what’s not, what are the limits of understanding and generalization.

My own definition of interdisciplinarity does not entail how many disciplines are being learned, but it has to do with trying to answer questions and resolve important specific problems in a new fashion, drawing on aspects of different fields—not necessarily disciplines but fields—to fashion a new and different kind of approach. We learn from both the success and the lack of success, or usually, the partial success of those efforts. Learning “disciplines” — whatever that means — is not the question.

Q: Given that understanding — that interdisciplines emerge in response to problems that require or stimulate new approaches — it seems as though interdisciplines are likely to be the site of anxiety both within and outside of the academy.

GRAFF: Yes, in more ways than I would have imagined before this project.

First, to talk about universities responding to society’s problems is easy to do in the most general terms. But then we confront structures, traditions, why it’s difficult to do it, why people in certain fields respond differently, the divisions and the battles between those who believe in pure research and those who believe in applied science or applied humanities or applied philosophy, and so on. The responses are cluttered, confused, full of anxieties. There are exaggerated claims on all sides. In one way, we have people in every discipline who are fearful of change, fearful that if we give up the traditions, the protections of the academy, we lose everything. This is a misunderstanding, but an understandable one. Much of it follows from dichotomies. Then there are fads and fancies.

And there are real dangers, constant concerns that we’re hearing again today about academic freedom, about whether universities and disciplines and professional organizations should be engaged in political actions. There are those within every field who are anxious not to cross those lines, and there are people who are concerned that knowledge should make a better world. I certainly believe that, but it doesn’t happen by my saying it or your saying it.

The world we live in represents another set of anxieties. Knowledge must save us. And one of the myths surrounding interdisciplinarity is that through it we will save the world. This leads to exaggerated, wholly unrealistic hopes and “wars” on everything, from poverty to the brain....

What we have learned — and continue to learn — is you need careful questions, careful use of resources, and the history of interdisciplinarity is a story of those anxieties—simultaneously propelling and obstructing it.

Q: So, you’re looking at cases of interdisciplines and mapping them historically as well as in other ways from social sciences, communications and mass media studies on up to more recent things like nanotechnology and cultural studies. By laying out those cases as they emerge over the last century and a half, what are you able to see?

GRAFF: That is a great question, and here we can talk a little bit more mundanely about research design. There’s a skeleton to the project with twelve case studies, and I’m trying to investigate in several dimensions, more or less, at once, which is probably not possible to do as well as I’d like all the time, but I’m trying....

Unlike most writing about interdisciplinarity, I’ve chosen to stretch my own ignorance past the breaking point at times, all truth admitted, to cross and compare with case studies from the sciences, the humanities, the social sciences, and from among the professions. Partly it means on one hand that it’s not an exhaustive history, and writing the case studies is really challenging because they have to be clear and intelligible but they’re not going to satisfy a specialist in any of these fields. That’s a necessary evil.

But, on the other hand, the story is a very different story, I think, when we can compare and look at relationships over time and across the spectrum at the same times, between the humanities and the sciences. They’re constantly fashioning and reshaping themselves in relation to and in reflection of each other. The humanities, in missing this, in having a history of setting themselves apart from and either as subservient to or superior to sciences—and here I speak as a committed humanist—have missed our opportunity to lead and to teach the scientists, the professionals, and others. We should be leading them instead of aping them toward a larger, deeper understanding of interdisciplinarity or at least interdisciplinary relationships.

► continued on page 18
Books produced during fellowship years are listed here; for subsequent publications please check the Noted section.


NOTED: A SAMPLING OF NEWS FROM TRUSTEES, FELLOWS, AND STAFF

SAHAR AMER (Fellow 2005–06) has taken a position as chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Sydney. She was previously a member of the Asian and International Studies faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

JORDANNA BAILKIN (Fellow 2003–04) has been awarded the 2013 Morris D. Forkosch Prize by the American Historical Association for *The Afterlife of Empire* (2012). The Forkosch Prize is awarded annually in recognition of the best book in English in the field of British, British imperial, or British Commonwealth history since 1485.

CATHY DAVIDSON (Fellow 1995–96) is leaving Duke University for the Graduate Center of the City University of New York in July 2014.

College: What It Was, Is and Should Be (2013) by ANDREW DELBANCO (Fellow 1990–91, 2002–03, and emeritus trustee) has been named the winner of the 2013 O. L. Davis, Jr. Book Award from the American Association for Teaching and Curriculum, the winner of the 2013 Philip E. Frandson Award for Literature in the Field of Continuing Education from the University Professional and Continuing Higher Education Association, and winner of the 2013 Gold Medal in Education II (Commentary/Theory) from the Independent Publisher Book Awards.

“The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross with Henry Louis Gates Jr.” has received the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding News or Information (Series or Special). HENRY LOUIS GATES JR. was a Fellow at the Center from 1988 to 1990.


TOM HEFFERNAN (Fellow 1986–87) has won the Modern Language Association Prize for a Scholarly Edition for The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity (2012).

ALFRED HORNUNG (Fellow 1989–91) was the recipient of the 2013 Carl Bode–Norman Holmes Pearson Prize from the American Studies Association in recognition of his lifetime of achievement and service within the field of American studies.

JEAN HOUSTON (staff) retired after over thirty years of service on the library staff of the National Humanities Center.

ROBERT E. BUSWELL and DONALD S. LOPEZ (Fellow 1996–97) have coauthored The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism (2013).


CARL H. PFORZHEIMER III (emeritus trustee) has been elected treasurer of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.


Russel Powell (Fellow 2013–14) and Sanem Soyarslan welcomed the birth of their son, Alexander, on February 20, 2014.

HUNTER RAWLINGS (former trustee) has been awarded the 2014 James Madison Medal as a distinguished alumnus from the graduate school of Princeton University.

MARTHA SELBY (Fellow 2010–11) was the recipient of the A. K. Ramanujan Prize for Translation for her book Tamil Love Poetry: The Five Hundred Short Poems of the Aittukuru ‘an Early Third-Century Anthology, which was completed during her fellowship year at the Center.


*Supported by an endowment fund established by the Research Triangle Foundation
Recap of the 2014 Human Rights and the Humanities Conference

The National Humanities Center held its third and final conference on Human Rights and the Humanities, March 20–21, 2014. In various ways, this year’s gathering took up the notion of “the human” and its significance for our understanding of human rights.

The conference opened on Thursday evening, March 20, with a keynote address on “The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined” by noted cognitive scientist Steven Pinker from Harvard University. In his talk, Pinker presented data that, he argues, demonstrate a precipitous decline in violence over the past few centuries. He further argued that this decline is not due to changes in human biology or to efforts to circumvent inherent violent tendencies, but to a number of changes in culture and economic circumstances that favor peaceable motivations.

Friday’s sessions featured other distinguished scholars discussing, among other things: how shifts in thinking about “the human” during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have helped to shape current thinking; the ways that notions of a common humanity and discourse surrounding the dehumanizing effects of slavery have played a part in the abolition of and, later, the scholarship about slavery; and how the contemporary regime of human rights activism and humanitarianism, based on assumptions about a universalized human subject, may need to be revisited.

This year's participants and moderators gathered on Saturday morning for a workshop, led by Michael Gillespie, to share their thoughts about and experiences of teaching undergraduates about human rights issues. Their contributions, and those of previous years’ participants, will be used in developing an online pedagogical resource for collegiate instruction, similar to those developed by the Center for its America In Class® teaching resources and Teacherserve® instructional guides.

Created in an effort to reexamine conventional assumptions about human rights through the lens of the humanities, Human Rights and the Humanities is a multiyear project involving scholars from around the world. Over the past three years the Human Rights and the Humanities project has brought together historians, philosophers, scholars of literature and culture, anthropologists, political scientists, and others to share their insights and help us to better understand human rights not only as a matter of political and social interest but as a historical and cultural phenomenon and a subject worthy of extended ethical consideration.

The initiative has been made possible through the generous support of the Research Triangle Foundation of North Carolina, Duke University, North Carolina State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York.
EDWARD FRANCIS MCCLENENN II  
(Fellow 1986–87), who contributed foundational work to the field of decision and game theory, died November 2, 2013. He was 77. McClennen wrote over fifty articles and the highly influential book *Rationality and Dynamic Choice: Foundational Explorations* (1990). McClennen focused on foundational issues in decision and game theory, and on the application of these theories to issues in social and political philosophy, public policy, political economy, moral theory, and practical reason.

After he received a BA in philosophy from the University of Michigan in 1959 and a PhD from The Johns Hopkins University in 1968, he taught at Purdue University, Lehman College CUNY, Washington University, Bowling Green State University, the London School of Economics, and Syracuse University, from which he retired in 2013. At Bowling Green as the Ohio Board of Regents Eminent Scholar in Moral and Social Philosophy, he was codeveloper of a program funded by UNESCO, the Kennan Institute, and others that brought young Central and Eastern European scholars to the US after the collapse of the Soviet Union as a means of helping them understand the relevance of new institutional economic theory for their reemerging nations. As Centennial Professor of Philosophy at the London School of Economics, he designed and administered a highly successful interdisciplinary Master’s Program in Philosophy, Policy and Social Values. From 2005 to 2007 he participated in a group of international scholars who were brought to Libya by Saif al-Islam Gaddafi to help in the writing of a new constitution, for which he drafted the Bill of Rights.

S. CUSHING STROUT, JR.  
(Fellow 1984–85), a pioneer in the field of American studies, died on November 21, 2013, in Ithaca, NY. He was 90. Strout wrote many scholarly essays and books on American intellectual and literary history, including *The Pragmatic Revolt in American History: Carl L. Becker and Charles A. Beard* (1958) and *Making American Tradition: Visions and Revisions from Ben Franklin to Alice Walker* (1990).

Strout had a keen interest in magic, working as a semiprofessional magician in clubs, hotels, and occasionally for the United Services Organization during World War II. In 2005 he published a book of card tricks, *On the Other Side of the Mirror*.

After receiving an MA in history from Harvard University, he was an instructor in the Departments of History and English at Williams College from 1949 to 1951. In 1952 he received a PhD in the history of American civilization from Harvard, one of the first PhDs in what is now the field of American studies. He subsequently taught at Yale University and the California Institute of Technology before taking a position in 1964 in the English Department at Cornell University, where from 1975 until his retirement in 1989 he was the Ernest I. White Professor of American Studies and Humane Letters. He was a Morse Fellow at Yale, a Fulbright Fellow at the Center for American Studies in Rome, a resident scholar at the Rockefeller Study and Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy, as well as a Fellow at the National Humanities Center.
under a king, but a king who is not a Catholic. So, a lot of these agendas resurface in what we could call the Long Restoration, and inflect how readers respond to Milton and his poetry.

Q: You are focusing on the passions and the sublime in *Paradise Lost*. Are they in some way evocative of a counter-Enlightenment response to Enlightenment ideals of rationality?

SUGIMURA: That’s a great question. Part of what I’m interested in looking at is the way 18th-century readers are commenting on the passions that emerge in Milton’s poetry; some of them are trying to actively suppress the way in which the passions might be contributing to the sublime. And that is, if you want to think about it in rational/antirational terms, a counter-Enlightenment move. If you’re reporting Enlightenment culture on the side of the “Moderns,” you want clarity of expression and thought—rationality. You don’t want the excess associated with the passions—with, for instance, the wildness of fury, or something that wholly escapes your control.

At the same time, there are other sides of a more radical Enlightenment culture that see in that very excess a form of liberty of thinking—that through the passions or through this exploration of an encounter with something transcendent, there is something that allows you to realize yourself in a creaturely way more fully. That is to say, what it means to be human is, on some level, to experience these intense passions, and the pleasure or pain accompanying them. That’s part of a much more radical Enlightenment culture.

Q: The emotional effects that Milton creates and weaves into his argument, then, give rise to contending veins of interpretation. Does a consensus eventually arise or does he remain a contentious figure throughout the period?

SUGIMURA: No, he’s a site of contestation—the battleground on which a variety of aesthetic and, I’d say, also political debates are being waged. And yet because, as we’re moving into the 18th century, there is also an anxiousness about toleration, about not wanting to be a heresy hunter, quite a few of Milton’s commentators move away from the politics and the theological heterodox ideas that the poetry might be promulgating. And this is where you get that focus on aesthetics. This is Addison’s approach; he attempts to make Milton in 1712 not the very scary regicide that he was for many English readers, arguing instead that he was a great poet—that the magnificence of the poem can stand on its own apart from the man who writes it. But when we approach the end of the 18th century, when Johnson is writing his *Life of Milton*, Johnson can’t really come to terms with Milton the man, even though he finds the poetry absolutely breathtaking.

In the 18th century, you have readers of Milton who are very concerned with talking about the different lives of Milton and in thinking about the way in which he uses language to convey certain problematic ideas—whether it be about metaphysics or about theology—and how you don’t want to necessarily just flatten those moments of tension, which is what the “great scholiast” Richard Bentley does. Yet Bentley’s edition of Milton in 1733 elicits a great flurry of responses that began as early as 1734 with Zachary Pearce and the Richardsons and go into the 20th century with William Empson (1935).

Q: Milton has become a part of a massive British literary and intellectual tradition. Is this something his early readers were thinking about?

SUGIMURA: Absolutely. In the 18th century, the canon is developing, and Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton are all in it. And that is part of what’s amazing about people who are politically inclined not to like Milton. They are willing to concede that the poetry stands on its own—that his was a mind and an imagination unlike any other they had seen, which had created the most amazing Christian epic written in English. It did something incredibly audacious, the likes of which they’d never seen. It had such imaginative vision that the readers were just drawn in, despite themselves.

Many of the commentators will say the reason that *Paradise Lost* wasn’t more widely read on its publication was precisely because of the politics associated with it. That is to say, despite the fact that Milton was a bogeyman for many people in the 18th century, he’s still acknowledged as a genius. So, much of what I’m looking at is about canon formation, as well as what Milton is doing to the idea of the sublime, which is evolving through the 18th century.

There is also, I think, something different going on in the 18th century with ideas of how sublimity relates to passions, about what it means to be human in a way that’s different, say, from being an angel—that is, of being creaturely in an angelic or demonic way. What 18th-century readers find so fascinating about the passions is how they are a part of human experience, and that is part of a larger Enlightenment project.
Q: So, was there a belief that the artistic object itself could be a vehicle for accessing the divine?

SUGIMURA: Absolutely. John Dennis at the end of the 1600s, says that to read *Paradise Lost* is to tap into enthusiastic or divine passions because you’re encountering ideas that have to do with transcendence. For Dennis, this includes encountering God in a different way, of beholding creation like the angels do. And so, the experience of reading is itself something that overwhelms you, washes over you, purifies you. But again, Dennis is very much privileging the religious aspect of reading Milton’s poetry, and his is not entirely the norm in the 18th century.

Q: That seems similar to a desire that those who love literature would identify with—the transport we associate with great literature.

SUGIMURA: What you’re doing there is actually bringing together readers of Milton today with the readers of the 18th century. This idea of ravishment and transport characterizes many accounts of the sublime—of encountering something that is unlike anything else and somehow stands alone objectively, even though our experience of it is profoundly subjective.

And the very fact that Milton is a site of contestation means there are many conflicting philosophic ideas within his writing; the poetry sometimes undoes or complicates the very theology that he purports to promulgate or advance; emotions may be evoked in a way that is counter to the stated aims of the poem. These moments of opposition are, I think, what interested 18th-century readers, and I think it’s what continues to interest readers today. After all, it’s that philosophic dynamism and emotional charge that make the poetry sparkle and come to life.

The amazing thing Milton does is to take the opening lines of Genesis and explode them into this beautiful and incredible poem, which challenges readers on every single level. When you look back and think about people talking about sublimity, much of it has to do, actually, with the idea of encountering something great—great not only in its conception, great not only in the way it’s portrayed, but great in the way that it makes you respond to it. It elevates you in that response. And I think this is something that has continued with readers today, and why we can learn so much from earlier readers of Milton. They focus—rightly, I think—on the poem’s capaciousness. It’s one of the things that Johnson noticed: that “Milton’s delight was to sport in the wide regions of possibility.” Somehow much of what is sublime about *Paradise Lost* has to do with that kind of infinite gesture. And it participates at once with an ancient tradition of epic in terms of the ideas of what creates that genre, but it also breaks those ideas down or complicates them in all sorts of ways. Milton is remaking the epic tradition itself, but, in so doing, he makes it almost impossible to write an epic after him.

That’s one of the greatest challenges of thinking about what it is to read Milton and also what it is to think about the sublime, because ultimately readers are approaching the poem from the perspective of the finite. But Milton has created something that is infinite and infinitely complex, rewarding and endlessly fascinating. To read Milton with his 18th-century readers is to discover different ways of grappling with that tension and to see how the passions that elevate us are, in fact, as sublime as the experience that first awakens them.
way of national rules either. Your contract is supposed to protect you, but in most places around the world, you can be deported for invoking it. Jamaican cane cutters brought to the US had a clause in theirs that prohibited "indiscipline," but it didn’t say what constituted indiscipline. In practice, it meant complaining you weren’t getting paid what you had been promised, speaking up on behalf of your fellows, contacting a lawyer, going on strike; all those things were and are deportable offenses in the US guestworker program.

There are international guidelines for how migrants are supposed to be treated, “conventions” promulgated by the International Labor Organization in the 1930s. But these are guidelines, not rules, and the countries that receive most of the guestworkers, including the US, didn’t sign them.

Q: How does the arrival of guestworkers into a community, or an industry, affect the indigenous labor force?

HAHAMOVITCH: This is something that I’ve looked at for a long time since employers always say they need guestworkers because they have a dearth of labor—jobs that Americans won’t do, for example, or that Saudis won’t do, or Kuwaitis won’t do.

That actually makes sense in a place like the United Arab Emirates, whose population is over 90 percent guestworkers. There, the oil industry came out of nowhere before the country even existed; the Bedouins, pearl divers, and date farmers who lived there didn’t have the skills necessary to drill for oil or build the rigs. They could have spent years educating people to be engineers, architects, and construction workers or find people from abroad who could do the work. They chose the latter. Now you hear Emiratis complain that their kids don’t speak proper Arabic because the nannies are from India, the Philippines, or Indonesia.

In the US it’s much dicier to argue that guestworkers do work that Americans won’t do. In some industries guestworkers remain a tiny fraction of the workforce. In others, like Florida’s massive sugarcane industry, they supplanted an American workforce. They didn’t enter a vacuum. Employers consistently make the case that this is a question of labor scarcity, but it’s really about gaining access to a contingent workforce that won’t quit, shows up for work every day, leaves when you don’t need it anymore, and works in fear of deportation. Growers have also deployed guestworkers to defeat union campaigns, which is why Cesar Chavez’s United Farm Workers union was so hell-bent on banning guestworker programs in the 1960s.

Q: There’s a great deal of discussion going on right now in the United States about immigration reform that would involve converting undocumented laborers into some form of guestworker. Based on the history you’ve been examining, what concerns, if any, does this raise?

H AHAMOVITCH: Well, first, let me say that I understand why some people in the undocumented population would settle for this idea. Obviously, they’d prefer a more long-lasting solution, but any kind of legalization is very attractive. At the same time, though, as a historian, I see lots of red flags because we’ve been in this situation before. Africans brought to the United States were residents of the United States but had no rights. They had no pathway to citizenship, shall we say, even in many free states. The 1857 Dred Scott Supreme Court decision said that no person of African ancestry has any recourse to the Constitution. We all know how that went. Likewise, not all immigrants were allowed to naturalize and become citizens. US naturalization law, passed in the 1790s, said that only free white people of good moral character could naturalize and become citizens. That meant that while 30 million Europeans were migrating to the US, settling down, becoming politically active citizens, Asians could enter, work, and start businesses but they could not become full members of US society. That remained true until 1952! And because they couldn’t become citizens, they couldn’t protect themselves at the polls. The consequences became evident in the second half of the nineteenth century when western states started passing local ordinances to keep Chinese immigrants out of particular trades and towns, to
prevent them from owning land, and so forth. In 1882 Chinese laborers were excluded from the US altogether. All Asians were banned in 1924 by a new immigration “reform” act that said if you couldn’t naturalize you couldn’t enter. Allowing people to stay without full rights has potentially dangerous consequences.

Now, 90 years after that comprehensive immigration “reform,” we are considering making 11 million people into residents but only on a temporary basis, with no pathway to citizenship, no access to the ballot box and therefore no way politically to advocate for themselves.

Q: Are there places in the world that are addressing this in more effective ways?

HAHAMOVITCH: There used to be—the European guestworker programs after World War II provided a very different model than ours. Whenever I talk about guestworkers, people will say, “oh yes, Turks in Germany.” But most people don’t realize that Turks were just one group among many. In the aftermath of World War II, there were 30 million guestworkers in Europe. They came from the rural periphery of Europe—Ireland, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and elsewhere—into the center, mostly into Germany and France, but elsewhere too. Switzerland was 37 percent guestworkers in the twenty years after World War II.

guestworkers out but, when they failed, they fought for guestworkers, fearing no doubt that foreign contract workers would undercut them if they weren’t guaranteed the same high wages and good benefits that citizen workers enjoyed. If you can’t beat ‘em, organize ‘em. Eventually, guestworkers got collective bargaining rights, those long, paid summer vacations, even the right of family reunification (except for the Turks, who had to fight hard for the same right). Germany didn’t deport guestworkers at the end of their contracts either. In fact, so many were able to renew their contracts year after year that, when the oil shocks of the early ’70s killed off the last of Europe’s guestworker programs, the remaining guestworkers had been there an average of seven years. Even more remarkably, guestworkers weren’t sent home when the European programs ended. Instead, they were integrated into the receiving countries’ populations and even polities. This happened least well for the Turkish guestworkers, which is why so many people know about them, but how many people know that there are Italian Germans or Greek Germans? In Europe the postwar guestworker programs presaged what happened later when European Union states opened their borders to members’ labor migrants. In the US, in contrast, guestworker programs led to a hardening of borders.

When the oil shocks ended Europe’s last programs, they inspired new ones in the oil-producing states of the Persian Gulf and the Pacific Rim. Unfortunately, those countries followed the US model, not the European one.
Q: Your training was multidisciplinary and your intellectual interest has bridged disciplines or engaged areas where one discipline would be insufficient. So, how does your experience play into this project?

GRAFF: More than any of my other projects, this endeavor is really deeply personal and autobiographical.

Growing up as a child of the ’60s gave me a certain inquisitive spirit and a variety of interests and commitments. I went to high school at a time of the “new” sciences, the “new” social studies. There was a spirit there and at least the beginnings of an interest in what we now call multidisciplinarity in the humanities. I went to college in the late ’60s and we were encouraged to be intellectually adventurous. We played at reforming curriculum. It was a different time. The social, political, and cultural contexts were life-shaping.

In graduate school I was taught to explore different disciplines. I was taught by the real pioneers of what we then called the new histories. There was a kind of stimulus where we were encouraged not to spend a lot of time thinking up labels, but to find hard problems and to experiment with new ways of looking at them, especially across history and the social sciences.

From that background, in trying to use quantitative data to look at how we think about the distribution and the importance of reading and writing in mid–19th–century cities, I went to a new, supposedly interdisciplinary university in Texas. In the early years I was housed in the social and behavioral sciences but paid in the humanities. I was encouraged to attempt to develop different kinds of programs. They often didn’t succeed but we learned a lot. My career led me in these directions. Eventually, it led me to Ohio State and my current position, where as a card-carrying certified historian, I hold a primary appointment in the Department of English. There, I’ve been given the opportunity to develop OSU’s only campus-wide interdisciplinary program in literacy studies, Literacy Studies@OSU. This project furthers my attempt to make sense of it all, and to see what I can communicate and pass on about, literally, what works and a lot of things that don’t, across disciplines and disciplinary clusters.

Q: Is the history of interdisciplines more one of synthesis or of negotiation where one discipline is privileged over another, or does that differ from case to case?

GRAFF: It’s a hard question to answer simply because all those things happen. Synthesis has become one of those words in the discourse of interdisciplinarity, like “integration,” that often doesn’t mean much anymore. I prefer to think in terms of “What are the good questions? What are the important problems?” “How can we try to answer them in different ways?”

I like to think of the spaces between disciplines. At Ohio State, literacy studies has discovered that our playground is between the silos of departments that have 50 to 100 tenure-track members. But in saying that, some of my case studies show that very successful interdisciplinarity can take place within the so-called boundaries of a discipline. Interdisciplinarity can exist on different levels in different ways in different locations. It can be organized in different ways.

But some of the people who believe in what I would informally call “big bang interdisciplinarity” are afraid we’re running out of the big problems—we’ve split the atom, we’re enumerating the human genome. What’s left? They say it’s only little things. But who knows? I think that way of thinking is part of the problem. We should be educating young people to move between the big and the little, between the disciplines and the interdisciplines—to follow, in my language, questions and problems. I was educated to believe that answers eventually get replaced, but good questions never go away. 

THE NATIONAL HUMANITIES CENTER is a leading institute for advanced study and the only one in the world dedicated solely to the humanities. The Center provides a national focus for the best work in the liberal arts, drawing attention to the enduring value of ancient and modern history, languages and literatures, ethical and moral reflection, artistic and cultural traditions, and critical thought in every area of humanistic investigation. By encouraging excellence in scholarship, the Center seeks to ensure the continuing strength of the liberal arts and to affirm the importance of the humanities in American life.

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the library in 2002, notes that the key to meeting Fellows' needs is the ability to dedicate time and attention. “We are able to give much more attention to each Fellow simply because of the librarian to Fellow ratio at the Center. Even Fellows who come from institutions with some of the best libraries in the world receive more bibliographic and reference support than they do at home. The fact that they have access to Duke, NC State, and UNC’s collections means that they can receive almost all of their desired materials in 24 hours. The three libraries have a combined total of 17.5 million volumes—14 million of those are unique to a single institution, which makes the shared collection of unique volumes the fifth largest in the United States. And for rare and difficult to locate materials, we are able to spend hours on a single request whereas an academic interlibrary loan department can spend only a few minutes. We also can devote more time to their reference questions.”

In recent years, as digitization and other technological innovations have changed the research landscape in many ways, the librarians and the Center’s information technology coordinator, Joel Elliott, have introduced a regular series of lunchtime seminars on digital tools and techniques for scholars. These sessions touch on everything from digital research methods and data protection to footnote management software and Photoshop® image-editing tips. According to organizer Brooke Andrade, associate librarian for interlibrary loan and reference, “The response to the lunchtime seminars has been overwhelmingly positive. We have actually had a few Fellows call them ‘life-changing.’ This is another area in which we are able to spend more time and attention with the Fellows than technology trainers at their home institutions. It isn’t unusual for us to follow up with one-on-one meetings with Fellows to address specific questions.”

In the future, as more rare books, interviews, and archival materials are digitized and indexed, and e-books and digitized journals become even more pervasive, the research landscape is likely to change in many ways—potentially more friendly to libraries and researchers seeking to access materials, but possibly more challenging as pricing models and other restrictions limit availability and foster greater specialization. Doubtless, however, the Center’s research librarians will continue to be one of the most highly regarded, and well-remembered, benefits of Fellows’ time at the National Humanities Center.

This was a question confronting the Center’s first librarian, W. Alan Tuttle, in 1978—shortly before the Center’s first class of Fellows arrived—and he traces the answer to a meeting that summer. “I remember July 21, 1978, as the date when the future productivity of Fellows of the National Humanities Center became a real possibility,” says Tuttle. “Robert McCormick Adams and I attended a meeting among the university librarians of Duke, NC State, and UNC-Chapel Hill. They themselves constituted the panel of advisors who had been asked to help Fellows of the National Humanities Center avail themselves of the amazing resources of these three magnificent library systems. Within a few minutes Dr. Adams had guided the library directors into talking about how each of their institutions served the faculty members of the other two Triangle universities and suggested they consider the few dozen Fellows as faculty of yet another nearby university. After they all agreed to his suggestion, I really don’t remember anything at all of how the meeting continued or concluded. I was too happy seeing the answer to my chief problem.”

More than thirty-five years later, that agreement continues to yield benefits for Center Fellows. Nurtured and guided by Alan Tuttle and the Center’s other librarians, the Center’s partnership with the Research Triangle universities’ libraries has become a highly efficient operation. The vast majority of Fellows requests are filled within 24 hours, with seemingly minimal effort, and the Center’s librarians eagerly assist in finding rare and obscure materials from libraries and archives around the world.

From paper records to the current system that marries online efficiency in placing and tracking requests with the care and attention of the Center’s on-campus library staff, the methods employed to gather, process, deliver, and return materials have remained consistent. For more than 30 years until she retired in December of 2013, Jean Houston, the Center’s associate librarian for circulation, was directly responsible for overseeing this process and keeping it functioning smoothly.

Eliza Robertson, who succeeded Alan Tuttle as director of the library in 2002, notes that the key to meeting Fellows’
SUMMER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

JESSIE BALL duPONT SUMMER SEMINARS FOR LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE FACULTY
June 1–20, 2014

Constructing Childhood: Words and Pictures
Seminar Leader: Laurie Langbauer (Fellow 2011–12), professor of English, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Globalization and the Varieties of Modern Capitalism
Seminar Leader: Edward Balleisen (Fellow 2009–10), associate professor of history and public policy, Duke University

SIAS SUMMER INSTITUTES
Cultural Encounters: Global Perspectives and Local Exchanges, 1750–1940
August 3–15, 2014 (at the National Humanities Center)

Seminar Leaders: Harry Liebersohn, professor of history, University of Illinois, Urbana–Champaign; and Jürgen Osterhammel, professor of history, University of Konstanz, Germany

Scenes from the History of the Image: Reading Two Millennia of Conflict
Dates TBA (at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin)

Seminar Leaders: Thomas Pfau (Fellow 2010–11), Alice Mary Baldwin Professor of English and Professor of Germanic Languages and Literatures, Duke University; and David Womersley, Thomas Warton Professor of English Literature, St. Catherine’s College, University of Oxford

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