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# NEPCA NORTHEAST POPULAR CULTURE ASSOCIATION

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September 2016

NEPCA established 1974

## WELCOME

Welcome to second e-version issue of *NEPCA News*. Last year NEPCA abandoned the paper edition of the newsletter for ecological, financial, and logistical reasons. Newsletters are classic "throwaway" items once they've been read, so we decided to save some trees (and ink). Moreover, the cost of designing, printing, and mailing the newsletter had risen to the point where we needed to make choices about the best use of organizational resources. The Executive Council opted to use savings to create a second graduate-student prize, buy liability insurance, and fund other endeavors with the savings from the newsletter, rather than raising dues to bolster an ephemeral medium. The last point was primary. Slow production schedules for the old newsletter meant that much of the newsletter was outdated by the time members received it. Years ago NEPCA migrated news, reviews, and notices to its Website, <https://nepca.wordpress.com/> so that we could deliver up-to-date information. Surveys revealed that most conference presenters, attendees, and active members now get information online and through social media. Attendance at conferences has soared, so we must be doing something right!

## HOW DO I KNOW IF MY MEMBERSHIP IS UP TO DATE?

We also streamlined membership. It works like this. You are currently a member if:

1. You are a lifetime member or a past president
2. You have registered for this year's conference
3. You have mailed a membership fee during the 2016 calendar year.  
(Memberships run October to October.)

***Your membership expires at the end of October 2016*** if you registered for the 2015 conference, but do not fall into any of the categories listed above. If you wish to continue receiving *NEPCA News* and to be a member of NEPCA, please renew your membership by **December 31, 2016**. You can do so on PayPal from our Website by clicking on the "Payments to NEPCA" tab, or you can send a check c/o NEPCA to: Robert E. Weir, NEPCA Executive Secretary, 15 Woods Road, Florence, MA 01062. Membership is \$30 for full-time faculty members and \$15 for all others (retirees, adjuncts, part-time faculty, graduate students, independent scholars). You can become a lifetime member for the bargain price of \$150 and never have to worry about renewing again.

NEPCA's Website can be accessed at: <https://nepca.wordpress.com/>

## WHY JOIN IF EVERYTHING IS ONLINE?

An excellent question! Thanks for asking. There are several reasons to join:

1. NEPCA is an all-volunteer organization, but our vendors are not. It costs a surprising amount of money to run that "free" Website, and our annual conferences cost a small ransom by the time all the bills are paid. Moreover, no organization—not even a nonprofit such as NEPCA—can afford to be without liability insurance, which is another big expense.
2. NEPCA gives back a lot of its membership fees in the form of book- and graduate-paper prizes that support academic excellence. Those prizes alone require the equivalent of nearly 40 full-time membership fees.
3. Do you need to show your academic dean you are being productive? You can write a **refereed book review** for NEPCA, but this option is available only to active members.
4. Naked self-interest: NEPCA is a tax-exempt organization, hence your membership fees are **tax deductible**—a boon for all of you looking to reduce taxable income and are too busy grading or writing papers to stash your cash in the Cayman Islands. Okay—that was snarky, but you do get the satisfaction of supporting a professional organization that promotes things you care about, and your membership really *is* tax deductible.

## NOW, THE GOOD STUFF! 2016 CONFERENCE and NEWSLETTER CONTENT

NEPCA's annual fall conference will convene on the campus of **Keene State College** Friday and Saturday **October 21–22, 2016**. The college is located in Keene, New Hampshire, which is about two hours from Boston and directly east of Brattleboro, Vermont.

This newsletter will provide conference information on the following:

- Tentative conference schedule
- Travel directions
- Lodging and food suggestions
- Things to do in the Keene, NH, area
- Issues to be discussed at the 2016 Executive Council meeting

- Information on NEPCA prize winners
- Links to officers and area chairs
- Links to book reviews
- Articles on and links to teaching tips
- A list of current NEPCA officers
- Registration forms for in-person attendees

This newsletter will also contain reviews, links to other reviews, and other information pertinent to NEPCA members.

## **DIRECTIONS and PRACTICAL INFORMATION**

### **DIRECTIONS:**

#### **By car:**

Campus address: 229 Main Street, Keene, NH. You can set your GPS for that address and start looking for NEPCA signs when you arrive that direct you to sites. You can also print or download a campus map from this site:

<http://www.keene.edu/campus/maps/documents/illustrated/download/>

These directions have been printed from the college Website:

<http://www.keene.edu/campus/maps/driving/> but the basic idea is that you will need to find your way to New Hampshire Route 101. The same link allows you to plug in your starting point and get detailed directions.

#### **From the West and Interstate 91**

- I-91, take EXIT 3 in Brattleboro, Vermont to ROUTE 9 EAST to Keene
- Proceed on ROUTE 101 EAST
- Continue through the ROUNDABOUT
- At the next intersection turn LEFT onto MAIN STREET
- Turn LEFT onto WYMAN WAY

#### **From the North – Routes 9, 10, and 12**

- Follow the highway to the traffic light at the intersection of ROUTE 101
- Turn LEFT onto ROUTE 101 EAST
- Continue through the ROUNDABOUT
- At the next intersection turn LEFT onto MAIN STREET
- Turn LEFT onto WYMAN WAY

#### **From the East – Route 101**

- ROUTE 101 WEST to Keene
- At the second traffic light turn RIGHT onto MAIN STREET
- Turn LEFT onto WYMAN WAY

#### **From the South – Route 12**

- ROUTE 12 NORTH to Keene
- At the intersection with ROUTE 101 Go STRAIGHT ahead onto MAIN STREET
- Turn LEFT onto WYMAN WAY

#### **From Boston and Eastern Massachusetts**

- ROUTE 2 WEST to ROUTE 140 NORTH (Gardner, Mass.) to ROUTE 12 NORTH to Keene
- At the intersection with ROUTE 101 Go STRAIGHT ahead onto MAIN STREET
- Turn LEFT onto WYMAN WAY

### **By bus:**

The Greyhound/Vermont Transit terminal is located two blocks from campus at 67 Main Street. Schedules can be searched at: <http://locations.greyhound.com/us/new-hampshire/keene>

### **By train:**

Scheduled **Amtrak** train service <http://www.amtrak.com/northeast-train-routes> is limited and stops in Brattleboro, VT, or Manchester, NH—both of which are distant from Keene. NEPA does not recommend that you use the train. It would be far faster and cheaper to rent a car.

### **By air:**

The closest flights go to Manchester, NH, or Bradley Airport in Windsor Locks, CT, though you would need to rent a car to take a bus from either location.

### **One-Stop Shopping:**

The MyTransitGuide app is a good way to find out which transport option is best for you: [http://free.mytransitguide.com/index.jhtml?partner=^BNH^xdm028&k\\_clickid=\\_kenshoo\\_clickid\\_&gclid=CM2C9Y69oM8CFQpahgod8BsN7w](http://free.mytransitguide.com/index.jhtml?partner=^BNH^xdm028&k_clickid=_kenshoo_clickid_&gclid=CM2C9Y69oM8CFQpahgod8BsN7w)

## **Where to Stay:**

See the Website for suggested lodging: <https://nepca.wordpress.com/2016-conference/2016-conference-conference-schedule-and-logistics/>

## **Area Attractions:**

Some attendees will be staying in the Brattleboro, VT, area. It, like Keene, has a lively downtown for a small city. Here are a few attractions for those staying in Brattleboro, VT, (which is 19 miles from Keene, NH).

- The **Brattleboro Museum and Art Center** at 10 Vernon Street has changing exhibitions that are generally small in scope, but unusual and interesting.
- The **Estey Organ Museum** at 108 Birge Street takes you back to when having a small pump organ was a symbol of status and Brattleboro was a world leader in providing them.
- You can see a covered bridge on Guilford Street (off Route 9), the **Creamery Covered Bridge**.
- You can view a movie in an old theater that dates to cinema's earliest days. The **Latchis Theater** downtown has been carved into smaller spaces, but be sure to peek into the main auditorium.
- Microbrew fans can quench their thirst at the **Hermit Thrush Brewery** at 29 High Street.
- Brattleboro has several superb craft stores, including **Vermont Artisan Designs** at 106 Main Street.
- Rob Weir recommends the following food options in Brattleboro: Those looking for a fine-dining experience should check out **Duo** on Main Street (\$\$/\$\$\$). For something less expensive, try **Fireworks**, also on Main Street (American food

\$/\$\$). **Whetstone Station** is on the bank of the Connecticut River at 36 Bridge Street (Burgers, etc. \$/\$\$). One of the best food options in town, especially for vegetarians, is the café in the **Brattleboro Food Coop** at Brookside Plaza at 2 Main Street. It has a surprisingly high number of options no matter your food preferences (\$/\$\$). Brattleboro is also a good coffee town with many options, so if you're improperly caffeinated, it's your own fault!

For those staying in Keene, the following items may be of interest:

- The historic **Colonial Theatre** is located downtown. Comedian Brian Regan will appear there on Thursday, October 20. On the weekend it will convert back to a movie house, with the film *Southside with You* being shown and a special screening of the Met Live production of *Don Giovanni* airing Saturday.
- The **Horatio Colony Museum** is located at 199 Main Street, the home of a prominent industrialist. There is also a nearby nature preserve associated with the museum
- Keene has two **rail-to-trail** offerings for bikers, joggers, and walkers: the 33-mile long **Cheshire Rail Trail**, whose Keene section includes a stone-arch bridge over the Ashuelot River; and the **Ashuelot River Trail**, which is accessed from Emerald Street near Keene State College.
- **Stonewall Farm** is located at 242 Chesterfield Road. It's a working farm with an educational mission that sells farm-fresh products. City slickers can actually witness cows being milked, while those of us who live in the boonies yawn!
- Those looking for something rugged can climb **Mount Monadnock** in nearby **Jaffrey, NH**.
- If you're looking for a decadent experience, take an 18-mile drive to **Walpole, NH**, and go to **L.A. Burdick Chocolate Shop**. Wear expandable pants! And if you see someone strolling in who looks like **Ken Burns**, it's Ken Burns.
- Keene, NH, is an excellent town for **shopping**. It has several nice galleries and its downtown is a good mix of chain stores and family-owned businesses.
- The downtown also has numerous food options. A list of suggested restaurants will be distributed at registration.

## REMINDER: NO CREDIT CARDS ON SITE!

**If you are registering at the conference, fees must be paid by personal check, bank check, money order, in cash, or online.** NEPCA does *not* accept credit cards. If you'd like to use a credit card, you can use **PayPal**, but this should be done *before* you arrive at the conference.

This announcement does not apply to those who have pre-registered.

## NOTES ON THE CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

The schedule below is correct as of September 20, 2016, though it is subject to change. After you receive this newsletter, the schedule will be posted on NEPCA's Website: <https://wordpress.nepca.com/> and will be updated on a regular basis. If you click on the **Fall Conference** tab at the top of the page, you will up-to-date schedule information.

A final schedule will be printed and made available at the registration desk for participants.

**Note to administrators:** The list below reflects only those whose papers have been accepted. NEPCA will publish a list of actual attendees after the conference.

## **TENTATIVE 2016 CONFERENCE SCHEDULE**

**Friday, October 21, noon–5:30 pm**

**Registration: TBA**

**Friday October 21, 2016**

**1:30 to 3 p.m.**

### **American Literature #1**

Chair: TBA

Lisa Boragine, *Reading Cheryl Strayed's Wild as Wilderness Advocacy*

David Downey, *Johnny Come Marching...Home?: Phil Klay's 'Redeployment' and the Complications of Home in American War Stories*

Cecilia Macheski, *Transporting Venice: History and Mystery from the Doges to Donna Leon*

### **Comics #1**

Chair: TBA

Camila Gutierrez, *Socialist Propaganda and Interstellar Narratives in the Golden Age of Chilean Comics*

Rafael Ponce-Cordero, *From The Silver-Masked Saint to The Crimson Grasshopper: Towards a Critical History of Latin American Superheroes*

Carolyn Potts, *Nelvana of the Northern Lights—A Warrior of a Different Breed: An Examination of Polonization Present in the Canadian Whites (comics)*.

Michael Schuldiner, *Structural Marker's in Pablo Picasso's Tragi-Comic Strip, 'The Dream and Lie of Franco'*

### **Fantastic #1: Women and the Fantastic**

Chair: TBA

William A. Tringali, *The Lavender Menace: The Horror of 1980s Lesbian Feminism in Tony Scott's The Hunger*

Elizabeth Nielsen, *Manic Pixie Green Girl: On the Problem of the Green-Skinned Space Babe*

Jonathan Truffert, *Chinese Fantasy and Women: When Immortals Tell About Life*

Hillary Di Menna, *The Treatment of Women Shown through Witches in Pop Culture*

## **Fashion & Body Image #1**

Chair: TBA

Kellie Deys, *Aerie Real, Co-Opting, and the Latest Incarnation of Body Positivity*  
Eric Aldieri, *Radical Nostalgia: Normcore Fashion & Fragmented Time*  
Christina M. Blankenship, *From Wheat Bellies to Garcinia Cambogia: Dr. Oz, Fear Appeals, and Audience Loyalty*  
MaryLynn Saul, *The Meaning of Beauty in Maguire's Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*

## **Food #1**

Chair: TBA

Lucy R. Valena, *No One Will Ever Know': Fake Wedding Cake in Historical Context*  
Ann Kordas, *Anxious Appetites: The Horrors of the Italian Table in 19th-Century America*  
Jennifer Dutch, *Comfort Me with Cooking: Cookbooks, Convenience, and the Rhetoric of "Quick and Easy" Meals*  
Linda Thomas, *Arab American Women's Community Cookbooks: Preservers of Culture*

## **Gender/Identity/Sexuality #1**

Chair: TBA

Enrique Morales-Diaz, *Reconstructing Masculinities in Marvel Animation*  
Mashadi Matabane, *An "Axe" to Grind: The Cultural Politics of Black Women Electric Guitarists in American Popular Music*  
Johanna Church, *Intersex Representations in Film and Television*  
Catherine C. Saunders, *The Resurrection of the Black Tragic Heroine: A Discussion of Contemporary Mistresses on Prime Time Television*

## **Philosophy & Pop Culture #1**

Chair: TBA

Janet Lemon Williams, *Zombie Zeitgeist*  
Teresa M. Testa, *Siri and the Relational Value of Human Connectedness within a Moral Life*  
Gwendolyn Dolske, *Morality and The Circle by Dave Eggers*  
James Rourke, *P3 and Me: Using Pop Culture to Introduce Philosophy to Students*



**Friday 3:15 to 4:45 p.m.**

**Celtic Studies #1: Marketing the “Celt”: Fashion, Tourism, and the Transatlantic Exchange**

Chair: TBA

Beth O’Leary Anish, *Marketing Ireland to American Tourists: Roddy Doyle’s Take on The Quiet Man*

Mary Burke, *Modern Glamor and Celtic Tradition: The Contradictory Stories of Mid-century Irish Fashion Marketing*

E. Moore Quinn, *Delivering ‘O’Kelly’s Welcome’: The Irish Bed & Breakfast as Nostalgic Transcultural Space*

Donica O’Malley, *“Not Enough Soul”: Ginger Memes and the Creation of an Online Social Difference*

**Digital Media #1: Signs and Representations in Video Gaming**

Chair: Jeff Cain

Jessica Hautsch, *“The signs are all there....” Interpretative Communities and the Visual Language of GIFs within The Walking Dead Bethyl Fandom*

Adam Crowley, *A Virtual Canary in a Digital Coal Mine: Fun Economies and the Global Great Recession*

Giovanni Valentin, *Representation of Indigenous Peoples as Seen in AAA Videogame Titles*

Jeff Cain, *Video Games and Deleuzian Regimes of Signs*

**Fantastic #2: Imagining the Future**

Chair: TBA

Meredith K. James, *Indigenous Aliens: Science Fiction and Native America*

Nova M. Seals, *Knowledge, Form and Function: Checking Out the Posthuman*

3<sup>rd</sup> panelist TBA

**Film & History #1: Film/Leadership, Work, and Citizen Kane**

Chair: Caroline D’Abate

Elena Bakar and Kate Shepard, *Coaches on the Field and on the Screen: How Popular Cultural Media Depicts Team Leadership*

Ella Kaplan and Rebecca Stern, *When Work is Prostitution: How popular culture depicts the Meaning of work in Film and Television Media*

Thomas White, *Modes of Adaptation and Constructive Innovation in Citizen Kane*



## Documenting the Past

Chair: TBA

Julia R. Tryon, *Digging up the Past: Using Articles in Early-20th-Century Magazines... to Uncover Daily Life ... Through the Lens of ... Growing Roses*  
Robert E. Weir, *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Backstories of Two New England Follies*  
Robert Hackey, *Bringing the War Home: Theater and the Experience of War*

## Television #1: Myth and the Doctor

Chair: TBA

Jonathan B. Highfield, *Daleks and Cybermen; or What IBM's Watson Wants to be When it Grows up*  
Zoë Lehmann Imfeld, *Doctor Who, Aliens, and Alienation*  
Jon Mackley, *Doctor Who? The Myth of the Doctor and the New Audience.*  
Raymond J. DiSanza, *TARDIS So White: Sharon Davies, Mickey Smith, Martha Jones and Diversity Inside and Outside the Doctor's Blue Box*

## World Literature #1

Chair: TBA

Birgit Bunzel Linder, *Buttercups, Cannibals, Eyes, and Horlas: Fearful Fictions of Paranoia*  
Susan Gorman, *Digital Frontiers for the Epic: Video Games as a New Genre for Old Stories*  
Nataliya Shpylova-Saeed, *Memory and Literary Criticism: Channeling Soviet Readers' Reception of Mikhail Bulgakov's The Master and Margarita*

**Friday 5 to 6:30 p.m**

## Dance

Chair: TBA

Barbara Krasner, *Dance Marathons of the 1920s and 1930s*  
Virginia Cowen, *I Won't Dance (at least in gym class)*  
Manny Faces, *Bad Raputation: How Media, Corporations and High-Profile Individuals are ... Affecting Hip-Hop's Reputation and Diminishing its Ability to Educate ...*  
Ruby Cortez, *Race, Resilience, and Brotherhood in Hip Hop and Gagsta Rap*

## **Ethnic & Race Studies**

Chair: TBA

Christine Kelly, *Romanticizing the Women Folk: Performing a Gendered Color Line in the New Folk Revival, 1956 – 1965*

Nii Kotei Nikoi, *Hiplife: Modernity and Popular Culture in Ghana*

Melinda Mills, *Reflecting on Rihanna: What “Work” Tells Us About Black Caribbean Women’s Sexual Agency, Activity, and Survivorship*

Claire Gogan, *The Last Klezmer? Authenticity, Community, and Intergenerational Connections in the Life and Music of Peter Sokolow*

## **Fantastic #3: I Am the Master of My Fate (Right)? Searching for Morality and Reality in the Postmodern Age**

Chair: TBA

Catharine Kane, *Coming of Age in the Age of Uncertainty: Moral Relativism in Animorphs*

Kelly Kane, *White Rabbits, Blue Pills, and Vanilla Skies: In “Psy Fi,” the Final Frontier is the Human Mind*

Charlotte Reber, *I’m Not Calling You a Liar: Unreliable Narration and Complicated Canon in Dragon Age II*

## **Film & History #2: Hitchcock/Film Noir**

Chair: Greg Chan - chair

Andrew Wentink, *The Turning Point: Social Dance as a Narrative Device in the Films of Alfred Hitchcock*

Mark Padilla, *Dial M for Myth: Classical Markings in Hitchcock*

Alex W. Bordino, "Tabloids, Film Noir, and the Fragmentation of Form and Character: Constructing and Reconstructing *Double Indemnity*."

## **Health/Disease/Physical Culture**

Chair: TBA

Tony Kemerly, *You Are What You Eat: How Pop Culture Transforms Meals into Meaning*

Andi McClanahan, *“Physical Fitness and Nutrition isn’t Rocket Science”: An Analysis of Online Responses to the Fat Acceptance Movement*

More panelists TBA

## **Sports #1: Sports as a Mirror of Society**

Chair: Robert Weir

James Robinson, *Baseball's Leaving North Philly: The Racial/Class Transformation of North Philadelphia... Through The Phillies' Campaign For A New Stadium...*

Richard P. Preiss, *Covering all Sides: Larry Whiteside at the World Series*

Derek Catsam, *The Wizard of Williamstown? How John Wooden Almost Became an Eph*

Jim Davis and Dale Young, *Strongmen and Shooters: The Roots of Professional Wrestling and the American Sideshow*

## **Teaching and Pop Culture #1: Pop Culture in the Classroom**

Chair: Taneem Husain, Keene State College

Alexandra Gold, *Our TVs, Ourselves: Teaching Popular Culture Through a Feminist & Queer Lens*

Kraig Larkin, *Queuing Up: Teaching Socialist Consumer Culture With Kolejka*

Julie DeCesare, *Designing an Active Learning Popular Culture Experience*

Sara K. Howe, *Beyond Passion and Prose: Fandom in the Creative Writing Classroom*

### **Reception Friday, Early Evening**

Enjoy your evening in Keene, NH, but stop by the reception first so you can network with colleagues, find old friends, meet new ones, and find others with whom you can hang out!

**The Saturday schedule begins on the next page**

**Saturday, October 22, 2016**

Registration time, breakfast snacks, and location TBA

**Saturday 8:45 to 10:15 am:**

**Celtic Studies #2: Irish Cultural Representations from the Fenians to the Present**

Chair: Tim Madigan

Patrick Sweeney, *Press Coverage of the 1863 New York Draft Riot and the Role of the Irish*

Tim Madigan, *The Two Mr. Taytos*  
3<sup>rd</sup> panelist TBA

**Digital Media #2: Virtual Imageries**

Chair: Jeff Cain

Kristin Linder, *A Direwolf by any Other Name: A Comparative Analysis of Folksonomies by A Song of Ice and Fire and Game of Thrones Fanwork Creators*

Maxime Labrecque, *Hyperlink Movies and TV Series: A Love and Hate Story*

Mike Alvarez, *Death, Virtuality and Sociality in Jan Komasa's @SuicideRoom*

Yonty Friesem /Brien Jennings, *Using Photographic Novel to Create a Media Literacy Guide for Library Media Specialists*

**Fantastic #4: Dangerous Fantasy** (concurrent with Fantastic #5)

Chair: TBA

Shelly Jones, *Psychological Trauma in Curse of Strahd (2016)*

Kelsey M. Brandon, *Red Weddings and Rape Victims: Sexual Assault and Media Accountability on Game of Thrones*

Mia Martini, *Nazi Zombies: B-Movies and a Metaphor for Horror*

Kristine Larsen, *Angels and Demons: Physiological and Psychological Vivisection in the World of SyFy's Dominion (2014-15)*

**Fantastic #5: Frankenstein and the Fantastic I —Shelley's *Frankenstein***

Chair: TBA

Jobin Daniel Davis, *"And What Was I?" The Power of Aesthetic Perception in Shelley's Frankenstein*

Saraliza Anzaldúa, *There is No Monster: Monstrous Imitation in Frankenstein*

Sharon R. Yang, *Social Revolution's Terrible Price: Mary Shelley's Failed Pastoral World in Frankenstein*

### **Film & History #3: Fascinating Film Characters and Themes**

Chair: Doug MacLeod

Heather Weibel Tullio, *Assuming Guilt in Films and in Our Own Lives*

Douglas C. MacLeod, Jr., *On Viewing Death and Dying*

Sandra Navarro, *Uncharted Territories: The Role of the Child in 'Beasts of the Southern Wild'*

### **History & Uses of the Past #2:**

Chair: TBA

Samuel C. King, *Migration, Violence, and Chinese Restaurants in Early Twentieth Century Seattle*

Claire Stewart, *You Can't Share Cupcakes: A Brief History of Wedding Food*

Terrance Riley, *Steampunk and the Concept of a Usable Past*

David W. Moore, *A Monumental Crisis in New Orleans*

### **Television #2: Emotions and Realities on the Small Screen**

Chair: TBA

Elizabeth H. McCormick, *Lizzie's Dead: Queering Memory and Mourning in 'The Blacklist'*

Emre Tuncel, *Breaking Bad and Western Movies*

3<sup>rd</sup> panelist TBA

**Next sessions begin on following page**

**Saturday 10:30 a.m. to noon:**

**Comics #2:**

Chair: Vincent M. Livoti

Adrielle Mitchell, *Comics-as-Scholarship and Nonfiction Comics: The Affordances of the Graphic Medium across the Disciplines*

Luc D. Guglielmi, *Nudity in Comic Arts*

Vincent M. Livoti, *Getting Graphic: A Case Study in the Interdisciplinary Development of a Graphic Novel Course*

**Fantastic #6: Frankenstein and the Fantastic II — Rebuilding Frankenstein**

Chair: TBA

Gloria Monaghan, *Frankenstein and Epigenetics—The Future of Paradise*

Amie A. Doughty, *Franken-faeries, or the Conflation of Creator and Created in the October Daye and Merry Gentry Series*

Kathy Healey, *Clockwork Resurrection: Steampunk and Frankenstein in Mackenzi Lee's This Monstrous Thing (2015)*

**Film & History #4: War, History, and Locale in Film**

Chair: Carol Mitchell

Tatiana Prorokova, *Film and the History of U.S. Intervention in the Balkan War*

Kenneth Pearl, *British Naval Films in the Aftermath of the Great War*

Gayatri Devi, *Thinkers and Stinkers: Philadelphia in Films*

**Humor:**

Chair: Virginia Freed

Victoria Lozano, *Bossypants: How Tina Fey "Plays" with Feminism*

Elizabeth White Nelson, *The Land of Pumpkin Pies': Humor and the Crafting of Sectional Identity in the Antebellum North, 1820-1860*

Courtney White, *Horsin' Around: Animality and Anthropomorphism in BoJack Horseman*

Nayra B. Delgado Lopez, *The Edge of Comedy: Nicole Arbour's Dear Fat People*

## **Politics & Pop Culture: Authenticity and Identity Politics**

Chair: Bob Hackey

Anna C Golden, *Identity Theft: The Cultivation and Maintenance of White Identity in HOAs*

Patricia MacLeod, *ExperiMillennials*

Christian Nelson, *American Politics and the Popular Cultural Understanding of Authenticity*

Geraldine Wagner, *How TV's "House of Cards" and "Veep" Speak to Election 2016*

## **Sports #2:**

Chair: TBA

Robert MacGregor, *Songs at Sporting Events: "Strange Fruit," the First Muted Cry Against Racism in Words and Music*

Gustav Venter, *Playing Away from Home: The Nature of Soccer Integration in South Africa, 1978–1984*

Ronald A. Smith, *The Meaning of the Jerry Sandusky Scandal at Penn State*

## **World Literature #2**

Chair: TBA

June-Ann Greeley, *Me No More: Tana French's "The Likeness" and the Matter of Irish Identity*

Roma Estrada, *The Search for Self In Haruki Murakami's After the Quake*

Saiyeda Khatun and Amy Neeman, *Intersecting Literature, Film and the Global Literature Classroom*

El-Shaddai Deva, *The African Writer as Glocalizing Translator: A Case Study on Ferdinand Oyono*

## **Lunch and Awards Ceremony: TBA**

NEPCA's 2016 president, **Kraig Larkin**, will preside over a post-lunch program that includes announcing book- and graduate-paper prize winners, introducing key Keene State figures who made this conference happen, and making certain important announcements are delivered to attendees. At the end of the conference, professor Larkin will hand off the presidency to his successor.



**Saturday 1:45 to 3:15 pm:**

**American Literature #2**

Chair: Mark Madigan

Caitlin Santavenere, *'Don't Get Tough': An Exploration of Gender Roles in S.E. Hinton's The Outsiders*

Leanna Lostoski, *"Beyond the 'Revolution of the Word': The Inkless Revolution of Bob Brown's Reading Machine*

Eve Kornfeld, *On the Border: Representations of Law and Justice in Tony Hillerman's Navajo Narratives*

Sarah Sherman, *"Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story": How Lin-Manuel Miranda's Hamilton Uses Fan Fiction and Shakespeare to Change History*

**Fantastic #7: Frankenstein and the Fantastic III — Frankenstein on Screen**

Chair: TBA

Joseph Sgammato, *Frankenstein, Bride of Frankenstein, and The Hollywood Production Code*

Cheryl A. Hunter, *From Frankenstein's Monster to Ultron: Man's Unbridled Ambition Gone Awry*

Jesse Weiner, *Frankenfilm: Bill Morrison's Spark of Being (2010)*

Mariana Abuan, *The Modern Monster Made by Man: An Examination of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature in Penny Dreadful (2014-16)*

**Film & History #5: Film Genre**

Chair: Carol Mitchell

Shamim Hunt, *Feminist Male Directors of Women's Cinema*

Travis Maruska, *No Pain, No Gain: The Bush Administration and the Torture Porn Genre*

Laura Merolla, *Masculinity and the Anti-Hero in 1970s Mafia Films*

Randy Laist, *Tap-dancing Atop the Twin Towers with Jesus, King Kong, and the Wizard of Oz*

**Gender/Identity/Sexuality #2:**

Chair: TBA

Jamie Landau, *Feeling Fetal Personhood and Transgender families: The Affective-Emotional Rhetoric of Thomas Beatie Undergoing an Ultrasound*

Gabrielle Willms, *Female Friendship and Carnavalesque Comedy: Bakhtin and Irigaray in Broad City*

Jillian Silverberg, *Who's that Making Dinner? The Gendering of Cooking and the Home Cook's Identity in Mid-Twentieth Century America*

John J. Mudgett, *Queer Coding in Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

### **Religion:**

Chair: Peter Holloran

John W. Fadden, *The Sokovia Accords and the Apostle Paul*

Michael J Toy, *The Last Enemy To be Defeated: Faith and Funerals in Superhero TV Shows*

Jennifer Smith, *Jesus on the Charts*

### **Teaching and Pop Culture #2:**

Chair: TBA

Chris McGunnigle, *Access to Text and the Black Market of Using Digital Copies of Superhero Comic Books in Graphic Narrative Courses*

Jim Deys, *Prog Rockers RUSH Assert Authenticity*

Sinéad G. Ruane & Emily T. Porschitz, *Keeping it "Real" in the Classroom: Using Reality TV Programs as a Pedagogical Tool*

Bradford A. Towle Jr., *Observing Successful Trends in YouTube™ to Improve the Quality of Educational Videos*

### **Television #3**

Chair: Robert Niemi

Julia Brush, *From Prostitutes to Mothers: Women in HBO's True Detective*

Jonelle Coutinho, *Planetary Imaginary: Territory, Home, and Claiming Space in a Postcolonial Battlestar Galactica*

Robert Niemi, *Charles McGill Versus Slippin' Jimmy: Subliminal Class Politics in Better Call Saul*

**Final sessions schedule begins on the next page. We urge you to stay for these as there's some very exciting stuff, as you can readily see from the titles!**

Saturday 3:30 to 5 pm

**Celtic Studies #3: Inheriting the Identity: Affirmations of Irish-American Political Culture in the 20th Century**

Chair: Mary C. Kelly

Suzann Buckley, *The Last Hurrah: Fiction and Reality*

Mary C. Kelly, *BFFs or Frenemies? The Protestant Friends of Ireland post-1916*

3<sup>rd</sup> panelist TBA

**Comics #3**

Chair: Carol-Ann Farkas

Charles Clements, *Grotesque Disease and Queer Incommunicability in Charles' Burns Black Hole*

Dwain C. Pruitt, *The Comics That Hate Produced: Representing the African-American Muslim Experience in DC Comics*

Charles Henebry, *'In Fear and Helpless Rage': the Specter of Domestic Violence in The Incredible Hulk*

**Music:**

Chair: TBA

Jenna L. O'Connor, *Country Music's Trajectory and Grasp in Popular 'American' Culture*

Jessica Loranger, *There Will Be Two Wars: Popular Music Protests During the 1991 Persian Gulf War*

Ryan LaLiberty, *"An Open Casket to CDs": Kanye West and the Zombie Ontology of Album*

Ruby Cortez, *Race, Resilience, and Brotherhood in Hip Hop and Gagsta Rap*

**Fantastic #8: Still More Monsters!**

Chair: TBA

Martin F. Norden, *The Folly of Faithlessness in Dracula Has Risen from the Grave (1968)*

Megan Genovese, *Gender Monsters: Angels, Demons, and Fans in the CW's Supernatural*

Nan King, *Winchester Abbey: Poking Fun at the Gothic Tradition in the CW's Supernatural*

Donald Vescio, *Did the Aliens Do It? The Disappearance of Franklin Expedition and Malaysia Airlines Flight 370*

## **Film & History #6: Film Adaptation**

Chair: Carol Mitchell

Eren Odabasi, *The Postman Always Rings Twice: Three Adaptations of a Noir Classic*  
Brinda Charry, *The Bard in Bollywood – The Fraternal Nation in Shakespeare Appropriations*

Priscilla Hobbs, *Unbraiding Rapunzel's Hair: Hair and the Myth of the Kore in Disney's Tangled*

Rashmi Attri, *The Bard in India: Journey from 'Hamlet' to 'Haider'*

## **Psychology & Pop Culture:**

Chair: Peter Holloran

Aubrey Legasse, *The War at Home: Debunking Myths Surrounding Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*

Nicole A. Heller, *An Analysis of Maternal Parenting Styles in Orange is the New Black*

Michelle Ronayne, *Getting it Right: The Importance of Accuracy in Portrayals of Psychiatrists on Television*

## **Sports #3: Sports in the Classroom and Abroad**

Chair: Rob Weir

Carolyn Fortuna, *Curated Sports Popular Culture to Enhance Literacy Learning*

Tyler M. Sigmon, *Faculty-Led Sport Management Study Abroad Program Design and Marketing*

Ryan E. King-White, *Study Abroad: Critical Pedagogy or Poverty Tourism*

Jacob J. Bustad & Ryan E. King-White (to be presented by Jacob J. Bustad): *Service Learning and Study Abroad Practicality and Pitfalls"*

## **Executive Council/Membership Meeting: TBA**

All members are invited to attend and give feedback at this meeting, though only elected Executive Council members can vote on initiatives.

## **Executive Council Meeting Topics**

- Election of Executive Council members and officers
- Discussion of future sites
- Report on finances
- Formal vote on bylaw change to create James Hanlan Leadership Award for graduate student representation on the Executive Council
- Fill vacancies on book prize and graduate prize committees
- Appoint any needed area chairs

## ROLLINS BOOK PRIZE

The winner of the Peter C. Rollins Prize for the best book on popular or American culture published in 2015 is: **Hilary Neroni's** *The Subject is Torture: Psychoanalysis & Biopolitics in Television and Film*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. Professor Neroni teaches in the Film and Television Program at the University of Vermont and is also the author of *The Violent Woman: Femininity, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Culture*.

NEPCA thanks the 2015 Rollins Prize Committee: **Jeff Cain** (Sacred Heart), **Andrea McClanahan** (East Stroudsburg State), **Robert Niemi** (St. Michael's College), and **Katherine Allocco** (Western CT State University). Professor Cain chairs the committee.

Nominations are now open for the 2016 Rollins Prize. Publishers should consult the NEPCA Website for details. Please note: Only publishers can only nominate books for the Rollins Prize; if you have published a book in 2016 and wish it to be considered for the upcoming Rollins Prize, please ask your publisher to consult <https://nepca.wordpress.com/nepca-prizes/> for details. Winners receive a cash prize and a certificate.

Edited collections, reference works, and original creative works (novels, plays, etc.) are ineligible for the Rollins Prize.

## GRADUATE-STUDENT-PAPER AWARD

NEPCA is pleased to announce its two graduate-student-paper awards for outstanding papers presented at the 2015 conference at Colby-Sawyer College.

Winner of the **Carol Mitchell Student Essay Prize**: **Hilary Warner-Evans** (University of Maine) for "Contemporary Topical Song Videos as Broadside Ballads: 'The North Pond Hermit' and 'What the North Pond Hermit Knew.'"

Note: It is rare that NEPCA honors an undergraduate paper, but this one was so good we made an exception. Ms. Warner-Evans is about to enter graduate school, and NEPCA is proud to acknowledge the achievement of this fine young scholar.

Winner of the **Amos St. Germain Graduate Student Essay Prize**: **Ida Yalzadeh** (Brown University) for "'But I ain't goin' never forget it': The Charged Folk Humor of Richard Pryor, 1973-1976."

The members of the 2015 committee were: **Andi McClanahan**, (East Stroudsburg University), who chaired the committee, and **Carol Mitchell** (Springfield College), **Adam Crowley** (Husson University), and **Carolyn Fortuna** (IDigit Media).

Graduate students attending this year's conference should contact their session chair to be eligible for the 2016 prize. *The session chairs must nominate papers.*

## UPDATE YOUR INFO

Has your e-mail or mailing address changed? Have you changed jobs? If your e-mail or “snail mail” address has changed, please let us know so we can update our database. Send a short email to: [weir.r@comcast.net](mailto:weir.r@comcast.net)

## DECISIONS MADE IN 2015

The following decisions were made at the Executive Council meeting in October 2015.

- Mark Madigan and Geraldine Wagner were elected to the Executive Council to take the place of David Tanner and James Hanlan, whose terms expired. Thanks to David and Jim for their years of service. NEPCA plans to draw upon their expertise in the future.
- The council accepted Karen Honeycutt's offer to host the 2016 conference at Keene State.
- The council voted to reduce the price for graduate students attending the 2016 conference.
- Rob Weir was empowered to consult with Marty Norden on a possible 2017 conference at UMass Amherst (which has since been confirmed and finalized).
- The financial report was presented and accepted.
- A bylaw change to create the James Hanlan Leadership Award to appoint a graduate student to the Executive Council for a one-year renewable term. Lance Eaton currently holds this post, though this year's meeting must formally authorize this change.
- Jeff Cain was appointed chair of the Rollins Book Prize Committee. He will be joined by Andi McClanahan, Bob Niemi, and Katherine Allocco. Ginny Cowen was thanked for her faithful service.
- The Carol Mitchell and Amos St. Germain graduate paper committee was reconstituted with Andi McClanahan chairing and Adam Crowley, Carolyn Fortuna, Bob Hackey, and Carol Mitchell serving on the committee.
- Lance Eaton updated the council on social-media efforts. Among the suggestions implemented were: spacing postings for maximum impact rather than bulk posting, and improvements to the online Google proposals and registration forms.

## FIRST CALL FOR PAPERS—NEPCA 2017 CONFERENCE

NEPCA is excited to announce that its 2017 conference will take place on the campus of the University of Massachusetts Amherst. For the first time in NEPCA's history, we will meet at a site that also has a hotel and food options in the same building.

A Google document will appear on NEPCA's Website later this fall and you can register using that form. You may also contact Marty Norden for information: [norden@comm.umass.edu](mailto:norden@comm.umass.edu)

If you have questions about whether your proposal is appropriate, ask a NEPCA area chair. A list of area chairs is listed on the Website, or by clicking this link:  
<https://nepca.wordpress.com/fall-conference/nepca-area-chairs/>

If you'd like to be an area chair and/or propose a new area, please contact Rob Weir:  
[weir.r@comcast.net](mailto:weir.r@comcast.net)

# THE CULTURED CLASSROOM

## Putting Class Back Into the Classroom

I'm guilty of being one of those scholars who too glibly use the words "important book" in reviews and academic discussions. We often mean, simply, a work that advances some argument within our narrow specialty—not a book we could actually teach, or one that undergraduates would find provocative. Every now and then, however, a book appears that truly is "important." Such a work is ***White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York: Viking, 2016)**. Its author, Louisiana State University history professor **Nancy Isenberg**, hit the market at a propitious time: during the Donald Trump political tsunami. Whether or not Trump wins in November, his campaign has energized many of the people about whom Isenberg writes: the white working class, especially those who live on the economic margins, often—but not exclusively—in the proverbial hinterlands. Educated Americans and those with financial resources have, historically, evolved a host of terms to dismiss these folks: waste people, sturdy beggars, clay-eaters, crackers, hillbillies, rednecks, trailer trash, lubbers, tar-heels, underclass, white trash....Isn't it odd that few of these terms are ever discussed during campus cultural-sensitivity sessions?

Isenberg asserts that we ignore this group at our own peril. By most accounts, white wage-earning Americans make up 30% of the electorate. This means they're no longer a majority, but given the stark divisions within American society, that 30% has the potential to alter elections. I think this book needs to be taught, so allow me to highlight a few of Isenberg's assertions and to add questions I think could spark lively debate.

\* First and foremost, Isenberg asserts that the working poor are not a recent phenomenon; they are sewn into the very fabric of white North American society. Isenberg catalogues this pattern from British colonization to the present. It's not really the "untold history" she bills it, but few have marshaled as much evidence for the claim that outcast underclasses are not merely unfortunate; they are the deliberate creation of economic elites that exploit them for their own gain. Moreover, white trash has been conditioned to see itself as such; Isenberg's is a pathology of powerlessness.

\* This will ruffle feathers, but Isenberg argues that those who discuss race or gender without referencing social class are futilely talking to themselves. This is because elites have successfully inserted the **mudsill theory** into the national dialogue. (The mudsill theory holds that society, like a house foundation, sits upon a bottom layer of social "mud" on which all power relations are constructed.) In essence, the white working class—often masculine in character—compensates for its lack of power by defining others as inferior: non-whites, recent immigrants, and women. This has also been done in ways familiar to pop-culture scholars: when crude power fails, use manufactured flattery of the sort we now see in the "new rage of slumming" (291), or what I'd dub "redneck glorification," as seen in Elvis, Dolly Parton, Bill Clinton's presidency, and TV shows such as "The Beverly Hillbillies," "Honey Boo Boo," "Redneck Island," and "Duck Dynasty."

\*This will also rankle: Isenberg sees class as *the* essential analytical category. She has little patience with using social class as a sort of "drive-by" tool in the way we view history or contemporary sociology.



\*Isenberg has even less patience with those who equate white trash traits with the Scots-Irish. Such ethnic identification isolates, stigmatizes, and ignores both the pervasiveness of the white underclass and the power relations that created it. She dismisses—and I agree—Grady McWhiney's *Cracker Culture*. I'd toss J. D. Vance's recent *Hillbilly Culture* (Harper, 2016) into the not-to-be-taken-seriously pile.

\*Another target of Isenberg's analytical sword: conservatives who dismiss white poverty as proof of degeneracy, lack of initiative, or cultural/regional norms. She bristles with indignation when someone like Mitt Romney insists upon the personhood of corporations, given the systematic manner in which the 1% he represents has denied the humanity of poor whites. If you think she exaggerates, see her chapter on eugenics.

\* She reminds us that the Civil War was as much a class war as one about race. Scholars know this as well, but it's good to be reminded.

\*Isenberg suggests that the cherished American ideals of equal opportunity, equality under the law, and freedom are largely ahistorical descriptions of the true American past.

So how can we use this book in the classroom? Here are ten discussion questions that occurred to me. Other readers will easily come up with others.

1. Isenberg says discussions of race and/or gender without references to social class are worthless. If you agree, list concrete reasons why you find Isenberg to be correct; if you disagree, move beyond personal preference and enumerate reasons why you think she's wrong. (One could easily devise a classroom debate of opposing sides on this question.)

2. Isenberg has a very pessimistic view of American ideals. Do you think she's right that these are more mythic than historical? What does the evidence suggest? (Have students do a sociological investigation into poverty. Who is poor? Where do they live? How many poor people are full-time workers? What is the racial breakdown on poverty?)

3. Question two could be approached in political terms like this: Mitt Romney made a major gaffe in the 2012 election when he said that 47% of Americans were reliant on some form of "government handouts," even though he was (mostly) correct. What happens, though, is we ask: Why *are* 47% of Americans dependent upon government handouts?

4. What is a secondary labor force/market? What did Marx say about the exploitation of working people? What is Antonio Gramsci's "hegemony theory?" Do any of these ideas fit Isenberg's analysis? (Obvious "egg hunt" possibilities here.)

5. Donald Trump's campaign attracted a lot of white working class voters. Why? In what ways were his followers similar to those attracted to Bernie Sanders? How did they differ?

6. An interesting recent phenomenon: In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, nearly 80% of Americans thought of themselves as "middle class;" now just 51% think so (and many sociologists would place the objective number at closer to 35%.) What are the differences between being middle class and working class? How have those definitions changed over time? Why are fewer Americans seeing themselves as middle class? Does this mean that the "white trash" is growing in numbers?

7. Isenberg gives us an incomplete (and dated) list of TV shows and entertainment that present the white underclass and she's not very good at all with movies. Come up with your own list of music, shows, and movies that deal with the white underclass she describes. How is class represented in these?
8. Other than a handful of characters such as Davy Crockett and the "common man" meme of the 1930s, Isenberg gives very few examples of working-class heroes and heroines. Can you compile a list of *positive* working class and/or poor folks who ought to be part of the discussion?
9. Is Isenberg guilty of casting underclass whites as historical victims without agency? What about, for example, the labor movement? Welfare-rights advocates?
10. This is controversial, but needs to be discussed: Does Isenberg unintentionally justify boorish, racist, and sexist behavior? Does she make excuses for people to wallow in ignorance? Does the underclass have any responsibility for liberating itself? Do we believe in Isenberg's pathology model? How does one escape the past? Should one? (Aren't these the same questions we raise about non-white poverty?)
11. Bonus question: If your students are mature enough to grapple with this—and if you've set it up as a *discussion*, not an assertion—ask students if it's as racist to use terms such as "white trash" as it is to use the "N word." (This could spark intriguing discussion of white privilege. How does it work in the face of economic deprivation and social marginalization?)

**Rob Weir**  
**University of Massachusetts Amherst**

### **Ways of Seeing the Grateful Dead** **Rob Weir**

It often surprises music fans to learn that rightwing author/commentator/shock jock Ann Coulter claims to be a Deadhead who has seen more than 60 shows. You can read all about it at: <http://www.jambands.com/features/2006/06/23/deadheads-are-what-liberals-claim-to-be-but-aren-t-an-interview-with-ann-coulter>. It also surprises some to learn that there is an ever-growing body of scholarship called "Grateful Dead studies," that the PCAACA has a Grateful Dead area chair, and that a Grateful Dead Archive has been established at the University of California Santa Cruz: <http://guides.library.ucsc.edu/grateful-dead>

Whatever one might think of Ms. Coulter's claim that Deadheads are what liberals claim to be but aren't, there's little disputing this quote from her: "Watching a Deadhead dance is truly something to behold." Ms. Coulter's strong identification with the Grateful Dead suggests rich teaching opportunities. A sociologist, for example, could construct a lesson about the dynamics of groups and the formation of group identity that affords opportunities to discuss the role (or non-role) of ideology in group dynamics. A political scientist could fashion something similar on the rhetoric and meaning of ideology in contemporary politics in keeping with recent studies suggesting that many aspects of politics are as much performance as deeply held values. A dance professor might also take the above Coulter quote at face value and explore the role of ecstasy in dance, to say nothing of the free-form aesthetics of Grateful Dead dancers. Of course, professors specializing in popular music have unlimited opportunities.

Those looking for some strong images to supplement their lessons can find them in two recent works from photographer/filmmaker **Jay Blakesberg**. The San Francisco-based Blakesberg has produced untold numbers of rock photos, album-art images, and videos, but he's also part of that amorphous group sometimes labeled Grateful Dead "insiders." His aptly named 2015 collection ***Hippie Chick: A Tale of Love, Devotion & Surrender*** (Rock Out Books) is a no-apologies look at music as a form of physical abandonment. It consists of 445 images Blakesberg took over three decades. It's not entirely about the Grateful Dead—he even got Grace Slick (Jefferson Airplane) to write the introduction—but those joyous Deadhead dancers of which Coulter speaks are heavily represented. In a strange way, Blakesberg also gives us a needed corrective to looks at the Sixties that focus too heavily on politics and disruptive behavior at the expense of the era's playfulness and cultural milestones. Take a look at hippie dancers and compare them with those of earlier generations, and not even 1950s poodle-skirted *American Bandstand* twirlers can match them. Blakesberg might be open to charges of male-gaze exploitation in some cases, but this, too, makes good classroom fodder.

His ***Fare Thee Well*** (Rock On Books) came out at the very end of 2015—just in time to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Grateful Dead. This one focuses entirely on the band and if you want to know what being an insider means—Blakesberg estimates he shot the band over a thousand times—this collection from the band's 2015 swan-song concerts (minus deceased members such as Jerry Garcia and Ron McKernan) shows it. Anyone wishing to explain the importance of spectacle will find a visual feast for illustrating the concept. And, yes, one might even make the case that the 2015 tour oddly justifies a few of Coulter's more provocative remarks. It's no stretch to think that cultural capital might have transcended music or ideology. A good way to introduce the thought of Pierre Bourdieu? Why not.

*If you have an example of a successful classroom lesson or strategy involving the use of popular and/or American culture, please share it with your colleagues. Contact [weir.r@comcast.net](mailto:weir.r@comcast.net).*

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Book reviews** are actively sought for the peer-reviewed online journal. Contact Rob Weir if you'd like to write one (or more!): [weir.r@comcast.net](mailto:weir.r@comcast.net). Below are several new and live links to ones that appeared throughout the year on NEPCA's blog.

***The Subject of Torture: Psychoanalysis and Biopolitics in Television and Film*. Hilary Neroni. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.**

**Note: This book was selected as the Rollins Prize Winner as the best new book on popular/American culture by an author living or working in New York or New England.**

Hilary Neroni's excellent new book *The Subject of Torture* breaks exciting new ground for the disciplines of pop culture and body studies. Her central argument posits that in the wake of the Al-Qaeda attacks, American popular culture became deluged with images of torture particularly in film and television, but also in print images, and that society was ready and eager to absorb these images. She argues that American society was already well positioned to accept the prominence of these images as the function of biopolitics in American culture had prepared the media to disseminate images of the dehumanization of individual bodies for a public that accepted that bodies—especially foreign and Islamic bodies—could easily be viewed and exploited as sites of pain and political power.

Neroni builds her argument brilliantly and with great expertise. She begins with the historical moment, specifically, the photos released from Abu Gharib in April 2004. As shocking as they were, these images seamlessly entered the American mainstream media and migrated easily into pop culture. She analyzes the cultural response to the photos and explains their historical and social importance. Then, she turns her attention to their influence on the growing acceptance and prevalence of torture in documentary films such as *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* (2007), *Taxi to the Other Side* (2007), and *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008). All of these documentaries condemned the use of torture as a military weapon, a theme that contrasts sharply with fictional depictions of torture, which tend to be more patriotic, glorious, and glamorous. From documentaries, she moves to an examination of the evolution of torture porn as an increasingly noticeable genre in film, a genre that she feels has grown in popularity based on Americans' constant exposure to images of torture and acceptance of its use in places such as Abu Ghraib. Specifically, she looks at the films from the *Saw* and *Hostel* series. Finally, she continues following the connections from historical event to documentary to silver screen to television. Neroni argues that the explosion of shows featuring torture fantasies and American force as evidenced in *24*, *Homeland*, and *Alias* reveal a new phase in the development of American identity and its sense of place in the world—namely as a protective nation empowered to use any conceivable method to guarantee security in a frightening world.

Neroni's careful and thoughtful argument addresses all facets of torture in contemporary American culture. She meticulously defines her terms, provides the legal and political context in which to understand the international understanding of torture, and engages current theory as well as Freud and psychoanalysis. She unpacks the historiographical arguments that have been made about power as well as current academic work being done on bodies. She wrestles with theories of sadism and desire. She explains and responds to both Foucault's and Giorgio Agamben's theories on biopolitics as she advances her own theories about the role biopolitics play in dominating American popular culture's fascination with displaying bodies in pain.

This book is beautifully written and organized. Each chapter solidly advances and develops her thesis. Neroni offers a deep analysis of a variety of pop-culture media that she constantly relates back to her main thesis. The writing and analytical strength of this monograph would be reason enough to assign the book in an undergraduate course.

*The Subject of Torture* demonstrates all that the academic study of popular can be. She analyzes the images found on film and television to identify the ideological shifts happening in American politics and public discourse as the result of recent profoundly violent historical events and an emerging emphasis on biopolitics because of pop culture's growing fixation with torture.

**Katherine Allocco**  
**Western Connecticut State University**

***Lizzie Borden on Trial: Murder, Ethnicity and Gender.* Joseph A. Conforti.  
Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2015.**

Joseph A. Conforti's *Lizzie Borden on Trial* examines the infamous case of Lizzie Borden, who was accused of murdering her stepmother and father with an axe in 1892. Conforti offers a new perspective on the case by centering his analysis on the socio-economic forces that allowed a middle-class, white, Protestant woman to be acquitted of these crimes. The author meticulously examines the neighborhoods, patterns of

immigration, social dynamics, gender roles, and ethnic identities of the changing landscape of Fall River, Massachusetts, a prosperous textile town. Conforti argues that Borden was able to manipulate the media and her own class and family connections by playing into people's anxiety about a growing number of immigrants (Irish, Italian, Portuguese, and French Canadian) arriving in town, long-standing religious prejudice, and her family's own long-established social position. Her deft performance while on trial also ensured her acquittal. Conforti pieces together all of the complex elements of New England society and Victorian sensibility and locates the trial within this multi-faceted context.

Conforti builds his argument slowly and carefully by looking closely at the larger society and social order of Fall River before focusing on the events of the murder and trial itself. He contextualizes the crime and trial beautifully and offers a complete description of Massachusetts during the Victorian era. The book contains excellent details and delves into the role of the Borden family as well as Lizzie's individual experiences in shaping this mill town. He devotes his longest chapter to a detailed examination of the Borden family and those associated with the household, unpacking the various influences in Lizzie's life that could have informed her (alleged) actions. Conforti, who himself grew up in Fall River, had heard the story of the Borden family all his life and, of course, has an intimate understanding of the town and its society.

The book draws from a number of interesting and excellent sources, including contemporary newspapers from all across New England and New York in the 1890s and also the trial records. He reproduces several passages from the trial transcripts. Conforti's book is very well organized moving both chronologically and thematically across the events of the trial and his social analysis. The book includes a useful chronology. In his bibliographical essay in the back of the monograph, Conforti creates a historiographical lineage for his own work and comments on the development and current state of the field, which has become increasingly interested in questions of ethnicity and gender. Conforti's work draws from several prominent scholars working on this topic and adds his own synthesizing observations.

This book would work very well in a methods class, as undergraduates would gain much from examining the way that historians interpret and approach primary and secondary sources. It would also fit nicely into a survey course on immigration in the United States or on the Progressive Era. Conforti's book is very accessible and would be engaging for undergraduates in a variety of classroom settings.

**Katherine Allocco**  
**Western Connecticut State University**

***The Road Not Taken: Finding America in the Poem Everyone Loves and Almost Everyone Gets Wrong.* By David Orr. Penguin Press (2015). 184 pp.**

In his 1998 biography of Andrew Wyeth, Richard Meryman tells of a time when Robert Frost contacted the eminent painter. Frost wanted Wyeth to paint his portrait, because Frost thought the two seemed to “share something.” And indeed, a good many critics might agree that certain parallels of style, tone, and composition might be drawn between their respective works. Wyeth nonetheless had no inclination toward the project. He didn’t feel like spending much time with Frost, and remarked, Frost “looked like an old sweet potato that had been baked and found a week later in the cold oven.” The essence of Frost apparently was not susceptible of portraiture; Wyeth thought it was “all there in his poetry,” and painting wouldn’t add anything. This anecdote might serve as an epitome of David Orr’s new book on what is arguably Frost’s best-known poem, “The Road Not Taken.” In fact, since Orr’s approach is gossipy and topical throughout, it’s rather odd that he missed including it.

Orr does a superb job of producing a portrait of Frost in words. He tracks the history of Frost criticism, both in professional academic circles and in American culture generally. Frost emerges as an iconic national treasure who, in the case of “The Road Not Taken,” fired a curveball that has stumped almost as many professional critics as it has high-school valedictorians. Like Wyeth, Orr accomplishes this by distinguishing Robert Frost the man from Robert Frost the poet. Frost the man had all the human failings that complement simple participation in humanity, while Frost the icon had at least a couple of slippery, homespun, “simple New England farmer” personae. In fact, while reading Orr, one waits in vain for a comparison to “the ploughman poet,” Robert Burns. Like Burns, Frost loved being seen as a rustic, and often did all he could to further the impression. This desire for plainness manifests itself in Frost’s poetic diction, which—even as it celebrates nature—relies more on syntax than on the mellifluous floridity of Swinburne or Tennyson. Not that sound was unimportant. Orr reports that Frost would never say, “I will *read* a poem”; instead, he always remarked that he would “say” one. If a certain work seemed to go badly at a Frost reading, he would ask the audience whether they would like to hear him say another poem. He worked in the oral tradition, a fact that differentiates him from, for example, T.S. Eliot, who might be accused of having written poems that were actually lengthy footnotes. Unsurprisingly, the two men seem to have despised one another. Frost thought Eliot was pretentious, and Eliot once observed that Frost “specialized in New England torpor.”

The crux of Orr’s treatment of his main subject, the text of “The Road Not Taken,” revolves around the well-known lines that describe the two famously diverging roads. Orr situates his skillful close reading within a *tour de force* of everything ever thought or written about the poem. He points out that there are two categories of interpretation: the one favored by graduation speakers, in which the reader is persuaded to agree that one should always take the less-travelled road, since it is presumably more challenging and more indicative of rugged American individualism. And then there are all the other readings. Orr examines every possible angle here. He looks at logical dilemma, political rhetoric, the psychology of “choice,” the history of free will, and even self-help books. His best point is that the high-school interpretation of the poem is clearly wrong, but that the other possibilities don’t seem quite right either. But here he balks, because he does not seem to want to essay a bit of basic literary theory.

To be sure, Orr is writing for that *rara avis*, the “general reader,” who may or may not still exist. A good many of the graduation speakers probably have never read the whole of “The Road Not Taken;” rather, they have merely looked around the Internet for a useful quotation and pounced

on a couple of lines from an old standard. In that case, they are not likely to see the poem's other flow, a rhetorical line in which the narrator mentions that the two roads aren't very different after all, and that the title isn't "The Road I Took," but "The Road *Not* Taken," thus making the whole composition center on the road that is *more* travelled. In this latter reading, the binary logic that seems to create two strongly divided categories simply collapses. A certain irony then creeps in, a sense of postmodern relativism, in which Frost might be seen to mock the Romanticist notion of a lonely traveler making a momentous decision to journey alone through a sublimely naturalistic landscape. Orr reinvents the wheel here, inasmuch as he never defines the relationship of the two roads as what it is: a rudimentary example of Derridian *aporia*. Instead, he writes a fascinatingly detailed encounter with the text, an interpretation that depends not inconsiderably on his lyrical and energetic prose style as well as his wisdom. The putative General Reader will come to apprehend all of the poem's ironic nuances, its parodic distance from the high-school interpretation, and the crumbling of its American Individualist façade. Anti-theorists, if such still prowl academia, will no doubt see this as a virtue. But one must demur, however gently, at Orr's decision to ignore almost fifty years of literary-theoretical endeavor. That said, it would be rather churlish to find too much fault with a book that in its closing pages manages to juxtapose Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Robert Johnson's "Cross Road Blues" and still make perfect sense.

**Jeffrey P. Cain**  
**Sacred Heart University**

***Your Band Sucks: What I Saw at Indie Rock's Failed Revolution (But Can No Longer Hear).* Jon Fine. New York: Viking, 2015.**

Jon Fine's memoir *Your Band Sucks: What I Saw at Indie Rock's Failed Revolution (But Can No Longer Hear)* chronicles the author's career as a second-tier rock star and reflects on the growth and significance of the music industry in the 1990s. Fine, who is now the executive editor of *Inc.* magazine, was the guitarist and song writer for a number of bands, including the one he loved best: Bitch Magnet.

Bitch Magnet formed while the members were students at Oberlin College and was active from 1986 until 1990. During those years, the band produced three albums, a few singles, and managed to tour all over the world. Fine makes these years sound grueling, hopeless, romantic, and totally fun. Fine's memoir is full of tales of marathon sleeplessness, cramming himself uncomfortably into a rusty, stinky old van, arguing with promoters and club owners, and worrying constantly about all the money that he was losing as a touring musician without any other gainful employment. Fine usually resists glamorizing this experience, and mostly strives to honestly recount the sacrifice and mistakes that he encountered on the road.

Fine is clearly an expert in this era of music. His book includes encyclopedic descriptions of the many bands that shaped his genre, the record labels and the multitude of personnel who operated behind the scenes. He draws mainly from his own memory, but also from recent conversations and interviews with other musicians and from fans. He seems to have known everyone in the '90s Indie music scene and lovingly divulges all sorts of personal stories about the members of LCD Soundsystem, Freshkills, Slint, Bastro and many, many more. He recounts wonderful stories about the All Tomorrow's Parties music festival, CBGBs, Kokie's Place, and the Bowery Ballroom, places and events so integral to the Indie music scene but all but forgotten now.



This book is engagingly written. His style is witty, personal, honest, and eloquent. It's a tough book to put down, as his anecdotes can be so compelling. This would be an interesting book to assign for a writing class. Despite its abrasive title and occasionally condescending tone, this memoir makes no attempt to glorify or sanitize its author. Fine confesses to all his foibles and errors and snobberies and mostly comes face to face with his love of an age and genre long gone.

**Katherine Allocco**  
**Western Connecticut State University**

***Lessons Learned from Popular Culture.* By Tim Delaney and Tim Madigan. SUNY Press, 2016. 274 pp.**

It's been 46 years since Ray Browne (1922–2009) founded the Popular Culture Association, and 49 since he launched the *Journal of Popular Culture*. Yet, as uncomfortable as it might make a lot of scholars, pop culture remains suspect in wide swaths of the academy, the accusation being that those researching and writing about it are just playing rather than engaging in "serious" study. One of the glories of *Lessons Learned from Popular Culture* is that its authors are willing to play with and against those perceptions. What better way to exact revenge than to turn the stereotypes against their creators! SUNY Oswego sociology professor Tim Delaney and St. John Fisher College philosophy professor (and former president of the Northeast Popular Culture Association) Tim Madigan have written a playful, sometimes-irreverent text that's a mix of hard-hitting analysis and nonchalance.

There is a self-selected sampling of production from an array of pop culture categories: movies, television, social media, music, radio, newspapers, comics, cartoons, books, fashion, technology, fads, celebrity, comedy, sports, and virtual reality. In each chapter, they offer short probes of specific examples from the genre with an eye toward drawing some sort of "lesson" from each—often a whimsical one. The movie chapter, for instance, uses these films: *Planet of the Apes*, *The Simpsons Movie*, *Apocalypse Now*, *Pinocchio*, *The Truman Show*, and a smattering of zombie films. If you're looking for an overall plan, don't. The authors choose things that intrigue them because their real intention is to spark discussion, not get bogged down in the details of any one production. They mention eight zombie films in just two-plus pages to reach the lesson that, "Zombies have no worries, and that's what worries us humans" (23). If that sounds trite, so it might be, but scholars aren't the audience and the same two pages touch upon weightier issues: the Problem of Other Minds (cognitive research), Rene Descartes and the nature of individualism, existentialism stripped to its basics, and the ethics of extending the life of vegetative elders. In like fashion, *The Truman Show* is a vehicle for considering Plato's allegory of the cave. Any one of these would make for a dynamite undergraduate discussion, and those impressionable minds are this book's intended audience.

Along the way, Delaney and Madigan also wander onto social problems turf. What new dangers emerge when street gangs become savvy with social media? Do overdone trends like the ice bucket challenge cause more fatigue than change? Do smart phones make us more intelligent, or simply pacify our stupidity? Are fantasy sports the new frontier of gambling addiction? They even engage in reflexive parody. In their look at Amazon as the behemoth that eats the local bookstore and narrows consumer choice, their lesson is: "If we're not careful, Amazon will refuse to sell this book. Or, they might decide to sell it at a discounted rate—which is great for the reader but not so good for the authors or publisher" (151).

Any book that covers such diverse and idiosyncratic turf is open to nitpicking by reviewers wondering why the authors chose example A instead of B. This one certainly raises such questions. Delaney and Madigan are way too enamored with *Seinfeld* and sometimes force-fit the narrative so they can quote from the show. Fine—but *Seinfeld* has been off the air for a whopping 18 years now and, syndication aside, I doubt today's undergrads share the authors' obsession with the show. (Studies reveal, by the way, that *Seinfeld* was beloved in the Northeast and on the West Coast, but not elsewhere.) I have a few conceptual issues, one of which is that I do not conflate mass and popular culture, as do Delaney and Madigan. I suspect that anyone picking up this book will have one of two reactions: they'll be lost in perceived chaos, or they will find its eclecticism thought provoking. I'm inclined to the second view and am willing to place my quibbles in the *meh!* category. *Meh*, by the way, might be a vulgarization of a Yiddish term, it might have come from TV's *Melrose Place*, or it might have originated with Sideshow Bob on *The Simpsons*. Does its current popularity mirror the snarky irony of millennial culture, or is it a psychological coping mechanism reflective of life in a time of moral relativism? *That's* the kind of stuff Delaney and Madigan are talking about! If some academic curmudgeons can't see that these are valuable lessons to discuss and learn, we shall leave them to their arcane specialties so they can talk quietly among themselves.

**Robert E. Weir**  
**University of Massachusetts Amherst**

***Can I Go Now? The Life of Sue Mengers, Hollywood's First Superagent.* Brian Kellow. New York: Viking, 2015.**

Brain Kellow has written the definitive biography of Sue Mengers, and it's a fun book. Mengers was an influential Hollywood talent agent who represented some of the industry's most glamorous stars at the height of their careers, including Barbra Streisand, Cybil Shepherd, Gene Hackman, Anthony Perkins, and Burt Reynolds. She is often credited with helping them secure some of their most iconic roles. Kellow suggests that Mengers redefined her profession by carving out a place for women in an industry dominated by men, but does not push any sort of central argument beyond his desire to record her biography. Kellow clearly adores Mengers and has dedicated himself to recovering as many details of her life and career as possible. He presents Mengers as a relentlessly energetic force of nature who stood out from other agents of the age. Through sheer force of will, tenacity, and a refusal to be overlooked, Mengers promoted some of Hollywood's greatest stars and pushed to have her voice be the loudest in the room. Kellow provides excellent social and historical context when describing the world that Mengers entered—initially as a young secretary—and he makes frequent observations about how her often-outrageous behavior propelled her to the forefront of Hollywood representation.

Kellow divulges all the juicy gossip from the film industry from the 1960s through the 1980s. His writing is very accessible; his tone often breezy. He includes uproarious stories about Katharine Hepburn and Ali McGraw, extensive quotes from Michael Caine, and copious information about Barbra Streisand's career, Streisand being one of Mengers' greatest projects. Kellow never shies from exposing people at their worst, including Mengers, whose larger-than-life personality and predictably unpredictable behavior caused people either to love or to hate her.

Mengers comes off as a prickly character at best, with a complicated family history and psychology. She was determined, ambitious, and willing to use any means necessary to promote her clients and, of course, herself. She was at the center of the Hollywood scene during these decades and seems to deserve the credit that Kellow heaps upon her for shaping

these celebrities and the films on which they worked. By the end of the book, it is unclear if she did, in fact, open new opportunities for future generations of women agents, but it is very clear that she opened up plenty of opportunities for herself and that she enjoyed her success to the fullest.

This is not an academic work and relies primarily on interviews, personal conversations and anecdotes. Kellow offers an affectionate retelling of Hollywood royalty and all their foibles. He is clearly interested in describing the evolving nature of professional agents, but is equally interested in reporting on the stars' more embarrassing moments. This would be a great book for film buffs who would enjoy the behind-the-scenes anecdotes, the description of the process of producing films and negotiating casting, and the chance to see these celebrities from a new angle—namely from a superagent's point of view. This book would also be useful for courses on writing, journalism, or New Hollywood filmmaking.

**Katherine Allocco**

**Western Connecticut State University**

PS: Our eagle-eyed book review committee member **Tim Madigan** notes that Bette Midler has starred in a recent Broadway show on Mengers titled "I'll Eat You Last." You can see a clip on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUN7c80JAe4>

#### **Reviews Posted Online:**

1. Charles DeMotte, ***Baseball & American Society***. How does baseball mirror American society? More than you might think: <https://nepca.wordpress.com/2016/07/22/baseball-american-society-ground-rule-double/>
2. Anne K. Rasmussen, ***The Music of Multicultural America: Performance, Identity, and Community in the United States***. A look at how music looks outside the realm of processed pop and within specific identity communities: <https://nepca.wordpress.com/2016/07/13/music-and-multicultural-america-book-review/>
3. Barbara Ryan and Milette Shamir, ***Bigger than Ben-Hur: The Book, Its Adaptations, and Their Audiences***. The Ben-Hur story from various angles and in various media: <https://nepca.wordpress.com/2016/04/14/book-review-bigger-than-ben-hur/>
4. Adam Hochschild, ***Spain in Our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939***. A work of history, but also one that focuses on journalists and the politics of idealism: <https://nepca.wordpress.com/2016/03/16/spain-in-our-hearts-adam-hochschilds-call-to-remember/>
5. Ian Plenderleith, ***Rock n' Roll Soccer: The Short Times and Fast Life of the North American Soccer League***. Some things are just before their time! North America before it too got bit by the soccer bug: <https://nepca.wordpress.com/2016/01/04/new-book-chronicles-north-american-soccer-league/>
6. Thom Rourke, ***Gene Baset's Vietnam Sketchbook: A Cartoonist's Wartime Perspective***. Are things more clear when they're black and white? A Vietnam War correspondent's quick sketches capture a lot of ambiguity! <https://nepca.wordpress.com/2015/12/12/gene-bassets-vietnam-sketchbook/>

7. Jane Beck, *Daisy Turner's Kin: An African American Family Saga*. Beck's fascinating tale of one black family's life in Vermont from 1873 on is an imaginative blend of history, folklore, and memory: <https://nepca.wordpress.com/2015/12/05/daisy-turners-kin-merges-oral-history-griot-traditions-and-professional-history/>

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## SCENE FROM A PAST CONFERENCE



**Ida Yalzadeh** of Brown University making a point at last year's conference. She must have made it well, as she won the **Amos St. Germain Prize**. Maybe you can be immortalized in next year's *NEPCA News* by winning one of this year's prizes!