

• in progress...

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The Department of English Newsletter

Welcome *back* to **in progress...**, the periodic report of the scholarly, creative, and professional activities of the English Department faculty at Harper College. "Periodic" seems to be the operative term. . . . The newsletter was on an unexpected hiatus last semester, but it's up and running once again.

The current issue highlights the work of three adjunct faculty in the Department: Lauren Hahn, Tom Sanfilip, and Ana Arredondo. For extended versions of the excerpts, refer to the publications in which they appeared (or will appear).

Teaching *To the Lighthouse*

Lauren Hahn teaches English 102, the literature-based composition course, and introductory genre courses in the English Department. Last semester, she reviewed Daugherty's and Rigel's [Approaches to Teaching Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*](#) (MLA, 2001) for the [Midwest Modern Language Association Journal](#). The following is an excerpt from her review:

When the editors of this volume surveyed professors who teach twentieth-century literature, they found that when instructors could choose just one Woolf text, they selected *To the Lighthouse* "as the one most representative of her genius" (xii) and one that "grapples with issues students are interested in" (xii). But the complexities of this novel give some instructors pause. Will students appreciate Woolf's richly-textured, evocative prose, or will they abandon the novel on page 5? Now help is at hand, for this recent addition to the MLA "Approaches" series offers a veritable gold mine of teaching strategies, along with topics for classroom discussion, short essays and research projects for students at all levels.

One of the volume's strengths is the number of essays aimed at introductory literature courses, where often students are non-majors, have not read widely, and require creative guidance. Janice M. Paul builds on students' prior knowledge by having them define "novels," identify traditional narrative elements and then discuss the metaphoric and experimental nature of *To the Lighthouse*. Mark Hussey explains the clues that Woolf's novel offers about the best way to read a nonlinear narrative. He encourages students to find connections between the three parts of the novel: "[I]mages of James cutting up and arranging pictures in a catalog and, later, Mrs. Ramsay picking up these pieces and putting them together demonstrate what the reader must do: select and gather the echoes and fragments" (43). Pamela L. Caughie's students, with help from Eric Auerbach's famous essay "The Brown Stocking" and Barbara Johnson's critique of Auerbach in *A World of Difference*, construct their own definitions of "Postmodernism" as they read Woolf's novel.

Another asset is the authors's emphasis on practical strategies for making the novel meaningful and enjoyable, since, as the editors mention, even "good, motivated, well-read students can have trouble reading *To the Lighthouse*" (xi)

(To read the full review, see the [Midwest Modern Language Association Journal](#) 36 [2003]: 66-69.)

The Big Boodle

Tom Sanfilip teaches composition and literature in the English Department, and writes poetry and film scholarship. Recently, he published an essay on Errol Flynn's role in the 1950's film *The Big Boodle*. In the article, Mr. Sanfilip argues that in *The Big Boodle*, Errol Flynn develops an atypical role that represents a "darker, more existential persona" (141). The following is an excerpt of the essay:

Before Casto overthrew the Cuban dictator Batista, Errol Flynn, the great Hollywood swashbuckler, headed to Cuba to star in a seemingly undistinguished film titled *The Big Boodle* (1956). A review in the *New York Times* described the film as "fairly taut . . . if somewhat loquacious," shot before a back-

drop of “cantinas, staccato rhythms, narrow streets, and wide plazas” (38). *Newsweek* pointed out that despite “murky black and white photography,” the Havana locales were “the most diverting aspect of the picture, aside from the interesting view of the new Errol Flynn” (“Errol with Jowls”). The magazine spared nothing in its physical description of the aging Flynn while noting a dramatic turn in the actor’s film image. “A heaviness of face, a maturity—almost a jowliness—and a distinct weariness of eye which gives him a credibility he never had as the sword-bearing hero of many a derring-do” (“Errol with Jowls”).

Flynn had, in fact, garnered the same critical reaction for his performance in a previous film, *Istanbul*, just completed prior to the release of *The Big Boodle*. Ironically, *Istanbul* was released the same month as *The Big Boodle*, January 1957, and *Variety* immediately recognized a different Flynn persona on screen, stating that “Flynn has shed his former derring-do acting for a more serious vein” (“*The Big Boodle*”).

It is *The Big Boodle*, however, that most reveals the reversal of Flynn’s identifiable screen image, one closer, in fact, to *film noir* than anything he had done in his career. Flynn, dismissed in the 1950s as past his prime and limited in his abilities to tackle a serious role, created a remarkable reinvention of himself as an actor in the title role of Ned Sherwood, a croupier with a questionable past, working in a Havana casino.

(To read the full article, see “Errol Flynn, Cuba, and *Film Noir*: Revisioning *The Big Boodle*.” *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 31 [2003]: 141-44.)

Two Poems

Ana Arredondo is a recent graduate of the MFA program at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The following poems are included in her thesis, “Negatives.”

Train

she kissed him there
he sat on it
speed shifted air
around

fixated on
the swerving curve
and weaving in
to her

maneuvering
her legs to wrap
him up, her in
his seat

sliding through glides
arriving now
sweat-tangles fly
rushing

red

when she rose
he fell for it
that sacred craft
of curves, caught
the breeze, she formed,
head to thigh
before him,
that lift,
then turn, twisted
her skirt, tangling
the sway,
in that switching
traipse
he tasted red

(To read more poetry, see
<http://www.harpercollege.edu/libarts/eng/dept/inprogress>)

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