

# TABLEAU

THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO | FALL 2020



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*Tableau* (Fall 2020, Volume 22, Number 1) is published biannually by the Division of the Humanities at the University of Chicago for alumni and friends. Editor: Lucas McGranahan. Contributing Editors: Jeanie Chung; Laura Demanski, AM'94; Courtney C. W. Guerra, AB'05; Julianna Joyce, AM'15; Joyce Kuechler; Sara Patterson; and Mary Ruth Yoe. Proofreader: Ellen Honor. Designers: Guido Mendez and Chloe Reibold. Contact: Division of the Humanities, 1115 East 58th Street, Chicago, IL 60637, [tableau.uchicago.edu](http://tableau.uchicago.edu).

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### ON THE COVER

*Gestalt Web* by Augusta Read Thomas, one of a series of drawings graphically depicting a creative process in composing music with implications for other areas of imaginative thinking. Thomas is University Professor of Composition in the Department of Music and founding director of the Chicago Center for Contemporary Composition. Photography by Nathan Keay.

*Translated Vase, by Yee Sookyung, is part of a Korean arts exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, overseen by Art History alumna Christina Yu Yu, PhD'11.*



## Dear Alumni and Friends,



Anne Walters Robertson

When I wrote my column for the Spring 2020 issue of *Tableau*, we could not have known what lay in store for the Division of the Humanities—and the world.

The shutdown order with the onset of COVID-19 came just as our spring break began. We quickly migrated our teaching to online formats, as students, faculty, and staff became proficient in technologies such as Zoom and Panopto. They carried on with remarkable success in Spring Quarter; one colleague reported that rethinking his courses for online teaching helped him focus more on the tools he was giving students and less on his in-person performance.

Only a few weeks later, the tragic events in Minnesota and elsewhere, including the killing of George Floyd, left us all horrified and outraged. We struggle to know how we can achieve the kind of change that will bring justice and lasting peace to our society, and we seek innovative ideas and inspiration.

In times such as these, humanistic writings from many eras and cultures can offer comfort and enlightenment. I have been rereading Boethius's seminal treatise from late antiquity, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, a work on the possibility of happiness in an uncertain world written while the author was in prison and awaiting execution. At the same time, I have enjoyed **Loren Kruger's** (English Language and Literature) new book, *A Century of South African Theatre* (Bloomsbury, 2019), which tells the fascinating story of how the Market Theatre in Johannesburg used live performance to witness against apartheid in the 1980s.

During the spring, we maintained virtual public programming alongside our academic offerings. For the highly successful Berlin Family Lectures,

Danielle Allen (Harvard) offered four timely talks on “Democracy in the Time of Coronavirus.” Through the Zoom webinar format, we welcomed a large audience from 34 states and 11 countries. And on June 12, the Humanities Division held its first-ever virtual convocation. Dean of Students **Shea Wolfe**, Deputy Dean **Eric Slauter**, and I were happy to be able to celebrate the remarkable achievements of our new graduates.

Throughout these tumultuous months, our friends have remained wonderfully supportive. **Randy Berlin**, AM'77, endowed a new early-career chair, the Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Assistant Professor of Renaissance and Early Modern English Literature: Masterpieces from 1500 to 1700. Its inaugural holder, **Timothy Harrison**, is an excellent scholar of Donne, Milton, and Shakespeare. Ted Carlson and **Catherine Mouly**, AM'76, PhD'86, likewise generously provided the Margaret Deffenbaugh Carlson, AM'43, Postdoctoral Fellowship, and **Maurice “Jerry” Beznos**, EX'67, and **Lois Beznos**, AM'66, donated the Julius Rosenwald Postdoctoral Fellowship to help support students hard-hit by the collapse of the job market.

Our faculty, students, and staff look with hope toward 2021, as we persevere in what we do best—unparalleled education and research in the humanities. We wish you all health and safety.

*Anne W. Robertson*

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

LEFT: PHOTO COURTESY THE EDWARD S. MORSE MEMORIAL FUND AND CHARLES BAIN HOYT FUND, MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON; RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ZICH



# GLOBAL IMPACT

BY JEANIE CHUNG

How Alyssa Ayres, AM'96, PhD'04,  
translated her academic work into foreign policy

By now the COVID-19 outbreak has been a reality in some parts of the world for nearly a year. But in late spring, **Alyssa Ayres**, AM'96, PhD'04, was already struggling to understand the effects of the pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns implemented to slow its spread.

As the senior fellow for India, Pakistan, and South Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations, Ayres studies and advises on India's role in the world and US relations with South Asia, broadly speaking. The fact that the pandemic had halted her normal schedule of international and domestic travel was the least of her concerns.

How would global roles change—or would they? How would India, with its dependence on migrant laborers who largely fled the cities, open up again? What kind of economic domino effect would result, and for how long?

"This is all unfolding right now so we have more questions than answers," says Ayres, who

served as US deputy assistant secretary of state for South Asia before coming to CFR. "In foreign policy, you usually don't get to choose your own priorities, and, as the saying goes, at times the 'urgent crowds out the important.'" Less than two weeks after making that statement, Ayres was talking to PBS, CNN, and other news outlets about the border dispute between India and China in the Himalayas.

Pandemic or not, South Asia looms large on the global stage. India, the world's largest democracy, has one of the world's largest economies. India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons and a historical antipathy. Throughout the region—as in much of the world—there are pressing concerns around the environment, urbanization, religious strife, and rising nationalism.

Ayres's research efforts have touched on all of those issues. Her first book, *Speaking Like a State: Language and Nationalism in Pakistan* (Cambridge

University Press, 2009), which grew out of her UChicago dissertation in South Asian Languages and Civilizations on nationalism and language in Pakistan, won the American Institute of Pakistan Studies book prize. A few years ago, she and two CFR colleagues conducted a collaborative project on the new geopolitics of India, China, and Pakistan. In her most recent book, *Our Time Has Come: How India Is Making Its Place in the World* (Oxford University, 2018), she charts India's rise to global prominence.

In many ways, Ayres lives the life of an academic: she researches, publishes, collaborates with other scholars. What distinguishes work at a think tank like CFR, Ayres says, is "an emphasis on impact and providing analysis and recommendations to address current public, rather than more disciplinary-focused, concerns." On any given day Ayres might brief a member of Congress, give a formal presentation to a foreign policy organization, respond to media inquiries on a





Aerial view of Jodhpur, India, at night. Ayres has tracked the rise of India on the global stage.



” In foreign policy, you usually don’t get to choose your own priorities.

—Alyssa Ayres, AM’96, PhD’04

developing issue, write a blog post for CFR’s *Asia Unbound*, compose a longer essay for a policy journal or a more widely distributed magazine like *Forbes*, or work on her current book project, which examines how India’s rapid urbanization will shape its future.

“One of India’s defining domestic challenges in the 30 years to come is managing the growth of its cities,” Ayres says. If estimates hold, more than 400 million Indians will shift to cities; by 2050 the majority of the country’s projected population of 1.6 billion will live in urban areas. Delhi is projected to surpass Tokyo as the world’s most populous metropolitan region around 2030. By examining a handful of Indian megacities, Ayres will take up questions emerging from this process: the future of work, building for resilience to climate change, and governance at the municipal level—all in a world in which global cities are networked with each other like never before.

To reach a broader audience than books might, Ayres posts regularly on Twitter (@AyresAlyssa), which she also uses to learn about breaking events, noting, “It is usually much faster in the news cycle” than traditional outlets.

Policy work is a different track than Ayres expected. After first studying in India during a semester abroad during her junior year at Harvard, she began a doctoral program at UChicago after college. She took time away from the program twice: once to go to Lahore, Pakistan, for a University of California, Berkeley, program in Urdu, and a second time when the International Committee of the Red Cross recruited her to work as an interpreter in Jammu and Kashmir.

Seeing the direct impact of her work with the ICRC caused Ayres to question her path and leave UChicago altogether to work in the policy programs division of the Asia Society. Though she came back to complete her graduate education, throughout

her doctoral program Ayres was unsure of how she wanted to use it. “These are hard questions for some of us to answer,” she says, “and I will not lie, I am still asking them.”

**Whitney Cox**, AM’00, PhD’06, a graduate school contemporary of Ayres’s and associate professor and past chair of SALC, admires Ayres’s ability to chart a course from graduate school to an international strategic advisory firm before the US State Department, saying, “She’s done really interesting work that extends from her time here.”

As a result of her winding trajectory, Ayres is eager to talk to UChicago doctoral students who are interested in careers outside the academy.

“Sometimes it helps to brainstorm different pathways of possibility,” she says. “And no one—I repeat, no one—is ever a failure for recognizing that their capabilities, potential, and purpose align well with fields that take them beyond academic disciplines.” ■



# A POET AND HIS PATRONS

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09

Eric Elshtain, PhD'10, translates museum visitors' reflections into poetry.

PHOTO COURTESY THE FIELD MUSEUM; RIGHT: PHOTO COURTESY ERIC ELSHTAIN



Visitors peer into a diorama at the Field Museum, where Eric Elshtain is poet in residence.



I try to tell them: it's a gift  
you're giving to yourself.

—Eric Elshtain, PhD'10

**Eric Elshtain**, PhD'10, is the first-ever poet in residence at the Field Museum—"not a position I applied for," he says, "but just an idea I had."

He knew the museum had hosted visual artists in residence before and thought his medium might have a place there too. So with some help from the Poetry Foundation ("I thought it might help to have some other institutional support, as opposed to walking in and saying, 'I want to be your poet,'" he explains), he crafted a proposal that the Field quickly and enthusiastically accepted.

Then he got to work: In addition to writing his own poems inspired by the Field's collection, Elshtain helps museum visitors discover the bard within. Currently, due to the pandemic, he is a remote poet, designing poetry-based exercises included in the museum's online curricula for schoolchildren.

But in normal times, seated at a mobile desk with a typewriter, he works with children and adults to convey in verse the questions, ideas, and experiences that arise from what they see. Here, Elshtain describes two of his favorite experiences with museumgoers. His comments have been edited and condensed.

"I was sitting in and amongst the mammal dioramas, which I think have become my favorite part of the museum. This guy walks by, looks at me, stops, and says, 'I just noticed you're a poet. I need to talk to you.' He told me he'd been thinking about Martha, the last passenger pigeon, in a zoo in Philadelphia, all alone, the last of her kind.

"As he started talking about Martha, I started

typing. That became a draft. Then we sat and worked together. I explained certain decisions I was making about line breaks and so forth. We basically composed a poem based on his verbatim observations about Martha, the last passenger pigeon.

"What would he have done otherwise? He probably would have just walked away, and those thoughts wouldn't have been put down anywhere.

"Another experience: a woman in her mid-30s was with her grandmother. They had been through an exhibit on wildlife photography. She walked by, read the sign that explains what I do, let out this huge sigh, and said, 'I need your help. I'm just so distraught. I've been put in a dark place by that exhibit, because I keep thinking about environmental destruction and climate change and the disappearance of these creatures, and I need someone to help me express myself.'

"She sat with me for close to an hour and we worked out a poem on her thoughts about extinction and environmental distress and her distress. It was an important moment for her—and for her grandmother, who decided that she might need to start doing some writing as well, because *she* has some thoughts.

"Some people have been moved to tears because they've been given what they consider a gift. I try to tell them: it's a gift you're giving to yourself. Because many times, all I've done is transcribed their words verbatim and tried to capture the natural rhythms of human speech. That's really my contribution. I'm like a translator." ■

LEARN ABOUT MORE ALUMNI WORKING AT MUSEUMS—AND READ A POEM BY ELSHTAIN—at [tableau.uchicago.edu/museums](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/museums).

# HUMANITIES IN A TIME OF CRISIS

BY LUCAS MCGRANAHAN

*Tableau* spoke with Agnes Callard, AB'97, in the early weeks of COVID-19.



In a *New York Times* op-ed in March, soon after the COVID-19 pandemic began to upend ordinary life on a global scale, **Agnes Callard**, AB'97, an associate professor in Philosophy, hazarded an explanation of why some of us were suddenly drawn to apocalyptic stories. Why fuel your distress by screening 1995's *Outbreak* or picking up Cormac McCarthy's harrowing 2006 novel *The Road*?

Because we value being in touch with reality, Callard wrote, including in hard times. To opt for alienation or numbness, while tempting, is ultimately “worse than feeling bad—even if it feels better than feeling bad.”

To be fully present in a pandemic is an acute example of something philosophy has asked of us for millennia: to examine ourselves clearly, in the context of our own mortality. “The first source I know of for the idea of philosophy as preparing to die is Plato's *Phaedo*,” says Callard, who specializes in ancient philosophy and ethics. “And there is some parallel between the thought that philosophy is preparation for death, and that humanity has to prepare for its own death.”

The specter of apocalypse prompts us to do philosophy writ large, examining the value and meaning not only of our lives as individuals but also of the entire human project. “There's a very tempting thought of just putting your head in the sand and not thinking about this question,” she says. “Look, we do our thing, we have our children, and then there's the next generation.” And yet the thought of humanity's end is what reveals its finite and contingent character, which helps us to examine it as a whole.

One of Callard's own judgments here is that history includes genuine, if uneven, progress, and that this is a big part of what gives the human project value. The best example, she believes, is the notion of intrinsic human rights, which was prefigured in ancient religion and philosophy before reaching “full flower” in the Enlightenment.

“I think there are things like that that we're still working on,” she says, noting a general sense in which humanity progresses: each generation has the benefit of all prior generations' thinking. By digging into these conceptual foundations—something philosophers specialize in—we can become more critical in our acceptance, or rejection, of traditional concepts.

Callard's contributions to public thinking go well beyond philosophical reflections in light of COVID-19. In addition to her more scholarly pursuits—including a 2018 book on the nature of aspiration, or seeking to become a different person—she regularly engages with broad audiences through op-eds and essays, podcast spots, and *Night Owls*, her popular recurring late-night philosophy chat session with UChicago undergraduates, which became virtual during Spring Quarter.

As lively and engaging as these discussions can be, Callard maintains that philosophy, including public philosophy, has a serious function. Whether we are facing a pandemic or just looking in the mirror, we are tempted to avoid fundamental questions that disturb us. “Philosophy,” she says, channeling Plato's myth of the cave, “turns the soul around to face the light.” ■

CHECK OUT CALLARD'S POPULAR NIGHT OWLS SERIES at [tableau.uchicago.edu/night-owls](https://tableau.uchicago.edu/night-owls).



## Tableau spoke with Kenneth Warren amid nationwide protests over racial injustice in the spring.



Turning to literature in a time of crisis—like the wave of protests sparked by the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May—is a “double-edged sword,” says **Kenneth Warren**, the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor in English Language and Literature.

“It’s exciting and it’s a challenge to try to figure out how our research sheds light on the contemporary moment,” he says. “The humanities—the study of fiction, the study of works of the imagination—can often give us some perspective on what aspects of what we’re seeing are abiding and what might be new and unprecedented.”

But he also cautions against seeing scholars as first responders in a crisis. The danger is that “instead of being good humanists, we become bad journalists, which is to say responding too quickly to the moment.”

A similar challenge faces the authors Warren studies. “I study novels, and one thing you can say about a novel is that it takes time.” While he acknowledges that some novels have had outside influence in their own time—he cites Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Richard Wright’s *Native Son*—the form is not exactly built for rapid-response criticism.

Warren sees another problem beyond the long gestation of a novel. Why should a certain elite, literary class get to speak on behalf of an entire population, even if they are considered to be members of that population? He implicates himself here, admitting that the special status given to writers is “the basis of our conversation today.”

His book *What Was African American Literature?* (Harvard University Press, 2010) argues that the very concept of African American literature has depended on the political silencing of Black voices during the Jim Crow era. Precisely because so

many African Americans were effectively barred from political expression, especially in the South, he contends, the public “would turn to [Black] writers in particular to ask the question ‘What does the Negro want?’”

He is not denying that Black writers of the era produced great works embodying genuine insight. His own scholarship delves deeply into the work of one such writer, Ralph Ellison—whose novel *Invisible Man* was staged for the first time in 2012 at Court Theatre, with Warren advising on the text’s adaptation. But he does want to raise the question of who gets to speak for African Americans, whether that means novelists or, he adds, the “political and public commentary class.” There is something to be said for directly listening to those who are suffering most, as opposed to their approved cultural surrogates.

Warren often adopts an economic as well as a racial lens—he has taught courses on both the Gilded Age and the Great Recession. “I don’t like the formulation that opposes class and race,” he says, “because I think the two things work in tandem.” As a result, he views the spring’s protests as an expression of anger, not only at police violence but also at economic inequality that harms African Americans disproportionately.

Warren knows when he is walking the line between humanist and journalist. He also grasps the irony that he belongs to the literary class whose framing of the issues he is asking us to question. These tensions will persist as long as scholars attempt to train their particular intellectual skills on the pressing social problems of their day. Warren suggests proceeding with humility, bearing in mind that “to be in your moment is *to be in your moment*—subject to the limitations and prejudices of your time.” ■

It’s exciting and it’s a challenge to  
try to figure out how our research sheds  
light on the contemporary moment.

—Kenneth Warren



*Marissa Fenley made her puppet Gordon—named for modernist theater pioneer Edward Gordon Craig—at a workshop hosted by Chicago-based theater company Rough House in 2016.*

# POWER PLAY

BY MAUREEN SEARCY

Marissa Fenley studies control dynamics between ventriloquists and their dummies.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL VENDIOLA



# ” Ventriloquism is an art of arrested development.

—Marissa Fenley

There’s much more to puppetry than a performer and a prop, says **Marissa Fenley**. As a joint doctoral student in English Language and Literature and Theater and Performance Studies who grew up making puppets in an artistic family, Fenley studies the power dynamics of the art onstage and in literature.

Examining puppetry in twentieth- and twenty-first-century theater, television, film, and literature, she considers the particular mechanics of different styles, like ventriloquism and marionette shows, and analyzes how techniques influence the intimate relationship between puppet and puppeteer, as well as with other puppets and the audience. Fenley’s first dissertation chapter examines ventriloquism through the lens of race, pedagogy, therapy, and motherhood.

As literary metaphor, ventriloquism is shorthand for erasing the complexity of another’s voice and amplifying your own, relying on the idea of an all-powerful manipulator and a disenfranchised other. The mechanics of performance, however, create additional complexity. By lifting their hard palate to widen the vocal cavity, ventriloquists create the aural illusion of distance, producing what’s called a “drone voice,” Fenley says. That distancing influences the relationship between the ventriloquist and the dummy.

“The vent can swallow the voices of others while simultaneously asserting the ventriloquist’s non-identification with them,” she says. “He does not have to bear the mark of difference on his own skin in order to internalize otherness.” However, through different case studies, Fenley shows that the power differential is mutable.

Fenley had become interested in the academic analysis of ventriloquism when she attended an annual ventriloquist convention in northern Kentucky. There she visited a museum dedicated to the history of the practice, where American ventriloquism’s origins were made explicit: minstrelsy, a tradition relying heavily on racist caricatures of African Americans. The dummy appeared around the time minstrel shows moved to vaudeville, with its “cross contamination” of traditions. Minstrel motifs were prominently displayed, and that heritage

was “reanimated by everyone at this convention,” she says, “but never mentioned.”

Race remains central to American ventriloquism. Fenley cites two contemporary White entertainers as examples of minstrel ventriloquists. Terry Fator uses a Black dummy named Julius, who is a talented soul singer, which of course Fator is himself. “He’s implicitly saying, ‘I can be soulful; I can access what I’m assuming to be the property of Blackness,’” says Fenley. “But Fator doesn’t want to completely access racial difference because it would undermine his power.”

Jeff Dunham has a whole roster of dummies embodying racial and ethnic stereotypes while he plays the straight man. Like Fator’s, his performances “amplify a normative, apolitical White body in comparison to a politicized, racialized, highly controversial dummy body,” says Fenley. “If you analyze their jokes, it’s clear that they’re interested in defining Whiteness. There’s all sorts of ways they try to deny their investment in White supremacy, but it isn’t disguised.” They so blatantly borrow from minstrelsy’s techniques and iconography that it makes no sense to pretend otherwise, she says. In the power struggle between minstrel ventriloquists and their dummies, the performers don’t lose their White voice; they create a racialized voice to intensify their own.

To represent the teacher-student dynamic, Fenley uses one of the most famous American ventriloquist acts: Shari Lewis and her sock puppet Lamb Chop. They first appeared in a 1956 episode of *Captain Kangaroo* during a time when education theory began incorporating fun as an important aspect of childhood learning. Lewis was a founder of pedagogical puppetry.

“Pedagogical ventriloquism is faced with a particular problem,” says Fenley: “how to use the dummy to teach how not to be dummies.” In traditional modes of education, the student gains autonomy through knowledge. In contrast, “ventriloquism is an art of arrested development,” and the dummy never becomes autonomous. Children are supposed to learn the lesson the dummy can’t grasp.

But Lewis actually uses Lamb Chop to encourage children to stay children, addressing a new

phenomenon of that era—working mothers. Lewis’s close connection with her sock puppet is meant to show that “attachments can be stable,” Fenley says, “even if they entail fluctuation and temporary disappearance.”

English avant-garde ventriloquist and comedian Nina Conti and her puppet Monkey serve as the case study for the therapist-patient relationship. Fenley notes a cultural association between ventriloquism and psychiatric disorders. What “leaks out” from the ventriloquist’s lips, into the puppet, might represent repressed feelings that provide access to self-knowledge.

In Conti’s therapy-based web series, Monkey is a representation of Conti’s inner mind—but Monkey’s “leaky mouth” provides no meaningful self-realization. Although early in the series Conti claims that Monkey can “say the unsayable,” she later says that what leaks out “is not the stuff you cannot normally say but should, but the stuff that does not need to be said in the first place.”

Fenley also uses Conti to explore the mother-fetus interaction. “Pregnancy for her is similar to ventriloquism in that the fetus and mother are entangled,” says Fenley, “especially an unwanted pregnancy, where who gets to matter in a scene is constantly under negotiation.”

In one act, Conti uses ventriloquism to explore the power dynamics of unwanted pregnancy, with Monkey entering her life on the day her child would have been born. In one of their stage acts, when Monkey hypnotizes Conti into sleep, he realizes he can’t speak without her and must bludgeon her awake, demonstrating that for one to have a voice, the other must give, and therefore lose, theirs. For Conti, unwanted pregnancy is a relationship that is a continued state of being mutually and violently dependent.

Fenley’s latest research focuses on the use of puppetry in protest, which she believes provides a visual anchor for a diffuse set of actors and beliefs. She will also investigate avant-garde marionettes and other anthropomorphic puppets to further investigate how the mechanics of their performances illustrate the dynamics of intimate relationships. ■

READ ABOUT FENLEY’S TAKE ON MUPPETS, PROTEST PUPPETRY, AND MORE at [tableau.uchicago.edu/fenley](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/fenley).



# NEW FACULTY FALL 2020

BY LUCAS MCGRANAHAN

This year, the Division of the Humanities welcomes ten new faculty, including nine former Provost's Postdoctoral Fellows transitioning to the role of assistant professor.

**Sophia Azeb**, assistant professor in English Language and Literature, works at the intersection of Black studies, American studies, and Middle East studies. Her current book project, "Another Country: Constellations of Blackness in Afro-Arab Cultural Expression," examines transnational and translational Black literature, narrative, festival, and music to reveal how varying conceptions of Blackness and Black racial, cultural, and political identity are imagined, articulated, and mobilized. Azeb's latest publication is "Crossing the Saharan Boundary: *Lotus* and the Legibility of Africanness" (*Research in African Literatures*, Fall 2019). She received her PhD in American Studies and Ethnicity from the University of Southern California.

**Natalia Bermúdez**, assistant professor in Linguistics, has worked extensively to describe and document Indigenous languages in Latin America, primarily Chibchan languages, especially Naso (Panamá). Her current research focuses on verbal art (linguistic forms that are interpreted as salient, e.g., ideophones, puns, poetic couplets) through humanistic, grammatical, and social perspectives. She is also interested in the multilingual expressions and experiences of Latinx

and queer identities. Bermúdez received her PhD and MA in linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin. She was also principal investigator for the *Naso Cultural Encyclopedia*, a multi-volume study undertaken as a collaboration between scholars and the Naso people.

**Sarah Johnson**, assistant professor in English Language and Literature, studies seventeenth- through nineteenth-century archives of slavery and marronage in the United States and Caribbean. She researches how resistance practices and flight from enslavement by Black and Native individuals in the Caribbean and North America shaped textual and visual production in the colonial period. Johnson's current project is provisionally titled "Forms of Escape: Eighteenth-Century Narratives of Maroons and Marronage." Johnson holds a PhD in English from the University of California, Berkeley.

**Sharese King**, Neubauer Family Assistant Professor in Linguistics, investigates the relationship between race, place, and language, examining cross-regional variation in African Americans' identity and speech. Her work also explores the racialization of language and the social and political consequences of this racialization in the courtroom. She has researched African Americans' speech in Bakersfield, California, and Rochester, New York, and she plans to expand this work to Chicago. Her work has been published in the field's flagship journal *Language*, as well as,

most recently, in the *Annual Review of Linguistics*. She received her MA and PhD in linguistics from Stanford University.

**Thomas Lamarre**, AM'87, PhD'92, professor in Cinema and Media Studies and East Asian Languages and Civilizations, studies the history of media, an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary pursuit overlapping with art history, communications, the history of science and technology, and the study of culture. His two most recent books examine anime: *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009) and *The Anime Ecology: A Genealogy of Television, Animation, and Game Media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018). Lamarre completed his UChicago graduate work in East Asian Languages and Civilizations after earning a doctorate in oceanology from Université d'Aix Marseille II. He was previously a professor at McGill University.

**Khalid Lyamlahy**, assistant professor in Romance Languages and Literatures, studies North African Francophone fiction and poetry. His current research explores questions of identity and alterity in post-2011 fiction from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, and he is at work on a new book project on Moroccan poet Mohammed Khair-Eddine. He has also published a novel, *Un Roman Étranger* (Présence Africaine, 2017), and is a regular contributor to literary magazines in France and the United States. Lyamlahy holds a PhD in French and Francophone studies from the University of Oxford (St Anne's College); a master's degree in comparative literature from l'Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3; and a master's degree in engineering from the École des Mines d'Alès.

**Kaneesha Cherele Parsard**, assistant professor in English Language and Literature, examines how the legacies of slavery and emancipation shape Caribbean literary and visual works, with an emphasis on how gender and sexuality structure race, labor, and capital. Her book project, "An Illicit Wage: Economies of Sex and the Family after West Indian Emancipation," explores wage labor in the century after British West Indian emancipation and the start of Indian indenture. Her scholarship appears in *American Quarterly*, *Indo-Caribbean Feminist*



Top: Sophia Azeb, Natalia Bermúdez, Sarah Johnson, Sharese King, Thomas Lamarre. Bottom: Khalid Lyamlahy; Kaneesha Cherelle Parsard; Headshot, 2018, photography by Julia Phillips and Keisha Scarville; Tina Post; Erik Zyman.

*Thought*, and *Small Axe*. Most recently, she contributed an essay to the *Small Axe* exhibition catalog, *The Visual Life of Social Affliction*. Parsard holds a PhD in American studies and African American studies, with a certificate in women’s, gender, and sexuality studies, from Yale University.

**Julia Phillips**, assistant professor in Visual Arts, primarily works with ceramics and metal, creating pieces reminiscent of functional objects. Her sculptures often incorporate body casts alongside mechanical accoutrements, interrogating physical relations as metaphors for social dynamics. Her exhibitions include *Fake Truth* at Kunstverein Braunschweig, Germany (2019); the group exhibition *Performing Society: The Violence of Gender* at Tai Kwun, Hong Kong; *Feminist Histories: Artists after 2000* at Museu de Arte de São Paulo, Brazil; *Duro Olowu: Seeing Chicago* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2020); and *Failure Detection* at MoMA PS1 (2018). She received her MFA from Columbia University and completed the Whitney Museum of American Art’s independent study program for studio art. In addition to a semester at Universidad Complutense de Madrid, she has attended international residency programs, such as Vila Sul in Salvador, Brazil.

**Tina Post** is an assistant professor in English Language and Literature, a faculty member of the Committee on Theater and Performance

Studies, and an affiliate of the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture. As a scholar of racial performativity, Post studies the ways that embodiment can advance or subvert identitarian belonging or dis-belonging. Her scholarship draws from literature, visual culture, fine art, theater, and movement. Post’s current book project, “Deadpan,” examines performances of inexpression and affective withholding in Black arts and culture. Post completed a joint PhD in African American studies and American studies at Yale University. She also holds an MFA in creative writing and literary arts from the University of Alaska Anchorage.

**Erik Zyman**, assistant professor in Linguistics, is a theoretical syntactician. A priority of his research is identifying, as precisely as possible, the fundamental operations that build the syntactic structures of human language and determining why they have the properties they do. His work has been published in *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, in *Glossa*, and elsewhere. For his next research project, Zyman will be developing a novel definition of the fundamental syntactic operation Merge (which takes two words or phrases and combines them to form a larger phrase)—one that preserves the theoretical and empirical successes of previous definitions of Merge while overcoming some of their drawbacks. Zyman earned his PhD in linguistics at the University of California, Santa Cruz. ■



Julia Phillips, *Witness I-III*, 2019 (detail view). Glazed ceramics, cables, cardioid microphones, contact microphones, speakers, subwoofer, gravel (miscellaneous technology). Courtesy the artist.

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# TEXTS SUPPORT

*Students in Reading Cultures this past Spring Quarter viewed Charlie Chaplin's Modern Times while sensing seismic social and economic shifts in their own time.*

## Three Humanities Teaching Fellows adapt to remote learning.

During Spring Quarter, **Lauren Schachter**, PhD'19, taught Reading Cultures, a Humanities Core course, for the first time. "As COVID-19 started to wreak havoc on the economy," Schachter says, she taught anthropologist Marcel Mauss's work on gift exchange societies, followed by Marx.

The syllabus also included Honoré de Balzac's *Old Goriot*, Xiao Hong's *The Field of Life and Death*, and Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times*, "all of which explore how individuals interact with major social and economic shifts," she says. At the end of the quarter, during the surge of Black Lives Matter protests, they read Richard Wright's *Native Son*: "a powerful coincidence that I hope gave students another way into thinking about not only recent events, but also the long history of systemic racism in the United States."

Schachter is one of 16 Humanities Teaching Fellows, recent UChicago PhD graduates who teach for two years under the supervision of a faculty mentor and the Chicago Center for Teaching. Like all UChicago faculty, the fellows had to scramble to adapt to remote teaching with little notice.

Two of Schachter's students were six or more time zones away from Chicago time, and the level of internet access among the class varied. So instead of meeting twice a week with the entire group, she met once a week with groups of four to six. On Zoom, she says, "it's harder to pay attention, discussions are clunkier, silences are more awkward, and there's no such thing as proper eye contact." To compensate, she tried to create a comfortable environment where students could be "curious and unsure and worry less about performing smartness. The stress of the pandemic forced us all to be more forgiving of ourselves and each other."

**Patrick Muñoz**, PhD'19, taught Evidentiality, an elective for advanced linguistics majors. He made his lectures asynchronous ("Everyone is using this word now," he notes), so the class period would be free for live online discussions. "Online teaching isn't bad with a small seminar," he says. "One thing I do like about Zoom is that students can screen-share, which allows easy navigation of documents and literally getting everyone on the same page."

Asked whether he's a technophile or -phobe, Muñoz isn't sure. "I think this is like asking

where someone stands on income tax or the telephone," he says. "It's a reality of life whether you like it or not."

In contrast, Lindsay Family Fellow **George Adams**, PhD'19, who taught Analysis of 20th Century Music, says he used "about the same amount of technology as I do normally, except of course for the videoconferencing."

During an ordinary quarter, Adams says, his students would attend concerts by the New Music Ensemble or by student composers, so they could discover the music being written today. But a more significant loss than live performance, he says, was "the experience of listening together in the same room. The social aspect is important. It can really affect your impressions of a piece."

Like many faculty members, Adams cut back on assignments, recognizing the unprecedented stresses that students were facing. His dissertation adviser, **Larry Zbikowski**, professor of Music and the Humanities in the College, suggested "this might be a good opportunity to focus on delivering the ideas and skills that really matter," Adams says. "That's a mindset that I think I'll take into teaching in person—always keep in mind that top priority."—*Carrie Golus, AB'91, AM'93*

GET A FIRSTHAND ACCOUNT OF A TEACHING FELLOW'S EXPERIENCE at [tableau.uchicago.edu/schachter](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/schachter).

# A LITERARY LEGACY

Berlin gift creates endowed assistant professorship in early modern literature.



Melvin (1919–2019) and Randy Berlin attend the 2019 Berlin Family Lectures.

The University of Chicago has received new support for the study and teaching of early canonical works of English literature—a \$2.5 million endowed gift to the Department of English Language and Literature from **Randy Berlin**, AM'77, and her late husband, Melvin. In recognition of that gift, the University has named the Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Assistant Professorship of Renaissance and Early Modern English Literature: Masterpieces from 1500 to 1700.

The inaugural holder of the Berlin assistant professorship is **Timothy Harrison**, a member of UChicago's English faculty since 2014. Harrison's work in early modern literature also encompasses philosophy, theology, and the sci-

ences. His first book is titled *Coming To: Consciousness and Natality in Early Modern England* (University of Chicago Press, 2020).

"I am excited to see what Timothy will accomplish with this support," says Randy Berlin. "The intent of this special faculty position is to keep classic texts of English literature alive—some of the greatest works ever written—ensuring they are taught so that students now and in the future can enjoy and profit from them."

"We are grateful for Randy and Melvin's extraordinary commitment to advancing ideals of humanistic excellence," says Dean of the Humanities **Anne Walters Robertson**. "This new gift will

support an early career scholar who will follow in the footsteps of UChicago faculty such as John Matthews Manly; Edith Rickert, PhD 1899; David Bevington; and **Richard Strier**."

Manly and Rickert produced the definitive edition of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in the 1940s; Bevington and Strier advanced understanding of English literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through close readings of works by Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton and a comprehensive understanding of the cultural contexts in which these artists wrote.

At the time of Melvin's death in 2019, the Berlins had been married for 71 years. Randy, a life member and past chair of the Humanities Division Council, holds a master's degree in English from the University. She practiced law in Chicago and has served as a lecturer at the University of Chicago Law School. Melvin, a Chicago native, was a driven and creative entrepreneur, founding, growing, and ultimately selling two companies in the area: Berlin Metals and Berlin Packaging. The couple formed a close team, making decisions together about what causes to support and taking joy in using their resources to enrich others' lives. Randy describes them as being "of one mind" in their philanthropy.

Dedicated patrons of the arts in Chicago and of the Humanities at UChicago, the Berlins previously created the Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Professorship of the Development of the Novel in English and the University's annual Berlin Family Lecture series, which bring luminaries from the arts, humanities, and humanistic social sciences to campus for a series of three to five lectures each year. Past speakers include legal scholar Lawrence Lessig, Nobel literature laureate Mario Vargas Llosa, and MacArthur "genius" architect Jeanne Gang. In May 2020, Harvard political theorist Danielle Allen—a leading voice during the coronavirus crisis and former dean of the Division of the Humanities—delivered her Berlin lectures virtually.

"Randy Berlin's visionary decision to support young scholars of Renaissance literature allows the English Department to stay at the cutting edge of the discipline," says **Deborah Nelson**, the Helen B. and Frank L. Sulzberger Professor of English. "At the same time, it helps ensure that UChicago's legacy in early English scholarship continues."

—Sean Carr, AB'90

WATCH THE 2020 BERLIN FAMILY LECTURES FEATURING DANIELLE ALLEN at [tableau.uchicago.edu/berlin2020](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/berlin2020).



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