
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH & COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

San José State University
Spring 2006

Contents:

Lurie Chair Houston: The Visiting Professor by <i>Dareth Pray</i>	1
The Honors Program by <i>Sara Scovil</i>	2
SJSU says "Farewell" to Professor Keeseey by <i>Stefanie Chase</i>	3
The English Society by <i>Katie Masters</i>	4
The Credential Program by <i>Fathima Kaleel</i>	5
Encore: Alum Returns to Sender by <i>Rey San Juan III</i>	6
Scholarships & Awards by <i>Ingrid Starink</i>	7
The Art of Epistolary: Two New Editions by <i>Delilah Gallardo</i>	8
Shillinglaw's Journey into Steinbeck Country by <i>Rachel Haigh</i>	9
Tapping into Meaning by <i>Daniel Figueroa</i>	10
Fall 2006 Course Descriptions	11
The Chair's Message	16

Lurie Chair James D. Houston: The Visiting Professor

by *Dareth Pray*

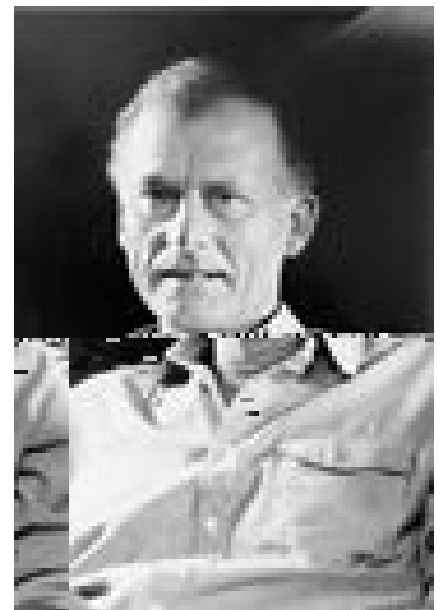
"Delightful" was the word James D. Houston used to describe his return to San José State. This semester's Lurie Chair, Houston is a graduate of SJSU's Drama Department, where he took classes in 124 Hugh Gillis Hall, the same room in which he currently teaches.

Houston is a well-respected award-winning author of both fiction and non-fiction. His works of fiction include *Continental Drift*, *A Native Son of the Golden West*, and his latest novel, *Snow Mountain Passage*, which chronicles the experiences of one family in the Donner party. He is equally prolific in non-fiction, writing *In the Ring of Fire: A Pacific Basin Journey*, *Californians: Searching for the Golden State*, and *Farewell to Manzanar*, which he co-wrote with his wife, Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, a well regarded author in her own right. Houston has just completed a novel and is currently co-editing an anthology of California Literature with Jack Hicks, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Al Young. Volume one was published in December 2000 by the University of California Press, and volume two is expected to be published in 2007.

As our Distinguished Visiting Professor of Spring '06, Houston is teaching two classes: one undergraduate literature course, English 166: American Literature Since 1945; and English 241, a graduate seminar in fiction writing. Students in Houston's literature course have the opportunity to benefit from his expertise in California literature since he has chosen the literary tradition of our state as the class' focus. Readings include Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums*, Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, and See's *Golden Days*.

What Houston hopes his students will take away from his course is a larger sense of the relationship between who we are and where we live. To this end, he introduces his students to some defining characteristics and chapters of California literature such as the Beat Generation, the California Detective Novel, the Prose of the Apocalypse, the

(continued on page 2)



Houston's personal teaching style, as his students (myself included) can attest, hinges on fostering a dialogue and a sense of community between fellow literature and writing enthusiasts. Houston calls exploring ideas about literature and fiction in a classroom setting "stimulating." One of his favorite aspects of teaching, he says, is getting students to share in his excitement about literature and his passion for crafting stories.

And it seems that Houston has accomplished this goal. Students are raving about Professor Houston: he is "approachable," "very knowledgeable," "receptive to students' ideas," and "genuine." One student says her favorite thing about Professor Houston is how "he smiles genuinely at every single person when he calls roll." Other students praise the relaxed yet intellectual atmosphere he creates in class: "he is a good facilitator—he provides feedback without dominating the discussion"; "students feel encouraged to participate"; "he listens and connects with people." One student calls his literature course, "one of the best classes I've ever taken!" Unanimously, students feel motivated to share their ideas, and they appreciate Houston's talent for sparking discussion and helping students develop their analyses. "He is open to all interpretations, as long as they can be backed up with logical reasons," says another student.

Students of SJSU are very lucky to have the opportunity to learn from the expertise of James D. Houston this semester. In addition to his classes, Houston will conduct "A Conversation with James D. Houston" at noon and a reading of his work at 7:30 pm April 13, 2006 in the Martin Luther King Jr. Library, 2nd Floor Meeting Rooms 225-229 as part of the CLA's Major Authors Series.

For more information about Houston's life and work, browse his official website at www.jamesdhouston.com.

Learn What's Going on in the Department

To receive information about department activities via email, join the English Society's List Server. To join, send an email message to this address: listproc@listproc.sjsu.edu. In the body of the text, type this: SUBSCRIBE EngDept [your first name] [your last name]. You will receive an automatic reply acknowledging your successful subscription and explaining how to unsubscribe any time you wish.

SJSU Says “Farewell” to Professor Keesey

by Stefanie Chase

Don Keesey
has been a well-
known professor
to students in
the English
Department at
San José State
University for
the past 39
years. Even
some current
SJSU English
professors have
had the pleasure
of learning a few
things from
Professor Keesey

when they were students. Unfortunately, because he has chosen to retire, this will be the last semester students can benefit from Professor Keesey’s expertise in 18th-century British literature, classics in translation, and literary theory, among other subjects.

After teaching at Michigan State University and the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, Professor Keesey made his way to SJSU in 1965 and has remained here ever since. Over the years, he has taught many courses, too many to name, in fact, not only in the English Department, but also in the Humanities Honors Program.

One of his favorite courses to teach is the seminar in “Modern Approaches to Literature.” He enjoys this class not only for the content, but also for its intimacy. Professor Keesey feels the seminar format is ideal for the content of the course. What he will miss most, though, are his conversations with students who are passionate about literature. For him, these are mostly older first-generation college students who have a special appreciation for the subject. He will remember these discussions as among his fondest memories of the university.

Because of the time period he began teaching at SJSU (in the late sixties), Professor Keesey recalls the beginning of his career here as a “lively” time, characterized by war riots, tear gas, and student strikes. Reflecting on the changes he has seen the campus undergo through the years, he notes that “the last 33 years have been comparatively peaceful.” Overall, he describes his time at SJSU as a good experience, and he feels extremely grateful he had the opportunity to teach here: “[It’s a] good place to work...[a] good place to teach.”

“Random Chuck Norris fact,” I hear as I arrive at the English Society (ES) Lounge after class. I pause at the door to listen. The young man continues, as a group of students half-listens, “Did you know that Chuck’s beard was the inspiration for the Swiss Army Knife?”

The listeners give varied responses; there is a mixture of laughter and groans, such as “That was lame!” and “Boo!”

I take a seat on the couch among my friends and try to pick up on the conversation. That is one of many things I like about the ES: you never know what discussion will be taking place. You can bet that it will be random, though, either highly intellectual or borderline ridiculous.

Located in the Faculty Office Building room 113, the ES Lounge is a “hang out room” for English majors, minors, and graduate students, but other majors are welcome to “hang out” as well. Philosophy and Criminal Justice majors, for instance, are often there as well, happily ensconced among the the literature buffs. It is a place to relax between classes, study and research, joke with one another, and take the stress out of the school day. At times, the room is buzzing with students’ voices and laughter; at other times there is but one other person quietly studying or sleeping. The atmosphere of the room varies as much as the personalities that make use of it.

“This is the room where I pretend to do homework,” jokes Richard Webb, an English major graduating this May.

“Which is a problem because he stops the rest of us from getting our work done,” adds Mary Williams, another graduating English major.

As I listen to the ongoing discussion about the all-important American icon, Chuck Norris, I think about how many of these students I have met through the ES. I have courses with many of them, but with our busy and varied schedules, and the impersonal vibe of this mostly commuter school, it is hard to get to know your classmates.

“The ES is the only thing that keeps us from going straight from class and immediately home,” says graduate student Rob Swart. The room is more than just a break from classes, however. We give, and receive, insight on classes, instructors, assignments, and our futures.

“You get help here,” says Swart. “Help on papers, debates on literature...movies,” he throws in.

English major Michael Shannon adds, “Meaning-

ful existential debate exists within these walls. Witty, rhetorical comments, and lots of laughter.”

“I can advertise my rugby team here,” jokes senior and soon-to-be graduate Ben Dondero.

Students are both friends and tutors here. We care about school, the next step, and impressing our professors, whom we see not only as instructors, but

also as mentors. The lounge is located among our professors’ offices, which allows us to develop stronger relationships with them. Professors come by to chat with us often or poke their heads in to say, “Hi.” We get to see that they are human and they, too, were once where we are now.

The ES, in fact, recognizes annually a professor who goes beyond the call of duty and gives an exemplary performance throughout the academic year. The James Joyce Distinguished Professor Award is presented to one English Department professor. The l“ Tw(-.0638 Tw[(also a51istential deb

Cruz, and take various road trips around the area. This past February, a group took a field trip to the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Because of its loose organization this year, the ES has not been able to conduct many events; however, it hopes to get organizationally busier soon. The students want to start the department teas again, set up conferences and lectures, and do some more on-campus readings, Thro8 -at my...i Tf and do some moents wb/F1 eJT what so

The California Commission of Teacher Credentialing (CTCC) is requesting that changes be made to the San José State English Department's Teacher Credential Program to meet the new state requirements. Effective fall semester 2006, those changes include the following:

New required courses:

- English 109: Writing and the Young Writer
- English 117: Film, Literature, and Cultures (previously an elective)
- English 145: Shakespeare and Performance (revised)
- One course in World Literature to be selected from the following:
 - o English 122: Topics in Comparative World Literature
 - o English 123: A-D. Literature for Global Understanding (A = The Americas, B = Africa, C = Oceania, D = Asia)
 - o English 125A: European Literature Survey

New recommended support course:

- Education 162: Language/Literacy Development of L2 Learners

New recommended elective courses:

- English 56B: English Literature Survey II
- English 68B: American Literature Survey II
- English 71, 130-137: Courses in Creative Writing
- English 102: History of the English Language
- English 115: The Bible as Literature
- English 120 or 127: Theatre History, Contemporary Theatre
- English 141-144; 146-154: Courses in British Literature
- English 161-168: Courses in American Literature

Effective fall semester 2006, Dr. Mary Warner will be assuming duties as the Coordinator of the Department of English and Comparative Literature Teacher Credential Program.

Perhaps you have seen him strutting down the halls of Sweeney, and if you are *a fool such as I*, you may have wondered what the King of Rock and Roll is doing at San José State University. It takes only a second glance, however, to realize that this isn't Elvis come to campus to give music lessons; it's Elvis' greatest fan and SJSU alum Steve Woods, a craftsman not of music, but of words. He may not be the original *big hunk of love*, but he can certainly be your *teddy bear*.

Let's *walk a mile in his shoes* and learn from the *hard knocks* Steve has experienced during his academic career. Born in Connecticut and raised in Massachusetts, he moved to California when he was ten years old. He became *all shook up* over reading and writing when he was 13 years old and began writing short stories and poetry. His biggest influences were Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Joseph Conrad. When he became a freshman at Leigh High School, he knew he wanted to become a *flaming star* writer.

After graduating from Leigh, Steve moved on to West Valley. He earned his Associate of Arts degree, then transferred to SJSU to learn the *wisdom of the ages*. He took a *smorgasbord* of courses: philosophy, psychology, history, and English. After six years of *blowing in the wind*

After a 10-year hiatus, Steve finds it refreshing to be back in a university environment. He is currently preparing his thesis, which includes a novella and a collection of short stories, for publication. Although he is done with his coursework, he still needs to complete his exams. He expects to graduate in December: *so close, yet so far*. During his time here he has not come across an English professor with a *wooden heart*: they have all been intelligent, encouraging, and generous with their time, and for that he would like to say "thank you, thank you very much."

Once he graduates, Steve knows there's a *brand new day on the horizon*. He eventually wants to move to the Sierras, to a *little cabin on a hill* where it is quiet, peaceful, and ideal for writing. He also wants to find a junior college that lacks a creative writing program so he can design his own and share his *burning love* for English. He is currently working on a novel he aims to finish by 2008. One day, he hopes to achieve that *impossible dream* every writer has: to be able to write full-time *today, tomorrow, and forever*.

When it comes to his writing, Steve feels he is not as diligent as he should be. Because his stories contain dark elements, *the devil in disguise*, so to speak, he prefers to begin writing around midnight on a cold rainy winter's night. The quietness and solitude of the night helps *get his mojo working*. His aim is to make his audience slow down their reading and appreciate the style, structure, and content of his pieces.

Steve feels that our culture is moving too fast. "As society evolves, we lose the quiet moments and our patience: nearly everything is designed to give instant gratification." He believes that we should read and write in a manner contradictory to the tendencies of society: slow and relaxed. He also feels that that writing, reading, and studying great literature can only be done one way—passionately. In that, Steve epitomizes the paradox that is rock and roll.

Ladies and gentlemen, Elvis may have left the building, but Steve Woods is here to stay.

Department Scholarships & Awards

by Ingrid Starink

As an English major, you know that writing papers comes with the territory. Make those long, laborious hours spent devising and articulating those brilliant theses work for you in other ways. Not only can you use your old papers to complete the English 193 Capstone Seminar, but with a little revising, you can also submit them for various departmental scholarships and awards.

Awards fall into two basic categories: those for which the student applies via written work, and those which require faculty nomination. Either way, there's an impressive selection and an impressive amount of money that gets distributed to deserving students. The James Phelan Award alone has eight different categories including metrical and free verse, short story, reminiscence, and critical essays. And for all you first-year students, check out the Shirley Nelson Iverson Scholarship, which is open only to freshman English majors who plan to become high school teachers.

The benefits of winning a scholarship or an award go beyond the pecuniary. Not only do awards encourage you to continue writing, but the honor will also enhance your resumé and may offer other opportunities such as prestigious memberships. Check out what some of our 2005 winners had to say:

"Poetry is a solitary art in its creation. The recognition has boost[ed] my ego and encouraged me to keep sending my work out. The Sibley [Award] was by faculty nomination. It meant a lot to me that my work was so respected by my teachers. The award I have enjoyed the most is the Araujo Award. Because it is part of the Academy of American Poets, I received a membership. [Awards] mainly serve to encourage writers to continue writing and developing as poets. They are 'green lights' in a world that is full of stop signs."

Neli Moody, graduate recipient, James Phelan Literary Award for Free Verse; Virginia de Araujo Award; Dorrit Sibley Award

"I really do appreciate the professors who didn't let me settle for "good enough" on my papers—they've taught me a lot. Having my writing honored by our esteemed faculty has given me enough encouragement to balance out the rejection letters. Plus, the awards and scholarships I've received will put some polish on my resumé."

Jenny Walicek, undergraduate recipient, James Phelan Literary Awards for Short Story and Critical Essay; Roberta Holloway Undergraduate Award; Josephine Chandler Scholarship; Catherine Urban Scholarship

"I'm very pleased my essay won two of the awards, especially since the judge was an instructor I'd never met



Letter writing has become a lost art. People today have become so accustomed to cell phones, e-mail, and instant messaging that they have forgotten the importance of letter writing. Letters can be used as tools for teaching grammar, recording human experiences, and learning about different cultures and historical periods. Due to be re-

leased this year are two publications that greatly prove that this art is well deserving of our attention: Paul Douglass' *The Whole Disgraceful Truth: Selected Letters of Lady Caroline Lamb*, and Linda Mitchell's *Studies in the Cultural History of Letter Writing*.

Professor Douglass' collection of letters permits the reader to travel through the thoughts of Lady Caroline Lamb, a novelist known for her fascinating life, and whose work is increasingly attractive to Romantic scholars. Though Lady Caroline wrote letters to a great number of people, none were so famous as her lover, Lord Byron, with whom she had an extremely public affair. Although many of the letters between the notorious lovers have been destroyed, Douglass' book presents a new discovery: a lost letter from Lord Byron to Lady Caroline, which Lady Caroline transcribed in a letter she wrote to a close friend. It is discoveries such as these that show Douglass to be a meticulous researcher who is committed to delivering the "whole truth" in his books.

The chapter titles of Douglass' book reflect the main themes of Lady Caroline's letters: "Marriage," "A Reluctant Adulthood," "Byron," "Life After Byron," and "The Career of an Author." He intersperses detailed commentary between the letters, which puts the events of Lady Caroline's life into context for the reader. This book beautifully complements Douglass' biography of Lady Caroline Lamb by allowing Lady Caroline to reveal herself as a woman of untamable depth and creativity.

Douglass spent hours transcribing letters in the prestigious John Murray Publisher's Archive and traveled to the original homes of Lady Caroline in London and at Castle Howard. Douglass' work is enjoyable to read, for it demonstrates his sincere

devotion to successfully portraying the voice of his subject by using Lady Caroline's own letters.

Linda Mitchell's new book, *Studies in the Cultural History of Letter Writing*, is a collection of essays that address themes regarding the art of epistolary, such as letters of exploration, English letter-
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cruited the services of the book's photographer, Nancy Burnett, and located additional photographs in a number of Northern California archives: "[The publisher] wanted a blend of contemporary pictures — color pictures — and older photos. And so I found them in various archives ... I used a lot of photographs from the Stanford archives, and Salinas, a couple from San José State, and a lot from the Monterey Historical Society." She took pleasure in gathering the pictures, as well as in collecting information from the various communities within the Salinas Valley, the Monterey Peninsula, and the Bay Area. "The real joy is in the writing and the research and the talking to various people," she said. "I was down in Monterey, and so I was doing research in some archives in Monterey and a lot of people were wonderfully kind, helping me shape it [the book]."

Because of the educational content of the book, reaching the widest audience proved to be the toughest challenge for Shillinglaw. "It was difficult to strike the balance between wanting to include a lot of information, wanting to make it accurate, wanting to quote from his letters and manuscripts, etc., and also making it readable."

After running the Center for Steinbeck Studies at SJSU for over eighteen years, Shillinglaw resigned last May "in part to have more time to write." Having edited five books, she explains that she was spending too much time on editing: "Editing a journal is a lot of work. You have to keep reading other people's essays and kind of go back and forth, you know, shaping the essays. And so I just felt finally like I was grading papers all the time ... but that's what it was." Now able to concentrate on her own writing, she is finishing up two biographies — one on Steinbeck, the other on his first wife — which are scheduled for publication next year. With an introduction to *The Winter of My Discontent* in the mix, she

Tapping into Meaning

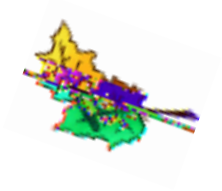
by Daniel Figueroa

In February of 2006, Professor Mary Warner's book, *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Resource of Story*, became available in all major bookstores worldwide. Based on a survey of 1,400 adolescents from around the country and directed toward educators, counselors, parents, and teens, the book offers a

The second half of the book responds to the data collected by providing detailed information on literary texts that speak to the kinds of issues today's adolescents regularly face. The chapters are organized by themes: Real-Life Experiences, Facing Loss, Identity, Struggles with Decisions, Survival,

valuable resource for anyone interested in helping troubled youth.

Warner's survey asked four principle questions: "What are the most important issues in your life?"; "Where do you go for guidance on these issues?"; "Have you ever read a piece of literature that you found helpful?"; and "What would you recommend for a peer to read?" The first half of the book provides a breakdown of Warner's survey as well as the data she collected on the literature the respondents referred to, including the authors' backgrounds and other works by them.



issues through sustained imaginative ventures that display variety, originality, beauty, and craft. Assigned readings are all chapter books, but students will have the opportunity to become familiar with picture books, fairy tales, and mythology as well. The approaches we will explore should be helpful for instruction at the elementary and middle-school levels. Nevertheless, this is a literature, not a methodology course.

Professor Krishnaswamy: MW 0900-1015

English 112A: Children's Literature

Study of literature for elementary and intermediate grades, representing a variety of cultures. Evaluation and selection of texts.

Professor Salewske: TR 0900-1015

English 112A: Children's Literature

Study of literature for elementary and intermediate grades, representing a variety of cultures. Evaluation and selection of texts.

Professor Rico: W 1900-2145

English 112B: Literature for Young Adults

The goal of this course is to acquaint students with as many YA books and authors as possible; we will read five novels as a class: *After the First Death*, *Whale Talk*, *Witness*, *First Crossing*

English 133: *Reed Magazine*

Introduces students to all phases of literary magazine production—from selection of poems, stories, and essays for publication, to editing, proofing, designing, producing, and marketing—as well as fund raising and grant writing. Class sessions will serve as editorial board meetings, and each person in the class will take on certain editorial responsibilities for the entire semester.

Professor TBA: M 1900-2145

English 135: Writing Nonfiction

This course explores the many faces of Creative Nonfiction (also referred to by some as the New Journalism, or Literary Journalism). This is NOT a who, what, when, where basic journalism course, nor a technical writing class. You will read a variety of forms of the genre and learn a great deal about topics other than literature—which is the beauty of nonfiction. During the course of the semester you'll write a personal essay, a profile, a travel story, and a feature article, as well as one long work of your choosing. The various pieces you write will leave a nonfiction record of your world as you see it today, examining your own life, the physical planet, the people you share it with, and hopefully look at some of the forces that are driving them all. Prerequisite English 71.

The Chair's Message

by Scott Rice

By now everyone has heard of James Frey's fictionalized memoirs and how they wrenched Oprah's knickers into a knot. In response to such literary fraudulence, and to set at least one record straight, I am offering my own memoirs which are—I swear—truthful to the last detail.

I was born on an ice floe in Baffin Bay, just off the island of the same name, and raised by a polar bear. I don't know what obstetrical whimsy drove my human mother to select an ice floe for a birthing place but the choice proved fatal to her and nearly to me. Polar bears usually give birth to cubs two at a time, and it was my good fortune to be found in mid-summer by a sow with only one cub and the desire to fill a pair.

Now the first thing you are probably wondering is why I did not freeze to death. Polar bears, as every school child without an iPod knows, survive in the Arctic because they have thick coats of fur and about four inches of blubber. Luckily for me, I inherited my father's acute hirsutism, and a diet of bear's milk and seal fat soon endowed me with the requisite blubber. Oh, and to answer the question that is forming on the edges of your mind, what does seal taste like? It tastes like chicken.

My adoptive mother realized early on that I would never be able to catch a seal on my own, being too much of a runt and having neither the dental capability nor a respectable set of claws. Quite accurately, she also diagnosed me with ADD and knew that I did not have the patience to lie quietly for hours by a hole in the ice waiting for a seal to pop up. Thus, all the while I was maturing, she was content to share her kill with me, right up until the time that I was found by an exaltation of linguists who, being enchanted by my ursine bawling, kidnapped me and took me back to California for study. Fortunately for me, I landed in a colony of ESL specialists and within ten years was able to say things like "Me hungry" and "Not tofu again." In fact, I would not be able to speak or write English today if I had not gotten into a freshman composition class at San José State.

Every memoir has to have a theme, usually how someone overcomes numerous reversals and eventually makes his peace with the world, and so it is with mine. With a loving, protective mother, all the seal I could eat, no school, and the long hibernations, I would have had an idyllic childhood but for one thing, sibling rivalry. When mom was away on a hunt, my big brother (he eventually reached 700 pounds and was bipolar) made my life, well, unbearable. His favorite stunt was to relieve himself in the snow and then . . . but the memory is too painful.

Now a lesser person would carry his bitterness to the end of his days, but I am made of better stuff. Thus it befell that eighteen years after I was hauled clawing and squealing from Baffin Island, I returned to the land of my forebears in a Cessna 152 and in the company of a man from Wyoming who included in his possessions an engraved and re-tooled .450 Martini-Henry. There I identified my brother on an ice floe, and the future office-holder erased forever the last vestiges of my sibling resentment.

The *Department of English and Comparative Literature Newsletter* is written and produced by students in English 129. Copy Editors: Fathima Kaleel, Dareth Pray, and Ingrid Starink; Layout & Design: Rachel Haigh and Katie Masters; Production Coordinator: Delilah Gallardo; Production Technician: Stefanie Chase; Proofreaders: Daniel Figueroa, Rey San Juan III, and Sara Scovil; Instructor: Professor Bonnie Cox.
