

UCL DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH NEWSLETTER

Welcome From the Head of Department

As I draw near to the end of my three years as Head of Department I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to reflect on the pleasure of seeing so many of you at our alumni events and on other occasions over the last three years. The alumni events, in which a number of my colleagues and friends of the department including alumni have participated, have been immensely well attended and enjoyable. In 2008 we celebrated the 400th anniversary of John Milton's birthday, the first of our series of events on the theme of 'Literature Seen, Heard and Spoken'. In 2009 we held the other two events in this series, one on Shakespeare: Words and Performance (in March) and one on Literature and Song (in June). Later in the year we joined with the Greek and Latin Department to celebrate the 150th anniversary of A. E. Housman's birth. And earlier this year (March) we held a 'Bloomsbury Day', focusing on Bloomsbury past and present. You can see reports of these events in recent issues of this newsletter posted on the Department's website (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/english/alumni/index.htm>). We were delighted that so many of you were able to come to the events, and we were also pleased to see some of you at the Northcliffe Lectures, a biennial series of guest lectures in the Department (given by Jenny Uglow in 2008 and Caryl Phillips in 2010). Invitations to these and other departmental events are issued in our alumni newsletters; please do keep an eye as well on the 'News and Events' page of our website for further information.

The Department has seen a number of changes since I wrote to you earlier this year. Three of our most long-standing members have retired: two academic colleagues, Tim Langley and Sarah Wintle, and our Department Administrator Kathryn Metzenthin. Between them, these three colleagues had clocked up almost 100 years of service! They are greatly missed and we wish them all the best for their retirement. We were sorry too to say goodbye to Clare Szembek, the Department's administrative assistant, who has moved to the Spanish and Latin American Studies department. We also have some new faces amongst us. Stephen Cadywold joins us from the Slade Institute of Fine Art as our new Department Administrator. Alison Shell comes to us from Durham as a lecturer in Shakespeare and the Renaissance (some of you may remember her as a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow in this Department in the mid-1990s). Jane Darcy joins us as a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow. We are delighted to welcome these new colleagues.

I can report some exciting developments in our research activities. The new City Centre was launched last June with a wide-ranging and provocative lecture on 'City of Disappearances: Losing Oneself in the Modern and Post-Modern Metropolis' by Michael Sheringham (Marshall Foch Professor of French Literature at Oxford University), and you can view a number of other events linked to the Centre on its website (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/citycentre/Events>). The Medieval Song Network, co-directed by Ardis Butterfield, held in September a very successful workshop funded by the AHRC, the first in a series to be held in 2010-11. Chris Laoutaris was recently shortlisted for the Tony Lothian Prize for best first biography proposal for *The Queen's Soldier: The Life and Wars of Elizabeth Russell* (more on this below).

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Substantial publications in 2010 by members of the Department include *The American Short Story Since 1950* by Kasia Boddy, *Restless Cities*, a collection of essays edited by Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart, *The Oxford Companion to the Book* co-edited by Henry Woudhuysen, and *Victorian Biography Reconsidered: A Study of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives* by British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow Juliette Atkinson. Other colleagues' books are about to be published as I write, including Peter Swaab's *BFI Film Classics /Bringing up Baby/* (see further below) and a collection of essays edited by Hugh Stevens entitled *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*.

Thank-you for all your support during my headship, and thanks too to those who have helped me in organising alumni activities over this period, especially Berry, Kathy, Anita, Clare and John Morton. I have greatly enjoyed the opportunity to build links with alumni, and I know that the Department will continue to develop such links. Your encouragement and participation in our future shows us that your time here is one which you continue to draw on in your lives. I hope you will feel able to continue this collaboration in the years to come.

Professor Susan Irvine
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Bloomsbury Walk



Rosemary Ashton recently conducted a guided historical walk exploring the role Bloomsbury played in the reform of education and culture in 19th Century London taking in significant buildings such as University College London; the Ladies' College in Bedford Square, founded in 1849 to give higher education to women; Dr Williams's Library in Gordon Square, built in 1849 as a hall of residence for students at UCL; the Catholic Apostolic Church in Gordon Square, opened in 1853 and professing a millenarian creed; Mary Ward House in Tavistock Place, built in arts and

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crafts style in 1897 to offer free play and education to working-class children and their parents; and the Mary Ward Centre in Queen Square, which carries on the work of Mary Ward House, offering education in a wide range of subjects, both academic and practical, to local people.

Bloomsbury Squares

A trail of installations in nine of Bloomsbury's garden squares can be followed to discover little-known information about the squares' origins and the people connected with them. The trail, developed by the Bloomsbury Project and local design practice, Practice + Theory offers an opportunity to explore Argyle, Bedford, Bloomsbury, Brunswick, Gordon, Queen, Regent, Russell, and Tavistock Squares and learn more about how they developed during the 19th century.

The UCL Centre for Early Modern Exchanges

Alumni may be interested in a new UCL research centre in which the English Department is centrally involved. My recent personal research, into a family of seventeenth-century English Catholic writers with connections in Spain and elsewhere, led me to draw on the expertise of a colleague in the Department of Spanish and Latin American Studies, Alexander Samson. We found that it was so enjoyable and fruitful to share and discuss each other's work that we wanted to extend our conversations to include specialists in our period from other departments and faculties – and so the UCL Centre for Early Modern Exchanges was born (with generous support from the UCL Grand Challenge of Intercultural Interaction, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, and the Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences).

We're using the expression 'early modern' in the sense understood by historians, to mean the period between the medieval and the modern (so not the early phase of literary modernism around the 1890s). The Centre is interested in all kinds of intercultural exchange in all parts of the world in the period 1450-1800. These include travel writings, experiences of exile and migration, translation, literary influences across borders, the circulation of books and manuscripts, and trade in general. We want to explore representations of those of other nations, races, and religions; occasions of significant cultural contact or heightened anxiety (such as, for example, the marriage of Mary Tudor to Philip II of Spain, or the Armada conflict); and the circulation of all kinds of knowledge, including medicine, science, and technologies as well as literature and art. The interplays between the early modern period and its classical and medieval pasts, between innovation and nostalgia, and between the Old World and the New are further themes that we plan to address.

We held a launch event on 29th April 2010 at which we were delighted to welcome Brian Cummings of the University of Sussex, who gave a memorable talk on 'Shakespeare and the Inquisition'. This concerned a fascinating literary object: a copy of Shakespeare's First Folio which was substantially censored by an English Jesuit in

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Spain. Professor Cummings brilliantly demonstrated how the censor's deletions and excisions formed a kind of dialogue with Shakespeare's text – an intercultural exchange, in fact.

We have an ongoing series of seminars which take place at 4.30pm on Wednesday afternoons, and which combine speakers from different disciplines at UCL with guest speakers from elsewhere. These include, in autumn 2010, Quentin Skinner and William Sherman, with topics such as 'France and England: Medieval to Early Modern'; 'Renaissance Virtues: Privation and Manipulation'; and 'The History of the Book'. Full details may be found on our website at www.ucl.ac.uk, which is adorned with images from the UCL Art Collections who have also given us invaluable support.

Also available on the website is the call for papers for a major conference which we are organising for 15-17 September 2011. Keynote speakers include Barbara Fuchs, Andrew Hadfield, and David Norbrook, and we have already received offers of panels on everything from portraiture to anatomy to early modern terrorism. Longer term plans include a new interdisciplinary MA in Early Modern Studies, and various research projects.

Alumni are very welcome to come along to the seminars and conference, and to take part in any other of our activities that are of interest. Please feel free to join in with our early modern exchanges.

Helen Hackett

Alumni News

Soumik Data, 'British Sarod Maestro'

It is wonderful to report on the fascinating career of one of you. Since graduating from UCL and with a MMus in Composition from Trinity College of Music, Soumik Datta (26) has been on a steady rise to becoming the new name in British Asian contemporary music.

The young 'British Sarod Maestro' (Time Out) has released 3 albums through his own record label *Baithak Records*. He has collaborated with mercury award winner Talvin Singh, choreographer Akram Khan, comedian Bill Bailey, composer Nitin Sawhney and Beyonce. For soundbites and clips please visit www.soumikdatta.co.uk. In 2010, he played at Ronnie Scott's, Theatre des Abesses (Paris), WOMAD Festival, *Eplanade* Singapore, Sydney Opera House, Israel Festival and has been received by rapturous audiences across the globe.

Films such as *West is West* and *Brick Lane* feature Soumik's unique Sarod, a sound that is a 'must for those who find Indian music intimidating' (Songlines Magazine). He has recently scored *Life Goes On*, a British Asian feature film starring Om Puri. The soundtrack album under the same name is an eclectic mix of Indian classical

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music, French rap, London Dub, symphonic suites, Turkish influences, Tagore, Gibran and Shakespeare and is available on iTunes, Amazon, Napster, Shazam etc.

In 2011 Spring, Soumik will compose for the world tour of Moroccan choreographer Siddi Larbi Cherkaoui's 'Bound', for the Alchemy Festival, Southbank Centre, and for his next feature film TBA. In 2011 autumn, Soumik directs *The Tagore Project* - a devised theatrical production with live music exploring the work of Indian national poet Rabindranath Tagore, commissioned and supported by the National Theatre Studios.

Farewells

From Kathy Metzenthin

After working for 25 years in the English department at UCL, I finally left UCL this October. The delivery from the HR department of not one, but two certificates marked this, as if to emphasise that I was now officially certifiable. However, getting away wasn't going to be as easy as I thought. It started with a leaving party in June, which I shared with my academic colleagues Sarah Wintle and Tim Langley, also both leaving after many years in the department. We had a great party including some fine displays of ping pong, especially from the demon batsman Mark Ford. A farewell lunch was planned in Pizza Paradiso before I went on holiday at the end of August with the intention of never returning. However just before I was about to head off into the sunset (or in this case sunshine) escape was denied yet again when I was asked if I would come back to cover until my successor started in post. The lunch went ahead anyway although I by now had to confess that we were all there on a somewhat fraudulent basis, and that I wouldn't be disappearing for some time yet! But look on the bright side – an excuse for another, this time final lunch – followed by a karaoke session!

I first arrived at UCL back in 1985 at a time of financial austerity – does this sound familiar! At the time I was working at Bedford College, in the – compared to Foster Court – idyllic setting of Regent's Park. Bedford College was one of the smaller Colleges of the University, proud of its history as the first institution to offer full degrees to women. Life was much less stressful then - we had time for longish tea breaks, longish lunch breaks and drunken student parties that went on until after the gates closed. And we had offices that looked out over the Park. This all came to an end when, for financial reasons, it was decided that the University of London should be concentrated on five sites, a decision that hit the smaller colleges hardest, who were forced to consider mergers. There were protests, appeals, demonstrations, campaigns against redundancies, but of course the mergers went ahead anyway, in Bedford's case with Royal Holloway College, under the tongue-tripping name of 'Bedford and Royal Holloway New College', this name soon, predictably, to be abandoned in favour of 'Royal Holloway'. My first experience of travelling out to Egham was inauspicious – I got on the wrong train which turned out to be heading for the train wash (like a car wash only bigger – MUCH bigger - as I must be one of the

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few people to have discovered) and then to a depot at Clapham Junction, from where I had to be walked back up the line to the station! It became clear that, even if one got on the right train three hours of travelling every day to Egham wasn't going to be tolerable. I looked around for a new job, saw that a vacancy in the UCL English department was being advertised and put in an application.

I was interviewed by Karl Miller who was then head of department, and by Sarah Wintle, who was Departmental Tutor. This was back in the days when one was still expected to be able to do shorthand, and I was duly asked if this was in my repertoire of skills. I answered that I had learnt it but was a bit rusty – to which Karl replied 'Not to the point of atrophy I hope'. I denied atrophy, claimed to know what an FTE was, said I wasn't afraid of doing the departmental accounts and was offered the job.

I started at UCL in the middle of September, nowadays one of the busiest times of the academic year, and it is hard to imagine that one could begin a new job only a couple of weeks before the start of term and not be scared witless.

The English department was, as now, in Foster Court. It had dark brown indestructible carpets and mustard yellow doors, which we only got rid of when the whole building was refurbished twenty years later. In support of the brown carpets they were much more successful at hiding the wine stains than their carpet tile replacements!

There was one computer in the department and it was on my desk. Henry Woudhuysen and Danny Karlin, then junior lecturers, used to plead to use it and would squabble over which of them was going to get a go. I spent a fair amount of time pressed up against the window with one of them at my elbow! Of course one can't do anything without computers these days. Everything is now on line, supposedly in the name of efficiency, though as we have all experienced, if the systems go down one is virtually helpless. And as for waiting for those reports to load well the frustrations are endless.

I feel that I have been very lucky in many ways in my working life. I have had a job that has changed so much over the years that I could say that I have had new jobs without having had to move. I have had lots of advice and help from colleagues in the central division, and from a group of fellow administrators in the faculty with whom I have been able to share some of the frustrations and annoyances and to have a jolly good moan. I have been lucky to work in a department where everyone, both students and staff, for the most part gets on well with each other, which has high standards both academically and administratively, and which has an ethos of co-operation and willingness to work together to share the burdens. I have also been lucky in having worked with excellent heads of department, who have always given me lots of support and with whom it has been a pleasure to work, and in having had administrative colleagues who are unstinting in their efforts to make sure that students have what they need and that the department functions smoothly. As only one of a small number of administrative staff in an academic department, I have been able to work with a fair degree of independence knowing that everyone else is glad that you are doing your job and that they don't have to.

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When you retire, everyone asks you what you are going to do. For one thing, I look forward to a life where no-one comes along and says - is the photocopier working today; has the post been yet; is there something wrong with the computers; the biochemistry lecture theatre is over that way somewhere isn't it; where's the stationery cupboard these days; is it face down for the fax - and so on! Apart from this benefit, I will finally have time for all those things that get pushed to one side - more books, more theatre, more travel, more music.

I feel I should mention one or two of the more memorable occasions of life at UCL -

One of these is the preparations for the first of the Research Assessment Exercises when I was reduced to tears by having to count the numbers of publications produced by the department over a number of calendar years - not academic years, which is how they were normally represented - including fractions where there had been more than one author (who might have been from another institution), and getting different results every time I tried to do it! This was counteracted though by the three occasions when the department found out that it had achieved the highest ratings in the Research Assessment Exercises.

Another was the time when the cleaners threw away a box full of finalists' unmarked Special Subject Essays - don't worry we did recover copies of the Essays. A nightmare for us but good copy for the student newspaper!

Then there were the social occasions such as the finalists' parties, with René Weis's famous trifle, and the superior sausages that we never got because Michael Mason left them in the boot of his car at Oxford station.

More recently, the alumni events that the Department has organised have been such enjoyable occasions, with the opportunity both to hear such a wide range of entertaining and stimulating talks given, for the most part, by our former students and staff, and to catch up with all those whom I remember from their time as students in the department. I shall certainly be back for more of those, this time as an alumnus myself.

And I will probably always remember when Caryl Phillips, whom I had nursed through various anxieties connected with his coming to deliver the 2010 Northcliffe Lectures paid me the compliment (?) of saying that I was 'departmental valium'! I hope I haven't sent you to sleep.

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From Sarah Wintle

In the first Alumni Newsletter John Sutherland claimed to be the longest-serving staff member ever. I now claim the record. I came to the Department as a first year student in October 1966, left for four years in 1969, returned in 1973 and retired in September this year. Forty years in Foster Court – beat that.

I can remember the name of 25 of my fellow students and I don't think I've forgotten more than two or two three. We were part of the 10% or so of our generation to go to university, a proportion increased from the 5% at the beginning of the decade as a consequence of the 1963 Robins Report and the foundation of the 'new universities' - Sussex, Warwick, York. The group was mostly grammar school educated, mostly the first generation in their families to go to university, and almost certainly the first women. After interview the entry requirement was two Es at A level. The ten paper course was heavily weighted to the past: eight compulsory courses included Old English, two Medieval courses and Shakespeare, and among the options was 'Modern Literature'. Romantic and Victorian literature made up one paper and there was no dedicated first year course. Ten University of London papers were sat in a week or so at the end of our third year, and despite the awfulness of sitting exams, the preparatory experience of reviewing and revising three years' work was intense and curiously exciting.

We had fortnightly one-to-one tutorials, whole year classes for OE and ME, lots of lectures, not always well attended, no seminars except a practical criticism class and, in the third year, Shakespeare seminars. I can remember the names of nineteen members of staff and looking back from the present, the ratio of staff to student seems astonishing. Not only was there so much less undergraduate teaching, but there were few graduate students and certainly no flourishing MA courses.

Foster Court, indeed the whole college, was depressingly scruffy; pitted brown lino and institutional cream paint gave a strong impression that the place could never be properly clean. High-minded secularism saw comfort as self-indulgent. When in 1973 I came back as a very young lecturer the head of the History took me down to the basement of his Gordon Square department and spoke eloquently of Bloomsbury housemaids lighting the boiler at six in the morning while the Stevens sisters slept on upstairs. There were few halls of residence and a number of people lived in lonely lodgings. Because there were no seminars or set texts and few attendance requirements you were on your own except for your tutor and your friends. Pastoral care was non-existent, though the student health centre – probably unfairly -was a byword for cod-Freudianism. On the other hand there were no fees to pay and maintenance grants were, though means tested, quite generous.

I remember reading 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison' in a practical criticism class, sharing a Milton essay crisis, and my second year tutor telling me sharply that she had never met anybody so in thrall to New Critical orthodoxy for Wimsatt's essay on the intentional fallacy was my gospel. After that I took up with Raymond Williams and then in my third year bought a small beautifully produced little book with a lavender cover in a new series published by Cape – *Writing Degree Zero* by Roland Barthes. I

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remember reading many big novels (nobody had a television) – *Clarissa*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Daniel Deronda*, *Women in Love* – though I only answered on poetry and drama when it came to finals; ever the new critic perhaps. Outside there were demonstrations and marches to go on, LSE and Grosvenor Square; letters against the student ‘fascist tendency’ to be written to Pi. I’ve seen them recently and though they were rather well written they were horribly priggish. The works of the alternative psychiatrist RD Laing told us we were mad and therefore sane. At the Academy Cinema near Oxford Circus, just where the present M & S is, we watched continental films – Goddard, Truffaut, Antonioni, *Closely Observed Trains*, *WR Mysteries of the Organism*.

Frank Kermode came to the Department in my second year. It being 1968, some of us sat on the floor outside his office and demanded a confrontation for we thought the syllabus fusty and repressive. Sitting on the floor, including in classes, demonstrated our liberation not only from chairs but from the shackles of the past. Professors Kermode and Quirk however were properly radical and instigated the New Syllabus which remains the foundation of the course still taught in the Department.

The wine stains on the new carpet of the recently refurbished Foster Court bear witness to a much more social department than that of 1966. The present student body, part of the over 40% of their generation who go to university is over three times as large, not counting a hugely increased graduate population. University is no longer the exception; many, perhaps most, students have parents who are both graduates, and a requirement of two Es at A level now seems a joke. Fees now have to be paid and maintenance grants have been replaced by loans but students are here to enjoy reading as well as get a good degree. There’s still room for those who wish to follow their bent, for writing something odd, eccentric, or simply ambitious, for reading books that you won’t write on in exams.

There are only six or so more full time staff now than in 1966 although because of research fellowships and sabbaticals, rare then, the situation is fluid. The Department, despite increasing pressures external and internal, has been a good place to work. People talk to each other about books, staff to staff and staff to students. Nobody though knows what is coming next.

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Obituary

Yvonne Reynolds, 1943-2010

Many alumni will have affectionate memories of Yvonne Reynolds, who died on 8th February 2010 after a period of illness. Yvonne was a student in the English Department from 1991 to 1994, when both teachers and fellow-students greatly enjoyed her spirited and thoughtful contributions to seminars, and her presence in the social life of the department. She then took on another, even more central role when she worked in the department office from 1998 to 2001, offering many kinds of help and support to students and staff, and enlivening our days with her characteristic wit. She took a remarkable personal interest in everyone she met; indeed, she lives on in legend among her successors in the office as ‘the one who knew all the students’ names’.

Everyone in the English Department missed Yvonne very much when she decided to retire. We enjoyed keeping in touch with her and seeing her at alumni occasions, and we all feel a deep sadness now at her death. Sarah Wintle recalls that Yvonne was ‘a wonderful person to have in the English Department, and I remember a lot of laughing and much shrewdness’. She adds that ‘seeing her always lifted the spirits’. For Kasia Boddy, ‘she turned work into a pleasure, with a smile, a joke, a sharp remark’. Meanwhile Ardis Butterfield remembers Yvonne as a ‘warm and caring presence in the office’, who was always ready with ‘a sympathetic and friendly response’.

At Yvonne’s funeral on 19th February 2010, tributes offered by a number of friends vividly evoked her personality. Jessica Moran spoke of a recent shopping trip together, when Yvonne, though obviously tired, was determined to keep going and share the day. When Jessica tried something on which Yvonne thought was ridiculous, ‘she laughed out loud’, recalled Jessica, ‘and told me in no uncertain terms to take it off. Yvonne had rescued me, and not for the first time. I think that Yvonne’s determination and readiness to speak her mind, usually with humour, were just two of her wonderful qualities.’ Yvonne’s niece Fenella McGuire remembered Yvonne’s ‘tremendous integrity – if it was morally wrong then it was certainly worth fighting for’, and also Yvonne’s unfailing attentiveness and interest in her life.

Guilland Sutherland described many special moments of shared friendship, including being woken by Yvonne at 3am in Suffolk to hear a nightingale. Guilland also spoke of Yvonne’s pleasure in her UCL friendships, and in occasions such as the Keith Walker Memorial Lecture. Liz Shallcross evoked Yvonne’s intelligence, wit, and hospitality, and concluded, ‘well informed, and with strong opinions, she could be challenging, infuriating, but never boring. She was always busy, had a big list of things still to do, and was vexed to have been cheated out of the long life she had fully expected to enjoy.’

Many alumni will cherish their own memories of Yvonne, and will join in feeling how fortunate we were to have her as a member of the English Department. One of the strongest themes that emerges from the tributes to her is her gift of making and

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sustaining friendships, something from which we might all perhaps take inspiration. She is survived by her husband Stephen, her children Esme and Ben, and three grandchildren.

Departmental Books and other news:

Chris Laoutaris (UCL) Shortlisted for the 2010 Tony Lothian Prize

Chris Laoutaris has been shortlisted for the Tony Lothian Prize for best first biography proposal for *The Queen's Soldier: The Life and Wars of Elizabeth Russell*. Dr Laoutaris was awarded a British Academy Post-Doctoral Fellowship for 2007-10 to research the biography of this formidable Renaissance woman. Lady Elizabeth Russell (1540-1609) was a fighter in every sense. She declared war on Shakespeare, was the first woman in England to hold a custodial marital post, a Protestant radical, ringleader of numerous riots, meddler in international espionage and litigious battler in the courts. For more see www.biographersclub.co.uk

Chris Laoutaris is the author of *Shakespearean Maternities: Crises of Conception in Early Modern England* and is a contributor to two of Ashgate's *Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama* series of texts (edited by Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson) and the recent *History of British Women's Writing: 1500-1610* (edited by Caroline Bicks and Jennifer Summit, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2010).

***Tennyson Among the Novelists*, by John Morton**

John Morton, who organised the 'Literature Seen, Heard and Spoken' events last year and who wrote his PhD at UCL from 2003-2007, has just published monograph, *Tennyson Among the Novelists* (Continuum, 2010). A study of Tennyson's influence on novelists from the 1850s to the present day, it considers novelists as diverse as Dickens, Joyce, Woolf, Lawrence, Byatt, Waugh, O'Hagan, Hardy and George Eliot.

Philip Horne of UCL has called it 'a highly informative and entertaining feat of sustained literary detection, finding the Laureate's influence, and his words, in a wide variety of unexpected places, but also an extraordinarily learned and judicious account of the relation between prose and poetry since Tennyson's time'; Michael Sayeau (also of UCL) believes 'it makes a strong case for the restoration of Tennyson's place in our genealogies of cross-genre literary development'. More details are available from the following website:

<http://www.continuumbooks.com/books/detail.aspx?BookId=134330&SntUrl=152186>

To make use of a discount for UCL alumni, please email the author at mj20@gre.ac.uk

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Bringing Up Baby, by Pete Swaab

The first time I saw *Bringing Up Baby* on video (back when video was newish and I was youngish) I laughed so hard that the friends I was with wondered quite what had got into me. It still makes me laugh very hard even after seeing it umpteen times and writing a book about it. More than just making me laugh, though, *Bringing Up Baby* has a strange power to make me feel happy about the world. It takes such a positive view of human absurdity, gives such a welcome to trusting in luck, nerve and character, puts work and worry so decisively in their place, subordinate to vitality and what screwball comedy tends to call 'fun'. Funny, certainly, but 'fun' too, in the cryptically value-laden sense which screwball gives to the idea of 'fun'.

The film was directed by Howard Hawks in 1938, some way into Hollywood's great decade of screwball comedies, which kicked off in 1934 with Frank Capra's on-the-road comedy *It Happened One Night* and Hawks's own hysterical and histrionic *Twentieth Century*. In *Bringing Up Baby*, as many readers will know, Cary Grant plays a naïve and repressed palaeosaurologist who becomes entangled with (and ensnared by) a wilful heiress (Katharine Hepburn). Chaos ensues and romance blossoms as not one but two leopards are set loose in verdant Connecticut. 'Baby' is a pet leopard – there are no human babies in the story, which is refreshingly unconcerned with family values – and the film wonders profoundly why we want animals in our lives and why we sometimes need to behave as animals ourselves. The 1930s saw a 'cycle' of horror films and also of screwball comedies. Successful films in these fast-moving genres knew about their predecessors and often alluded to them or departed from them. Audiences were smart and informed about the themes and variations involved. In researching the film in relation to its genre, I came to think *Bringing up Baby* both the epitome of screwball comedy and an exception to its rules. Its epitome, for chaos, wildness, a heroine who is far from subordinated, and gags with some comic tradition behind them, an exception in that it's not moralistic or idealistic, not particularly interested in marriage or remarriage, and not interested in the meeting of wealth and poverty. Although never socially earnest in the admirable way of many screwballs, it is in its own way an American dream of independence. It believes the real way to get on in life – for film-makers as well as scientists – isn't by deference and respectability but by having sexy fun with the right people.

Like its heroine, *Bringing Up Baby* never lets up. Its speed is breathtaking. 'Fun is fun, but no girl wants to laugh all of the time,' according to the sage blonde words of Anita Loos's Lorelei Lee. But in this amazing film we do go on laughing all the time; every scene without exception is a funny one. Only in the last section in the jail does the comic invention fall off, and even here it in no way slows down. Perhaps this is the key to the utopian magic of the film. It is a good place where everything is delightful and funny, not excepting things which can elsewhere cause alarm and mayhem, and – as Katharine Hepburn keeps telling us – 'everything's going to be all right'. Life can't normally take place in such a comic atmosphere and at such a relentlessly comic pace, but perhaps romance can, and the film places its trust in the wild abnormalities of romance.

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Hawks came to think he had made the story too ubiquitously screwy: ‘It had a great fault and I learned an awful lot from it. There were *no* normal people in it. Everyone you met was a screwball and since that time I have learned my lesson and I don’t intend ever again to make everybody crazy... I think it would have done better at the box office if there had been a few sane folks in it – everybody was nuts’. This isn’t entirely true – the lawyer Mr Peabody is normal enough and the others are variously and intermittently eccentric, no more. But the exemption from normality which Hawks calls a fault – reflecting on the relatively disappointing box office returns – seems to me more like a description of the magic of the film.

I hope that English department alumni will be able to experience this magic for themselves at some upcoming screenings which I’ll be introducing. The first is at the Barbican Cinema at 8.30pm on Monday 6 December, celebrating publication of the book on 3 December, with a Q and A session after the film. But if that date is too soon, I’ll be introducing another screening at the BFI Southbank on 11 January 2011.

UCL alumni can buy *Bringing Up Baby* by Peter Swaab at a 50% discount on its cover price of £9.99 by going online at www.palgrave.com and entering the discount code WBRINGBABY2010 when confirming the order.

Pete Swaab

British Colonial Cinema Project

Lee Grieveson just finished a 3 year AHRC funded research project on British Colonial Cinema, the fruits of which are available here: www.colonialfilm.org.uk.

Medieval Song and More

Ardis Butterfield has elected to a Visiting Fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford (2010-11) and her new book *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford, 2009) has been very well-received including in the current LRB (7 Oct 2010). Ardis’s inaugural lecture was held on Thursday 18 November, ‘The Origins of English Song’, with Angus Smith, tenor, The Orlando Consort and Christopher Page as Respondent. She has also received an AHRC award of £36,840 from their Research Networking Scheme to support a workshop series and concert in 2010-11 for the Medieval Song Network. (More details on the Dept News section).

***The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*, edited by Hugh Stevens**

This will be published in November 2010.