Welcome to another newsletter from the English department, in which we try to keep you abreast of events and personalities in and around the Department. In this issue we have stories about the Wake Forest University Press, a valuable source for Irish poetry in the United States, and its director Jeff Holdridge. And to help demonstrate that the English classics continue to exert pull on the popular arts, student Kristie Saoud interviews Victorianist Melissa Jenkins about the recent film adaptation of Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* by British filmmaker Andrea Arnold.

The rest of the newsletter features students and former students in the department. Laura Wilson, Class of ’71, writes about the importance to her of the British humorist P. G. Wodehouse—an article illustrated by Laura’s own drawings. Current Journalism Minor Kevin Jordan, who received national media attention when he received a donated kidney from Wake Forest Baseball Coach Tom Walter, writes about how the experience honed his own interest in writing. And Mary Waterer, Class of 2009, reminisces about her days as a “caffeinated ragamuffin” in the halls of Tribble.

We hope you’ll enjoy reading about our department this term, which—like an enormous 19th century novel—exists as a network of personalities past and present.

Best wishes,

Scott W. Klein
Professor and Chair
When Wake Forest Professor Dillon Johnston first began his search for contemporary poetry, he came to the quick realization that the ocean between America and the United Kingdom was more than a physical divide. Despite his efforts, it was remarkably hard to find any poetry by Irish or English authors on this continent.

Instead of giving up the quest, he decided to do something about it.

Johnston approached then Provost Edwin Wilson about the literature gap, and together they made plans to solve the problem. They agreed to start their very own small-budget, strictly Irish poetry press. In 1976, the Wake Forest University Press opened in Johnston’s small academic office on the first floor of Tribble Hall.

Thirty-seven years later, the Press has not changed in size or being housed in Tribble, but has grown in almost every other way. The annual production of books, originally one or two, has increased to four to six each year. Its recognition has expanded both on and off the continent and now boasts the title as North America’s premier publisher of Irish poetry. Johnston’s solo leadership has expanded to include a crew of interns presided over by Assistant Director Candide Jones and supervised by Director and Editor Jefferson Holdridge. And Johnston still presides over his establishment as Advising Editor.

While the Press’s presence and purpose is not particularly well known on its university’s campus, Holdridge asserts that its standing abroad is much more significant: “When I was in Ireland, people knew of Wake Forest because of the Press.”

Holdridge made his first trip to Ireland while in college when his brother got married in Dublin. He fell in love with the country and decided to spend his junior year abroad. He returned to the U.S. to graduate, but not long after he went back to the Emerald Isle where he received his doctorate at University College Dublin and enjoyed twelve years with the Irish.

Back in America, Holdridge came to Wake Forest in 2002 to become an English Associate Professor as well as take up the directorship of the Press. To make the transition smoother, Johnston hired Holdridge as Editor that year and maintained the title Director, himself. After Johnston’s retirement in 2003, Holdridge was appointed Director of the Press. Last year
Holdridge was additionally promoted to full Professor and continues to embrace both positions on the Wake Forest campus.

Among the various English courses Holdridge teaches, Irish Literature is his specialty. It provides a “constant interaction” between his two professions and grants him the opportunity to share both his knowledge and his passion with students. While the English Department and the WFU Press are not formally connected—the English department is under the dean while the Press is under the Provost’s office—Holdridge maintains that a link does exist “not always, but ever-present.” This contradiction recognizes the English Department’s great support of the Press, despite its independence as a publishing institution.

Other supporters of the Press include the poets it publishes. Because of its small size, the Press maintains intimate relationships with each of its poets. Holdridge and Jones speak directly to the poets during the editing process and have both housed visiting poets. According to Holdridge, the Press is “very highly thought of” by its poets. “They appreciate our presence and what we’re trying to do.”

Between his time spent in Ireland and his years with the Press, Holdridge has met numerous poets. Included amongst his most notable acquaintances is the late Seamus Heaney. Despite only having met him briefly at a handful of readings, Holdridge was most impressed that he was “not only a great reader, but warm and friendly.” He remarked upon Heaney’s “profoundly accessible personality,” and his ability to make people feel comfortable. “Heaney had a great presence as well as great quality to his work,” Holdridge says.

In both educational and personal settings, Holdridge is familiar with Heaney’s works. He teaches Sweeney Astray in his Irish Literature class, and is personally fond of Glanmore Sonnets, although he cannot classify a single Heaney piece as his favorite. Recently, however, he has been returning to the sonnet sequence Clearences. Heaney wrote the sequence after his mother passed away, and while Holdridge has always enjoyed the work, he has found new meaning in it after his own mother’s death two years ago.

While Heaney’s anti-modernist work was not always as well received by critics, Holdridge believes that some of the charges made against him were overstated, sometimes influenced by envy and resentment, sometimes by his reputation rather than his actual achievement. Heaney’s international success and Nobel Prize increased his prominence while sharpening criticism about him. Holdridge is confident that with Heaney’s passing there will come a reassessment, where unnecessary disparagements will be corrected in time and “achievement will be understood on its own merits.”

Despite his continuous interactions with poets of such achievements, when asked about his fondest memory working at the Press, Holdridge’s answer did not include any published names. Rather, he referred to the atmosphere and camaraderie found in the Press’s humble Tribble basement office. His immediate response was “the humor that Candide displays in the office, particularly with the interns,” referring to the Assistant Director who oversees the day-to-day operations of the Press and the student interns who work for class credit, financial aid, or future aspirations.

Holdridge believes that the Press is a sort of “haven

Continued On Next Page
for students outside academics.” Interns meet other students they wouldn’t have otherwise and gain experience while working in a nice atmosphere. Holdridge finds more contentment in this small office than in the realm of fancy meet-and-greets and busy schedules.

This intimacy is ultimately what defines the Wake Forest Press. Despite its international recognition, the Press has stayed true to its modest roots, recognizing its niche in the publishing world and embracing its role by consistently publishing quality works.

With Irish poetry on our side now, Ireland is the only thing that remains an ocean away.
Kristie Saoud | Class of 2014

Many are surprised that throughout my college career as an English major, I have never read a Bronte novel…well that is until my 19th Century British Literature with Professor Melissa Jenkins this semester. In class, we discussed Emily Bronte’s renowned novel Wuthering Heights focusing on the psychology of the characters, the gothic and the truthfulness of the narrator.

Apart from our class discussions, I was very interested in the role of landscape as the novel is set in the moors of northern England. Conveniently, Aperture Cinema in downtown Winston-Salem was playing the 2011 film rendition of Wuthering Heights directed by Andrea Arnold shortly after we completed our analysis of Emily Bronte’s masterpiece. Overall, I had mixed feelings about the film, but cinematically it had a beautiful way of capturing the natural beauty of the land and the somberness of the nature surrounding the characters. The following interview highlights discussion with Professor Melissa Jenkins regarding merits of adaptation.

Q: In the latest film adaptation of Wuthering Heights, various characters were either trimmed down or completely omitted. For example, the children of both Heathcliff and Catherine who appear in the second volume of the novel don’t even make an appearance in the 2011 film. How does this alter not only the narration but the entire message of the novel?

A: This is a very common decision in film adaptations of Brontë’s novel. Interestingly, it mirrors many of the first reader reactions to the novel. Although the majority of Brontë’s novel focuses on the aftermath of Catherine and Heathcliff’s doomed romance, readers are likely to perform the same action as Brontë’s narrator, Lockwood – drifting away from the happy union realized in the second generation, to linger at the graves of the first. Despite, therefore, the fidelity to the effect of the novel exacted by Hollywood adaptations that omit all of the gothic framing, doubling, and repetition, many of her thematic points about inheritance, righting wrongs, reading, and education are completely lost.

Q: The choice to cast a black man instead of a “gypsy” was due to Andrea Arnold’s lack of public support

Continued On Next Page
from the local gypsy community. Do you think this remains a major setback for the characterization in the film or an opportunity to strengthen an idea?

A: It has become increasingly popular in modern criticism to offer race-based readings of Heathcliff. Such readings are true to the text in many ways – Heathcliff is indeed typed as “other” in large part via physical descriptions of his darkness and foreignness. Yet, part of the attraction of Heathcliff as “other” is an inability to pinpoint the exact nature of that otherness. Nelly, to cheer him up, says, “Who knows, but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen?” Characters alternatively see a gentleman, a devil, and a gypsy. Casting a black man makes the point about his “otherness” straightforwardly and, possibly, crudely. It simplifies, possibly even “tames,” the interpretive possibilities.

Q: Could the decision to cast an actor of African-American descent foster a wider audience of filmgoers?

A. Possibly, but it could also backfire. Some modern viewers may dismiss it as a gimmick.

Q: Various wide-angle shots display the moors to be a central character in Andrea Arnold’s film. How important is nature in the development of the story?

A. I sometimes wonder if the function of nature is overstated by many who discuss the novel, perhaps due to the romantic vision of the Brontë’s Haworth as in the middle of nowhere, in the wilds of Yorkshire. In visiting Haworth Parsonage, one is struck by the natural beauty close at hand, but also by how quickly one gets from the parsonage into “town.” Certainly nature gives the novel its name and is the first force Lockwood encounters as he approaches the novels’ two estates, but in the action that follows, interiors (and the imprisonment inside of certain spaces) be-

Q: The film presented Heathcliff as merely a product of his society (nature vs. nurture) – does this distort the story in any way? Is Heathcliff not to be held accountable for any of his actions?

A. One of my favorite speeches from Heathcliff comes when he chastises Isabella Linton for “picturing in me a hero of romance”; he adds, “I can hardly regard her in the light of a rational creature, so obstinately has she persisted in forming a fabulous notion of my character, and acting on the false impressions she cherished.” I have to think that he is talking to all potential “readers” of his character, who must “type” him as hero or devil with no consideration of the gray spaces in between. Heathcliff wanted to be held accountable for his actions, but was surrounded by people suffering from delusions about him and about themselves.

Q: How do you think Ms. Bronte would feel about the latest adaptation?

A: I imagine that she’d be too dazzled by the technology to be too worried about the swerves away from her book. And she’d probably be flattered that people are still interested in her little book after all of these years.

Q: Should all adaptations be celebrated even if they distort or omit ideas central to the original text?

A: I’m happy with any adaptation that encourages a new generation to seek out the original.
Laura Wilson | Class of 1971

“And now for something completely different.” A favorite introduction to British television’s “Monty Python” in the ‘70’s, this phrase gave America a new sense of humor. The English Department at WFU taught me about satire and English writers, but somehow Drs. Fosso, Carter and Shorter also prepared me for things to come. I converted to the Pythons and PG Wodehouse humor, and the addiction carries on.

Perhaps it was the humorless time of Vietnam and Civil Rights anger which encouraged many of us to find something of outrageous laughter. Perhaps the butt of the jokes was so unexpected: Cockney housewives and clueless aristocrats, not to mention terrorist rabbits.

PG Wodehouse draws upon the English traditions we studied in our WFU classes, so it is possible that it appealed to an English grad of ‘71, hoping to pass the next quiz. Nowadays, I am homebound from illness, and perhaps I simply have the time for something entirely different and a world I find hilarious.

Why PG Wodehouse? A between-the-wars writer with characters in the style of Hogarth caricatures, Wodehouse captured the less lovable English aristocracy of the 1920’s as no one else has. They are shallow to the point of bone dry, spend their fortune on food, clothing, and flash cars, compete in nonsensical bets, and they learned nothing at Eton but how to conduct practical jokes on the masters.

Using exaggeration and formulaic plots, Wodehouse began publishing in Punch (1913) and Globe (1901) with a column and with stories set in country estates, watering holes of the rich, and the flats of wealthy, dapper young men like Bertie Wooster, who can’t make tea, and his wise valet, Jeeves. The beloved author also wrote spy thrillers and domestic dramas, but the tales of an excessive, Col Blimp aristocracy made him rich and famous.
What’s the appeal? As Wake Forest professors taught us, the reader must care about the all of the characters, even the villains. These nitwits are quite lovable, especially Bertie Wooster and Jeeves. Bertie’s heart is in the right place as he tries to make matches out of his wealthy, bored friends, and Jeeves is a rescuer—and a very educated, clever man.

Born into this world of financially arranged marriages, exclusive clubs (satirized by The Drones in the Wooster stories), and often fascist ideas, Wodehouse manages to make us giggle and shake our heads at an earl who freaks out over a silver cow creamer.

He relies on stock situations and characters, like the Roman writers Terence and Plautus and the *commedia dell’arte*. Wodehouse would have studied Latin in the English public school system. Wodehouse’s iconic characters include the lovelorn man, the serious woman, the buffoon father, the jealous macho lover, and the wise servant Jeeves.

Wake Forest taught me that it’s all about language. It’s fascinating to know the biography and history of the times, but appreciation and understanding is caught in the words.

Although he was friendly with Evelyn Waugh, Wodehouse chronicles the upper class in a maverick style. The difference is the language. His writing is described as “poetic” but not flowery, as proven in the famous line, “Everything in life that is fun, is usually immoral, illegal, or fattening.” There is no shortage of slapstick reminding us of the English music hall tradition, as Bertie crashes through a jewelry shop with a silver cow creamer flying in the air.

Facial expressions, especially those in the BBC Television Series, are as varied as Jack Benny’s reactions are predictable. Bertie hanging from gargoyles brings to mind Harold Lloyd’s perils, another 1920’s fixture. Mixed up identities and double entendre in Wodehouse are as old as farce itself. My favorites are the English idioms such as “Bob’s Your Uncle” or “Up the Spout.” I never tire of searching them on Google.

Lending from Shakespeare’s satire “Twelfth Night” and Jonathan Swift’s work, WFU English Professors taught me that there truly is always a dark side to humor. Wodehouse’s wealthy characters expose their fascist beliefs as witnessed thought Ronald Spode and the doddering ideas of Mr. Bassett reading to popping off his shotgun at anything he suspects.

Ironically, the adored author got himself into a “spot of bother” in a confusing period of his life when he lived under the supervision of the Third Reich and wrote somewhat sympathetic radio shows about them.

*Continued On Next Page*
This troubling experience has never been cleared up and thus led to his hurried return to the UK under a cloud.

Like some biography, this background has little to do with the skilled language and laugh out loud humor I discovered in PG Wodehouse. At Wake Forest, we learned that the text has a separate life.

I’m also an amateur artist and find myself doing charcoal sketches of Wodehouse’s flappers, dotty old ears and the butler-hero Jeeves. An artist I deeply admire, Lauren Burch, once said that in struggling with illness, you should fill your home with flowers and music. Further, I would add “humor” to that list.
It’s safe to say that a coach and player couldn’t be any closer than Coach Tom Walter and myself. It all started in the lobby of Emory University Hospital the morning of February 7, 2011. There, in front of his family and mine, we were both wheeled down a cold hallway so he could save my life. I didn’t know then that my career in baseball, my life and the beginning of my passion for journalism would unfold in the days and months ahead.

That morning, Dr. Allen Kirk first removed Tom’s kidney then transferred it down the hall to my room where I was the recipient of this transplant. Meanwhile, ESPN, CBS and a couple of local stations began rolling their cameras.

The reason the world soon learned of my unique story is because those cameras were rolling. But, only months before the surgery, I was questioning whether my kidneys would breakdown everything that I had built on the baseball field. Whether I’d ever live the same way I had for the first seventeen years of my life. My life didn’t have an ounce of certainty on the day I stepped on the campus of Wake Forest in the fall of 2010. Baseball had always been my cornerstone, and that was unexpectedly taken away from me because of my health.

What seemed like an endless fall during my first college semester can now be explained simply by numerous doctor visits and as many visits with Coach Walter and the baseball staff. I didn’t feel right. And Coach Walter had seen me at my best when he recruited me and at my worst when he observed me on campus. From the day he witnessed the sickness that I had been dealing with for months, we immediately got on the same page about one thing: the solution.

And the solution – Coach Walter donating one of his kidneys to save my life - was seen on national television: On E:60 it was called Sacrifice, and the day after our successful surgery, our story was on CBS’s and ABC’s morning news.

Continued on the next page
We knew what we were doing was special, but in less than 24 hours, it would become national news. I began to realize that this story was one that needed to be told and that it was the role of journalists to tell it. Watching my own story being told opened my eyes to other people’s stories. There were amazing stories happening in the hospital all around me. While I was in the hospital for that week after surgery, I heard a story about a lady giving one of her kidneys to one of her closest friends. Everyone has a different story to tell.

Listening and reading about the lives of other people may have had its roots in the fact that I wasn’t allowed to move after surgery. Since the surgery and the coverage of it, I have found a way to read more and more features and appreciate how they are put together. I can remember writers calling to check facts and follow up even after their interviews. Witnessing the final product proved to be more satisfying than I ever thought it could be. I saw the significance of storytelling and I wanted to be a part of it.

I’ve only taken a couple of journalism courses so my intrigue certainly surpasses my experience. As a young writer I want to learn about different techniques of interviewing, different writing styles for different situations and create my voice as a writer. My life was saved in front of a national audience, and ever since then I’ve been inspired to tell other people’s amazing stories. At this point in time, I’ve turned an intrigue into a passion, and I’m hoping to turn this passion into a writing career.
Sitting here, staring at this blank, white page, realizing that I have somehow managed to procrastinate on such a simple task requested of me by one patient Kelsey Browne (Department newsletter editor), I cannot help but laugh and recall the nights spent on the 8th floor of ZSR, chugging coffee and Red Bull, watching my life tick away as I pounded on the keys of my disappointed ThinkPad, praying to God for any epiphany in the midst of my reckless attempt on some sane semblance of thesis followed by flowery elucidation ending in full sprint from printer to classroom.

My professors are all saints for accepting such a caffeinated ragamuffin into their doors, and even more benevolent in their willingness to offer the opportunity for my participation in such a sacred space. For that is what Tribble Hall is: a labyrinthine sanctuary. Sure, the staircases and half-hallways and poorly-placed dead-ends are maddening but it suits its inhabitants quite nicely. Grateful to have my first literature seminar in the elegant A201 (I believe that’s the one), I sat enthroned amongst eleven similarly seated peers as we encountered Dr. Klein’s passion for Dickens and Joyce and Browning, amongst others, and I was reassured of my desire to be an English major.

Now, of course, the Voice of Reason taunted me saying I needed to “be rational”, “major in something more practical”, “step down from the clouds”, and “pick a concentration that leads toward gainful employment” so, I gave it a shot. Economics seemed like a respectable degree to achieve but two weeks in, and I dropped out. My imagination had found the perfect location if it ever cared to commit a tedious suicide: Manchester Hall.

Having crossed that option off my list, I naturally shifted into my pre-med semester (for those of you reading this who have yet to declare your course of study, DO NOT waste a semester thinking you might want to be a doctor… your dignity and GPA will suffer). For added flair, I cast my lot with the Spanish majors and was enchanted by the vision of becoming a missionary MD in the Dominican. Dare I say what two lab sciences and Spanish 319 (Advanced Gram-
-mar and Composition) in one semester did to my morale?

“Where did I go wrong?” I asked myself. “Why won’t I merely jump through these straightforward (albeit dull) hoops that meet societal standards and lead to a monotonous life of quiet desperation?” (So cliché, I know, but thank you, Thoreau). The answer was simple enough: I needed to do what I had always enjoyed.

The American Romantics had been my heart since I was eight years old, with plenty of books already under my belt, when a dusty, red, leather-bound collection of Poe had been plucked carefully from my parent’s mantel, tucked safely under my little arm, and smuggled into bed. There, I am confident, the combination of reading by flashlight, combing through skeletal illustrations, and pure osmosis twisted my already dark dreams and impressionable mind into something that would make Tim Burton proud. I had begun preparing for my college degree long before I even knew where I was going to middle school.

As I took my place among kindred souls in Dr. Wilson’s American Romanticism seminar, I honestly had no idea what we were about to face. There really are no words to properly encapsulate the profound effect his teaching had on my experience at Wake Forest and life since. The whole class felt that way. We would leave the room, heads swimming with possibility and awe, exhausted from the mad scribbling of notes and the mental gymnastics we tried to maintain for fifty minutes, every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. We regularly laughed at the thought of our brains simply exploding if it had been a Tuesday/Thursday class… the extra 25 minutes would surely kill us. How that man managed to cram that much brilliant pedagogical discourse into less than an hour while still maintaining a culturally relevant sense of humor was beyond me.

College no longer consisted of “jumping through hoops”; it was an impossibly wonderful exam on the most genius minds of literary history, a torrential downpour of allusions and endless erudition, an enlightening trek through my faith, psyche, and cyclothymia, a balancing act in the liminal spaces on which I love to tiptoe, and most importantly, a long and treacherous journey on the Pequod. Thank you Dr. Wilson.

Thank you also to my dear Dr. Sigal who will be proud to know I still recite Chaucer as a party-trick/audition piece here in Los Angeles. Your love for the beginnings of the English language and storytelling continues to inspire me today.

To Dr. Hans: I only regret not taking more of your classes sooner but am thankful that my last semester was spent laughing at your colorful choice of verbiage, irreverent sense of humor, and occasionally serving as subject to your jests (I miss the banter). I still study Heidegger and Derrida more than you might assume and think of you often.

Thank you, Wake Forest English Department. You taught me to think, to reason, to compose (I hope this brief essay isn’t too poor a showing), and, best of all, you enriched my life by tying it to an endless world of possibility.

Mary Waterer

--Currently living in Los Angeles, CA working under the pseudonym Maredith Walker. Feel free to contact at: maryedith10@gmail.com