

After Word

Welcome to the first issue of *After Word*, a letter for graduates and current students of the Literature program at The Richard Stockton College. This issue is designed to introduce you to the voices of the people who make up the program. We hope you enjoy it.

In 1990 came Robert Regan, Dean of Arts and Humanities. "The program is constantly renewing and revising," says Dean Regan, who brings news of an impending new-hire. "We have excellent scholars and superb teachers who are very good at bringing to themselves top quality people. They lead the program spiritually and actually. They are the people that make things happen."

Dr. Ken Tompkins, who came in 1970 and helped shape the school, is creating a series of computer programs. The latest is the MOO, or Multi-User Object Oriented Programming. Says Ken of this production, "Literature majors ought to understand and like the MOOs the most because they are really just texts. I am starting to work on bringing HyperMedia into our classes. I want to have an on-line, national discussion of Hyper-Texts in the classroom here at Stockton."

Ken has a comrade in his computer queries in Dr. Tom Kinsella, who arrived in 1989. "There are good ways to use computers, and bad ways. I consider myself an explorer: I want to find

not so easily guided by the author, because of the menu-like choices."

Dr. Jack Connor, a Stockton resident since 1984, is watching the changes in writing as the computer modem becomes a widely used tool. "There is a renaissance of letter writing on the electronic highway. The question is, 'How are writing teachers going to tie into it?' Someone is going to hit on a way to teach on the highway."

Jack teaches writing primarily, and is currently trying to revive a course on writing about nature. He also teaches a course on the biology of birds and is a naturalist at heart. He has written two books: *The Complete Birder*, published in '88, and *Season at the Point '91*, about the hawk migration at Cape May Point.

Another writing professor, Dr. Georgeann Lenard, better known as GT, is mainly concerned about teaching: "Teaching is my art, my primary obligation and my primary pleasure." GT came to Stockton in 1984. Her favorite novel, or anti-novel I should say, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, by Laurence Sterne, would probably fit well with the idea of hypertexts, for "it has no real plot,

"she says. GT cites a quotation from the text as the guiding principle of her life: "Every thing in this world...is big with jest, and has wit in it, and instruction too, - if we can but find it out." *Tristram Shandy* was written in 18th-century England, and the book itself was a big part of why she decided to study that era's literature.

Dr. Patrice Hannon moves us into the present century in her studies of 19th- and 20th-century British literature. Patrice arrived at Stockton in 1991 and is presently writing a book on the aesthetics of humor in British literature. She rejects the Freudian idea that humor is always necessarily hostile or obscene. "I am responding to the aesthetic aspect of the subject and not to supposed motives and meanings."

The subjects of her discussion are primarily 19th-century British literature, although she ranges from Chaucer to Anthony Burgess.

Patrice thinks Stockton is a great place to be: "The students think for themselves here, and I don't feel the pressure to jump at the latest critical trend. It's an innovative place, but that term is not synonymous with trendy." GT agrees, "We don't have a lot of the academic insanity here."

Henry Lousiau Now Listen Carefully, 1993



problems before they go too far and explore potentials; to find out how HyperTexts, Internet, and Virtual Reality will affect the classroom. What we are going through now with computers is something amazingly similar to what we went through four hundred years ago with the printing press. Before books, thinking was more oral and memory-oriented, but with them we can have information ready on a shelf. With books, we think linearly, from front to back, while with hypertexts, reading is non-linear and

"An important reason for the solid intellectual foundation is the influence of the older faculty," says Dean Regan. Among the originals is Dr. Fred Mench, at Stockton since 1971. Fred talked about the newest emendations to the program.

"In the department," he says, "we've gone through some of the biggest revisions in eight years. With any luck we won't have to fiddle with it for a good while. One thing we are thinking about doing is integrating a reading list into the curriculum."

Fred's scholarly work is on historical novels set in Rome. A number of recent ones are detective novels/murder mysteries, with first-person narrators. "The good historical novelist of any period can pull into the story more people than a history monographer can. The books can also be fun reading, and can show that some of the problems we struggle with in our own lives are the same as those of antiquity." Fred plans a course,

"History through the Novel," with articles and booklets produced from his work. Ultimately he plans to write an account of the nature of the changes in the historical novel over the last century.

Dr. Jeanne-Andrée Nelson, professor of French, has resided at Stockton since 1975. She announces that competency in a language other than English will be required starting in the Fall of 95. "In the last four years the program has increased from two to five language professors. Although we still cannot offer a major in language, we can now offer all levels of language every year, and maybe by next year we will have a minor for all Stockton students."

This April Jeanne-Andrée will direct a play for the graduating senior party. The one-act absurdist play *They Alone Know* will be performed by current students on Stockton's campus in the experimental theatre on Friday, April 29, at 3 pm. Everyone is invited to

attend. She hopes to do this every year and is looking for original scripts.

Dr. Joseph Marthan, also a professor of French, has been at Stockton since 1990. He comes to us from Casablanca—that's right, of Bogart and Bergman fame! He likes the liberal education at Stockton because he sees education as an investment, and thus his job is to provide students with a taste of the pleasure of learning so that their investment will produce great returns. His specialty is 17th-century French literature, but he also studies contemporary French culture, and recently contributed a chapter to a book on that subject. He includes that interest in his language teaching by using a pedagogical series called *French in Action*, a "total immersion program." Only French is spoken in his class, and videos shot in France are used so that the student can hear the language as it is truly used. He sees the three semester language requirement as a good incentive for students to take more advanced courses in the language. He salutes his former students, "Un grand bonjour a tous mes etudiants!"

Dr. Norma Grasso has been at Stockton since 1973, and teaches Spanish as well as literature courses. Norma has been contributing monographic essays about several Latin American women writers to various anthologies: "I do this because I think there is a great need to make people in the States aware of the existence of such incredibly talented writers. It is difficult to generalize on the themes and styles of these authors. Like their male counterparts, Borges, Cortazar, Garcia Marquez et. al., they write about a variety of subjects: metaphysical, religious, political, or social. Each country contributes many important women writers. Some are well-known, like Gabriela Mistral, who won the Nobel Prize in 1945, or Isabella Allende, whose novels have become bestsellers in many countries. One of them, *The House of the Spirit*, will soon be a film, with Meryl Streep. Other writers (especially poets) are still little known in the United States because of the lack of translations."

Dr. Angel Santiago came to Stockton in 1989. He hails from Puerto Rico and also teaches Spanish. He is in the process of writing a work of fiction. Last summer he published a book of criticism using the methodology of semiotics. "In the Caribbean and in Latin America the majority of the population is black or of Indian descent, but that society was always dominated by European culture. Until 1925,

This is what happened: January in Minnesota. A Friday afternoon. It had been snowing for about two hours, the temperature below zero. The forecast blizzard had arrived. The college (at which I was a newly hired assistant professor) called off classes at noon, but those of us with a distance to go were advised to remain and use the college as a shelter. Food would be provided. Cots.

To get home I'd have to drive thirteen miles on a two-lane road. But it was a Friday afternoon, I told myself, and I didn't want to spend the weekend in a college cafeteria. Besides, my wife and one-year-old would be alone. Fearless, I scraped the car windows, the man who had weathered New York City most of his life and had never been mugged. The windchill was minus 60. It took half an hour to go two miles. The land was flat and open. Prairie. There was nothing to deter the wind, and the blowing snow increasingly prevented me from discriminating between road and cornfield. I could beat this. So what if it took an hour or two.

The front window iced up. I could barely see out of it. But it was a straight road, and I could drive in what seemed like a straight line, now and then opening the side window to confirm where I was. That, of course, let in the cold. I started thinking: Maybe I won't make it. Maybe I should turn around. But it was impossible to turn around, I'd get stuck, and I was almost halfway. Around this time I realized I wasn't on the road. I got out of the car. Whiteness. The kind of whiteness one could easily allegorize into evil. "Poet found frozen to death in cornfield." I could see my wife reading the headlines. Or "Professor from the East exhibits hubris on the northern plains, and pays." That from a student on the school paper who was alert when I discussed Oedipus. I got back in the car. Already my beard had frozen. Gas tank half full, or was it half empty? Two candy bars in the glove compartment, my only concession to the danger of Minnesota winters.

I would die, either in the car or outside of it. I decided to walk, don't ask me why. Actually there was a reason, though it didn't become evident right away. When I looked up I could see telephone wires. Telephone wires led to telephones and telephones lived warmly inside houses.

Perhaps the reader now is starting to lose interest. He or she can see the outcome: I followed the telephone wires to a house and was saved. The reader concludes that I was lucky, but egregiously stupid. Perhaps a beautiful woman opened the door. No, that would be a cheap narrative touch. Desperation, really, in storyteller terms. And I want to sustain, for a while longer at least, a different sense of desperation.

The fact was that after a few minutes I could see the blur of a farmhouse in the near distance. But more significantly I was freezing and overwhelmed by the desire to sleep, to lie right down in the snow and sleep. I had to repeat to myself, "There are poems to write, love to be made. Poems to write, love to be made." My mantra. When I got to the door, I literally (remember that word) fell against it in B-movie fashion. I may have knocked, but I don't remember. An old farm couple opened the door and let me in. Gave me blankets. Soup. When I sufficiently recovered I used their warm phone to call my wife. But the snow kept accumulating and I had to spend three days with them, a disagreeable couple if truth be known, but my saviors.

I've told this story for years, and only one thing is wrong with it, if in fact it constitutes a wrong. It never happened to me."

-- From *Walking Light: Essays and Memoirs* by Stephen Dunn

majority characters did not have important places in literature. After World War II Latin Americans moved into the city. These people lost their country, culture and values. During the last thirty to forty years they have been making a new culture of a mixed race- a city culture." In his work of fiction, Angel is trying to portray the civil war in Central America using representations of the most important cultures, written in Middle Ages Spanish and depicting the culture of the palace. "I am not interested in writing a book of history, but rather a work of literature."

In September 1990, Dr. Ivan Drufovka-Restrepo came to Stockton from Columbia. He teaches all levels of Spanish language, as well as Latin American literature. Ivan, like a good theorist, has come up with underlying reason for his, and your, and my own busy-ness: "Busy is a way to escape from the self- you do so many activities because it makes you go out of yourself. But the students get 300 percent, I love them and they love me back. Learning is really entertainment. I am not here to give a grade, but to learn something. I learn from my students." Currently, Ivan is organizing a course on Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

"Communications has had an impact on Litt/Lang enrollment. It is now an integral part of the department," says Dean Regan of the newest track in the program. The two professors of Communications are also the latest faculty additions.

Dr. Chuck McGeever, or "Doc" as his students call him, has been at Stockton since May 1993. He is enthusiastic about Stockton and about the Communications track. "I find the Stockton student the hardest-working student I've come across in all six places I've taught." He has been working on the development of the track, and reports that the curriculum draft has been placed upon the Faculty Assembly's agenda for full faculty consideration.

Dave D'Alessio also came in 1993. He has what he calls a hard science background: "I was trained in statistics. I worked days as an industrial chemist." He is interested in political communications and mass media, and has worked in TV, radio, and public relations. "The communications track is designed to be innovative with the variety of material available to the Stockton student. The focus is on the message and meaning, on intellectual rather than mechanical

aspects. This is important because meaning and messaging is common to all communication, mechanical and industrial."

Poet Stephen Dunn, at Stockton since 1974, is putting out a new book

of poetry in April, *New and Selected Poems: 1974 - 1994*. It will draw from his previous eight collections and contain sixteen new poems. There will be a reading from the new book and a book signing on April 22 at 7:30 p.m. in B-126 on Stockton's campus.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Literature Degree

1. You can be a career student, like Eric Loveland. "I am working my way through a morass of confusion, nicely punctuated here and there by brief periods of anxiety, toward a PhD in French Literature. I teach a lower level French course while receiving a stipend and having my classes paid for by the university. So, in other words, I am a career student."

2. You can break your vows, like Peter Murphy. "I made three vows when I graduated from high school. One, I would never be a teacher. Two, if I did teach, I would never teach English. Three, if I did teach English, I would never teach poetry." Peter is an English teacher at Atlantic City High School, where he teaches, and writes, poetry.

3. You've been through all of F. Scott Fitzgerald's books.

4. You can manage your time, as does John Graziano. "My time's been fairly well divided between work, and the search for better work."

5. You can answer all the questions in the Literature column on *Jeopardy*.

6. You can be broad and comprehensive, like Lauren Neuhaus, and teach all subjects at a private school.

7. You have gained the objective distance to turn climactic moments in world literature into cheap jokes: Why did Anna jump on the tracks? To get to the other side!

8. You can be pursuing multiple careers, like Steve Rogers. "I have been quite busy working at a

community center for pre-school and school-age children while I raise the necessary funds to move to New York City, in order to pursue my acting and writing career. I am in the process of completing two scripts for the *Seinfeld* show."

9. You can collect rejection notices for your own masterpieces from the finest publications currently available.

10. You can travel the world as an advocate for intergroup relations, as has Stacy Light, who now works for the Jewish Federation of Greater Middlesex County, and has visited the former



Soviet Union, Romania and Israel in her work.

11. You are not fooled when James Waller says his *Bridges of Madison County* is to be read with "a willing suspension of disbelief." Fourteen out of fourteen Stockton Literature professors have not read the book, although one began it, and objected to its existence righteously: "That is *not* literature!"

12. You continue to learn, like Daniel C. French, who has recently entered the field of public school administration: "My goals and integrity have not changed since I was a student. Teaching gives numerous returns which are not financial or immediate."

13. You are, without a doubt, literate - and you have a piece of paper to prove it.

Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire; return it in the enclosed postage-paid envelope

Has this issue of After Word been:

Useful? Yes No

Interesting? Yes No

Would you be interested in:

Seeing future issues of After Word? Yes No

Contributing to future issues? Yes No

What would you like to see in future issues of After Word?

or reply by e-mail: kpyshnik@cosi.stockton.edu.

Thanks for your thoughts. Your comments and contributions will shape future issues of After Word.

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