E Word from the Editors

How do you christen an English Department newsletter that’s just been born? You can’t shake its hand or break champagne over the computer, though dashing it with Essence of Eggroll might work. Because English majors glory in E-words. And alphabetically speaking, we’re right up there with the big ones in the news. El nino. Employment. Earnings. The Euro. E coli. E raq (though we reject that pronunciation). Ebonics. Electronics. Eureka!

Electronophilicans can now turn on the Department’s website and get our letter online. Those who relish ye olde English coaching days may prefer it by paper and post. Once each semester we’ll come both ways to find you wherEvor you are—Educating, Exam-cramming, Embellishing, Erasing, Excelling, Exhaling, Embowered in Elysium Eating Eclairs with an Elegant book, Editing, or just Eddying! E-mail us back a greeting, advice, your news (jlarson@andromeda.rutgers.edu). And come to see us, Eyeball to Eyeball, on fifth floor Hill Hall . . . if you Elevate at all.

So what’s wrong with walking? Exercise is in and we like being trendy. English has been around awhile and we like that too. For centuries up to today’s date, E-people have been Eloquent, Erotic, Elegiac, Enigmatic and Epigrammatic, making Epics, Essays, Eye-rhymes, Ellipses, Epigraphs, Epitaphs, Epiphanies! We love the people, places, Et cetera of Enchantment (and disEnchantment) bearing our E . . . Elizabeth, Emma, Elaine, Eurydice, Eyre (Jane), Endymion, Equiano, Earwicker (H.T.), Emerald City, Elsinore, Excalibur, Eeyore! Can you imagine literary Expression without E? Elementary, my dear Watson. Eftsoons his hand dropped he. Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes (Oscar Wilde). Egads! Exeunt. And that memorable line, to E or not to E . . . .

E is Excellent, Earth is an E-word, E-means well/good/true, and we are all E-people yet no two alike—just like words. We’re a downright Eclectic, Exuberant Band of Booklovers (we’re not against B’s). Ex libris is our sign, logorrheea our vice. Metaphorically we’re a vitamin, E train, Elflock, an Elixir (Eggrolls?), a place even beyond cyberspace (“E region: the part of the ionosphere 40-90 miles above the earth’s surface, containing the daytime E layer and the sporadic E layer”—you figure out which is yours).

Of course, though Eggstatic, even Exhibitionist, when tooting our English (major) horn, we know our letter isn’t Exclusively ours; the claim of EEs (electrical engineers) may be better, technically. Nor are we for Enforcing English. But we rightly delight in our field’s wide appeal. English is Elastic. Literatures appear all over Earth in it. Most careers nEEd it. English Majors bloom in myriad shapes, colors, and accents; and many students double-M in our E at R/N. Even

Irwin Primer: A Scholar Forever

Irwin Primer joined the R/N English faculty in the days before “cybernetics” was much talked about. Retiring exactly 40 years later, at the end of this academic year, Professor Primer plans to enjoy more hours than ever on the internet, gathering and exchanging information on eighteenth-century literature and culture. “There’s no going from academic to non-academic,” he says of his retirement, when he will be able to take up his scholarly projects full time.

It was during his graduate school days at Yale that Primer found this passion for scholarship—or it found him. There he also discovered Bernard Mandeville, the early eighteenth-century figure whose ideas and style made a powerful impression on the eager student. Author of The Fable of the Bees and general gadfly, Mandeville took unpopular positions on just about everything in his day. “Moralists believed that you should not be a spendthrift, that everyone should save his or her money,” Dr. Primer explains. “Mandeville said society is helped if you spend it. He was interested in morals, economics, sociology and psychology (before they were invented), and politics. And if you were interested in politics in eighteenth-century England, you were interested in religion.”

His Fable and other books were translated into Italian, French, and German; and it is one of Primer’s scholarly delights to study “the interplay of specific ideas and their translations.” The title of his recent Phi Beta Kappa talk on campus sums up these fascinations: “The Many Faces of Mandeville; or, A Man Without a Face.” Continued on page 7

pool players and bowlers invoke our name (“English: a spin around the vertical axis given to a ball by striking it to right or left of center, or by the manner of releasing it”). So hear all ye Electronic Epicureans and Empyrean Eggheads! ‘Ere’s our first Edition.

--Janet Larson and Filomena Gomes
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Memo from the Chair

It is a great pleasure to contribute to the inaugural issue of yeEmail. I hope it will be the first of many and that the newsletter will thrive, along with the English Club, as a vital contribution to our Department for years to come.

Faculty and students alike have bemoaned, with some justification, I think, a missing sense of community among us. Our commuter-campus environment has much to do with this. Yet I feel we are all guilty, myself included, for not trying harder to come together more often for intellectual and social exchange. It is my hope that this newsletter will encourage the growth of a more collegial spirit among us—a community of majors and minors, graduate students, and faculty, full- and part-time.

Everyone is invited to our spring SYMPOSIA, in which English faculty are talking about their current research (see “E-vents”), as well as to our gala SPRING REVEL May 4, at 4 pm in Hill 315, when we celebrate with feasting and readings by our creative writers.

Course News

FALL PRE-REGISTRATION (April 3-10) is upon us. Full course descriptions are in the rack outside Hill 503 and posted on our website. Advisors’ names and office hours can be found on the bulletin board across from the elevators. We urge majors to go over their schedules with faculty at least once a year. Besides getting acquainted, you might pick up some valuable advice; so as my mother used to say, “Take advantage!”

In the fall, FOUNDATIONS OF LITERARY STUDY (350:308) will replace Introduction to Literature (260) as the basic requirement for majors. We appreciate your advice and patience as we work on getting this course just right. SUMMER SESSION courses include Writing for Business and Professions, Caribbean Literature, Women in Film, and Ethnic American Autobiography, among others. Pick up a summer schedule in Blumenthal Hall 309. Discuss your plans with your advisor before registering—up to May 7 for Session I.

Our Expanding Website

Visit english-newark.rutgers.edu for all sorts of useful information about the Department and links to many field-related sites.

Coming Soon...

Hill 112 will turn into a new WRITING CENTER by the fall, with more peer tutors than ever, whose wages should make McDonald’s blush! If tutoring is your gift, get your name in ahead of the game to Barbara Gross in Hill 626 (ex. 626).

JACK LYNCH, a specialist in eighteenth-century literature, will join the English faculty in September.

Our thanks to Janet Larson and Filomena Gomes for organizing this newsletter, the students who helped put it together, the R/N Teaching Excellence Center for a grant, Barbara D. Strothers and Warren Mayer for miracles, and Felicia Polito and Beatriz Maldonado for Everything (with an E!).

—Gabriel Miller

E-vents Et Cetera

APRIL

Poetry Month

1 Wed Lloyd Brown, author of Iron City, speaking on Paul Robeson’s politics (2:30, 4th floor Dana Room)
3-4 International Conference on Portuguese Literature: lectures, films, Dana exhibit; free to the public (9-5; info 973-353-5498)
3-10 Fall Pre-Registration
4 Sat RACHEL HADAS reading her poetry (2:00, New York Public Library, branch at 112 E. 96 St.; info 212-289-0908)
6 Mon DEPARTMENT SYMPOSIUM: FRAN BARTKOWSKI, JOHN DEMARAY, and DAVID Hoddeson (4:00, Hill 315)
13-18 World Week at R/N (info 973-353-5881).
15 Wed DEPARTMENT SYMPOSIUM: RACHEL HADAS and GABRIEL MILLER (4:00, Hill 315)
15 Wed Reception for winners, 9th Annual R/N New Jersey High School Poetry Contest (7:00, Robeson)
16 Thurs Deadline for University College Writing Contest
22 Wed Ostraka No. 2 unveiling and readings (2:30, Robeson)
23 Thurs SHANKAR reading from A Map of Where I Live (4:00, Hill 315)
23-25 Women in the Black Atlantic” conference, Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis (registration 732-932-8701)
23-26 The Oak Table, a play workshop (NJIT University Hall Theatre; tickets 973-353-5119 ext. 17)

MAY

4 Mon ENGLISH DEPARTMENT SPRING REVEL (4:00, Hill 315): Spring Semester classes end
6 Wed Exam Period begins; Summer Session I evening registration hours 4:30-6:00; also June 3 and 17 (Blumenthal Hall 309)
7 Thurs Registration ends for Summer Session I (May 26-July 2)
18 Mon Annual Celebration of Our Work conference, “Women and the Arts” (9-6, Douglass College; registration 732-932-9072)
18 Mon University College Honors Convocation
20 Wed NCAS and G&M Senior Awards Night
21 Thurs NCAS, UC, and Graduate School Commencement (5:30)

FALL SEMESTER BEGINS SEPTEMBER 1.
The Club: It’s Even Better Than the One on Your Car

Roast beast sandwiches, strangely tinted foods, an oversized cat in a rather tall hat, a guy named Ramon. Put them together and you’re at a meeting deep in Robeson earlier this semester, when the newly-formed R/N English Club was hatching its plots. True, the beast hadn’t been roasted yet, the oobleck punch was just simmering in our excited brains, and Ramon, like the green eggs and ham, was present only in the pages of *Huevos Verdes y Jamon*. But we were there, setting the first R/N Dr. Seuss Day afoot, on dancing paws.

We were also asking: “What can you do with an English major?” For answers we are inviting alumni and friends who are doing some really interesting things with theirs to speak at our Career Nights. After a sumptuous buffet prepared by Club members on March 27, 20 guests heard Jonathan Gardner (’94) on his work for New York public relations firms; Terry McAleavy (’89) on her metro beat for the Bergen County Record; and Laurey Czekaj, currently enrolled in the English M.A. Program, on her shift from Wall Street brokering to teaching literature at Hasbrouck Heights High School. The dialogue—and the buffet—went on until 11 pm. Tom Hopkins at the Career Development Center is helping us plan a second such event later this semester.

We will soon be selling theater tickets and hope to help subsidize them a bit by food sales to the famished multitudes roaming Hill and Robeson. Start to look for Club members dramatically hawking their wares. Ham, anyone?

Susan Godhino, Cathy Lonsdale, Lamly Lamprey, and Christine Curtis (L to R above—we wish the guy would come back and identify himself) as well as Nicole Wigfall, Patty McCartney, and Theresa Hunt labored to set up the Club with SGA, worked on the Unity Jam, and started our website—www.pegasus.rutgers.edu/~englishc. We invite all members of the R/N community—day or evening, whatever their major or status—to join us for literary, social, service, and career activities. Elections will be held near the end of the semester. Why stop with exams? There’s Shakespeare in the Park in June.

To find us, come to a meeting, use the Club mailbox in Hill 505, watch our English Department bulletin board, speak to a member or our faculty advisor Janet Larson, return the coupon below, and visit our website. "What should your club be doing? Tell us—and lend us a hand or a hat!”

---Kathleen Taub

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ALL-PURPOSE COUPON

__Yes! Sign me up for the R/N English Club. Enclosed are my dues for 97-98__98-99__. __Introductory offer! $1 dues for 97-98. $5 for 98-99. My idea and talents for the Club are... [add a page]

__Yes! Keep sending yeE-mail. I’ll send any changes of address.
__My ideas for the newsletter are enclosed.
__I want to help with... [see the editor’s invitation, page 8]
__Please accept my contribution to your tiny budget.

Name
Address
Phone
E-mail

Was Alice an English major, or a Scarlet Knight in disguise, or was it only something she ate?

Student and Career News

OSTRAKA, the R/N literary magazine, made its debut this year, edited by JUDY HALL and advised by English faculty member Louie Crew. It is open to submissions from the entire campus. To learn about contests and publication deadlines, or to view the online magazine, visit http://pegasus.rutgers.edu/~ostraka.

The R/N Observer editor TREvor DEMONT has just won the New Jersey Collegiate Press Association top award for an article on Rutgers University policy on sexual assault. In Journalism’s part-time professional program, TARA KANE and BRYAN DONLEAVY are working as editor clerks at the Bergen County Record, where former clerk FILOMENA GOMES has advanced to full-time in its Lifestyles Department. TIM WIERZBICKI and KWANA HALSEY are reporter-trainees at the Star-Ledger. In on-line journalism JULIA JACKSON is an intern at Billboard Magazine and TOM ROSE at

Continued next page
As the Scarlet Knights were advancing in the N.C.A.A. basketball tournament last month, their articulate coach, C. Vivian Stringer, and her young team were being quoted almost daily in the New York Times.

We like the way she summed up their 79-76 victory over Oregon in the final minutes (3/15): "This game probably spelled more of what it took every member of the team to do, and that is to play, not blink, and believe in themselves down to the last 10 seconds." A feature on 3/12 quoted an eloquent tribute to Stringer from another star coach, Temple’s John Chaney, a longtime friend with whom she had worked in the early days of women’s basketball at Cheyney State, a historically black college near Philadelphia: "I remember this very small woman who moved at a pace that demanded everybody's respect. Here she had all these big football players—and football players don’t often show respect—but she... got it. She showed how to exercise muscle all the time, only it was the muscle inside your head.”

We have enjoyed a lively intellectual life this spring, with outside speakers Timothy Brennan and Gayatri Spivak, Professor Emeritus John Williams reading from his new poems, Words in Music, and colloquia by our graduate faculty. Barbara Foley kicked off this series with a fascinating talk on Jean Toomer’s Cane, followed by Sterling Bland, Heyward Ehrlich, and Virginia Tiger. More symposia are planned for April 6, 15, and 23. Then at the Spring Revel on May 4, our creative writers will read from their work. The entire campus is invited to these events, all at 4pm in Hill 315.

--Rachel Hadas
Travel Journal

English Major Steps Off Continent onto Shelf (of Virginia Woolf Books) and Finds Happiness

On her first trip outside the continental United States, NCAS sophomore Theresa Hunt spent Winter Break with a group of Ramapo College students at Regent's College of London, taking a 3-credit English Novel course (Henry James, James Joyce, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf). Below is a condensed version of the seven-page report she filed with us.

The first thing I had to do when we finally got to London was take a walk through Regent's Park, which surrounded our college. Imagine Rutgers/Newark in the middle of a grassy expanse, a brilliant shade of green, with a huge pond and 15 species of ducks, swans, and geese! Since we were reading Virginia Woolf's novel Mrs. Dalloway, which takes place partly in the main character's consciousness as she strolls through Regent's Park, I wanted to experience what Clarissa Dalloway did, seeing what she saw. Our professor later took us on a walking tour of Bloomsbury, the rather bohemian neighborhood near the British Museum where Woolf lived and wrote with her famous literary group. Hello, London!

Despite all our required reading, the 8-10 page paper, and the final, we went out a lot because being there was a large part of the course. The drinking age was 18, so I don't have to tell you where most of the kids wound up night after night, even day after day, despite our arrival lecture on "the evils of alcohol" by the college's "student life coordinator" (who was about 100 years old and kept calling us "boys and girls" even though we ranged in age up to 26). Those of us who didn't exactly want to experience London through the bottom of a pint glass spent our days doing careful planning and LOTS of walking. That's a cultural difference I noticed right away: Londoners walk everywhere (and almost nobody is overweight).

Our explorations of the city on foot and by the London Underground took us to St. Paul's Cathedral, with its dazzling ceiling mosaics, the Tower of London (which is both a castle and a bridge over the River Thames), the London Dungeon, the Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey, Windsor Castle, Buckingham Palace, and other spots. At the British Museum we saw Shakespeare's manuscripts and musical scores in Handel's and Bach's own handwriting. Naturally we found some time to shop. My favorite area was Camden Town, which is a lot like Greenwich Village, where we explored the huge Sunday flea markets, heard two bands, went to a poetry reading and a jazz improv night.

Just when I was beginning to go mildly insane from lack of fresh air and sunlight, we boarded a bus through the green English countryside to Warwick Castle (associated with Sir Walter Scott's novels). Loaded with history pamphlets on our self-guided tour, we roamed through rooms featuring highly realistic wax figures engaged in the daily activities of fami-

lies who lived there during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The stables even smelled like manure and coal smoke, reminding us that blacksmith shops were housed there. My favorite part though was the roofs. The sign just said: "Warning: 500 Steps." When an old woman is slowly ascending the narrow, windy stairs in front of you and screaming 10-year-olds are pushing from behind, and you're a bit claustrophobic besides, you really start to wonder if the view up there is worth it. It was: from the leads we could see the castle's topiary gardens where peacocks strutted, the town of Warwick, and a wooded area all around with waterfalls and little streams.

Another weekend I took the bus solo to Stonehenge and then went on to the city of Bath. Named for the famous ruins of the Roman Baths, it was a spa/social gathering place long before Jane Austen's characters went husband-hunting there. After recovering from a drink of its rancid mineral water, I attended a mass at Bath Abbey and toured its crypts. It was strange walking over people's grave markers in the floors; but who am I to judge any culture besides my own? (Only I couldn't help laughing at the "Way Out" signs everywhere--British for "Exit").

Like the cultural gaps, the slang was intriguing--but a bit embarrassing when I didn't know what people meant. Like in the following pub dialogue with a new English friend: Philip: I've missed the football game and really wish I had stayed home to see it. [He meant soccer.] Me: Oh. P: Do you need another drink? Me: No thank you, I think I've had enough. P: Are you pissed? Me: No, I really don't like soccer. P: What? Me: [What he meant was, Are you drunk?] In fact, there were some expressions I used that they didn't exactly get either. But since there were more of them than of me, I always seemed to be the one who felt silly.

It was a good thing Philip was buying because I was fast going broke. By the end of our stay I was really missing my shower, my cat, cinnamon pop tarts, and the American dollar. When our plane flew back over the Thames, I felt kind of sad suddenly, realizing it was the last time I'd be crossing that river for awhile. I couldn't have wished for a better educational experience and there has to be a next time. Meanwhile I'll remember stuffing my pockets at lunch with those stale cafeteria bagels no human could eat and going out to feed black and white ducks with little cowlicks, fat swans, and brown and white geese in the Regent's Park Pond.

The editors respectfully point out that although R/N is more parking lot than park, many species of birds visit our trees. Just listen to the mockingbird, who came back already the first week in March.
Assistant Professor DAVID BAKER’s book, Divulging Utopia: Radical Humanism in Sixteenth-Century England, 1508—96, will be brought out by Massachusetts Press in 1999. He and his wife Marcia Worth-Baker have been closely studying a naissance as well: Abigail Catherine Baker, born 30 March 1997.

Assistant Professor STERLING BLAND did cultural, historical, and linguistic research last summer for Paradise by Toni Morrison. In digging up all sorts of obscure information in Princeton’s Firestone Library, he confronted some riddles, such as: how does one get soil samples from the Oklahoma panhandle without actually leaving New Jersey? Is virtual soil on the Web? He reports “soul-satisfying conversations about literature and writing” with Morrison and—since much of the information was used to stimulate her creative process (rather than just corroborating facts)—“fascinating glimpses into the ways she filters fact through her formidable literary imagination.”

Associate Professor GEORGE DAVIS has collected 12 "nonfiction short stories" under the title Love Lessons (William Morrow 1998) on African Americans in relationships and the human condition. Assistant Professor SHANKAR has brought out a novel, A Map of Where I Live. In this comic development of Gulliver’s Travels, an Indian historian discovers Lilliput really exists and goes there—only to find political intrigue around a union official’s election and . . .

Professor Emeritus JOHN WILLIAMS has published a volume of poetry, Words in Music. The University of Akron Press has brought out a collection of BARRY SEILER’s poems, Black Leaf.

Assistant Professor of English and Afro-American Studies BELINDA EDMONDSON is a fellow this year at the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis in New Brunswick, following Associate Professor JANET LARSON in 1996-97. Edmondson’s seminar paper, “Trinidad Romance: The Invention of Jamaica Carnival,” contributed to RCHA’s 1997-98 theme, “The Black Atlantic,” on interconnections in the black world from African to North America, the Caribbean and Latin America to Europe.

Professor BARBARA FOLEY, back from a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship last year, has recently published “The Rhetoric of Anti-Communism in Ellison’s Invisible Man” in College English. As a member of the Combating Racism Taskforce of NOW/NJ, she participated in a summit in Washington, D.C., on “Women of Color and Allies.” She hosts ”Essex Country NOW” on Cablevision Channel 26.

Professor H. BRUCE FRANKLIN has edited two new collections: The Vietnam War in American Stories, Songs, and Poems (Bedford 1996) and Prison Writing in Twentieth-Century America (Penguin 1998). He is often interviewed on Vietnam topics, recently by Radio France International and the BBC.

Associate Professor STUART HIRSCHBERG has edited two texts for Allyn and Bacon, Essential Strategies of Argument (1996) and First Person Singular (1997), and The Millenium Reader (Prentice-Hall 1997). Bedford has brought out Critical Strategies for Academic Writing (1998) by Associate Professor MAL KINIRY and Mike Rose of UCLA.
She Comes into the Room . . .

Professor Henry A. Christian, who chaired the English Department three times and directed the Graduate Liberal Studies Program, taught American literature at R/N for 35 years and passionately loved his work. Memorials last spring honored his many accomplishments. With his daughters’ permission, we publish here an excerpt from an essay he hoped would find its way into print. (Ellipses are the editor’s except for those in the title and the last sentence). It was written in the hospital on numbered post-it notes three months before he died on April 3, 1997.

She is in the room; I have not heard her but suddenly without alarm know she is discreetly near the bedside. She is dressed in a neutral, quiet orange smock and light blue skirt, the uniform of the Hospital Volunteers . . . what in my mother’s day, in World War II, was called a Grey Lady. She can tell I do not need a small coloring book or Easy Effort crossword puzzle. . . . We smile and acknowledge our situation. As she turns to leave I strain for her face and note her perfectly dyed and styled hair. . . . I am 65 and have cancer of the pancreas and something has gone wrong and brought me—lungs failing—into this bed. She leaves as quietly as she came . . . a woman who has already seen more sunrises than I am probably to be allowed. She is gone, and the full measure of my life is less.

He comes into the room—another without a lot of noise but certainly with a lot of bustle. “I’m a very aggressive physician, but I know when to back off with sense,” he has told me. He is my respiratory specialist and along with my doctors of infectious diseases, cardiology, and oncology . . . joins with me in a portrait of an aging basketball five, already missing its coach, that is waiting to be interviewed for a sports column. “So we’ll go with that until tomorrow, and see,” my respiratory specialist says. “Your chest plates are some of the worst ever, but day by day they do show you are getting a little better.”

“It’s 41 out there and will drop to 17 by nine tonight; can you imagine.” She is already in the room, but only just now physically entering. I remember this nurse from a previous visit: she is efficient, rapid, believing that to get behind schedule is to invite the pressure of surprise . . . “How’s that breakfast?” she calls, already in the next room although she is still physically here in mine. I like her. I hope to have her kind of younger, middle-age energy again soon.

I am here and I let them come to me—here on my sofa, here on this hospital bed, here dozing in the passenger seat of some transport. I have created them and allowed them here since diagnosis was firm. They are my visualizations. Following any of the hundreds of cancer advisories, I try first to relax and then see my body, organs, tumors. I color the tumors . . . and within my hopeful head and body, behind closed eyes, I see bad cells die and flee. I let this and other visions come to me . . . and leave as well, here on my sofa, or here, here, here.

They are all in the room at one time—surprise!—my broken ball team, on this foot and that, with yesses and noes and perhapses and graphs and plates and possibilities and opinions that yes probably I can go home now, that this is just a setback or maybe really the onset of a final decline. After all, people do die of cancer; they also live shorter or longer lengths of hope . . . .

Now they are all here in my room . . . friends and acquaintances . . . who did not slip away from but rather embrace my embrace of my present life . . . We are in this room together, the male technician who creates my going-home x-ray portrait . . . . She is my chemotherapy nurse . . . loud enough: “Would you like to rest a bit before I make up your bed?” Or more quietly, “Hi, Dad!” or “Hi, baby” or “Not yet time finally now to sleep beyond these moments—to know a last addio.” She, they, it, someone, something comes into my room . . .

Irwin Primer, continued from page 1

Teaching at R/N was deeply rewarding because, among other reasons, it enabled him to share his scholarship. Students from his courses in Restoration Drama, The English Novel, Eighteenth-Century Literature, and Satire will remember his passion for these subjects as well as the puns and droll humor that enlivened his lectures, his eyes twinking at the edges, his smile giving the cue. Nor will this well-known professor forget his students anytime soon. But what he expects they will remember him for is “not giving out A’s like water. It’s common today, grade inflation. Although students who deserve an A will probably get it, too often now a straight-A record means something more like a B-minus on the old scale.” Primer chuckles as he offers his grain of unpopular truth—like his favorite gadfly Mandeville.

The hard work Primer expected of his students he also put in himself, preparing lectures, writing and reading exams, grading papers. In some subjects, as he puts it, “multiple-choice quizzes are just run through a grading machine to get results. But in the English Department we have to grade compositions, and if you’re serious about it you pay attention to the student’s every word. If the students have errors I inform them. If they do good work they receive the praise that is due.”

At the same time, he points out, preparing six English courses a year means that “you can’t read all the books you want while teaching and you can’t write all you need to. Nor can you go freely to places you would like to visit in the off-season.” Now, looking forward to an April trip to Italy, he is pouring over his Italian primer.

A hallmark of Primer’s career has been a firm sense of fairness. He has fought for his colleagues’ rights as a leader on campus in the Association of American University Professors. During the Newark riots he served on the R/N advisory committee that dealt with the changing situation day-to-day. In the 1970s he gave eight years to chairing the English Department and hired some of the faculty still here.

Besides his leadership and scholarly expertise, colleagues have often called on his talents as a skilled calligrapher. The English Department sign greeting all who step onto fifth floor Hill is his handiwork. But this is one task for which he will be needed no more, he says. “Now computers are everywhere and they do all the fancy lettering better.” Besides, Irwin Primer has other things to write.

—Filomena Gomes
ON WRITERS AND BOOKS

Of all those books, rare enough, that speak to the human condition, a small portion speak to the condition of the writer. Jamaica Kinkaid's newest work, My Brother, is such a book.

It is about the author's youngest brother, who died of AIDS in the mid-eighties. Beyond being a testament to the grief we feel when a family member dies, perhaps most especially a sibling, My Brother voices the fear of facing our own mortality. But to the writer of fiction, it is also striking for its impression of Kinkaid's absolute veracity. Not only does she present her characters "warts and all": the rawness of her own emotion comes across so eloquently and forcefully that one can only believe she has not hidden one iota of her experience from us. It must have been difficult to write this book.

To present the fears of another person you have created is hard enough; but to bare yourself as Kinkaid does in such a personal way is also to go against the common notion that writers hide behind paper and pen and create the world just as they see it. In writing anything—poem, story, letter, diary entry—we are indeed attempting to take some control of our own lives. Are our individual situations really so individual, though? The life of any celebrated author must seem alien, certainly unique, to most of us. Yet Kinkaid's brother died of AIDS and she reacted to it with the fear, anger, sorrow, and confusion anyone might feel. In creating our fictional worlds, we are really only re-creating with a twist—our individual perspective—the common experiences of humankind. And AIDS is ever more common. Kinkaid's brother was gay and she did not find out for some time after his death; she is a famous writer from Antigua who now lives in Vermont. These things work together with others to create her twist, yet her situation reflects the condition of our world. It is perhaps useful for writers to keep in mind that the strength of creativity does not lie in our absolute individual distinctness but in the quotidian nature of our lives, with their minute differences. It is the artist who transcends the attempt to be different who finally speaks to us.

---Judy Hall

Talent alert! YeE-mail needs student and faculty WRITERS, ARTISTS, an occasional PHOTOGRAPHER, a COMPUTER GRAPHICS person skilled in using Adobe Pagemaker 6.5, and TECHNICAL SUPPORT. All we can offer is the experience, the fun, and publication. We also need MONEY. A benefactor at the level of, say, $400 a year, who does not insist on editorial control would enable us to publish more than four pages each semester. Visualize our university budget for this newsletter as what typographers call a "hairline" (see bottom right corner).