

TABEAU



THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO | FALL 2017

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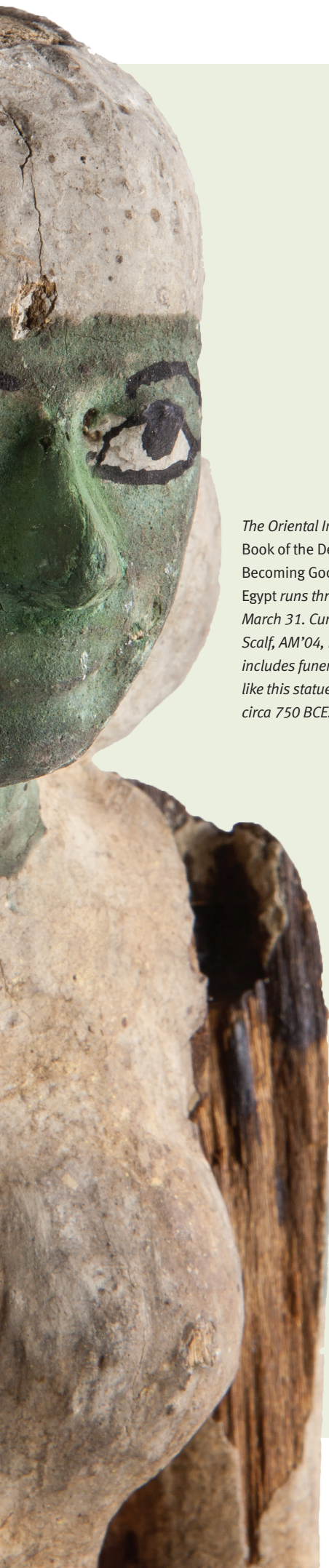
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ON THE COVER

Valentina Kulagina's *International Working Women's Day Is the Fighting Day of the Proletariat* is part of the Smart Museum's exhibition *Revolution Every Day*, which juxtaposes Soviet graphic art with video and film. From curators including Robert Bird of Cinema and Media Studies and Zachary Cahill, MFA'07, of the Gray Center, the exhibit runs through January 14, 2018. Lithograph on paper, Ne Boltai! Collection, 1934. © 2017 Estate of Valentina Kulagina/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.





The Oriental Institute's Book of the Dead: Becoming God in Ancient Egypt runs through March 31. Curated by Foy Scalf, AM'04, PhD'14, it includes funerary items like this statue of Isis, circa 750 BCE.

Dear Alumni and Friends,

Publicly focused work from the Humanities Division punctuated the 2016–17 academic calendar. This scholarship and artistry emanate from the same intellectual and creative impulses that inspire all our research, and it flourishes through the support we receive from our generous donors. Here is just a sampling of the public-facing work that appeared last year.

October began with **Augusta Read Thomas's** (Music) Ear Taxi Festival, a six-day celebration of new music, featuring 100 compositions and 54 world premieres performed by 500 musicians in seven locations around the city. This marathon garnered press from across the country, leading the *Chicago Tribune* to name Thomas one of its "Chicagoans of the Year" for 2016.

Around the same time, **Christine Mehring** (Art History) launched a series of scholarly events, performances, and exhibitions to celebrate the conservation of Wolf Vostell's Cadillac encased in concrete, *Concrete Traffic*, a Fluxus artwork commissioned by Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art in 1970. The car's trek from the Loop through the city to the University's parking garage was colorfully described in the *Wall Street Journal*.

In January the English translation of **Philippe Desan's** (Romance Languages and Literatures) book on Montaigne (*Montaigne: A Life*) led writers for the *New Yorker* and the *Wall Street Journal* to highlight "the enduring wisdom of Montaigne." Montaigne's critique of sixteenth-century social order, they noted, forecasts analogous assessments of later societies that were similarly "torn apart by political idols."

In May the honor of delivering the National Endowment for the Humanities's Jefferson Lecture,



Anne Walters Robertson

the highest honor for the field's intellectual accomplishment, went to **Martha Nussbaum** (Philosophy, Classics, Law). Her wonderfully accessible discourse on anger in ancient thought illustrated how this passion must be turned to positive ends to inspire constructive change.

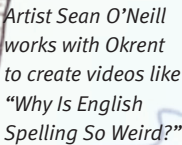
In June **William Pope.L's** (DoVA) installation *Claim (Whitney Version)* at the Whitney Museum was awarded the museum's \$100,000 Bucksbaum Award. Those experiencing the work confirmed that it was a uniquely multisensory experience, engaging the eyes and even the nose to address the representation of collective identity.

And on the eve of our nation's birthday, **Eric Slauter** (English) was interviewed on WBEZ about patriotism. The word originated not during the American Revolution, Slauter said, but in the nineteenth century, with its use reaching an apex during the Civil War.

These diverse examples of publicly directed work form part of the large corpus of deeply insightful books, articles, and creative endeavors that our faculty produce each year. We are grateful to our supporters for making all the research of the Division possible, and we look to them to continue to strengthen our capability to do such work. Just as our scholarship in the Division ponders all aspects of the human condition, our public-facing work directly enriches all our lives.

Anne W. Robertson

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



BY CARRIE GOLUS, AB'91, AM'93

Arika Okrent, PhD'04 (Psychology and Linguistics), owes her writing career to procrastination. When she was supposed to be working on her dissertation on irregular verbs, she found herself browsing the Regenstein's collection of books on artificial languages. She was so curious, she ended up writing a book, *In the Land of Invented Languages: Esperanto Rock Stars, Klingon Poets, Loglan Lovers, and the Mad Dreamers Who Tried to*

Since 2012 Okrent has been a regular contributor to the publication *Mental Floss*. Her short pieces are compellingly clickable: “The Grammar Rules of 3 Commonly Disparaged Dialects,” “The Signed Lingua Franca that Once Spanned North America,” and “Why Do We Use the Same Voice to Talk to Babies and Dogs?”

In 2015 Okrent began making videos for *Mental Floss* in collaboration with illustrator Sean O'Neill: "Why Do We Have Irregular Verbs?" "How Do We Know Languages Are Related?" "Octopi, Platypi, Walri, Oh My!" and more. Last year she won the Linguistics Journalism Award from the Linguistic Society of America for work that "reflects accuracy and timeliness ... but is also appealing to nonspecialist audiences."

You just happened upon the artificial languages books?

Yeah. It's rather amazing that the University of Chicago Library had so many. These are the kind of books that language inventors send to every library in the world, every government office in the world, hoping to get some kind of traction. Most institutions get rid of them.

The invented languages book is how I got started as a writer. I hadn't published anything before. I went to an Esperanto congress at MIT. I took notes and interviewed people, approximating being a reporter. That turned into an article in the *American Scholar*. Then I went to a Klingon conference and that became another article. Then it turned into the book.

What were the really big surprises of the book?

How many languages there were. People came up with this idea to invent a language over and over again through history, but when they did, it was informed by the preoccupations of the time. So in the seventeenth century it was rational languages [such as John Wilkins's Philosophical Language]. Then came the international Esperanto languages, and now the purely creative imagined-world languages.

Do you have a new book project?

I come up with things, then discard them. One that I've been trying to make happen for a while is on inner speech. Is it actually language, is it thought, or is it between language and thought? How linguistic is it?

I found out not everyone has this. I definitely have language in my head. Some people say they don't. They have more imagistic or visual ways of thinking.

Which of your Mental Floss pieces are you most proud of?

The ones where I try to condense something complicated and hard. For example, "How Do We Know How Languages Are Related?" This was a five-minute explanation of historical linguistics.

"Why Is English Spelling So Weird?" was one of the first videos I did. I thought it was going to be easy. It was actually pretty difficult. I've learned so much about historical linguistics and etymology; things I didn't study in my graduate program.

Does writing for the internet shape what you do?

You know how successful any particular thing is. You can see how many likes, how many shares, how many comments. That starts to drive you.

I could do so well with "Things You're Doing Wrong with Language." Any list that's "Top 10 Horrible Mistakes People Make and You

Do you come up with all of the topics yourself?

Yeah. Sometimes one of my kids asks me a question. "Why does Mrs. have an 'r' in it?" Then I'll go find out.

My skill is not that I know everything about languages. I know where to find out and how to find out, and how to avoid pitfalls.

You have a master's from Gallaudet University, historically a school for the deaf. What was that like?

All the classes in the linguistics department were taught in ASL. I had enough to get by. But I wasn't really good at it. I prided myself at being



One [thing] I've been trying to make happen for a while is on inner speech.

—Arika Okrent, PhD'04

Should Know About" will do great. But I don't like language shaming, plus most of those articles are wrong.

I'm not interested in punctuation. I will do the odd Oxford comma article once in a while.

Speaking of Oxford commas, are you pro or con?

That's what I try to avoid. The most recent video about commas was "5 Comma Types that Could Make or Break a Sentence." One of them is the Oxford comma. Why do people pay so much attention to that one?

That's my antireaction to the surefire reaction. Punctuation is very big, especially if it can break you into warring camps.

good at languages up to that point. That was a humbling experience. The switch to a visual modality made a difference for me.

Why do academics use language in a way that's so impenetrable to outsiders?

It's shorthand. You can either spend six sentences explaining precisely what you mean, or you can use a term that's shared in our group. It's not obtuse if you're in the group.

Writing about linguistics, it would be so easy for me to say "phoneme." We all know what a phoneme is in linguistics, but the average person doesn't. Usually I say something like, "speech sound." I do often long to use the jargon, because it's clear what it means. ■

LEARN MORE ABOUT OKRENT'S WORK at tableau.uchicago.edu/okrent.

Bob Daily, conferring here with *Superior Donuts* star and executive producer Jermaine Fowler, thinks a life outside showbiz makes for a better writer.

HOLLYWOOD HUMANISTS

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09

Three alumni trade the City of Big Shoulders for the City of Angels.

We live in a screen-bound age of Netflix, binge watching, and “peak TV.” *Tableau* spoke with three alumni whose work in the entertainment industry keeps us tuned in: **Bob Daily**, AM’86, executive producer of the CBS comedy *Superior Donuts*; **John Leverage**, AM’69, senior vice president of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, which awards the Emmys; and **Courtney Saladino**, AM’08, the head of film and television for Junction Entertainment, where she develops and produces scripts for Jon Turteltaub, the director of *National Treasure* (2004), *While You Were Sleeping* (1995), and *Cool Runnings* (1993).

How did you end up in your current job?

Daily: I grew up a TV junkie, obsessively watching reruns of *The Dick Van Dyke Show* on WGN every night as a kid. I should have realized that there

was someone writing those stories, but I don’t think it ever occurred to me as a career path. I briefly considered going into academia, but after getting my master’s, I realized academia was not for me. I remember a professor telling me my writing style was “too conversational,” and I thought, “Maybe he’s trying to tell me something here.” I became a journalist for a number of years in Chicago and wrote for national publications, and then some friends convinced me to move to LA and try my hand at television writing.

Leverence: Some of my teachers at Chicago were interested in popular culture—Westerns, classical and hardboiled detective stories, science fiction, etc.—which was almost heretical for a legacy school like Chicago. I got interested in formulaic literature, so the Western, the classical detective story, the hardboiled detective story, science fiction. After I left Chicago I got my

PHOTO COURTESY CBS



John Leverence



Courtney Saladino

I decided I don't want to just talk about movies—I actually want to make them.
—Courtney Saladino, AM'08

PhD at the Center for the Study of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. I came to California to teach in the radio and television department at Steven Spielberg's alma mater, Cal State, Long Beach.

I heard about the Television Academy job by a serendipitous coincidence, through a friend who was working there who thought it would be a good fit. So in the fall of 1979 I talked to the people at the Television Academy and told them about myself—they were very impressed that I went to the University of Chicago, I have to tell you—and in January of 1980, I was hired to run the Primetime Emmy Awards.

Saladino: I grew up here in LA, so I've always been around the business. But I got my undergrad in comp lit, and I had come to Chicago thinking I was maybe going to eventually get a PhD and teach. After I went through the MAPH program, I decided I don't want to just talk about movies—I actually want to make them. So that's why I came back to LA. I certainly had no idea when I came into the business that I was going to be a producer. I thought I wanted

to direct. That was because I love filmmakers and felt like I had a strong point of view, but after getting some experience and working for some of the best producers in the business, I realized that what I really wanted to do was what they were doing.

How does your humanities background help your work?

Daily: When I decided I wanted to be a television writer, I approached it from an academic background. I would watch episodes sitting in my apartment in Chicago with a legal pad, outlining the episodes scene by scene—what is the act break, what is the narrative arc of the story, and how is that carried out by the writer? I would very critically watch episodes and try to teach myself story structure.

When I was writing for *Frasier*, I remember one episode I wrote a Philip Glass [AB'56] joke. *Frasier* is probably the only show on television where you could actually write a Philip Glass joke. I definitely made good use of my humanities background then.

Leverence: The three-legged stool of structure, function, and value was the way we were taught to think about the humanities, the arts, and the creative process—an education that serves one well no matter what professional path it might lead to, and it's particularly useful to me with the work I do here, with the aesthetic products that are coming off the studio assembly line, one after another.

Saladino: It made me more of an active viewer, both as an audience member watching a film and as a reader of material. When I'm looking at a shot or a sequence in a film or on the page, I'm thinking, why that choice, and what does that choice reveal about the story or help the story or maybe not help the story? What are the ways in which it challenges you as the viewer, or doesn't challenge you? How does the craftsmanship of the material affect you, or does it have an effect?

What advice do you have for other alumni who want to work in entertainment?

Saladino: You're going to be told no far more times than you're told yes. It's a business of rejection: you are constantly being told no for any number of reasons that make no sense to you. You just have to say, "OK! On to the next thing." The other piece of advice I'd give is to remember that while we love cinema in all its artistic glory, at the end of the day it's the entertainment business. Having business acumen is invaluable.

Daily: Almost nobody has the same path. I've worked with people who were playwrights, and I've worked with a lot of stand-up comics; I worked with a brilliant writer who has written four novels. I came in from journalism. When I'm looking to hire people, I love finding people who have had life experiences before they became a television writer that they can draw on. They've worked in offices, they've had crappy jobs, they've traveled. Ultimately you have to have something to write about, so I think people who have led a life outside of the entertainment industry are more interesting writers.

Leverence: Persist. ■

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THESE ALUMNI IN HOLLYWOOD at tableau.uchicago.edu/hollywood.



AS TOLD TO JEANIE CHUNG

Translation is often the closest way to read a text. Two scholars discuss the process, its pitfalls, and ultimately its payoffs.



Jason Grunebaum is senior lecturer in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations (SALC) and a member of the College's Creative Writing Advisory Committee. He has translated two books by novelist Uday Prakash from Hindi into English.

A lot of stories in the world of literary translation start with accidents. The particular happy accident that led to my current project was *New York Magazine* running a feature in 2007 about the world's best untranslated novels. When they contacted me for a suggestion, [SALC professor] **Ulrike Stark** mentioned *The Tale of the Missing Man* by Manzoor Ahtesham. I looked at it, loved it, and after I recommended it to the magazine, we said we should start translating it together. [Editor's note: Grunebaum and Stark's translation, expected in 2018 from Northwestern University Press, won Northwestern's inaugural Global Humanities Translation Prize in April.]

We have a funny relationship to translation in the Anglophone world. There are two ideas out there that are totally incompatible with one another: One is that translation is just a mechanical process of moving one set of signs from a stable system to another set of signs with a stable system. The other one is that it's impossible.

A translation can't be a carbon copy, obviously. It's a new original work. The ideal would be, for example, if we took the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami—who has been translated into pretty much every language—and got people together who read the Italian, the French, the Chinese, and the English versions of his novel *Kafka on the Shore*, they all would feel like they had read the same book. But each translation remains its own original work.

The goal is to be able to hear in my ear what that author might sound like in English. It's very much a question of voice. With Uday, I feel fairly confident that at least I can hear one version of what he might sound like in English. That's the beauty of translation; there are infinite possibilities. Like jazz improvisation. Or the way Glenn Gould playing Bach versus somebody else who might bring out different aspects of the work or the composition.

In the classroom, once we get to second-year Hindi, we discuss translation a lot. One of my and the students' favorite units is to look at nine different translations of a famous Urdu short story called "Toba Tek Singh," by Saadat Hasan Manto. It imagines, after partition, the exchange of inmates from mental asylums. It's a great story, and there are many different translations. We read the story and closely examine the different translations. This opens up extremely productive discussions about both languages, meaning in Hindi, meaning in English, different translation challenges and strategies, and cultural recontextualization. ■



Larissa Brewer-García is assistant professor in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. Her book in progress, "Beyond Blackness: Translation and the Making of Blackness in Colonial Spanish America," focuses on black interpreters in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century South America.

There is an incredible Jesuit treatise about how to use translation to evangelize black men and women in the early transatlantic slave trade to Spanish America. I was struck by the statement it makes, that the entire project depends on finding the right interpreters—who happened to be other slaves. At that time there were more than 50 different languages being spoken in the Caribbean slave port of Cartagena de Indias, in modern-day Colombia.

Some fundamental concepts of Christianity might be difficult to translate to non-Christians, but what's curious about the Jesuits' writing is that they in no way want to convey that translation is impossible in such a context because it also would suggest that their evangelical project could come to an impasse. So they use an Augustinian notion of the universal sign that is God to justify using chains of enslaved interpreters to evangelize groups of newly arrived slaves.

These translation strategies were very different from those used for New World natives at the same time. For example, it was decided early on that missionaries should not translate "God" into native languages but instead import the Spanish term "*Dios*." Because using a native word might evoke or reinforce notions of a "wrong" kind of religiosity—"a god" instead of "*the* God"—you have to say, "there's this divinity who's a father whose name you will now know as *Dios*." No such rules were made regarding how African interpreters should translate Christian concepts to black populations. As a result, African interpreters generally had more control over the messages they translated than other New World intermediaries.

African interpreters were able to parlay this special influence into shaping certain documents about black men and women during the period. I found that texts produced in collaboration with African interpreters use a unique notion of blackness that's entirely positive. People of African descent are not described as "black *but* beautiful," as stated in the Song of Songs, but rather black, radiant, *and* beautiful. With this, I see the interpreters appropriating some Christian language about light to present blackness in a new way—changing it from a question of pigment associated with enslavement, sin, or bad luck to one associated with brilliance and beauty.

I've also started a new translation project about writings about black saints in seventeenth-century Spanish America. For this project I am translating a collection of early hagiographies composed in Spanish into English.

Translation is important for making works like these accessible to a wider audience interested in the African diaspora who can't read Spanish. ■

CHECK OUT EXAMPLES OF THESE SCHOLARS' WORK at tableau.uchicago.edu/translation.

DIGGING DEEP

BY MAUREEN SEARCY

In the classroom with the Stuart Tave Fellows.

Each year up to five Stuart Tave Teaching Fellowships are awarded to advanced humanities graduate students. Fellows teach an undergraduate course of their own design, reflecting their intellectual interests and providing engaging and broadly appealing subject matter suitable for their department's curriculum. Tableau sat in on three such classes this spring.

Popular Science and New Media: Methods, Theory, and Practice

Mikki Kressbach, Cinema and Media Studies

Mikki Kressbach—who specializes in the representation of infectious disease in contemporary film, television, and video games—teaches her course on science and medicine through emerging media and technologies in a small dim auditorium in Cobb Hall. About half the students are science majors, and the other half study the humanities.

Kressbach's course asks students to interact with media and everyday technologies, such as watching movies and using smartphone apps and fitness trackers. She wants students to explore "ordinary and often overlooked encounters with science," she explains.

Week six on the syllabus is called "Citizen Scientists: Gaming Science and Medicine." The second class of the week begins with a discussion of how video games train users in perception, knowledge, muscle memory, and reflexes. Learning is embedded in video game infrastructure, Kressbach explains, and games have been used in surgical training.

The students watch a video of physicians using a hospital-based laparoscopic surgery training system and compare their actions with the skills theoretically gained from video games, such as hand-eye coordination and ambidexterity. They watch a clip of a game called *Underground*, developed to train surgeons but marketed to the public on the Wii gaming platform. While the game might be fun for laypeople, students quickly identify drawbacks to such training for actual surgeons.

Digital gaming can be choppy, denying the ability to make precise micro-movements, says one student. Another student thinks the lag may be beneficial because "you have to anticipate the lag to effectively play the game." Kressbach asks if such a lag would pose problems in real surgery. One student suggests that learning on and mastering an imperfect system would make real surgery easier. Another student counters that training on a game teaches the surgeon to master the system and not the skills themselves.

Yet another student praises the platform: "You don't even realize you're learning. It's subconscious." This statement prompts another student to wonder, "Why would we want surgeons to learn subconsciously?"

Kressbach considers the difference between learning and practicing. "Training is hard," she says, "but execution shouldn't be."

Islamic Political Thought in the Global Era

Madeleine Elfenbein, AM'11, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

From 2015 through 2017, **Madeleine Elfenbein**, AM'11, helped lead the Race and Pedagogy Working Group—created by graduate students and affiliated with the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture; UChicagoGRAD; and the Chicago Center for Teaching. That experience, and teaching in the Core's Classics of Social and Political Thought sequence, inspired a class investigating how Islam "has remained a vital source of principles and doctrines for a diverse array of political thinkers and movements over the course of the past two centuries."

The quarter's study has included the modernization of Turkey, Islam and Blackness in America, and the Muslim Brotherhood. Sandwiched between Islamic feminism in week seven and secularism in Islamic political thought in week nine, week eight focuses on contemporary jihads and jihadisms, to explore how jihadi thinkers use Islamic texts and traditions toward specific political ends.

The class, held in Wieboldt Hall, begins with a look ahead to the following class's assignment, which included watching a four-minute Islamic State (IS) group video. Many students have already seen it and are eager to discuss it and other IS-produced media.

One student has read *Rumiyah* magazine, an IS publication. He notes that the issue was "written in English for English-speaking readers by people who speak English well." A column called Just Terror Tactics, he says, could be a headline on the cover of *US Weekly*.



The game Underground, which simulates surgery, was one focus of Mikki Kressbach's class on popular science and new media.

The class continues to discuss the stylistic choices of jihadist media and how their treatment is tailored to certain aspects of the message. Propaganda by and about Osama bin Laden was “appropriately rustic in its production value,” a student says. “You saw jihadis in a cave filmed with a camcorder. The low quality of the production matches the pristine brutality of their thought.”

Current jihadist media is higher quality: “Articles have been laid out in InDesign; they’ve got video fades going,” the student says.

Another student says the IS video looks like a UN production with statistics and infographics.

Elfenbein brings the class discussion back to the day’s reading, covering fundamentalist groups’ historical context and an analysis of jihadist literature, including the Hamas Charter (1990) and Osama Bin Laden’s declaration of war against America (1996).

As a capstone project for the course, each student writes an essay on a text by an Islamic political thinker of their choice.

Beethoven or Bust: Musical Canon Building in Nineteenth-Century Culture

Abigail Fine, PhD’17, Music

In a tiny second-floor classroom in Goodspeed Hall during the fifth week of spring quarter, **Abigail Fine**, PhD’17, reminds her students of the previous week’s assignment: find a cover of a song that changes the original’s tenor from highbrow to lowbrow or vice versa.

The notion of high- and lowbrow and their applications is the week’s theme in Fine’s course on how canonical artworks “rise to the top like oil on

water.” Fine explains outside of class that the course not only “polemicizes or deconstructs the canon but pieces together a mosaic of historical and cultural explanations for how canons form.”

The syllabus outlines the week’s focus on musical elitism between and within genres and the rift between serious art and entertainment, particularly in nineteenth-century culture. The class begins with a discussion of culturally enforced binaries and who the arbiters of highbrow art might be.

Fine asks the students if they know the origin of the terms “highbrow” and “lowbrow.” When no one answers, she warns: “Steel yourselves to be offended.” The concept comes from the pseudosciences of physiognomy and phrenology, which attribute personality traits and intellectual capacity to the shape of skulls and facial features.

She shows a figure from the 1889 book *New Physiognomy* captioned “Grades of Intelligence,” illustrating different skull shapes based on race. The eyebrow prominence is a focal point: a higher brow, attributed to “Europeans,” indicated greater intelligence, while a lower brow, attributed to the “negro,” indicated a low grade of intelligence. The students murmur in disapproval.

She brings the discussion back to music by explaining that in the mid-1800s, phrenologists made casts of the skulls of composers, including Beethoven, Schubert, and Haydn, and attempted to correlate their skeletal structures to their musical styles.

The class then explores the ethical baggage of defining art as high- or lowbrow, which leads to the power dynamics that shape tastes and eventually influence canon building.

Fine hoped to revise and retool the curriculum for a graduate workshop at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, where she joined the faculty this fall. ■

LEARN ABOUT STUART TAVE at mag.uchicago.edu/1966-tave.

NEW FACULTY

FALL 2017

BY COURTNEY C. W. GUERRA, AB'05

Seth Estrin, Assistant Professor in Art History, studies ancient Greek visual culture. He is particularly interested in how the art of archaic and classical Greece was used to convey emotion, prompting responses that helped individuals interpret their place within the broader culture. He examined this topic in “Cold Comfort: Empathy and Memory in an Archaic Funerary Monument from Akraiphia” (*Classical Antiquity*, 2016) and in his dissertation, “Objects of Pity: Art and Emotion in Archaic and Classical Greece.” He joins the University following a three-year appointment as a Paul Mellon Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

Estrin’s research reflects extended periods of study in Athens and Rome, as well as his participation in field projects in Greece and elsewhere. In addition to teaching University of California, Berkeley, undergraduates while completing his doctorate, he also served as a writing tutor for inmates at California’s San Quentin State Prison, where he co-taught History

of Western Art and Introduction to Ancient History. He holds several degrees in classical archaeology: an MA and PhD from the UC Berkeley and a master of studies from Merton College at the University of Oxford. His BA, in classics and art history, is from the University of Toronto. As a graduate student he received a Berkeley-Mellon Fellowship and an International Dissertation Research Fellowship from the Social Science Research Council.

Associate Professor **Ellen MacKay** joins the Department of English Language and Literature after 14 years at Indiana University, where she was director of the Institute for the Digital Arts and Humanities and resident dramaturg and director of educational outreach for Cardinal Stage Company. A scholar of Renaissance drama and literature as well as theatrical performance from Classical Greece through the present, she is the author of *Persecution, Plague, and Fire: Fugitive Histories of the Stage in Early Modern England* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), which discusses how the “dangerous” elements of theater, including pyrotechnics and



Josephine McDonagh, Ellen MacKay, and Sianne Ngai join the Department of English Language and Literature this year.

gunfire, were used to query the distinction between reality and performance. She oversaw Luminary's iPad edition of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (launched in 2013) and contributed to its iPad version of *The Tempest* (2012). She is the senior scholar for the National Endowment for the Humanities' Teaching Shakespeare Institute at the Folger Shakespeare Library, and cohosted the Q&A of their broadcast event *The Wonder of Will Live* in fall 2016.

MacKay received a research fellowship from Indiana University's Institute for Digital Arts and Humanities for a research project titled "Sea Spectacles: A History of Vicariousness from Nero to Google Glass," which she began working on as a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at the Cornell University Society for the Humanities. She received a PhD, MPhil, and MA in theater and English from Columbia University and a graduate certificate from Columbia's Institute for Research on Women and Gender. Her BA is from Barnard College, where she majored in theater.

Professor **Josephine McDonagh**, English Language and Literature, comes to UChicago from King's College London, where she was chair of nineteenth-century literature. She previously held a chair in Victorian literature at Linacre College, University of Oxford, and faculty positions in English at Birkbeck College, University of London (in Romantic and Victorian culture), and the University of Exeter, where she also codirected the Centre for Women's Studies. Her publications include the monographs *Child Murder and British Culture, 1720–1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), *George Eliot* (Northcote House Press/British Council, 1997), and *De Quincey's Disciplines* (Clarendon Press, 1994). She also developed a critical edition of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (Oxford University Press, World's Classics, 2008) and many coedited volumes. Her next project is "Literature in a Time of Migration: Print, Population, and British Fiction in the Nineteenth Century," which explores the ways in which literature responded to and helped shape a transcontinental migratory culture at a time of mass emigration from Britain.

McDonagh completed her PhD and MA at the University of Southampton in England and her BA at the University of Wales. She has held two visiting scholar appointments at Stanford University (one at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender and one in English), a visiting fellowship at Jadavpur University in India, the Kent R. Mullikin fellowship at the National Humanities Center in North Carolina, and the Houghton Mifflin Fellowship in Publishing History at Houghton Library in Boston.

Professor **Sianne Ngai**, English Language and Literature, is a feminist cultural theorist whose work explores the social and philosophical meanings of ordinary aesthetic categories. Her first book, *Ugly Feelings* (Harvard University Press, 2005), focuses on "non-cathartic" emotions like irritation and their association with inaction in the literature of the twentieth century. Her second, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Harvard University Press, 2012), received the Modern Language Association's James Russell Lowell Prize for an outstanding literary study as well as the Ray and Pat Browne Award for Best Primary Source Work from the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association. In it she attempts to answer the question of why potentially dismissive descriptors like "zany," "cute," and "interesting" are so prevalent in contemporary discussions of aesthetics, from high art to mass media. Her next book, "Theory of the Gimmick," addresses the discomfort prompted by "gimmicky" media (fiction, poetry, visual art, reality television) that audiences perceive to be cheap or belabored, contrasting these with other instances in which art is celebrated for accentuating its methods of production.

In addition to her recent book awards, Ngai received an honorary PhD from the University of Copenhagen–Denmark and a fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Institute for Advanced Study), an appointment in the Cornell University School of Criticism and Theory, a Charles Ryskamp Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies, and several other honors. She did her undergraduate studies at Brown University, where she triple majored in semiotics, English literature, and history of art and architecture. Her PhD is from Harvard University. Before coming to UChicago, she was on the faculty of Stanford University and the University of California, Los Angeles. ■

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EXCERPT: *EL ABRA DEL YUMURÍ*

BY FREDERICK DE ARMAS

“No one would dream of not inviting them, for the consequences would be devastating, fatal.”

When **Frederick de Armas** was a child, his mother, Ana Galdós, began writing a novel that she never finished. De Armas, the Andrew W. Mellon Distinguished Service Professor in Romance Languages and Literatures, studies and teaches the great works of the Spanish Golden Age. He has also devoted the past several years to creating a complete book from his mother's notes: *El abra del Yumurí* (roughly, *The Yumurí River gap*, *Verbum*, 2016). *Tableau* is pleased to present a translated excerpt of the book, a sort of murder mystery set in pre-Castro Cuba.

It was just a small parlor, situated on the corner of a somewhat dusty apartment with worn furniture and yellowed green wallpaper; but even so, it was an inviolable place. There the three unsavory dames came to play canasta every third Friday of the month, and each time they invited a different victim. In truth, they also played in other places, but this was the parlor that conserved the magic of the ancients. Though they had neither money nor beauty, these three 50-somethings knew very well they were indispensable at any society party in Havana. No one would dream of not inviting them, for the consequences would be devastating, fatal.



That October day, the three *canasteras* were highly offended because their special guest had not come, while they had arrived on time, even early. They had arrived early because they wanted to squeeze as much juice as possible out of their very flavorful guest; but there they were, abandoned by that very woman. She would pay for her misdeed.

The three sighed at the same time and prepared to weave a blanket with outlandish figures, while the cards remained on the table.

The two of spades signified past or future robberies and violent crimes; the two of diamonds, new passions; while the queen of clubs had to be the Countess. Clotilde had let the deck fall and this was all it showed; she had let it fall on that table so precious to the three *canasteras*, a table of very expensive woods with incrustations of marble and black opal, and adornments that impressed others. Three black chairs with leather backs comforted them. The fourth was empty.

The guest who sat there would be able to observe the only decoration in the parlor. It was a painting darkened with age. Though all their guests doubted what the three *canasteras* told them, they kept it to themselves, knowing how vengeful they were. No one, ever, questioned the absurd statements of these three dames. They declared that the painting was the most reliable version of *The Spinners* by Velázquez. With that they felt very much mistresses of culture. ■

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READ A LONGER EXCERPT at tableau.uchicago.edu/abra.

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The research, teaching, and administration are mutually reinforcing and nourishing.
—Anne Walters Robertson

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DIVISION'S NEW DEAN

In April Anne Walters Robertson, the Claire Dux Swift Distinguished Service Professor in Music, was named dean of the Division of the Humanities. Since her arrival in 1984, Robertson has spent her entire teaching career at the University of Chicago, serving as chair of the Department of Music, deputy provost for research and education, and most recently interim dean. —J. C.

What is your current research project?

I'm working on a book on fifteenth-century music and its relationship to the emotional writing and poetry and literature of the day.

A lot of this sacred music is actually based on secular songs. It would be as though a mass of the Catholic Church might be based on “Tea for Two.” The sacred and the secular were very interchangeable in the late Middle Ages, and sometimes a secular text would actually, through allegorical reading, express the sacred thought almost better than any existent chant.

This natural mingling of the secular and the sacred [has] always puzzled music historians because it went away after the Reformation.

Can you balance your scholarship, teaching, and administration in a way that is satisfying?

It's difficult, especially in a division with as many different units as Humanities has. But I've always found in all these administrative assignments that the research, teaching, and administration are mutually reinforcing and nourishing.

Dealing administratively with many different departments, and reading hire and promotion cases from across the Division in so many fields,

shows me an exciting range of scholarship that I wouldn't have encountered otherwise, and that in turn influences both my teaching and my own scholarship. Most recently I've been so positively influenced by **Philippe Desan's** [the Howard L. Willett professor in Romance Languages and Literatures] book on Montaigne [*Montaigne: A Life* (Princeton, 2016)].

Who has influenced you most as a teacher and scholar?

Philip Gossett [the late Robert W. Reneker Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus in Music] was chair of the Music Department when I got here, and he hired me. He remained a really fabulous mentor for me throughout his time here until he died in June. I had an email from him as recently as when I accepted the deanship in April, offering encouragement and advice as he was wont to do.

The extraordinary thing about Philip was that even though his own work was in nineteenth-century Italian opera, he had a way of speaking that made you feel as though your work was just as important. He was really a tremendous influence on me.

If you could take any class at the University, what would it be?

I would love to start with a College Core course, Greece and Rome: Text, Traditions, and Transformations. And I would love to work my way forward and take as many of the sequences as I could. I think it's a marvelous undergraduate education that our students receive here. ■

SEE MORE FROM DEAN ROBERTSON at tableau.uchicago.edu/robertson.

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