

THE BROADSHEET

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Over 60 students, faculty, staff and alumni attended this year's English Career Night, held Wednesday October 25, 2017 at the Merrimack Club



THE HANDMAID'S TALE: AN OLD BOOK MAKING NEW WAVES IN 2017

BY BRIDGET KENNEDY

Before this year, I had no idea what Margaret Atwood's book *The Handmaid's Tale* was about. The title was familiar from an old high school AP course suggested reading list. I saw headlines linking the novel to current events and protests swarming with red-cloaked advocates, and Hot Topic T-shirts with an obscure Latin phrase *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum* (*Don't let the bastards get you down*). My curiosity grew and I then NEEDED to read the book, if only to understand more about why the cloak and wings were becoming so popular.

I finally checked a copy out, and I read the whole thing in eight hours. Those eight hours I spent in Gil-ead have changed so much about my understanding of dystopian fiction, as well as the nonfictional world around me.

The novel delivers the story of a handmaid named Offred and is narrated entirely from her perspective. *(continued on next page)*

An official publication of the Merrimack College English Department, The Broadsheet is published four times during the academic calendar year. Its mission is to celebrate the English Department's role in promoting the literary arts on campus, to acknowledge the accomplishments of faculty and students, to profile students and alumni, and to create a forum in which issues relevant to English studies can be discussed.

We hear her innermost thoughts, get flashbacks to her life before the takeover and during her trainings at “The Center,” and learn a little bit about how Gilead runs. The Republic of Gilead is what has become of New England after the Sons of Jacob Revolution, which strips women of their autonomy in an attempt to “protect” them from the dangers of the world, such as kidnappings, rapes, and murders. Chemical and nuclear toxins have polluted the earth so much that humans are struggling to reproduce and have healthy, fully-formed offspring. Women who have already had children or are in the prime of their reproductive years with viable ovaries become handmaids, trained to be modest, morally pure, and in the creepy and complicated Biblical-ritual, based on the Old Testament story of Rachel and her handmaid, Bilhah, meant to save the rapidly declining human population. Women in The Republic of Gilead play the role of handmaids, and others are charged to “protect” them. Women cannot own property, open a bank account, or seek employment. The Republic argues that this maintains rightfully each woman on a pedestal.

The real life origin of this belief originates with adversaries of the early waves of feminism, particularly the second wave of the 1970s, when anti-feminist advocate Phyllis Schlafly campaigned heavily against the feminist movement and the Equal Rights Amendment (“equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex”). She argued that if women attained equality they would lose the “protective pedestal” they had been on, and that this radical shift in tradition would destroy society. This book was published in the 1980s—only a few years after the ERA fell three states shy of ratification. Margaret Atwood would have witnessed this first hand.

In 2017, the handmaids have become the equivalent of Dickens’ spirits of Christmas-futures-yet-to-come with regard to the debate over reproductive rights. Handmaids are the only ones allowed to have children in Gilead because they are pure. The Sons of Jacob permit only handmaids to reproduce with the leaders of society, but not to raise their own children. That responsibility falls on the elite, who will lead the new society. This echoes the practice of Nazi-era eugenics in a sense, controlling which humans will inherit the earth. The continuing debate over abortion rights, birth control, and other health care provisions (as well as equal pay) is crucial, because a world without true equality would not only represent a regression to a more socially unjust era, but probably look like Gilead. The fourteenth amendment guarantees us all equal protection under the law, and the ERA would have reinforced that right and promoted the freedom to make one’s own choices—not take women away from pampering and protection and throw them into the dangerous world, forcing them to work as Schlafly preached. The book also connects to current issues surrounding nuclear warfare and environmental pollution, because the entire reason Gilead needs handmaids is that nuclear-waste-related infertility and deformity pervade society.

While I have the advantage of knowing what potentially went into the writing of the novel because I also double-major in Women’s and Gender Studies, I know not everyone has the privilege of making these chilling connections automatically. In a review of the book from a February 1986 issue of *The New York Times*, the reviewer condemns the work for not providing a clear trail of real world historical events that she could use as a gloss for better understanding what happened that led to Gilead: “...the book just does not tell me what there is in our present mores that I ought to watch out for...Even when I try...no shiver of recognition ensues.” I have to admit that this reviewer has a point. Because the story is told from the perspective of only one character that does not hold a position in the government, and does not claim membership in a rebel group, there is little background as to how Gilead came to be.

The reviewer also expresses her displeasure with the novel's lack of similarity to Orwell, Huxley, and others. Truth be told, I think the difference *is* the point of the novel. While I am still achingly curious about how The Sons of Jacob took power and created The Republic of Gilead, I think the lack of detail makes for an even creepier story. After all, if we see the takeover coming all the time, it could be stopped and the story might not need telling.

The content of *The Handmaid's Tale* generates a truly terrifying dystopian future, particularly for women. Other allegories and dystopian novels I have read are usually written by men or originate from the perspective of a male protagonist. Perhaps part of the force of Atwood's contribution to the scene just might be the possibility that, for women, Western culture has always been a dystopia. I've read a fair amount of allegories and political fiction, but Atwood creates a truly terrifying story of enslavement under the guise of protection. This is perhaps one of the most important dystopian novels to read, along with *1984*, *Brave New World*, and *Animal Farm*.

I think I may have found my new all-time favorite piece of political or dystopian fiction.



The featured panelists at this year's English Career Night were (left to right): Amy Tremblay ('05), Marketing Manager for Investor Communications at Boston-based HarbourVest, a leading global private equity investment firm; Jennifer Hanselman ('13), Data Associate at Amazon.com, which has local offices in Boston and Cambridge; Gregory Lingley ('15), English Teacher and Assistant Athletic Director at Amesbury High School in Massachusetts, and Megan Hathaway ('13), Professional Advisor Relations Manager at The Boston Foundation, one of the nation's largest and oldest nonprofit community organizations.

THE AQUILA THEATER'S PERFORMANCE OF *HAMLET* AT THE ROGERS CENTER: REFLECTIONS ON MY FIRST EXPOSURE TO SHAKESPEARE ON THE STAGE

BY DAKOTA DURBIN

On September 28th and 29th, the Aquila Theater troupe presented William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* at the Merrimack Rogers Center for the Arts. Aquila Theater was founded in London in 1991 and in 1997 became a not-for-profit organization based in New York. Aquila Theater's mission is to "make classical works accessible to the greatest number" and the company accomplishes this charge through annual U.S. and International tours, including performances in London, Greece, Holland, and Germany. The troupe's appearance at the Rogers Center last month kick-started their stateside *Hamlet & Sense and Sensibility* Tour. I was lucky enough to acquire two tickets to the opening of *Hamlet*, which made that night one of many firsts: the debut of Aquila's U.S. tour and my first time seeing a Shakespeare play performed live on stage.

I can't lie and say that I have been a Shakespeare fan all my life. It wasn't until I took a course at Merrimack my sophomore year called "Body Parts: Pleasure and Pain in Shakespeare's Plays" with Professor Plasse that I developed a passion for Shakespeare, particularly for his tragedies. I found the beauty and depth of his language captivating and it opened my eyes to how incredible a playwright Shakespeare was. Since taking that course, I knew, however, that reading his plays represented only "half" the experience, so I had to get my hands on some tickets to see a live stage performance. When I saw that a professional troupe was coming to perform *Hamlet* at Merrimack, I knew that this had to be my first Shakespeare play. The day of the performance I was ecstatic. I didn't know what to expect. Would this be a modern interpretation? Would I be able to follow what the actors were saying? Should I have reread *Hamlet* in preparation for the performance? What would be appropriate attire for the theater?

These thoughts rushed through my head, until the lights began to dim and the actors appeared on stage. The cast treated the audience to a sort of group interpretive dance, each actor moving in response to music. This dance took the place of a traditional opening chorus to the play, conditioning the audience for the narrative that would follow. It also adumbrated events to come and served as a prologue, ending with the death of Hamlet's father, which happens to be where the play's action begins. It was unexpected, but certainly enthralling. My eyes were darting around the stage, trying to capture the dancers' sporadic movements. Instead of witnessing the play exclusively through words, I was experiencing it through motion and live, physical energy. It was a completely different way of "reading" the play and I did not realize until after that this dynamism was crucial to the true beauty of Shakespeare's work. The combination of script and physical action on stage captured the greater depth and versatility of the narrative drama. By means of these two media, the playgoer processes Shakespeare in myriad ways. My racing thoughts had disappeared, as I quickly became absorbed by the performance that unfolded before me.



Hamlet might be the most popular and influential of Shakespeare's plays. The epic tale of Prince Hamlet's quest for vengeance against his Uncle Claudius over the murder of Hamlet's father and marriage to his mother has captivated audiences for centuries. Having learned the truth from the ghost of his deceased father, Hamlet attempts to discover for himself the truth by staging a play for his uncle and mother that depicts the way his uncle murdered his father. By monitoring Claudius' reaction, Hamlet confirms his uncle's guilt. Even after he has learned the truth, however, Hamlet continues to ponder the consequences of exacting his revenge. The play focuses on issues and involving decision-making and agency, action and consequence, grief and suffering. While it is important to remember that *Hamlet* can be interpreted from a variety of approaches, I have always found its engagement with the mystery of human nature and essential character of existence most captivating.

I must admit that while watching the play I wasn't focused on "critiquing" the performance, mostly because I was trying to take in everything that was happening in front of me. Regardless, despite my lack of exposure to other performances, I cannot imagine that anyone would have found the Aquila performance as anything less than spectacular. I loved every moment of it. The staging was minimalist but well executed. For example, the production featured a projection backdrop, which changed periodically depending on where scenes took place, sometimes depicting a castle wall or, for scenes outside, such as the graveyard, silhouettes of trees and gravestones appeared on screen. Perhaps the most interesting thing about these backdrop images was that, in some cases, they were purposely displayed out-of-focus in order to capture the blurriness of a character's morals or the flaws in human perception. Some of these set images created a kind of smashed-mirror effect, displaying cracks and replicating the look of shattered glass. It was incredibly disorienting (purposefully so), and I thought underscored confusion and misperception, which helped mirror what was happening on stage. The atmosphere was dark and dreary, admitting only limited light and color of any kind. The director made great use of this limited light through shadows the actors cast, highlighting the importance of their positioning on stage.

The costumes were modern in style, with characters adorning black boots and black jackets, and the entire cast arrayed in dark colors, except for Ophelia (played by Lauren Drennan), who was clothed in a white dress. The whole cast did a great job. The actors' elocution proved clear, their deliveries precise and their movements well-timed. Gys de Villiers (Claudius) and Rebecca Reaney (Gertrude) were perfect in their roles as the corrupt king and queen of Denmark, masterfully acting as Hamlet's antagonists. James Lavender (Polonius) was a great comic relief character, delivering through body language and voice inflection much needed witty humor. Tyler La Marr, who played Hamlet's faithful friend Horatio, was a bit lacking in enthusiasm and vocal range in the first act, but after the intermission his performance picked up, almost moving me to tears during the final scene in which Hamlet dies.

As should be expected, Ophelia and Hamlet shined as the strongest performances of the play. Ophelia's descent into madness and eventual drowning was tastefully and powerfully executed through a silent, interpretive scene (which was reminiscent of the type of dance the play began with) that was told through the movements of her body, back-dropped by a projection of blue light, which generated the impression of being underwater.

Hamlet, played by Lewis Brown, was incredible. He was everything I had hoped a stage Hamlet would be. He was witty and sharp with his line deliveries and conveyed the intense emotions and contemplations embodied by his character through his physical movements and positioning on stage. For example, as Hamlet prepared to kill Claudius, who is in the midst of praying, shadows fall across his face, creating a mask, accenting perfectly his hidden, dark nature in that scene. When Brown was on stage I couldn't take my eyes off of his dynamic movements. He delivered the "To be or not to be..." soliloquy with astonishing intensity, pristine elocution and well-timed pauses. Overall, the cast outshined my expectations. I believe my appreciation was shared by the audience, who, at the end of the performance, gave the troupe a standing ovation, bringing the entire cast back to the stage twice.

The publicity flyer for the performance quoted reviews from *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* respectively, referring to the Aquila group as "a classically trained, modernly hip troupe" and praising it for making "The classics...relevant with superb acting and clever staging." From these two assessments, I had been preparing myself to witness whatever a "modern adaptation" of *Hamlet* would look like. Much to my surprise (and enjoyment), the performance seemed to align quite closely with the text, both in language and formation of the acts and scenes. While I am sure Aquila Theater took certain liberties adapting the play, such as removing some scenes and adding some character lines, it did not upset the narrative of the story. And, though the costumes failed to replicate outfits worn in the 1600s, all crucial aspects of the performance seemed not to have been "modernized"; the production, in fact, remained faithful to the text. There was no modern day technology and the scenery, while minimal, consisted mostly of stone walls and platforms. My idea of a "modern" *Hamlet* would probably involve a setting similar to present day and include extravagances, such as electronic technology and social media. This is not a complaint (though part of me had hoped to see knights and swords). No, I was quite content with this adaptation lacking the "modern feel"; my only issue involves the assertion made by *The New Yorker* that the Aquila production made a "classic" like *Hamlet* "relevant".

If the setting and performance were not modernized and if the performance faithfully represented its source material, then I do not see how *Hamlet* was "made relevant," for it seems to me that *Hamlet* remains a relevant story even in our current circumstances. Reworking would be unnecessary. The play's emotional pitch, its exploration of human nature and behavior, its examination of vengeance and forgiveness, and its portrayal of betrayal and guilt apply universally. While it is true that the "superb acting and clever staging" were essential to the success of this performance, those attributes serve only as vehicles for the play's core issues and questions.

With that said, there was one aspect of Hamlet's character I felt got lost on the stage, specifically, his struggle to act decisively. I believe one of Hamlet's most well-known and criticized features is his inability to act. He mulls and contemplates his potential courses of action, yet, until the end of the play, he does not make a decision that he acts upon and even that is debatable. The Hamlet I saw on stage seemed to be heavily oriented toward action. Perhaps it was the speed of the performance and the shortened second act that contributed to this perception, but I did not see this representation of Hamlet as a character that contemplates and thinks and questions, to the point at which you just want to yell out, "Do something already!"

Maybe capturing this aspect of his personality is difficult to represent on stage, since on the page Hamlet can be a static, inactive figure, yet as a living person he moves and breathes, adding a dynamic element to his character I did not anticipate. While this thought nagged at me a bit, it did not ruin the play for me. It was a wonderful first Shakespeare performance and I cannot wait to see more Shakespeare on stage in the future.

If I could offer a bit of advice to those readers who have yet to see Shakespeare live, I would recommend that they seek out a performance, appreciate the energy, the atmosphere, the voices, and the motion of the actors. When this production began, I made the mistake of trying to close-read the characters' lines as I had done when I was reading the text and their lines were flying by so fast. I felt like I was missing out on the play, for when you are reading the text, the script on the page is all you have and you can pause the "action" at any point, recurring to earlier moments whenever you need to. But I was wrong. In trying to "close read" the language of the performance I was missing something but it was not what I had thought. I was missing out on all the elements that escape the printed page. The energy, the atmosphere, the voices, and the motion of the actors create new formal focal points deserving of your close attention. Herein lies the richness of all drama meant for the stage. The next time open yourself to the whole performance!



Associate Professor Ellen McWhorter chats with Merrimack English alumnus Chris Lawrence (center). Professor Marie Plasse (Shakespeare and Renaissance drama) and Assistant Professor Emma Duffy-Comparone (Creative Writing Fiction) share their thoughts on the great turnout (right).

CARTOGRAPHY FOR ENGLISH MAJORS: DRAW A MAP AND PLOT YOUR OWN COURSE

BY RACHEL MACKELCAN

A few months ago, I put pen to paper and wrote about my struggles, detailing how English, as is the case with all majors in the Humanities, seemed to provide students with no easily identifiable career path. During that time, I was incredibly frazzled. At each turn I felt as though my direction was unclear, my progress toward employment unfocused, but today I come to you with a different story. Today I stand, having had the best summer of my life, not because I had fun, but because I was more challenged than I have ever been to write better and faster and to draw on skills I didn't realize I have.

Anyone who is familiar with my behavior knows I am a whirlwind, a busy body, and a workaholic. Finding one job that challenges and fulfills me has always been difficult. This summer, however, I met my match. This summer, I interned at a "coworking space" in Wilmington, Delaware called "the Mill."

Commonly confused with a business incubator, coworking spaces house under one roof businesses that are already up and running and provides them with opportunities to cooperate and collaborate with others. In layman's terms, the shared space allows companies to pursue their own business plans while also enabling them to reach out to others that are in the same place developmentally. A coworking space is like a bike without the training wheels. A business incubator, on the other hand, is a bike with training wheels, providing necessary start-up support, so that new businesses can establish themselves with the aid of experienced business professionals.

During my stay at the Mill I learned a good deal about emerging attitudes common to today's workforce and economy. For example, the freelance and Gig (like a music "gig") economies are growing rapidly, so the "need" exists for an affordable space in which to promote the growth of businesses and entrepreneurs. What chief executive Robert Herrera of the Mill realized was that, like him, millennials are more inclined to work freelance, rather than forty hours a week at a job they don't enjoy. He recognized that our generation has a greater range of choices available to them, and would prefer to avoid the same traps our families fell into when the economy crashed in 2008.

Like Herrera, during my lifetime, I have watched family members get laid off after dedicating years and years to jobs they did not love. And I know that I am not the only child who agonized while observing her father experience the distress of losing his job. Watching my dad struggle became all the more difficult for me, because he believed that being the man of the house meant sustaining the financial solvency to pay all of our bills. Truth was, my father was amazing when it came to being an at-home dad. During that time, and without realizing it, I learned an important lesson about the real value of a working life back then. Seeing the light in his eyes as he pursued a new career working at home was so much more valuable than any amount of money he earned.

So going into this summer and from a young age, I knew I wanted a job that interested and challenged me, not because I didn't know exactly what I want to do but because it is difficult to find just the right Linked-In search that comes tailor-made, not just to an individual's skills, but to her values and inclinations, with all the idiosyncrasies that inform an individual's personality and goals.

I also learned this summer that, in recent years, the small business sector has exploded. More so than ever before, young people are seizing control of their futures by taking risks and building their own businesses, instead of pursuing more traditional corporate paths. My boss, Robert Herrera, recognized there was an opportunity here, especially since Delaware was becoming a bustling hub for small businesses. He decided that he would create the number one coworking space in the state by turning the entire fourth floor of the Nemours Building on Orange and Tatnall streets into a fully operational office space, outfitted with a kitchen, a kegerator and conference tables that double as ping-pong tables. As part of the project, he also purchased the old, poorly run, indie movie theater on the first floor and planned to revive it as well. I worked at both locations.

My first job at the Mill involved working with a multi-media company called First Ascent and with Herrera. They charged me with the task of developing a weekly newsletter, in addition to establishing a copyright for the Mill website, in order to highlight the noteworthy resources supplied by our coworking space. Herrera himself planned on supplying a regular column dedicated to discussing what he saw happening in the Delaware economy. This turned out to be the hardest job assigned to me, because the CEO was very particular about what he wished to say and how he wished to say it. Often, my own articles would get scrapped at the last minute for a variety of production reasons, but this was all part of the learning process, and while it was sometimes stressful I found this whole (new) ordeal enlightening.

An important part of the challenge, I learned, was that newsletter production was a much lower priority for my boss, given the scope of the Mill project. He had too many things to focus on and only chose to start the newsletter because it was something he believed his space needed. We began with no set format, no real plan before I sat down with him, no mission, and, until I arrived, though he definitely knew what he wanted, he wasn't set on how to make it happen. My experience serving on *The Broadsheet* production staff trained me to know what a newsletter should look like, but my idea and vision often didn't line up with his. The internship indoctrinated me into the sometimes fraught task of working for a boss.

Pretty soon after starting at the Mill, the internship became a way of life, and to be quite honest it was stressful as anything. I was constantly living on my toes. One moment I would be sitting in an office or at a desk, and the next I would find myself sitting on the floor surrounded by power tools, because I was assigned the job of assembling new desks for the space. (On my final day I established a personal record of building eight tight and freestanding desks within the space of two hours!) When I wasn't at a desk or building one, I was writing, and when I wasn't writing I found myself running errands for the Mill. Each day that I walked into the Nemours building seemed like the first new step in a never ending adventure, and yes I would be lying if I didn't admit that my duties often involved my share of grunt work. But the work I did in that office kept me alert, drove me crazy, and kept me busy. When I wasn't interacting with employees from the different companies we housed, I was making trips to liquor stores, coffee stands, and sub shops. All the while I enjoyed myself and understood that the old skills I was using and new ones I was acquiring would prove very valuable to me once graduation was behind me. The experience was so positive, in fact, that I hope to return to work at the Mill someday.

You see, as an English major I thrive when I am challenged to make connections, to read, interpret data, and then apply what I have learned. Everyday I found myself socializing with a wide variety of people whose motivations, perspectives, and sense of mission were informed by a combination of business plans and career aspirations.

I learned quickly how proficient I had become at using my skills, even when it came to analyzing the consumer reactions to products companies at the Mill were supplying. I was able to help out at a company called “Smart Ventures,” whose main representative, Jerry Moran, is from Ireland and let me sit in on meetings he was conducting with young entrepreneurs and later talk with him about my opinions on his ventures as well as my visits to Ireland. Many readers of this publication who have since moved on to the world-of-work might not be surprised that my studies and experiences at Merrimack equipped me to enter Herrera’s coworking space and make a contribution. Even when I found myself in situations in which I had no idea what I was doing, I realized quickly how important it was to say “yes” to any prospect, any challenge, in order to grow.

Everyone majoring in English should actively seek out internship or employment opportunities at coworking spaces, where the dynamic atmosphere and variety of businesses promise to deliver more in the way of work experience and skill development. I think being in a place with hundreds of opportunities to learn, cultivating the habit of saying yes, taking advantage of what others know and were willing to teach me about their journeys was one of the most beneficial things I could have done going into my senior year. Now that I look back at all the times I agreed to perform grunt work with a smile I understand the importance of cultivating a positive attitude and I think realizing that the professionals I was working with were often just as stressed and desperate for answers on what to do next as I was made me realize that we’re all really just trying to figure life out.

This internship got me started on the dreaded task of building that network about which everyone talks. It also helped me discover who I am as a writer. Rhetorically, I was challenged to gauge the value of different approaches to an audience and to consider different ways to produce the kind of newsletter for which my boss was searching. Most importantly I learned to stay humble and admit when I needed a little extra help (half kegs weigh more than I can lift into a car alone and I am no longer ashamed to admit that) or time. This experience gave me a great sense of perspective on what I wish to do with my future and to be honest, I couldn’t be more grateful for that.

English Department Chair Professor Steven Scherwatzky (Restoration and Eighteenth Century Literature) interacts with our alumni panelists prior to the event. Serving as founder, organizer, and annual host of the English Career Night, he would later tell the crowd how elated he was that, unlike the Career Night he emceed three years earlier, he was not suffering from the after-effects of a disastrous encounter with a broken ceramic tea cup!



200 YEARS OF THOREAU: AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD HIGGINS, AUTHOR OF *THOREAU AND THE LANGUAGE OF TREES*

BY KIERA DUGGAN

Growing up in Concord, Massachusetts, I've always felt a connection to famous authors from my town. I went to writing camp at Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House. I have explored the Old Manse and Walden Pond countless times, and my elementary school bore Henry David Thoreau's name. Exploring Concord without its long history of writing is impossible for both residents and visitors alike. For example, Richard Higgins, a family friend, resides in Concord and, for him, Concord history remains relevant and important even now. His book *Thoreau and the Language of Trees* was published this year, the bicentennial of Thoreau's birth. Higgins has written for the *Boston Globe* and numerous other publications, and has also worked as an editor. *Thoreau and the Language of Trees* combines excerpts from Thoreau's writings, Higgins' analysis, and photographs Higgins himself has taken of the trees and landscapes about which Thoreau wrote. The following interview details Higgins' writing and editing processes, and the significance, in his view, of Thoreau to 21st-Century writers and readers.

What made you decide to write your book?

Amazement at the beauty, insight and depth of feeling in Thoreau's writing about trees. You have to care about trees in order to feel like that, but I did. For me, reading his work on trees was like having a vague interest in, say, Irish step dancing, and then seeing the most gifted step dancer in the world—a master of skill and deep expression. You are transfixed. Or if you know how to translate Shakespeare's archaic language and then read a Shakespeare play. Suddenly you get it! You see what a genius he is. I wanted to share Thoreau's genius and love for trees. However if you are a writer, and there is already a book on the subject, that much and \$2 will get you a cup of coffee. But I was lucky. There was not.

What was the writing process like? How long did it take to research and then assemble a first draft?

Essentially forever. I collected string for a long time. I began before I knew enough about Thoreau or trees. I made many mistakes, including departing from my narrative focus and being impressed with my writing. More mistakes than you can imagine, which I usually only realized later. But each one make me a better writer and the book, when it was finally done, a better book.

When did you begin reading Thoreau? Did you feel a personal connection to the author and his writings from the start?

I read some required standard Thoreau in college but not much. I read *Walden* in my 40s while in graduate school for the second time, at Harvard Divinity School. I took a course in nature writing with Richard Niebuhr—an unbelievable gift. *Walden* is not an easy book, and I might not otherwise have tried it, but Niebuhr revealed its magic. I then read Thoreau's natural history essays, which are extremely amusing, even funny, when they are not fascinating or beautiful, full of images painted with words. Still among my favorite reading.

***Thoreau and the Language of Trees* incorporates photos as well as excerpts from Thoreau's writing. How did you decide the book necessitated visuals to complement the writing?**

Perception was the key to Thoreau's love of nature. I wanted people to be able to see trees the way Thoreau did, as he had taught me how to see them, and I had become a photographer of them.

How do you think your work at the *Boston Globe* as a staff writer compares to writing books/writing creatively?

Writing even feature pieces for a newspaper, which is what I mainly did, is still somewhat formulaic. The format, diction, style, length and audience are all pretty much within familiar borders, which is why you can get good at it. Writing on your own is much more open—you have to set those parameters yourself. It is harder but can be more rewarding. To write a book you have to have a really good idea, an indestructible structure and an unswerving commitment to getting it done. A hard combination to achieve.

Likewise, how does editing compare to composing your own work? How has editing influenced your skills and experiences as a writer?

Yes, though it is 10 times easier to edit other people's writing. I quickly see all their flaws, verbosity and muddled sentences. The problem is, I can't see these in my own writing, not initially. I'm amazed at how much I find wrong in my prose if I wait days, weeks, months or years and reread. (It is startling and a great pleasure to read something I wrote years ago and find it OK.) My experience as an editor has made me fanatical about economy, making every word *do* something, pull some sort of load. I rewrite what I read—often literally, first copying it into my computer—because I can't stand indirect or unnecessary padding.

Why do you think the study of English is important? What advice would you give current English majors?

Yes. Long term, it will broaden your perspective, make you a better thinker and more humane person in ways that are, unfortunately, more imperceptible than measurable. I have heard for 40 years that the English major will now finally have his or her day in our debased world—that our culture has become so illiterate and our speech so coarse that surely he or she will surely possess skills in great need. It has yet to happen, and I doubt it ever will. But I would stick with it anyway. Thoreau's advice to all of us is good for the English major: know and do what you love, not merely what you think you do, which may really be shaped by other people, influences or expectations. As he put it: "Know your own bone; gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw it still."

My interview with Richard Higgins has provided me with greater insight into my own relationship with Thoreau. Despite the ways in which he and his writings were a staple of my childhood, I had always found him difficult to relate to, and far preferred other Concord authors, like Louisa May Alcott. However, upon seeing how Higgins so clearly saw illumination for the contemporary reader in Thoreau has made me rethink how accessible and applicable he is in 2017. It's impossible to be in Concord without being haunted by the historical figures that lived here, but the fact of where I live doesn't mean I find their experiences to be any more applicable to my own life. Thoreau always seemed so idealistic and out of touch in a world now so tangibly influenced by climate change, industry and commerce. In high school we'd occasionally walk to Walden Pond, crossing a busy highway. It was always a challenge to sit at the site of Thoreau's cabin, reflecting on his life, when the noise of the cars was louder than that of the wind over the water. Thoreau, though, was quite aware of industrial change, and his choice to live at Walden was a decision framed by the rapidly changing world in which he lived.

As Higgins pointed out to me, if there's one thing Thoreau was familiar with, it was making personal choices that fulfilled him, regardless of others' feelings. I'm sure any English major can relate to that—years of people giving unsolicited opinions on my subject of study and challenging my choice of major have been by far the most frustrating parts of my college career, even more than the volume of reading I've assigned and papers I struggled to write. I definitely won't be moving into a pond-side cabin after graduation, but Thoreau and I might find some commonality yet.

HOLLYWOOD'S MOST RECENT ADAPTATION OF STEPHEN KING'S *IT* WILL MAKE YOU FLOAT, TOO!

BY RYANN GAGNON

On September 8th, 2017, *IT* rose from the sewer and into a theater near you. Based on Stephen King's terrifying novel, the movie weaves suspense, gore and even comedy into one motion picture. Viewers might leave the theater with a newly developed trepidation when passing over sewer grates or walking by children wearing yellow rain coats. As the second on-screen adaptation of the book since 1990, the 2017 reworking of *IT* brings the infamous demon-clown back to life for the third time.

In the first ten minutes of the film, the demon after whom the movie is named violently claims his first victim; an innocent young boy named Georgie (Jackson Robert Scott). Pennywise the "dancing clown" (Bill Skarsgard) shows no mercy, going so far as to bite off the boy's arm before his death. Georgie's grief-stricken older brother, Bill (Jaeden Lieberher), is determined to uncover the truth about his missing brother. When more and more children in Derry, Maine mysteriously disappear, Bill and the rest of the "Losers' Club," (the nickname his group of friends proudly gives itself) venture into the dark world of Pennywise in a search for answers. Our young heroes find themselves quickly immersed in personal stagings of their own fears, and each must confront the very thing that terrifies him the most.

Comic elements make *IT* remarkable, providing welcome respite throughout the film. The casting of the Losers' Club, for example, could not be more perfect. From Richie's (Finn Wolfhard) quick sarcastic remarks to Eddie's (Jack Dylan Grazer) hilarious reactions to anything involving germs, viewers will laugh perhaps almost as often as they cringe. When Jack Dylan Grazer's character becomes outraged upon learning his prescription may consist of "gazebo" pills and when the young kids scream "holy sh*t" at the exact same moments as the audience, the theater I was in erupted with laughter. This might be the only horror film I've ever seen that was as funny as it was scary. Viewers come to see a movie about a psychotic clown and end up laughing for a good portion of the screening. But the display of film-making expertise does not stop at the comedy. The special effects in this movie are quite remarkable. As examples, when Pennywise grows a shark-like mouth of long, pointed teeth it made my skin crawl, and when Pennywise tears off Georgie's arm it looks so realistic I could almost feel my own limb being wrenched out of the socket.

A common critique of *IT* is that it's simply not frightening enough. Perhaps the actual number of scenes containing scream-worthy material is lower than expected, but the psychology of the film succeeds at making *IT* terrifying. Surely, it doesn't get much darker than a shape-shifting demon who feeds on the fear and lives of children. Moreover, the movie gives no explanation as to where Pennywise came from; there's no background information on him at all. I wondered: are there more demons like him? Does he come from Hell? Another dimension? Or is he the demented spirit of some horrible person who lived long ago? What if an even more destructive goal than terrorizing and killing a few children here and there fuels him? Possibilities such as these prove tormenting enough to keep even the bravest of horror fans awake at night.

In 1990, Hollywood released the first on-screen rendition of *IT*. King and fans alike were disappointed. Twenty-seven years later, however, King finally got an adaptation of his novel he actually enjoyed, stating, "the producers have done a wonderful job with the production." King specifically notes that he loves how his characters were portrayed, and felt that his fans would as well. He suggested that if viewers like and care about the characters, the frights and dangers coming their way will strike the audience as even more chilling. King says that he saw the movie twice; he "felt he was seeing things the second



time through that [he] missed the first time". Surely, loyal fans can enjoy the film knowing it was approved by *the King himself*.

Beyond the theater, one can expect to find Pennywise lurking behind nearly every corner of social media. The clown has appeared in thousands of humorous memes across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. The clown has been depicted dancing to pop and rap music, with various politician's faces photoshopped onto his, and he has been used to illustrate relatable feelings of everyday life. It's no secret that when millennials make memes out of something, it's because they

like it. But why satirize this particular character so widely? To me, the demon's relevance to current events is undeniable. Since its origins, the clown archetype represents the social fool; indeed, the word "clown" is regularly used as a description of anyone who's incompetent or clueless. In this particularly heated political climate, we see that the incompetency of high-ranking politicians is nothing short of terrifying. Pennywise thus becomes a symbol of the horror that arises when a president has no idea what he's doing.

To anyone who's yet to see the movie (and feels brave enough to), it's time to familiarize yourself with *IT*. The film is captivating from start to finish, and is unlike any movie experience you've ever had. Once you've seen the most popular horror of 2017, you'll float too.





Current students soak in wisdom offered by alumni Diana Li (left) and Brian Courtemanche (right). Diana now works as a store manager for Abercrombie and Fitch, and Brian serves as Director of the Endicott College Library.



Megan Hathaway explains to the audience that she knew she wanted to work at The Boston Foundation and consequently applied for a volunteer position as the means to getting her foot in the door.

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