JEAN ANOUILH’S
ANTIGONE
Offbeat, unique, quirky, progressive, hip, bohemian, unconventional: these are some of the adjectives I’ve heard applied to the RC since arriving on campus as Professor and Associate Director in August 2014. It was clear that the RC community sparked fierce loyalty among students and alumni. But beyond that, I knew very little.

I earned my doctorate at U-M in 1998 and so I was already familiar with Ann Arbor and U-M. Originally from North Carolina and Florida, I’m a historian who specializes in nineteenth-century America, and I’ve taught at a range of academic institutions and authored or edited nine books. Most recently I was Chair of the History Department at Temple University in Philadelphia. My wife, Heather Thompson, is also a historian and is joining the RC this fall. She’s a native Detroiter so I had picked up quite a bit about southeastern Michigan over the years.

But boy did I have a lot to learn about the RC! Thanks to the warm welcome of faculty, students, and administrators, especially Interim Director Charlie Bright and Associate Director Jennifer Myers, I still have a lot to learn but I have gained a deeper and broader appreciation for all that the RC has been and continues to be. In addition to the words I heard applied to the RC over the last year, I would also add excellent teachers, dedicated administrators, smart and enthusiastic students, and a community committed to racial, social, and economic justice. As a historian myself, I was particularly keen to understand the RC’s rich past. I’m honored to be the next director of such a storied place within U-M.

In fact, the RC will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2017! We hope that you will return to campus and join in the receptions, lectures, and other fun events we will plan, with details to come.

But even before we get to 2017 and our half-century mark celebration, the RC is already undergoing some changes. This past year tireless Director Angela Dillard became Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, our beloved poet and teacher Ken Mikolowski retired, we hired Anna Fisher, a new faculty member specializing in the digital humanities, Laura Kasirschke—herself a RC Alumna—has joined the faculty and will teach poetry, we were lucky to find Carl Abrego as our new key administrator, respected faculty member Jennifer Myers decided to step down from her long term role as Director of Academic Services, and Charlie Bright returned to the Director’s chair for one year. And I’ve been warmly welcomed as the Director for the next three years. Whew! The changes have come fast and furious.

And yet the RC continues its tradition of excellence: the language faculty remains one of the most vital and consistently dedicated parts of the RC, helping new cohorts of students master proficiency in a new language. The drama faculty raised the bar to new heights with wonderful summer performances of A Midsummer Night’s Dream in the Arb, while also teaching classes and overseeing performances in the Keene Theater. The Studio Arts faculty continue to thrive with the new additions of Isaac Wingfield in photography and Ana Fernandez in printmaking, while the music faculty garner accolades across the university for their dedication to students. Reading through the course evaluations of the faculty in Social Theory and Practice, Creative Writing, and Arts and Ideas demonstrates the life-changing teaching that takes place in East Quad every day.

As tempting as it would be, though, no one in the RC wants to maintain the status quo. In fact, we’ve undertaken a major self-study to assess where we are and where we’d like to go in the future.

PHOTO BY K. RUTHERFORD THOMAS
continues to flourish with the addition of Laura Kasischke and Sarah Messer and the third of what we hope will be annual gatherings called the Voices of the Middle West, a celebration of Midwestern fiction that brings together aspiring and established authors as well as regional publishers. Drama will be front and center this fall when the RC embraces the university’s October presentation of the Ancient Greek play *Antigone*. As always with the RC, though, we will have our own spin on the performance. For their summer read, RC students will study and in the fall discuss a modern version, an adaptation of the tragedy written by French author Jean Anouilh in 1942. Students in language, drama, history, and art will examine the twentieth-century version, and compare it to the original, which students will see performed thanks to contributions from the RC and the Office of the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education.

Also in this issue of the newsletter you’ll find spotlights on individual faculty, including Catherine Brown, who has recently joined the RC’s Arts and Ideas faculty. Catherine has made an immediate and wonderful impression on the RC and comes to us from the Romance Languages and Comparative Literature departments.

We hope that this newsletter keeps students, alumni, and parents in touch with the RC. As always, we welcome contributions to a wide range of initiatives. Thanks in advance for your support of the Residential College!

Jonathan D. Wells
Residential College Director
Fall 2015 is the Antigone semester. The University Musical Society is bringing in a major production (October 14-17) of Sophocles’ tragedy by the renowned avant-garde director Ivo van Hove and starring the great French stage and screen actress Juliette Binoche. This production employs the award-winning translation of U-M’s own Anne Carson. Special student tickets will be available.

In tandem is the RC’s Summer Reading, one of the most famous adaptations of the play, Jean Anouilh’s Antigone of 1942, an Existentialist take on the Greek heroine set against the background of Nazi occupied France. Anouilh’s piece will receive a full staged-reading in the RC Keene Theater on Sept. 24. Students will have the opportunity to take a one-credit minicourse (RC HUMS 485, sec. 001) in the first half of the semester based on attendance at or participation in these and other Antigone-related events in the RC. We are also planning a session of parallel scenes in Anouilh’s French, Bertolt Brecht’s German, and by the Northern Irish playwright Tom Paulin, as well as a play-reading of A.R. Gurney’s Another Antigone together with a screening of David Mamet’s film Oleanna.

– MARTIN WALSH, RC DRAMA

Watch our website (lsa.umich.edu/rc) for updates on future events
Sophocles’ *Antigone* is one of the most enduring and one of the most often adapted of the 3o-odd tragedies that have come down to us from ancient Greece. In the modern era especially, whenever there is a clash between individual conscience and the interests of an oppressive State, Antigone is our go-to girl. To take just a few instances, at the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland back in the 80s, poet Tom Paulin created a version of *Antigone* which he called *The Riot Act*. In Athol Fugard’s *The Island* (1974), South African political prisoners on Robben Island plan a production of *Antigone* for themselves. One of the more interesting variants, from our “ivory tower” point of view, is A. R. Gurney’s *Another Antigone* of 1987—an authoritarian Classics professor is flunking an activist female student who wants her *Antigone* version to count for her required term-paper, with ensuing negative repercussions for the prof. We hope to present this as a play-reading event in September along with a screening of the film version of a play which may well have been influenced by it, David Mamet’s controversial *Oleanna* (1992). Distinguished critic George Steiner explored the many recastings of her story in a major study, *Antigones: How the Antigone Legend has Endured in Western Literature, Art, and Thought* (1984).

*Antigone* may be our special political heroine, but was she such for Sophocles? It must be remembered that Antigone was a singularity, almost sacred in her Otherness—caregiver to the uniquely cursed Oedipus her father, witness to his apotheosis at Colonus, the forever tainted product of mother-son incest. It is Antigone’s tragedy, yes, but it is also Creon’s, and perhaps his even more so. He is the man in charge and he loses everything—wife, son, his very identity as ruler. As only three actors discharged the speaking roles in tragedies of the classical period, the principal actor would not have taken on Antigone, but Creon—Creon, who is in every scene after the prologue. Sophocles and Co. were primarily interested in the awful spectacle of a decent if perhaps not particularly charismatic leader trying to do the right thing and getting it all wrong, not in that of a two-dimensional tyrant on a tear. Creon in his smaller way replays Oedipus’ tragic trajectory. Just as one can’t have a great *Medea* without a supremely self-deluded Jason, so too one can’t have a great *Antigone* without a complex, conflicted Creon.

The play will continue to provide one of the great female roles, up there with St. Joan, Cleopatra, Mother Courage—witness the arrival, shortly, of the great French stage and screen actress Juliette Binoche who is to appear in an *Antigone* production by Ivo van Hove, thanks to our University Musical Society. But we also need a Creon to hold our dramatic interest. The tragic spectacle of a heroine of conscience descending to bleak despair (*Antigone*, after all, hangs herself in her sealed tomb) needs the complementary manifestation of lack of vision, creativity and “nimbleness” in an overlord who fails to recognize the moral impasse of his own creation and so brings about the destruction of his polis.

**Martin Walsh is the Head of the RC Drama Program.**
Most theatergoers associate Antigone with the 441 BCE Sophocles’ classical play, but to those familiar with French literature, Antigone also refers to an adaptation of that tragedy written by Jean Anouilh in 1942. (To distinguish between the two plays, Anouilh’s Antigone is often being pronounced the French way, roughly on-tee-GUN.)

While Antigone became Anouilh’s most famous play and established his reputation as a dramatist, he also wrote updated versions of other Greek dramas, such as Médée (1937) and Eurydice (1942). It is worth mentioning that Anouilh was not the only French playwright to adapt Greek classics to the modern French stage in the early twentieth century; Anouilh was actually influenced by two of them, Jean Cocteau and Jean Giraudoux.

Similarly to Sophocles’ Antigone, Anouilh’s play is based on the legends surrounding the city of Thebes which, after the departure of its ruler Oedipus, was supposed to be governed in alternate years by his two sons, Antigone’s brothers, Eteocles and Polynices. When Eteocles does not want to surrender power, Polynices assembles an army and a battle ensues, the outcome of which is the death of both brothers. Their uncle, Creon, who assumed power after the battle, decrees that Eteocles should be given the usual respectful burial, since he died for the kingdom, while Polynices, who was a traitor, must not receive the honors of a proper funeral. Antigone disobeys Creon’s decision and attempts to bury Polynices. Caught by guards, she is brought before Creon as a prisoner. Creon attempts to reason with her, but she insists on taking responsibility for her actions. Powerless to protect her, Creon condemns her to be entombed alive, but Antigone hangs herself. Learning of her death, Creon’s son Haemon, to whom Antigone was betrothed, commits suicide. Later, Creon’s wife, Eurydice, also ends her life, leaving Creon alone facing the repercussions of his actions.

While Anouilh’s version does not differ significantly from Sophocles’ in terms of the plot, many variations occur, generating differences in terms of both form and content. To mention only a few, Anouilh’s one act play begins with a Prologue, a long monologue by the chorus that introduces the characters already on stage and recalls the events leading up to Creon’s decision; Sophocles’ first scene, however, is a dialogue between Antigone and her sister, Ismene. To represent the chorus, Anouilh also substitutes the traditional Choral group with one single character. (Incidentally, it is in the Prologue that Anouilh employs, for the first time in one of his plays, the literary device of the mise-en-abyme.)

The blind prophet, Tiresias, a character central to Sophocles’ play, is absent in Anouilh’s, but the character of a nanny who takes care of Antigone and Ismene is added. Anouilh modernizes the play by using a very simple and familiar, sometimes even vulgar, prose which, accessible to all, departs from Sophocles’ classical text in verse. Playing with anachronisms, Anouilh chooses to dress his characters in twentieth century clothing and represents them involved in modern activities (chatting, playing cards); all of these devices bring the audience closer to the play.

Exploring more substantial differences, it should be noted that while Anouilh’s text is not grounded in religion, that aspect constitutes an essential element of the original version. Also, compared to their Greek counterparts, Anouilh’s characters seem desecrated, demystified. Indeed, Sophocles’ Antigone follows two moral imperatives, her fraternal duty and her obedience to the gods. She is sublime and, dying to comply with a law that transcends her, epitomizes the nobility of character attached to classical tragedies. Anouilh’s Antigone is greatly transformed. She is depicted as being ugly with an unpleasant character. Like the Greek heroine, she is defiant, although not within a religious context, and
by claiming her own freedom demonstrates a will and a determination against social pressures. This Antigone dies because she cannot accept that her ideal of happiness is not attainable. She also expresses her disillusions, showing a psychological dimension absent from the classical play. Similarly, Anouilh portrays Creon in a more human light as a victim of his status as king wanting to help his niece, but Sophocles represents him as a brutal dictator. Anouilh’s Creon, not really caring which body, Polynices’ or Eteocles’, is being buried also reveals a notable difference from the original version in which burial rites are so important.

Anouilh’s *Antigone* displays many dimensions: psychological, political, moral, philosophical. The central theme is obviously an allegory of rebellion against established order. In her confrontation with realism (Creon’s duty to maintain the state), the idealist Antigone is doomed to her fate, as she refuses to compromise her integrity by living in a corrupt and hypocritical society, regardless of the outcome that is, for her, death. Thus, her death should be perceived more as a refusal to live than a choice of noble death. Her idealism is transposed into her conception of happiness which is also an important theme. Her idea of happiness cannot stand any concession; it can bear neither banality nor the mediocrity of everyday life.

Such idealism is often encountered in young characters, and childhood can certainly be a theme worth examining. Very frequently, the adjective “petit” meaning “little” or “tiny,” is affiliated with Antigone who at times still acts in a childish way: when she cuddles with her nanny, for example. At the beginning of the play, she is also described as still being too little for the fate that awaits her. Interestingly, it is when she grows up to fulfill her mission that she discovers the corrupt adult world unacceptable to her. By deciding to die, she also refuses to compromise with time, as she will never age. Her idealism, which underlies her actions, also leads her to being alone, a feeling she expresses just before dying. Solitude is certainly experienced by all characters and can be the topic of another discussion. Other themes, such as the conception of power and of the absurd also provide interesting readings of the play.

Another element that cannot be ignored is the historical pertinence of the play. Written in 1942 and staged in 1944 while France was under Nazi occupation, the play can be read as a contemporary political parable in which Antigone became a heroine who provided inspiration to the French Resistance movement struggling against the Germans. As Anouilh himself commented: “The Antigone by Sophocles, read and reread, that I had always known by heart, was suddenly a shock for me during the war. [...] I rewrote it my way, resonating the tragedy that we are living.” And yet a dissident voice could also be heard at the time arguing that the ambivalence of his Creon towards power did not propose a strong enough stance against tyranny. Without dwelling on this controversy, it should be added that Anouilh was actually attacked for his neutrality during World War II because of his lack of involvement, while many other French writers took very firm political stands.

By rewriting the well-known myth of Antigone, Anouilh repositioned the Greek dilemma within a contemporary frame. While the fate of the Greek Antigone is dictated by the malediction of her lineage, the French Antigone’s destiny is governed by her will and thirst for freedom as she claims to have the right to refuse an unacceptable situation. As such, she remains a defiant figure with whom the Millennial Generation can no doubt identify.

DOMINIQUE BUTLER-BORRUAT is Head of the RC French Language Program.
University of Michigan employs older people to talk with young people. This fall RC faculty (in Anouilh’s words, “wrinkled, tired”) and students discuss a 1940s retelling of an ancient play: Sophocles’ *The Burial at Thebes*, as Seamus Heaney titles his translation, could be called *Burials at Thebes* with its four young corpses—Polynices, Eteocles, Antigone, Haemon. In this spectacle of premature death, Anouilh ironically dramatizes how unbearable the process of aging can feel. To achieve this feat, the French playwright probes pessimism about adulthood as a flipside of romanticized youth. As Antigone tells Creon of that country, “you can’t enter any more, with your wrinkles, your wisdom and your belly.”

If growing up casts the “sensitive” in a role too harsh to be endured, teen suicide makes sense. Conversations with undergraduates cut to the chase (quick): “I want to know what I have to do to be happy! Now, right away, because now is when I have to choose.” Antigone, age 20, determines to die. She rejects not just law and the polis but also the “loathsome” future ahead. Like Sophocles’ Creon, she suffers a change of heart too late: “only now I realize how easy it is to live…."

How do women reach their full stature? If we believe that every phase of the life cycle has value, how is that value reckoned? Like the corpses littering the stage, answers to these questions haunt us. Roberta Trites, author of *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, asks, “Do [we] ever want to write about childhood and adolescence….as negative, as something to be outgrown?” Anouilh’s pessimism forces us to ask that question. His dead ends for men include the louche clubs of Polynices, layabout roisterer, “handsome in his evening clothes”; “a corner where we can only say yes,” once Haemon is bereft of a “giant-god” father; and a game of politics, Creon’s “everyday job” propped up and pulled off by lies. Only in making so much of himself available to Antigone does Creon gather more sympathetic space than Sophocles’ king.

These prototypes—Mad Men, Yes Men, Also-Rans—cannot fashion female futures. Knitting, sewing, obeying—not bars, gambling, and fast cars—await Antigone. Her heroic resistance, belittled as child’s play by the tiny tot shovel used to bury Polynices, dies hard: “I want to be sure of having everything, now, this very day, and it has to be as wonderful as it was when I was little.” She declares to Haemon (whom she loves, conditionally, because he is still “tough and young”) that she would have shielded their unborn son “against everything.” Antigone already embodies the ferocious ardor that burns out parents. No wonder she feels “a great void” growing inside, signifying “something dying.”

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As with Romeo and Juliet, speeding time entombs the lovers. Gone are the hard truths of Sophocles’ blind seer, Tiresias led forward slowly by a boy. Instead Creon, having destroyed a girl’s capacity to idolize an older brother, clouds even faith in the volitional subject (Antigone: “I don’t know what I’m dying for”). Finally, turning to his page (“Are you looking forward to growing up?”), Creon speaks his own epitaph: “It’d be best never to grow up…."

Elizabeth Goodenough is an instructor in the RC First Year Seminar and Arts and Ideas in the Humanities Program.
Even by the standards of tragedy, Anouilh’s *Antigone* is one grim play. It is also a brilliant, almost endlessly provocative one. Much of the credit, of course, goes to Sophocles, who invented the Oedipus clan. The fact that we so often return to them is testimony to the power of the myth. Indeed, many find it hard to believe that the gang of Thebes were never “real people.”

Anouilh’s version is a Mobius strip—“non-orientable,” in a wonderful mathematical phrase. No matter where we start, it never makes sense. We are left lost in familial, political, and philosophical space.

That is how I read the chorus’ famous soliloquy about tragedy being “nice and neat” relative to drama (sometimes translated “melodrama”). His speech is, in part, ironic. Tragedy like Anouilh’s is “neat” because it never will be. Because, as he also says, “you know there is no lousy help left.” With “neat” like this, who needs falling off a cliff? Or being buried alive. Or not buried at all. Messy stuff.

So fates are laid down and choices are made, but the trajectory is never meaningful, let alone cathartic. In a startling moment—almost her last moment—Antigone repeats twice that “I don’t know any more what I’m dying for.”

She is no longer driven by loyalty to her dead brother, religious conviction about the sacredness of burial, or even resistance to Creon’s defense of everyday “happiness” as life’s solace. And she is ashamed enough by having orchestrated her own now meaningless death that she deletes the confession from her last note to Haemon, her fiancée. “It’s better that no one should ever know. It’d be as if they were to see me naked, touch me, after I was dead.” But Anouilh shows precisely the nakedness that Antigone wished to hide.

Creon does not fare much better. After Antigone is dead—and after Creon had tried to save her for politically pragmatic but not entirely politically pragmatic reasons—both Haemon, his son, and Eurydice, his wife, commit suicide. Generational transition was never a forte of the Oedipus family. Now alone, Creon seems no longer to believe even in the clear-eyed realism that, he had argued, maturity entails. He asks his page, “Are you looking forward to growing up?” “Oh yes!” replies the page. Creon responds almost as Antigone would, and in Peter Pan phrasing that represented her at her least compelling: “You’re mad, boy! It’d be best never to grow up.”

So fates are laid down and choices are made, but the trajectory is never meaningful, let alone cathartic. In a startling moment—almost her last moment—Antigone repeats twice that “I don’t know any more what I’m dying for.”

Measured against these not-neat endings, the conventional ways of framing Anouilh’s *Antigone* do not work well. Of course, the play is, in part, about a struggle between the idealism of youth versus compromising in the “real world.” But the fact that Antigone and Creon themselves eventually turn on their own M.O.s undercuts such easy formulation. More essentially, perhaps, Anouilh writes nothing at all that would suggest the virtues of a middle way, which is where most of us actually live. He is Mobius to the end.

The theory that Anouilh intended *Antigone* to represent political resistance—specifically in the context of Nazi occupation and Vichy collaboration (he wrote the play in 1942)—is even less supported by the evidence. The play ran continuously—nearly 500 performances—with the blessings of German and Vichy authorities. As further testimony to
what some call “ambiguity” (too weak a word), the same scenes, even the same lines, were applauded (literally) both by the resistance and by collaborators. Sartre, active in the resistance at the time, noted that “with Antigone, [Anouilh] is being charged on the one hand with being a Nazi, on the other with being an anarchist.”

Anouilh himself was usually silent about his political views. But it was certainly noticed when, in 1946, he joined an appeal to commute the death sentence given to Raymond Brassilach, a notorious anti-Semite and collaborator. That clinched the suspicion of many that Creon represented Petain—perhaps even the more hateful Pierre Laval—and Anouilh was their champion.

The counter-narrative that Antigone represented resistance was largely the result of the first, and still best known, English translation of the play by Lewis Galantiere (for late 40s productions in the U.S. and U.K.). Galantiere was unapologetic about his revisions, most notably in the Chorus’ final summing up. There, we are told of “other Antigones” arising in “passionate belief that moral law exists” and in passionate defense of “the sanctity of the human spirit.” Seeing this version, Anouilh wrote that Galantiere’s changes were “perfectly ridiculous.” He directly asked Galantiere to “instantly cut those lines.” Galantiere never did.

Easy dichotomies—youth versus maturity, idealism versus pragmatism, resistance versus collaboration, the presumed “human spirit” versus its presumed opposite—are seductive responses to a bleak work of art, just as they are welcome within the messiness of life. But they are a betrayal of the more essential truth of this and the last century (and maybe all centuries) that people die, and do not die, for reasons that are most often arbitrary, and certainly independent of their intent (if they have any). In the Bray translation of Anouilh’s Antigone, we hear this in the Chorus’ final reflection:

_Everyone who had to die is dead: those who believed in one thing, those who believed in the opposite...even those who didn’t believe in anything...And those who are still alive are quietly beginning to forget them and get their names mixed up._

The age of classic tragedy has led to something else: what some call “atrocity,” “absurdity,” or simply the way things are. Luckily, we at least still have the chance to talk about it.

_HANK GREENSPAN is a psychologist and playwright and an instructor in the RC First Year Seminar and Social Theory and Practice Programs._

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**ANTIGONE**
_A new translation by Anne Carson_

Directed by Ivo van Hove
Starring Juliette Binoche

October 15-18, 2015
7:30 pm
Power Center

[www.ums.org](http://www.ums.org)
On July 21st Telling It was the beneficiary of the 2015 Howard S. Holmes II Charity Golf Invitational. Holmes, a philanthropist in his mid-twenties, is the son of Howdy & Carole Holmes of the Chelsea Milling Company, home of “JIFFY” mixes. Our Presenting Sponsors were Victory Automotive Group and the Washtenaw County Sheriff’s Office, Jerry L. Clayton, Sheriff. The weather was perfect and the course was in pristine condition for this sold out event. For the vast majority of the golfers, this was their introduction to Telling It.

Washtenaw Co. Sheriff Jerry L. Clayton provided a sobering overview of the challenges faced by the youth in our communities, highlighting the reasons he believes in and supports Telling It. State Representative David E. Rutledge (D-Superior Township) also in attendance, shared his plans for a new collaborative initiative in response to the recent gang-related murders involving young people in Ypsilanti. Representative Rutledge expressed that he was impressed by Telling It’s impact and its innovative approach to supporting children and teens.

...we are not giving a voice to the voiceless but rather understanding that each youngster has an existing voice and is an expert of their own experience. Our job is to support their exploration of how best to be heard.

The following is an excerpt from the speech delivered by Deb Gordon-Gurfinkel, Telling It Founder and Director:

Telling It (TI) has come a long way since 2002 when the seeds of the idea for the program were first germinating. Since that time we have served more than 700 youth ages six to 18 years old through long-term partnerships with organizations such as SOS Community Services, Avalon Housing, the Washtenaw County Sheriff’s Office and Parkridge Community Center.

This coming fall, following a successful pilot of TI at Ypsilanti Community Middle School, we will be running TI in collaboration with Ypsilanti Community Schools. Additionally, this fall new groups are being added at all of our current partnership sites in order to serve more of their children and youth.

Telling It has evolved to meet the needs of the youth we serve by forming familial-like groups of no more than twelve participants. By keeping the groups small we can establish safety and a level of mutual trust between the youth, the site leader, the social worker and the support team in order for us to meet individual needs. In collaboration with the youth and over the weekly sessions, we invite young people to share and speak candidly, with no censorship on subject matter or language excepting Hate Language, which we explore in a separate unit.

What TI does is to provide platforms of expression so that young people can discover where they best express themselves, be that photography, dance, spoken word poetry, visual arts and so on. One of the foundational tenets of TI is that we are not giving a voice to the voiceless but rather understanding that each youngster has an existing voice and is an expert of their own experience. Our job is to support their exploration of how best to be heard. As part of that exploration, new ideas and skills are introduced that may alter a young person’s worldview and even the choices they make.

In closing, I’d like to share the last lines of a poem written by Jamel, a TI participant who was heavily gang-involved.

“Why should I serve or follow these men who create nothing but problems and hate to the point that it spirals out of control?

Yesterday you were my friend, homie, dawg.
Today you are my enemy because they say so.
Yeah right!
I will choose my friends, my future, my destiny.
Yes I would die for my family, girlfriend and friends.
I’m not dying for your special color, hand sign, symbol or street corner.
So instead of gang life, I choose LIFE”
It’s a great pleasure to come home to the RC. I have taught in LSA since 1991, first in the Spanish wing of Romance Languages and later with a joint appointment in the department of Comparative Literature. I call myself a medievalist, which is true in the sense that my intellectual interests turn around issues raised by the cultures of the European Middle Ages (for simplicity’s sake, let’s say the years 500-1500). It’s not purely true, though, since I find those issues everywhere around me here and now. What I learn from the Middle Ages helps me see contemporary culture more clearly; what I learn from contemporary culture helps me see the Middle Ages more vividly.

My imagination operates comparatively, by juxtaposition of texts in different languages, and cultural artifacts of different genres, from different historical periods. A good way to explain how this works in my scholarship is to tell you about my current book project. *Remember the Hand: The Articulate Codex in Early Medieval Iberia* studies the copying of Latin manuscripts of 10th-century Iberia, and what the scribes who made them wrote about the work of making them. Hard to find a more obscure topic, but for me, these manuscripts and their talkative scribes don’t just speak to their own time. Now that the digital revolution has made print not the, but rather a medium for written language, the relation between language and its technological supports is an urgent question.

I am hoping that by looking anew at one of the oldest of old media—the early medieval handwritten book—and studying the materiality of ancient practices of reading, writing, and interpretation, *Remember the Hand* will contribute to contemporary thinking about humans and their technologies by engaging contemporary culture in mutually challenging dialogue.

As a teacher, my primary commitment is not to any particular language, genre, or period, but rather to the process of generating powerful questions and then attempting to answer them through the rigorous and loving encounter with primary sources, whether textual, visual, or musical. The “rigorous” part of the encounter requires attention to the particularities of the object of study and to the process of making meaning from those particularities. In other words: not just what a text “means,” but how meaning is made by word choice, syntax, and sound; not just how a picture or a piece of music makes you feel but how exactly that feeling is produced.

My teaching might not be exclusively devoted to the distant past, but it is committed to the ethical and intellectual challenges that the study of the past presents to us. To engage with cultural artifacts from the past is to be reminded that there have been, and are, other “now’s beside our own. It’s to be confronted with a mixture of the recognizable and the foreign whose interpretation demands a delicate ethics of difference. And from such an ethics of difference can grow ways of living justly in a deeply diverse world.

I thoroughly enjoyed and learned a lot from my first two classes last year, both seminars under the RCHUMS 324 rubric. One, “It’s about Time,” studied time and temporality through religious thinking, philosophy, science fiction, and photography; the other “The Book and the Body,” examined connections between human bodies and language technologies (early writing, medieval manuscript, print, and internet). Both classes were an intellectual and creative blast; I look forward to meeting more of you in the years to come!
Prison Creative Arts Project Celebrates 26 Years

The Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) is kicking off our 26th year of offering students real-world learning experiences. Faculty and students work with community members both inside and outside of prisons to engage in creative arts workshops, organize one of the largest prison art exhibitions in the world, and publish an annual literary review. Students have many opportunities to get involved, including five undergraduate courses, a student organization, and UROP (Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program) placement.

New developments at PCAP this year include:

• Students enrolled in PCAP’s summer course in Brazil will attend the internationally renowned Theatre of the Oppressed conference in addition to visiting prison theatre workshops in Rio.
• RC faculty member Isaac Wingfield is teaching a new PCAP photography course this fall. U-M students and prisoners at Thumb Correctional Facility will complete a collaborative project.
• PCAP faculty and staff are spearheading Humanize the Numbers in 2015-2016. This project uses collaborative art practices, public installations, and cross-disciplinary collaborations to connect incarcerated men and women in Michigan state prisons with hundreds of students, artists, researchers, and activists in and around Ann Arbor.

We are excited to offer these new opportunities to students and to PCAP’s incarcerated participants. If you would like to be kept in the loop on all PCAP’s activities, you can join our email newsletter list at prisonarts.org.

Thanks to generous alumni donations, the second annual Voices of the Middle West festival featured the best of Midwestern literature’s authors and small presses. On March 21st, over 2,000 visitors attended the daylong bookfair and conference, held in East Quad’s newly renovated atrium. The bookfair featured 36 regional small press and literary journal exhibitors. The conference author panels featured some of our region’s best known and most exciting authors. The Midwest as Place panel welcomed authors C.J. Hribal (WI), Caitlin Horrocks (MI-Grand Rapids), Marcus Wicker (IN), and Melba Boyd (MI – Detroit). The Midwestern Fabulism panel hosted Matt Bell (AZ, formerly out of MI and OH), Alissa Nutting (OH), Anne Valente (OH), and Laura Kasischke (MI). The panel on gender parity in publishing featured editors from major regional presses such as Graywolf Press.

This year’s keynote speaker was acclaimed Chicago-based author Stuart Dybek. Dybek’s talk was followed by a book signing and public reception. Dybek also conducted a brief residency in the days leading up to the festival, with several class visits, a Hopwood Room Q&A session, and a festival kick-off reading at Literati Bookstore with the other festival authors. The conference again offered an open mic for students and the public.

The third annual Voices of the Middle West conference is scheduled for Saturday, March 12, 2016 and will be free and open to the public. We look forward to seeing you there!
RC Welcomes New Faculty Laura Kasischke and Sarah Messer

In Fall 2015, the Creative Writing program will welcome RC and LSA English Professor Laura Kasischke and poet Sarah Messer to our faculty.

A graduate of the RC Creative Writing program, Laura Kasischke is the author of several novels, a book of short stories, and several books of poetry. Three of her novels have been made into movies. Her most recent published work includes the novel Mind of Winter, and the poetry collection The Infinitesimals, both published in 2014. Among her awards are a Guggenheim Fellowship in Creative Arts – Poetry, a National Book Circle Award, and two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Sarah Messer has received fellowships and grants from the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, the NEA, and others. She is the author of a hybrid history/memoir, Red House (Viking, 2004), and a poetry book, Bandit Letters (New Issues, 2001). In 2008–2009, she was a fellow in poetry at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. Her work has appeared in the Paris Review, the Kenyon Review, and Gulf Coast, and Ploughshares, among others. She runs One Pause Poetry, a reading series in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Thank you for 38 years, Ken Mikolowksi!

Poet and long-time creative writing lecturer Ken Mikolowski retired at the end of the Winter 2015 semester.

Ken taught poetry at the RC for nearly 40 years, since 1977, and is only the second poetry instructor since the Creative Writing Program began in Fall 1970. Ken’s poetry seminars and tutorials were enduringly popular with both student poets and fiction writers seeking to bring poetic techniques to their prose. Even in his introductory class, Ken says he didn’t try to “teach students how to write poetry” but to help them with their own writing, by encouraging them to read, grow, and develop.

Ken plans to remain in Ann Arbor, to travel, and to write. Ken’s newest book of poems, That That, was published this April by Wayne State University Press. Ken has also published four other books of poetry: Remember Me, Thank You Call Again, little mysteries, and Big Enigmas, and has been widely anthologized. He has recently collaborated on projects with RC music professor Michael Gould, and on a jazz recording (released on CD last year). A multimedia presentation of Remember Me was staged last year in the RC Gallery, and has traveled to New York, Nairobi, Berlin, and Poland.

Ken credits the Artists’ Workshop in Detroit’s Cass Corridor in the 1960s as his greatest creative influence. A native of Detroit, Ken attended Wayne State University planning to earn an engineering degree. Over Ken’s seven years at Wayne (he was paying his own way) he turned to poetry, and under poet W.D. Snodgrass edited WSU’s Wayne Review.

In the 1960s, Mikolowski founded the Alternative Press in Detroit’s Cass Corridor with his late wife, the painter Ann Mikolowski. As the press’s editor for 30 years, Mikolowski published—as unbound letterpress-printed mail art—the work of local Detroit poets as well as nationally recognized Beat and Black Mountain poets, including Amiri Baraka, Charles Bukowski, Allen Ginsberg, and Anne Waldman. The Press was celebrated in a 30-year retrospective exhibition and symposium at the Hatcher Graduate Library in 1999.

Aside from the RC, Ken also taught at Macomb Community College and at Wayne State.
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