

TABLEAU

THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO | SPRING 2023



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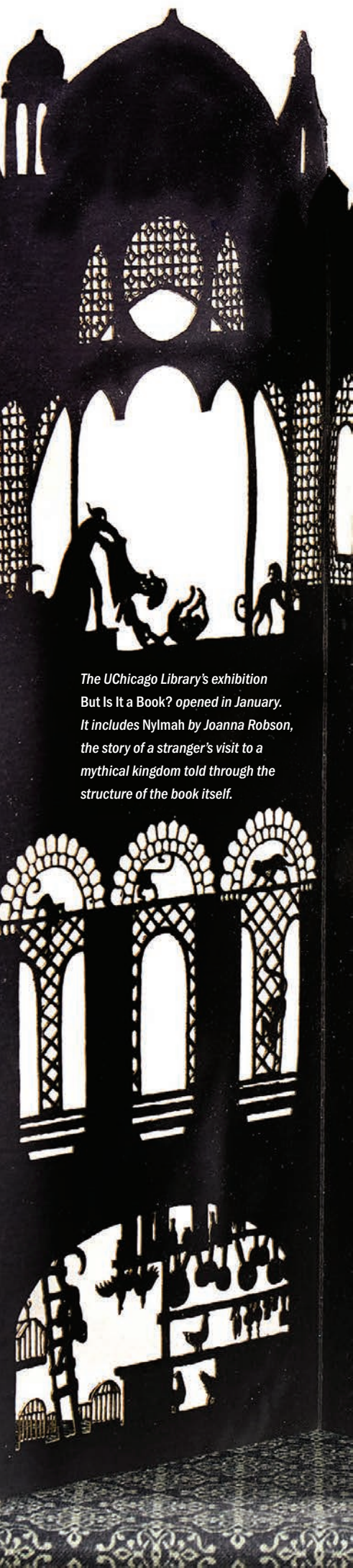
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ON THE COVER

Daisy Rockwell, AB'91, AM'98, PhD'98, paints subjects across the political spectrum, including Senator Bernie Sanders, AB'64, in this piece titled *Superb Owl*. Courtesy the artist.





The UChicago Library's exhibition *But Is It a Book?* opened in January. It includes *Nylmah* by Joanna Robson, the story of a stranger's visit to a mythical kingdom told through the structure of the book itself.

OPPOSITE: PHOTO COURTESY THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARY; THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ZICH

Dear Alumni and Friends,

As I prepare to step down as dean at the end of this academic year, I have been reflecting on the central role of the Humanities Division at UChicago.

Through scholarship and artistic creation, our faculty and students contemplate what human beings have said and thought and written; they likewise produce innovative new works in many disciplines of the arts. For more than a century, their research and creativity have immeasurably broadened and deepened our understanding of the human condition.

To be sure, our efforts as scholars and creators have needed strong support to launch and sustain this work. This support includes outright funding for professorships and postgraduate teaching fellows, vital fellowships for graduate students, and prestigious awards that recognize and motivate faculty and students. With this backing, our humanists have conceived and deployed new programs from master's degrees in digital humanities to courses in paleography and the history of the book to an ensemble for the performance of new music. The division has likewise fostered multifaceted diversity among faculty, students, and staff that continues to reshape our perspective on the humanities.

These indispensable foundations enable research and creation in the division: articles, books, and artworks that scrutinize, expand, and preserve the treasures that humans have produced. Recent accolades—for the work of **Philip Bohlman** on sonic encounters at sacred borderlands, of **Allyson Nadia Field** on race and representation in cinema, of **Theaster Gates** on space



Anne Walters Robertson

theory and land development, of **Jonathan Lear** on the philosophical understanding of the human psyche, and of **Larry Norman** on the creative conflict between ancient literature and early-modern ideals—highlight the astonishing range and variety of our scholarship and creativity in the humanities.

This exceptional work, along with that of the entire faculty, constantly clarifies the place—past, present, and future—of human beings in the world. Two UChicago visionaries, **Joe Neubauer**, MBA'65, and Jeanette Lerman-Neubauer, stressed this guiding aspect of the humanities at the end of the Campaign for Inquiry and Impact when they said that discovery in science and technology must be led by humanistic thinking about “where we should go next.”

These past seven years have given me the most stimulating moments of my nearly four decades at UChicago. It has been a privilege—indeed, a joy—to lead the Humanities Division during a time of such significant productivity and rapid change. Our loyal alumni and supporters have time and again enabled us to carry out our work through your unfailing generosity. For this and so much else, I am more grateful than I can fully express.

Anne W. Robertson

Anne Walters Robertson
Dean, Division of the Humanities
Claire Dux Swift Distinguished Service Professor
Department of Music



NEURO AESTHETICS

BY LUCAS MCGRANAHAN

Christine Zappella Papanastassiou explores color in the history of art—and in the brain.

Art historian **Christine Zappella Papanastassiou**, AM'15, PhD'22, is an adjunct assistant professor of neurosurgery at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, where she conducts interdisciplinary research on human perception and teaches art history to health-care practitioners. She spoke with *Tableau* about Renaissance Italian painting, the human body, and the unlikely path that led to her having an ID badge in a neurosurgery department.

How did you get interested in the study of perception?

There has been a trend in art history toward examining the sensory environment and the individual person's place in it. My dissertation was on the Cloister of the Scalzo, a small cloister in Florence that [members of a Renaissance-era confraternity] would walk through as they moved into and out of a space in which they did religious ceremonies, including self-flagellation. They would do these things in the dark and then emerge into this cloister that was sparkingly bright. If we don't think about that experience, and we just talk about the paintings as if they exist on a wall with no context of a viewer, then I think we're really missing a lot.

This point was brought home to me even more as I was working in museums like the National Gallery of Art and the Art Institute of Chicago. You really had to think about how a person encounters the works of art. How do

the works in a room talk to each other? How do the rooms talk to each other? And how are people moving about in these spaces?

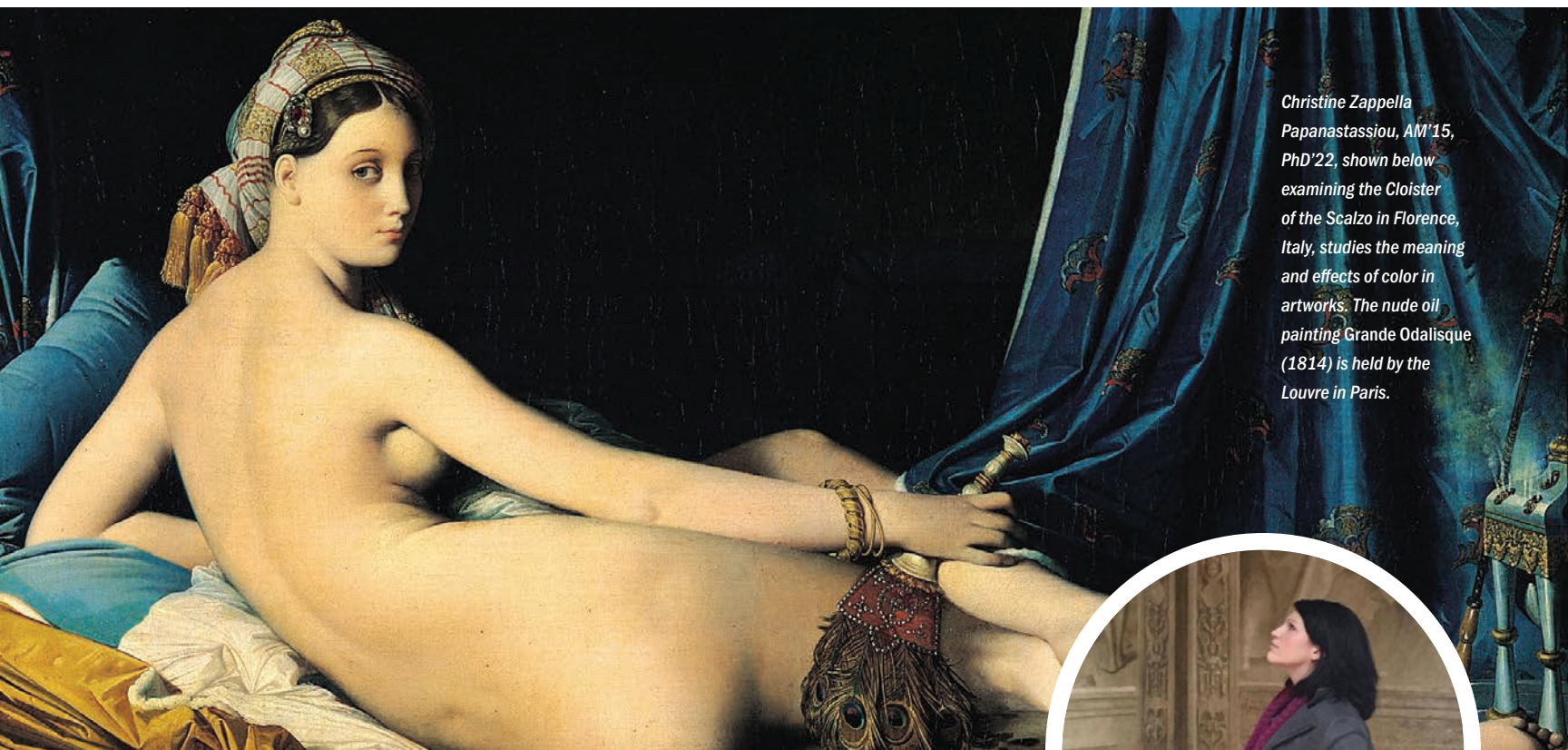
This led you to study medicine?

In art history we have this concept called the “period eye,” where you look at lots of art and you begin to understand the tastes of the people from the period. What I began to understand is that the period eye is disembodied. To put the period eye in a body, I was going to have to pay careful attention to real bodies, and in an interdisciplinary way.

First I realized that, as an art historian, I had no idea how we even see. So I started with basic research on human perception. I was drawing from biomedical sciences and from psychology. I rapidly realized that I could not be an expert in all these fields. I was going to have to get collaborators. I started sending cold emails to scientists—and they loved it! They would say, “When I look at art I always think about these things.” They were so generous, and they would send relevant articles and put me in touch with other experts.

How have these scientists made you think about art differently?

They've pointed out phenomena that I was totally missing. I was imagining the flagellants as they moved out of



Christine Zappella Papanastassiou, AM'15, PhD'22, shown below examining the Cloister of the Scalzo in Florence, Italy, studies the meaning and effects of color in artworks. The nude oil painting *Grande Odalisque* (1814) is held by the Louvre in Paris.



ABOVE: PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS; INSET: PHOTO COURTESY CHRISTINE ZAPPELLA PAPANASTASSIOU

this dark space, where they had beaten themselves for a long time, and into the bright cloister with these paintings. And I thought the brightness would wash out the images and it would have this effect like an epiphany. I got in touch with a vision researcher who said, “That’s definitely happening. But you know what also might be happening? The dazzling light might have a sensory perception effect that dulled their pain.” It seems this cloister was designed to bring out multiple effects to make it feel as if they were having an experience of divine healing.

What was it like to transition to biomedical research?

I had to learn all about how to work with human subjects and collect data. UT Health San Antonio has the Center for Medical Humanities and Ethics. They saw a place for me here—not only to do the brain research but also to be part of a greater intellectual community. There’s research that shows doctors and nurses who appreciate the arts are better at what they do. My husband and I will be co-teaching a class in the summer called Beauty and the Brain: Introduction to Neuroaesthetics and Neuro-Art History in the medical school. We’ll be taking case studies through the history of art and examining how sensory perception factors into the ways we can think about those works as they’re experienced by a user in space and time.

Is neuroaesthetics a previously existing field?

Yes. I am critical of the field when it’s done only by neuroscientists, though. It also needs to be done by people who work on aesthetic experience, including art historians and musicologists. It’s about being involved at the ground level of experiment design, where your voice is heard. I love scientists, but they’re not trained in art viewership. A big study came out about the facial characteristics that make a great ruler, based on portraits. It said, “If you want to be a great ruler, this is what your face should look like.” Art historians read it and said, “Yes, except that these ruler portraits conform to a type that has been idealized for thousands of years, and they bear almost no resemblance to what the people actually looked like.”

Barbara Stafford [PhD’72, the William B. Ogden Distinguished Service Professor Emerita of Early Modern to Contemporary Art] wrote a great book and edited a great volume on neuroaesthetics [*Echo Objects: The Cognitive Work of Images* (2007) and *A Field Guide to a New Metafield: Bridging the Humanities-Neurosciences Divide* (2011), both University of Chicago Press]. She gave legitimacy to this field along with art historian David Freedberg. Freedberg worked with a research team in Italy looking at macaque brains. Because of the unique situation where my major collaborator is implanting electrodes in people’s brains multiple times a week, we can more easily do this with humans.

Your research piggybacks on scheduled brain procedures?

There’s no brain research where that’s not the case, because there’s no ethics board that will let you just drill holes into someone’s head for fun.

What sticks with you from your UChicago experience?

The sense of warmth in the Art History department, especially because of women like **Claudia Brittenham**, **Christine Mehring**, and **Persis Berlekamp**. Their willingness to talk to me about life and being a mom in grad school was extraordinarily valuable. I had a different background from most of my peers, whose parents were professors, doctors, or lawyers. My dad loaded trucks, and my mom is a nurse. They not only made me feel good about that; they made me feel like the fact that I had worked so hard was always going to be in my favor. ■

READ AN EXPANDED VERSION OF THIS STORY
at tableau.uchicago.edu/neuro.



TWO PERSPECTIVES ON TIME

AS TOLD TO JEANIE CHUNG

What is time? What does it mean to move through time, and how do our interpretations change over time?

An anthropological poet and a physics-oriented philosopher tackle those questions and more.

Descartes accepted Aristotle's view that the universe is a plenum—that empty space is impossible—which Descartes explained using his "vortex theory" depicted above.



Edgar Garcia is an associate professor in English Language and Literature and Creative Writing. His most recent book, *Emergency: Reading the Popol Vuh in a Time of Crisis* (University of Chicago Press, 2022), examines the K'iche' Mayan creation story through a collection of essays.

My newest book takes on questions of time and change directly. The book is titled *Emergency* because it sees the time of the writing of the Popol Vuh as just that—a time of emergency, of crisis. The Popol Vuh was put to paper in 1702 by a Dominican friar to be included in a four-part manual on converting the Indigenous people of Guatemala. Colonialism was in action. But, as I say, this book is also a creation story communicated to that friar by Maya scholars and elders. In making their world-creation out of colonialism, they show us how world emergence is tangled with emergency, creativity with crisis.

In those moments, time both collapses and restarts. It feels both impossibly long and terribly sudden. While the experiences of the past years in the pandemic could never compare with the 90 percent population loss due to [non-native] diseases and the violence of colonialism, I do feel in the pandemic we got some sense of how the time of crisis collapses, suspends itself, prolongs a sense of being extratemporal, and then restarts in difficult, recursive shifts.

In the most straightforward terms, *Emergency* came from the pandemic—from being stuck at home with what I had in March of 2020. I had just taught a class on the Popol Vuh, and I had all the books at my house. And I started to think with them about my world. My world felt both impossibly contingent in contemporary crisis and deeply captive to longer histories of colonialism, social and environmental crises, and world creation in the Americas.

What is unique to me about the Popol Vuh is that it is a story of creation that doesn't make its world out of primordial darkness, but out of historical darkness—out of the crisis of colonialism. It begins: Here in Christendom, in the time of the teaching of Christ, we will bring light out of the eastern sky. We will bring the sun into existence. That's a different kind of creation story from one that begins in cosmic Nothing.

One idea such world creation in historical crisis prompts is that people are always relearning: that there is not only progressive accumulative knowledge, but also people looping back to their errors—looping back to shortcomings, looping back to inabilities—and that this is, in the end, a beneficial thing. Creation is editing. Creation is revision. Creation is history.

That said, I don't want to overstate the case that it's about a very particular moment in history: a moment of severe crisis. I found that move from such devastation to world articulation really inspiring. And sometimes works of literature do that because they don't happen in mechanical, quantifiable time. They happen in the experiential time of song, memory, and desire.

I called it *Emergency* because within emergency is the word *emergent*. So much of the book's spirit—its critical reflection—comes out of an idea that there are no possibilities without problems. There is no creativity without crisis. There is no world emergence without world-historical emergencies. ■



Thomas Pashby is an assistant professor in Philosophy. He specializes in philosophy of physics—especially the interaction of physics, metaphysics, and the philosophy of science.

The way I approach a philosophical question I'm interested in is to look at the science that seems relevant, then see if we can make any progress on the philosophical question by thinking about the science.

Time is an interesting topic, because for me we're really asking about our experience of time and how that experience gets represented in physics. I follow Donald Williams in regarding our experience of the passage of time as watching events move from the future into the present to the past. Our experience of time, then, is local—we experience the events that happen around us but not distant events.

I'm writing a book on the history of time in physics called "Time from Aristotle to Einstein." Aristotle makes an assumption that amounts to the existence of a shared present, of successive universal *nows*. It's an assumption that everyone before Einstein was prone to make when thinking about time.

Then came Einstein's special relativity, which has no universal present. In this way of thinking, sometimes called *many-fingered time* by physicists, each observer in the universe has their own notion of time, as if they were carrying their own personal watch that tells the time for them alone. We learned that rather than one global structure of time that we experience together, we experience different aspects of a universal structure that looks different depending on where you are in space-time.

One of the debates in the less physics-y philosophy of time is about how our theory of time should deal with tense: past, future, and present. It became the central question in analytic philosophy of time in the early twentieth century: Is tense a real feature of the world, or can tense be reduced to mere events and relations, so that we don't have to worry about the changing of events from future to present to past? I'm currently developing a tensed theory of many-fingered time for relativistic physics.

What's this knowledge good for? Well, physics tells us there are certain effects involving these differences in observers' notions of time that we'd better account for. For example, each GPS satellite needs to have its clock compensated for its motion through Earth's gravitational field. If they didn't compensate for these general relativistic effects, then the whole system wouldn't work and the GPS receiver in your phone would report the wrong position. Another example is in accounting for the lifetimes of excited particles: cosmic rays coming into the atmosphere that could be coming from different galaxies or from the very early universe. Two particles of the same type—say two positrons or two muons—have the same characteristic lifetime, but because of this relativistic effect (time dilation), the faster they move relative to us, the longer they seem to live. As if each particle kept its own personal time.

But the idea that there's something mistaken about the view that you and I share a universal present is interesting and meaningful in its own right. It encourages a relationist perspective, where what we experience as physical objects in the world are these local interactions—mostly with light, with the electromagnetic field. I find the idea that we have a global order emerging from local physics very interesting, and—for me—this takes us right to the very base of reality. ■

OPPOSITE: SCIENCE HISTORY IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ZICH

WATCH GARCIA DISCUSS THE POPOL VUH AT HUMANITIES DAY
at tableau.uchicago.edu/populvuh.



The Department of Linguistics has five assistant professors. Left: Monica Do and Erik Zyman.



GENERATIVE RESEARCH

BY LUCAS MCGRANAHAN

Producing sentences and identities with Linguistics junior faculty

The five junior faculty members in UChicago's Department of Linguistics are investigating a wide range of phenomena using a variety of methods. From theory to experiment to engineering, these assistant professors are "bringing fresh perspectives to traditional lines of inquiry in the department, and opening up creative and exciting new ones," says department chair **Chris Kennedy**, William H. Colvin Professor.

BUILDING BETTER AI

Allyson Ettinger's research on humans and artificial intelligence systems is "motivated by a combination of scientific and engineering goals." On the human side, she uses computational methods to model and test hypotheses about the brain's processing of language. "As a sentence unfolds word by word, how is the brain accessing the meanings of those words and combining them into meanings of phrases? What is the role of



Top to bottom: Sharese King, Tinks (Royâle) Bermúdez, and Allyson Ettinger.

probabilistic understanding?” On the AI side, she works on establishing reliable assessments of the linguistic capabilities of natural language processing (NLP) systems.

“Recent years have seen impressive and dramatic success in the performance of NLP systems in AI, leading many to conclude that humanlike language understanding may have been achieved in these systems,” Ettinger says. Her research group uses insights from linguistics and cognitive science to clarify how we understand human-based standards, adapting controlled methodologies from the study of humans to develop more precise assessments for language capabilities in AI systems. In particular, she focuses on testing their ability “to perform robust and systematic compositional meaning understanding”—that is, to combine the meanings of smaller parts of language to produce more complex meanings.

CONSTRUCTING A SENTENCE

Erik Zyman also investigates how complex linguistic expressions are built out of simple building blocks. As a theoretical syntactician, he is interested in “identifying the fundamental operations that build syntactic structure in human language.” One basic operation, which linguists call *Merge*, combines two words or phrases into a larger unit. Although *Merge* is fundamental to many versions of generative syntax—an approach according to which grammar is governed by deep laws—Zyman says the operation is difficult to define with precision while both satisfying the relevant conceptual requirements (elegance, simplicity, and others) and accounting for the properties that the relevant syntactic structures have in human language. In a forthcoming article in the journal *Syntax*, Zyman says he “develops a novel formal definition of *Merge* that overcomes some drawbacks of previous ones while building on their strengths.”

Zyman aligns himself with a tradition of seeking order beneath complexity: “The second-century Alexandrian syntactician Apollonius Dyscolus was convinced that syntax is fundamentally orderly and rationally comprehensible. Nearly two millennia later, Noam Chomsky, building on a view of Galileo’s, stated that ‘Nature is in fact simple and it’s the task of the scientists to show how that’s the case.’ I agree with both of them.”

CONSTRUCTING AN IDENTITY

Two scholars are examining the social construction of identity through language.

Sharese King, a Neubauer Family Assistant Professor, investigates the relationship between race, place,



and language, examining cross-regional variation in African Americans’ identity and speech. Inspired by her family’s linguistic diversity, King asks “how African Americans perform Blackness across contexts and the role language has in such performances.” She has conducted research with speakers in Bakersfield, California; Rochester, New York; and, most recently, in Chicago through the Chicagoland Language Project, a collaboration with Northwestern University that seeks to “document the diversity of language and life” in different South Side neighborhoods.

King’s research aims to address the social and political consequences of racialized language. In addition to publishing in journals such as *Language*, the *Annual Review of Linguistics*, and the *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, she has been featured on podcasts, trained court reporters on transcribing African American English, and co-authored an op-ed in the *Los Angeles Times* with UChicago psychologist **Katherine D. Kinzler** arguing that

“anti-racist reforms by institutions and individuals will require thinking about race and speech—and opening our minds to the equal value of speech in all its forms.”

Tinks (Royâle) Bermúdez approaches the construction of race—and gender—by looking at humor, investigating how “counterhegemonic humor and counternarratives” can change people’s self-understanding and mediate their relationship to oppressive forces. Bermúdez has examined how the Naso (Teribe) people of Panama use humor to engage in social commentary and mock Indigenous stereotypes, and they argue that a similar process, which they call *euphoric transmutation*, underlies practices of resistance by transgender people of color. The dominant language representing race and gender, they say, “doesn’t allow us to connect with our bodies or ourselves, and it makes us exist in a state of freeze or dissociation.” Countering dissociation, euphoric transmutation—which can involve teasing or other playful inversions of power relations—is meant to be “an active process in everyday life that changes things from the bottom up and gives safety and joy to oppressed people.”

Bermúdez also investigates how interspecies relationships—between humans and both animals and plants—give us a deeper connection to our own bodies and to our selves; in particular, how “practicing interrelation” with other living beings may encourage a better form of relation to transness and Blackness among humans.

CHOOSING YOUR WORDS

“We sometimes lose sight of how impressive language production really is because we do it all the time,” says **Monica Do**, who uses experiments to better understand the relationship between thought and language. “Language involves making choices,” she says. These choices include not only deciding what to talk about but also what form an utterance will take. “We can say ‘A cat attacked your houseplant.’ Or ‘Your houseplant was attacked by a cat.’ Or simply ‘Your houseplant was attacked,’” Do says. “What makes us choose one way of saying things over others?” (She says we might choose the final expression if our cat did the attacking.)

Decisions like these—which can be explicit or subconscious—are the subject of Do’s experiments, which use techniques such as eye-tracking to investigate the many cognitive and social factors affecting speakers’ linguistic choices in English and other languages. “It’s not easy, a little like trying to read people’s minds,” she says. “But the insights we get from our experiments can help to shed light on the commonly utilized but poorly understood task of spontaneous language production.” ■

OPPOSITE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ZICH; THIS PAGE: PHOTOS COURTESY SHARESE KING, TINKS (ROYÂLE) BERMÚDEZ, AND ALLYSON ETTINGER

READ KING’S OP-ED ABOUT LINGUISTIC PREJUDICE at tableau.uchicago.edu/prejudice.





ALL EARS

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09

Four alumni podcasters on life behind the mic

Amid a sea of news, true crime, and celebrity interviews, these alumni bring a humanist's ear to podcasting as they produce shows that are silly, serious, and sometimes both.

WHOA!MANCE
ISABEAU DASHO, AM'17, AND
MORGAN LOTT, AM'17

When **Morgan Lott** and **Isabeau Dasho** were in their first quarter of the Master of Arts Program in the Humanities (MAPH), Lott hosted a party “wherein she made cocktails and narrated the cultural significance of *The Bachelor*,” Dasho recalls. That was how Dasho became a *Bachelor* fan. She returned the favor by recommending something to Lott: a romance novel, Tessa Dare’s *A Week to Be Wicked*.

Lott hadn’t read many romance novels and was bowled over. “I loved it so much and wanted to talk about it endlessly,” she says—and in a way, she’s gotten to, through her and Dasho’s podcast, *Whoa!mance*. In each episode, the cohosts discuss a different romance novel and declare it either a whoa-mance or a no-mance. (“It’s utterly subjective,” Dasho says. “Please don’t ask us our rubric for that.”)

Whoa!mance’s North Star is the notion that romance

novels—an often maligned and dismissed literary genre—can, in fact, be taken seriously, and can be substantive enough to withstand critique. Dasho and Lott always find plenty to talk about, and they’ve discovered an audience of fellow romance readers eager for rich analysis.

“The thing that is most exciting for me is hearing from listeners,” Lott says, whether they “very loudly disagree with us, or agree with us, or are grateful that someone said something.” In return, she and Dasho often highlight listener-recommended books on the podcast.

As cohosts, Dasho and Lott bring distinct points of view. Dasho has been reading romance novels since she was a teenager and knows the genre deeply; Lott has more of an outsider’s freshness of approach. Lott will notice things like a book’s imprint “and then do a massive internet search and discover that, indeed, Playboy had a romance imprint,” Dasho says. “And down the rabbit hole we go.”

Their relationships to the romance genre have changed over the three years they’ve been making *Whoa!mance*. Lott, once the neophyte, has become pickier. “Now I have very strong opinions about what I want to read,” she says. And Dasho, the insider, has become more able to interrogate the things she likes. “It forces me to be critical,” she says, “in a fun way.”



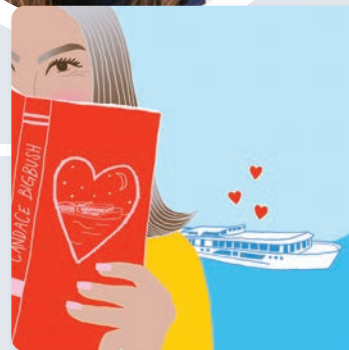
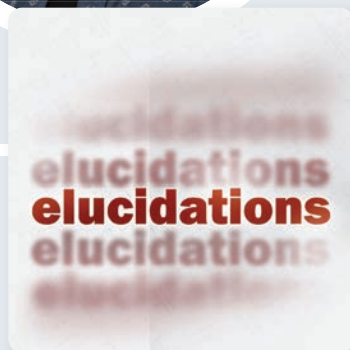
MAPH alumni Morgan Lott and Isabeau Dasho



Philosophy and Computer Science alumnus Matt Teichman



MAPH alumna Heather Huntington



LEFT TO RIGHT: PHOTO COURTESY ISABEAU DASHO AND MORGAN LOTT / WHOA! MANCE ILLUSTRATION BY MARY REISCHMANN; PHOTO COURTESY MATT TEICHMAN / ELUCIDATIONS GRAPHIC COURTESY MATT TEICHMAN; PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARA CASEY-VISCONTI / UP A RIVER ILLUSTRATION COURTESY AURAL STORIES

ELUCIDATIONS

MATT TEICHMAN, AM'09, PHD'15, SM'18

Podcasts, in **Matt Teichman's** view, possess a "secret superpower. You can learn stuff without it taking any extra time," he says. "It's like a trick."

He discovered this superpower as a graduate student in philosophy, filling his ears with every podcast related to his field he could find. "I just thought it was amazing that I could listen to podcasts for 15 minutes and get the lay of the land in some area of philosophy"—all while washing the dishes, he says.

With his long-running podcast *Elucidations*, Teichman pays forward that favor to other philosophy-minded dish-doers, bus stop-waiters, and putters of all stripes. Since 2008 Teichman has interviewed 144 people "of philosophical interest," according to the show's description (some are philosophy professors, but plenty are not).

Teichman's favorite episodes include his conversations with Georgetown's Quill Kukla on reproductive risk ("it brings together all this really interesting stuff about science, trust in scientific results, and how to make decisions on the basis of your nonexpert understanding of scientific results," he says); UChicago teaching fellow **Emily Dupree**, AM'14, JD'19, PhD'21, on the rationality of revenge; and Notre Dame's Patricia Blanchette on for-

mal logic ("I think we should light every logic textbook on fire and just have her rewrite them all").

The show is meant for everyone—a goal Teichman has worked hard to achieve. "I definitely don't want to [make] a podcast that you'd have to be doing a PhD to understand," he says. "I've had a few cases where someone started out in conference mode, and then I just asked them a normal question, like 'What do you think of hamburgers?'"

Elucidations is "about modeling the kind of communication that I think would be good for public outreach but also internally to academia itself," he says. "When you state your thing in plain English, it's a win-win."

UNSOLVED DEATH MURDER CRIMES, A MID-SEMESTER NIGHT'S DREAM, THE KISS, AND UP A RIVER (WITH DANIELLE EVENSON) HEATHER HUNTINGTON, AM'99

Heather Huntington and Danielle Evenson's first podcast was a joke—literally. *Unsolved Death Murder Crimes*, which they cowrote and coproduced, was a Christmas-themed true crime spoof investigating whether Grandma really did get run over by a reindeer.

The two comedy writers quickly discovered that podcasts have one nice advantage over film and television. Making movies and TV shows is slow and expensive and

relies on the fickle whims of producers and studio executives. With podcasts, by contrast, "it's sort of the Wild West right now," Huntington says. "There are a lot more yeses."

In the last two years alone, they've been able to write and release three original podcasts with two different studios: *A Mid-Semester Night's Dream* and *The Kiss* with Meet Cute and *Up a River* with Aural Stories. "It was so fun," Huntington says. "And fast," Evenson adds.

Unlike screenplays, where "you need to hit your dark night of the soul by 'this' page," Huntington says, "there isn't really a prescribed format" for the podcasts she and Evenson write. They learned as they worked, experimenting with episode lengths and story formats. "Writing for the ear is so much different than writing for the eye," Evenson says. "It takes a while to hone."

Though the medium was new to Huntington, some of the subject matter harked back to her time in the MAPH program at UChicago. *A Mid-Semester Night's Dream*—an adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* set in a graduate program—"is very loosely based on my experience at UChicago," she says, and is a nod to her thesis adviser, the late David Bevington, whose Shakespeare classes she loved.

"MAPH directly contributed to that podcast," she says. "And I feel that it's a very ridiculous surprise that, for such an academic place, what I wound up doing from my time there is writing dirty jokes for podcasts." ■

GET PODCASTING TIPS FROM THE ALUMNI at tableau.uchicago.edu/podcasts.



In addition to translating Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell created two paintings—including the one shown here—to adorn different editions of the book.

DO THEY SAY DUDE IN INDIA?

PHOTOS COURTESY DAISY ROCKWELL

BY CARRIE GOLUS, AB'91, AM'93

Daisy Rockwell, winner of the International Booker Prize, on the subtleties of literary translation

Early in her graduate studies in South Asian Languages and Civilizations, **Daisy Rockwell**, AB'91, AM'98, PhD'98, took a translation seminar with A. K. Ramanujan, a poet, linguist, folklorist, “and a beautiful literary translator,” Rockwell says. Ramanujan was one of the few academics she encountered who valued translation as an end in itself: “The seminar was eye-opening and continues to inform the way I think about my practice.”

Since 2013 Rockwell has worked as a translator of Hindi and Urdu texts into English. In 2022 she was awarded the International Booker Prize, in conjunction with Hindi author Geetanjali Shree, for the English version of *Ret Samadhi*, published as *Tomb of Sand*.

In addition to her work as a translator, Rockwell is a painter and the author of the novel *Taste* (Foxhead Books, 2014).

When did you consider translating as a career?

I taught at Loyola University Chicago for five years in a visiting position. Then I took a job at the University of California, Berkeley, as the vice chair for the Institute for South Asia Studies. I was there for three years. When I left Berkeley, I didn't have a plan of any kind.

I used to translate in graduate school. I actually had

a book-length completed project, a book of short stories by Upendranath Ashk [*Hats and Doctors* (Penguin, 2013)], about whom I wrote my dissertation.

Around 2010 I had a chance email exchange with a graduate student at New York University, a translator, who gave me a contact at Penguin India. The new editor there was interested in Indian writing from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, which is what I was interested in. I sent her that manuscript and she took it.

So you're translating for the Indian market?

I know, it sounds funny. But the American and British markets are very hostile to South Asian translations. I—and many other translators I know—have tried repeatedly and gotten no interest whatsoever.

Most people in India are multilingual, but that can mean many things. If you went to English-speaking schools, you might be able to read Hindi, but haltingly, even if it's your mother tongue. You might not know literary language particularly well, because there's a lot of vocabulary that one acquires through reading.

India has a huge English-language publishing industry. The number of Indians who read in English is probably only about 1 percent of the population. But it's a big population.



So your readers might know the culture better than you do.

My main audience is either South Asian or South Asian diaspora. They might have a small amount of relevant knowledge—or they could be capable of reading the book in Hindi, but just don't.

I now conceptualize my readership as this huge tent, and I'm trying to keep everybody in it.

You went back and forth a lot with the author of Tomb of Sand. Is that common?

It depends. Some authors have no interest.

Geetanjali's writing is very, very idiosyncratic and poetic. There were quite a lot of things that I simply could not understand based on a dictionary. I would show the text to native speakers, who can sometimes perceive things I can't, and they said, Sorry, I have no idea what's going on.

I don't think writers should have to answer the kinds of questions that I had to ask her: What were you thinking here? Why did you do this? In theory, they should be left alone to write. But I had to ask.

Since she speaks English, did she consider doing the translation herself, as some authors do?

Indian English can be very formal. Often when Indian authors try to self-translate, they have trouble getting it out of a formal register.

But Geetanjali never wanted to self-translate. She wants to concentrate on writing. People often ask her, Why do you even write in Hindi at all? She could write in English and immediately have a bigger market. She finds it disturbing that people ask why she's writing in her mother tongue.

She didn't like the title Tomb of Sand. What would her choice have been?

She brings this up every chance she gets. Sometimes we have arguments onstage. We're like a married couple. I got my way, so she has the right to complain.

The title in Hindi is *Ret Samadhi*. *Ret* means "sand." But *samadhi* means a wide variety of things. To her, *tomb* means a marble mausoleum with a dead body inside. I feel like *tomb* has a wider meaning in English. A tomb of sand is obviously not made of marble. It becomes a

question mark, almost a micro fiction: What could that be? What is a tomb of sand?

But to Geetanjali, she's lost *samadhi*, which can also mean a deep, trancelike state. That was what she meant. She likes to point out that it's actually in the Oxford English Dictionary. She wanted the title to be *Sand Samadhi*. I say that sounds like a beach yoga class.

You painted the artwork for the cover of Tomb of Sand. Is this a first in publishing?

Maybe? What's funny is before my translation came out, the original Hindi book had gone through a new edition because we found a bunch of typos while I was translating. So I made a different painting for the new Hindi edition.

Having a translator do the cover at all is unusual. But to have the translator do the cover of the original text is very strange—so strange that nobody has even remarked on it.

How did it feel to win the International Booker?

Surreal. Translators don't get out much, especially during COVID. So a gala event was a bit shocking—but thrilling.

It was a difficult book to translate and took me much longer than other books have. It doesn't necessarily happen in life that you get an enormous prize for something that was really hard to do.

And honestly, if we hadn't been recognized by the Booker, probably no one would have read our book—because it's long and hard. Geetanjali and I joke that before we got long-listed, only our husbands had read it.

In Tomb of Sand, I noticed the word dude. Do you translate into American English, or do they say dude in India?

That's a great question. I try my hardest not to use American English. Whilst I'm not writing in Indian English, I have to echo it a bit.

Tomb of Sand is the first contemporary book I have translated. *Dude* was something I felt tempted to use in certain settings, but I wasn't sure. So I put out a Twitter poll, which specifically asked for responses only from people in South Asia. The vast majority said everybody—but especially young people—say it.

English people think it's an Americanism. But people all around the world are saying *dude*—except the British. ■

I don't think writers should have to answer the kinds of questions that I had to ask her:

What were you thinking here?

Why did you do this?

—Daisy Rockwell, AB'91, AM'98, PhD'98

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THE PAGE AND THE STAGE

BY MAUREEN SEARCY

Khouloud Gargouri studies women on stage and fictional characters in the French-speaking world.

Khouloud “Lou” Gargouri, a fourth-year PhD student in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures and the Committee on Theater and Performance Studies (TAPS), researches contemporary francophone literature and theater, with a special focus on female solo performances. Gargouri grew up in Tunisia, an Arabic-speaking country with a francophone heritage deriving from its colonial past. She spoke with *Tableau* about politics, comedy, and memories of fictional characters.

Why did you choose to focus on one-woman shows?

Women are really taking the stage—for entertainment and to spread awareness about women’s issues such as abortion, immigration, racism, and breaking taboos. I’m particularly interested in the use of the stage to spread political messages about female history and oppression, and how theater can become a way to fight back.

For my doctoral research, supported by the François Furet Travel Grant, I attended 26 plays at a theater festival in Avignon. One performance helped me ground my doctoral work: *Gardiennes*, a play written and performed by Fanny Cabon, who stages her own family line over a century in a series of ten monologues illustrating different women as they struggle with abortion, alternating between comic and tragic.

Does your research focus on all French-speaking countries or mainly France?

At first I was very ambitious: France, Tunisia, Morocco, and Canada. But it’s too much for a PhD timeline. Right now I’m focusing on France and conducting research in Paris for the academic year.

What brought you to UChicago?

After college in Tunis, I taught French at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. I wanted to stay in America because it’s more about my interdisciplinary path—it’s validated and valued in the US. I spent one year at Tufts University studying French literature and started performing stand-up in Boston comedy clubs. When I saw that I could combine theater and literature at UChicago, it seemed perfect.

What does your comedy focus on?

It all started because I felt that people around me knew so little about Tunisia. I open my stand-up by introducing Tunisia’s geography and repeating all the weird and funny comments I get when people learn that I’m from there. (No, it’s not “Indonesia”; yes, I am a White African; yes, I speak Arabic and can perfectly say “Allahu Akbar.”)



You mentioned attending plays and taking a course in stand-up at Cours Florent, a prestigious drama school in Paris. What else does your current research entail?

Spending time in the Bibliothèque Nationale, attending conferences, speaking with directors. I’m also working with Françoise Lavocat from Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, who was in Chicago last year as a visiting professor. The project is about memory of fictional characters—how did you meet certain characters, under what circumstances? We first surveyed in the US, China, Japan, Russia, and France—of course—as well as other countries. I can tell you that Harry Potter is kind of on top.

I was curious about memories in my home country, and Professor Lavocat was eager to expand the survey, so I collaborated with fellow Tunisians and collected around 136 answers.

What kind of differences did you notice?

We noticed Americans tend to discover favorite characters by themselves, whereas in Russia or Tunisia, which are more family oriented, relatives introduce characters. The survey is ongoing but so far, my major finding was that, despite its heavy colonial heritage, Tunisia has its own references. The most cited book was written by the Tunisian author Mahmoud Messadi. ■

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REMEMBERING JANEL M. MUELLER

BY SARA PATTERSON



Janel M. Mueller
(1938–2022)

Janel Mulder Mueller (1938–2022), who was the William Rainey Harper Professor Emerita in the Department of English Language and Literature and the first woman to lead the Division of the Humanities (or any academic division) at UChicago, will be remembered for training generations of young scholars in and beyond English Renaissance studies, many of whom became leaders in their fields. Some of their reflections are collected below.

Laurie Shannon, AM'85, PhD'96, the Franklyn Bliss Snyder Professor of English Literature at Northwestern University

"Janel Mueller's power was in seeing how to make dry, historical rhetorical texts electrifying for those studying with her," Shannon says. "She was the single most influential person in my life and career. I have served as the

chair of the English department at Northwestern University, so I have been both administrator and professor. Janel inspired me because she showed me how to combine intellectual pursuits and administrative skills to shape my institution."

Julie Carlson, AM'79, PhD'85, professor of English, University of California, Santa Barbara

"No one else ever has analyzed and evaluated my work so thoroughly and thoughtfully," Carlson says. After Carlson published her second book, *England's First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley* (John Hopkins University Press, 2007), she visited Mueller for a week at her vacation home in Douglas, Michigan. Mueller wanted to discuss Carlson's book and had placed markers in it, taking it "seriously but humanely. We had long, meaningful conversations about the arguments in the book."

Gregory Kneidel, AM'94, PhD'98, professor of English, University of Connecticut

According to Kneidel, Mueller could be both rigorous and kind. "Janel returned an ink-stained draft of a dissertation chapter (a draft I thought was in good shape) with a note saying that I had a lot of things to work on while she was gone in Paris for a few months," he says. "Those were a stressful couple of months, and I was sort of dreading her return. But when Janel came back, she brought an adorable green-and-white Babar the Elephant striped onesie for my newly born son. Everything on the dissertation worked out fine in the end."

Paula McQuade, AM'91, PhD'98, professor of English and Catholic studies, DePaul University

McQuade recalls Mueller's generosity as a mentor. "Fifteen years after receiving my PhD, I wrote a book on early modern women writers titled *Catechisms and Women's Writing in Seventeenth-Century England* [Cambridge University Press, 2017]. Cambridge University Press tentatively accepted the manuscript, but the editor had some concerns about my manuscript transcriptions. I reached out to Janel, hoping perhaps that she could recommend some resources. Instead, Janel immediately offered to read and correct the entire book, checking my transcriptions against photocopies of the original manuscripts. She did this during a snowy week in Chicago, while awaiting proofs of her own, final book titled *John Donne* [Oxford University Press, 2015]."

Micheline White, associate professor of English, Carleton University

White studied with Mueller at Loyola University Chicago. In 2012 she received a gift copy of her former professor and mentor's new edition of *Katherine Parr: Complete Works and Correspondence* (University of Chicago Press, 2011). "I thought I would quickly peruse the volume and use it as a supplement for a unit that I teach on Queen Elizabeth I. In fact, Janel's gift quickly and unexpectedly transformed the trajectory of my career. After reading some of the texts and pursuing a few of Janel's intriguing footnotes, I found myself caught up in a series of projects that have become the center of my research program since 2013." ■

LEARN MORE ABOUT MUELLER'S LIFE AND LEGACY
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