



M.A. in English Program Newsletter

Welcome! We hope you enjoy the second issue of the online newsletter for the Roosevelt University Master of Arts in English.

- 1. You're Invited!**
- 2. Exciting New Scholarship Opportunities for English Graduate Study**
- 3. Classroom Report: American Gothic Literature**
- 4. Faculty Research: Larry Howe, Associate Professor of English, Investigates Early American Narrative Fiction**
- 5. Alum Profile: Jami Woy**

I. You're Invited!

This is an invitation that could change your life.

I hope you will take five minutes out of the beginning of your school year to learn a bit about what's going on in the English program at Roosevelt University – and if you're interested, I hope you'll consider applying to our M.A. Program in English. We've graduated many, many area high school teachers from our M.A. because we offer a dedicated and highly trained faculty, a flexible schedule of courses, and opportunities for you to focus on both scholarly work and curricular development. You can learn a bit about our program in the newsletter below – and to find out more, check us out online at: <http://www.roosevelt.edu/english/default.htm>

We'd also love to meet you and talk in person about you and our MA in English Program at our Graduate Open House on Thursday, October 12. It will be held in the Gage Building, located at 18 S. Michigan Avenue. You're welcome to just drop by or RSVP at <http://www.roosevelt.edu/admission/info/complete2.asp?jump=431> for your convenience.

You can also apply directly to our MA in English Program at <http://www.roosevelt.edu/admission/graduate/default.asp> if you're ready!

Enjoy reading about the new scholarships we offer, and our engaging faculty and alumni interviews. We hope to see you soon—at our Open House or in the classroom.

Bonnie Gunzenhauser
Chair, Department of Literature and Languages
Roosevelt University
bgunzenhauser@roosevelt.edu
(312) 341-2074

[back to top](#)

II. Exciting New Scholarship Opportunities for English Graduate Study

Thanks to a generous bequest from the estate of Ronald and Jane Anderson, the MA in English Program has new scholarship opportunities available for new and continuing graduate students. The scholarships are competitive and cover a substantial portion of your tuition. All new and continuing students are eligible and we encourage you to apply at <http://www.roosevelt.edu/english/handbook-forms.htm>. If you're interested in one of these scholarships, please apply here and complete the appropriate form. Our committee on graduate admissions looks forward to reading your application.

[back to top](#)

III. Classroom Report: American Gothic Literature

Ann Brigham, Associate Professor of English and Women's and Gender Studies, discusses her course, "American Gothic Literature." She's teaching the course at our downtown campus this Fall, and will offer it on Monday afternoons at our Schaumburg campus in Spring 2007.

American Gothic Literature: Just what is it?

The genre of Gothic literature, both British and American, is made up of literary works that explore the dark and unseen sides of human culture. These stories present worlds teeming with the buried, the undead, the supernatural, the forbidden, the demonic, and the grotesque. Although these stories are often perceived—and sometimes dismissed—as fantastic or frivolous, I think they are important to study because they point to a cultural fascination with that which simultaneously attracts and repels us. This course approaches American Gothic literature as a genre that expresses cultural anxieties about a number of related issues: gender identities, family structure, class and race relations, national development, religious belief, and the power of the unconscious and sexual desire.

How did you become interested in teaching this course?

I was introduced to American Gothic literature in graduate school, and I was drawn to this literature because of the way it focused on the dark side of the development of the New World. That is, the earliest American Gothic literature presented the New World not as an Edenic paradise founded on the promises of reason and progress, but as a fallen world built on exploitation and violence, and overrun with moral horrors.

As you move throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, you see how other texts, by writers such as Faulkner, O'Connor and Morrison, continue this theme; writing about the ruinous worlds created by the Civil War, capitalist development, and slavery. Another thread of the Gothic deals explicitly with gender issues. Those texts written by authors that range from Charlotte Perkins Gilman to Shirley Jackson and Joyce Carol Oates, suggest how the truth—in this case, the oppression of women—is the terror, not some supernatural horror.

What types of students take this course? What have been the students' responses?

Because the Gothic focuses on the complex inner workings of the human mind and emotions in relation to social issues, connecting psychological anxiety with cultural anxiety, it is a fascinating topic for students of American culture and literature. Additionally, because it has its roots in British Gothic, students of British literature are also drawn to the topic. More generally, though, I have found that students find much to attract (and perhaps repel!) them in these texts because they are interested in the ways Gothic literature represents the human desires and fears that shape the self, the self's relation with others, and perceptions of the world

[back to top](#)

IV. Faculty Research: Larry Howe, Associate Professor of English, Investigates Early American Narrative Fiction

Larry Howe recently completed a Roosevelt research leave, during which he worked at the Newberry Library investigating early American narrative fiction. Much of the material he examined has been out of print since it was first published in the late 18th century. His analysis of these texts reveals a preoccupation with and anxiety over the fledgling nation's newness, and a determination to construct a culture of novelty.

Why did this topic interest you?

This project grows in part out of my book on Mark Twain. I presented Twain's extended narrative fiction as an example of conflicting attitudes about authority in American literature and the culture as a whole. That argument relies on a synthesis of several different contemporary theories of the novel, which is strikingly represented in Twain's work, and helps to explain why he is regarded as such a distinctively American writer.

The current project began as a test of that theory of the American novel by going back to the roots of the genre. Rather than work only with well-known texts such as Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* and William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*, and the many others, I thought it necessary to look as well at the numerous, but relatively unknown, fiction narratives of the period to see how the synthetic theory I was working with applied to this body of writing. Additionally, I wanted to test the viability of generalizations that have long been made about the handful of works that remain in print when the sample of texts is expanded.

What other research have you done? What have been your most surprising discoveries?

In addition to working at the Newberry library, I've also conducted research at the American Antiquarian Society (AAS) in Worcester, Massachusetts, the Dedham Historical Society, and the Boston Public library—both in my native state of Massachusetts. The AAS specializes in American imprints dated up to 1875, so its collections focus precisely on the materials that interest me. The other institutions contain additional documents about local history that have been extremely useful in deepening my understanding of the political and social debates that conditioned the cultural attitudes from which the fiction narratives sprung.

The Newberry, though, has been my research base. Its collections are far more varied than any of these other sources, but just as nearly as deep in the sources I'm examining. The Newberry also supports a stimulating community of scholars from around the world, many of whom have been engaged in study of this period for careers much longer than my own. The Newberry's Early American History and Culture Seminar has been a really remarkable source of support and inspiration for my work.

I'd say the most surprising discovery I've made is the extent to which a concern about novelty percolates throughout most of the documents I've examined, whether the issues addressed relate to politics, education, property, or morality. This concern almost always cuts in two directions: novelty is both embraced as a distinctive constituent of American life and anxiously questioned as a threat to traditional values. While there's an exhilarating anticipation of the progress that American life holds in store, there's also a compensating distrust of radical change. Examining this tension helps me understand how America could be founded on principles of equality, yet be stratified by class to the degree that an entire race could be subjected to slavery.

The anxiety about novelty can often take some pretty surprising turns as well. For example, there are a number of narratives in which incest, or the threat of it, either conditions or subtly shades the plot structure. The disaster that frequently befalls women who challenge the status quo reflects a resistance to the expansion of freedom. The fear of the wilderness and the hostility of Indians to white settlements is also a recurrent theme counterbalanced by fear of unsettled strangers—usually, nefarious con men with closer ties to Europe than the practical

life of America. Lastly, suspicions about learning and professions that are predicated on higher education recur throughout many of the texts, calling the habit of reading—which novel readers indulge—into question.

How does your current research project play out for you (and your students) in the classroom?

Not surprisingly, this dichotomy between novelty or progress, on the one hand, and tradition or stability, on the other, is prevalent even today. We see it almost daily in our political discourse. Studying literature from the period of our national founding that reflects themes echoed in our own era, is an important reminder that issues and attitudes that we think are unique to our time are quite often variations on persistent themes. For example, numerous contemporary pundits have repeatedly remarked that our current social climate is more polarized than ever before; but, to believe that we have to ignore history.

The publicly articulated debates about the Constitution show divisions that are just as deep as those that are attributed to the “red state/blue state” pseudo-phenomenon. We remember George Washington as a saintly figure, due in part to Mason Weems's *Life of Washington*, but newspapers and journals in the late 18th century could even be more ruthless in their criticism of the first president as today's partisan blogs are of the 42nd/43rd President.

In studying the imaginative narrative literature of this early moment in our history, I hope to show students how even a genre as flexible as the novel conventionalizes our expectations even as it tries to challenge those conventions. More importantly, I hope that this kind of study can help them to become shrewd critics of rhetorical shifts that condition the discourses of both our past and our present.

[back to top](#)

V. Alum Profile: Jami Woy

Jami Woy is a 2002 alum of Roosevelt's MA in English Program. Jami currently works at McGraw-Hill as an editor in the areas of reading, language arts, and literature. She develops and edits content for grade levels 6-8 in Glencoe-McGraw-Hill's *Reading, Language Arts, and Literature* series. She sat down with us to discuss her experiences in Roosevelt's MA in English Program, and how the Program has influenced her current position.

What was a particularly memorable class you took in the MA in English Program?

Not to confuse education with entertainment, but an interesting and informed professor wields the ability to make an otherwise blasé topic intriguing. Such are the trappings of fame and power in the classroom. For example, I recall that Ann Brigham's reputation preceded her; many students took her classes because her status was that of an outstanding professor (despite the class she happened to be teaching).

Fancying myself a Modernist fan of the American literary canon, I was tepid about taking a Victorian literature class, but the professor was creative, engaging, well organized, smartly integrated theory, asked thought provoking questions, encouraged student dialogue, and picked extraordinary reading selections. Thanks to Ellen O'Brien, I have an entirely different perspective of Victorian literature. Similarly, I always enjoyed classes with Gina Buccola, who was flexible, creative, and capable of wittily infusing humor into her lessons (while skillfully peppering her unsuspecting students with facts). A professor can be more than a conduit of knowledge. Sometimes, the messenger makes the message.

How would you describe the faculty-student interaction you experienced while you were in the Program?

The particular faculty I was drawn toward tended to be enthusiastic about their subject and about knowledge transference in the classroom. Those professors were dynamic faculty members with their hands on the pulse of contemporary theory and pedagogical practice. They made faculty-student interactions one of the English department's fortés, and fostered open dialogue coupled with the fluid exchange of ideas. Shrewd verbal and written communication

skills translate into marketability, and I received astute individual feedback on papers. Their invaluable critiques certainly helped to polish my writing skills, and those skills are a necessity in the workplace.

Describe how you've personally benefitted from receiving your MA from Roosevelt?

I really think it's up to the individual to maximize the benefits of any learning experience by extrapolating from their education (be it formal or informal) and applying it to other facets of life. I think Roosevelt's social justice mission not only works well with that attitude, but also affects the ideological theory you will encounter while working on your MA. Theory can shift your paradigm, and shifting paradigms—or at least questioning existing ones—is crucial to the learning process. I would also stress that smaller classes and accessible professors—both of which you will encounter at Roosevelt—bridge potential communication gaps that could arise at larger universities.

How do you utilize your MA in your career?

In my case, an MA has proved crucial. It's an absolute necessity that a print editor working on literary anthologies be well-read and informed. Publishing houses certainly affect literary canons, and the editors determining what to publish (or not) must be capable of supporting their decisions with scholarship, an awareness of audience, and literary trends. The capacity to write effectively and correct your own mistakes—and the work of others—is equally important. An MA did not necessarily provide me with all of the content-based editorial knowledge I've acquired (like understanding the obscure art of parallelism), but it did instill the significance of fact-checking and mold my research abilities. It also enhanced my awareness of literary elements, syntax, vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, attention to detail, and to some degree, my integrity as a writer.

What advice would you give someone considering pursuing an MA in English at Roosevelt?

While the superiority of the English department's faculty is significant, it's important to factor the entire institution into your decision-making process. For example, consider the centrally located downtown campus, consider the small classes, consider the types of literary theory you'd prefer exposure to, and consider faculty accessibility. Location is a huge factor. If you are a returning student working full time in the Loop, you'll find the location and class times ideal. For traditional students the Loop is equally attractive. Know that, pedagogically, the school tends to take a student-centered approach, which is appealing for most students.

[back to top](#)

Roosevelt University, 430 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60605
[English Program](#)
Department of Literature and Languages
Bonnie Gunzenhauser, Chair
(312) 341-2157

