

POPULAR CULTURE ASSOCIATION IN THE SOUTH

NEWSLETTER

FALL 2001

Getting to the next meeting can make all the difference, says Liz Cummins



PCAS/ACAS President Elisabeth Cummins

Like so many PCAS/ACAS members, I became involved in the organization at the urging of friends who were regularly attending the annual conference and reported in great detail on the lively sessions; the attraction of great Southern places like Atlantic Beach (home of this year's meeting); and the pleasure of being with colleagues (many of whom attended year after year) who taught, studied, and wrote about popular culture. Knowing full well the isolation that sometimes occurs in a department or at other conferences when I've stated that my primary research interest is science fiction, and being reasonably intelligent, I knew I'd better get

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See you on the beach!

2001 PCAS / ACAS meeting includes several highlights

The 30th annual meeting of the Popular Culture Association in the South and the American Culture Association in the South will be held October 4-6 at the Sea Turtle Inn in Atlantic Beach, Florida. Special highlights of this year's meeting include a reception on Thursday; an awards luncheon and a reception with a cash bar Friday.

The State Coordinators

meeting will be held on Thursday, and the business meeting will be held on Friday. On Saturday, the Executive Committee will hold a working lunch, and the Graduate Student/New Professional Caucus meeting will be held.

This year's luncheon speaker is Bob Stanton of Jacksonville University. His speech is titled "The Art of the Writer."

Program Chair welcomes PCAS/ACAS members to Atlantic Beach

Ron Buchanan, PCAS/ACAS 2001 Program Chair, attended his first PCAS/ACAS conference in 1987, and he has only missed one conference since. This year marks his third run as Program Chair (also serving in 1990 and 1991). Buchanan has also served as the Local Arrangements chair for the 1989 conference in Montgomery and the 1995 conference in Richmond. He additionally presided over the association during its 25th anniversary. He knows this conference well.

During his first PCAS/ACAS conference, Buchanan was completing his dissertation at the University of South Carolina on televised evangelists' sermons at the height of the PTL scandal. This

not only let him present his work at our conference but also afforded him the opportunity to travel all over the country, as well as appear on news and cable shows in Montgomery, Alabama, to talk about the personalities involved in the scandal. Other papers he has presented at PCAS/ACAS involve:

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2001 Program Chair Ron Buchanan

Book Reviews

The Robert Frost Encyclopedia, edited by Nancy Lewis Tuten and John Zubizaretta. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001. \$95.00. To order call 1-800-225-5800.

This encyclopedia is not some gigantic tome encompassing everything there is to know about the work and life of one of America's best known poets. Actually, it's less than five hundred pages and fits quite nicely into a book bag. The book's editors very carefully address the reasons for such a volume in their prefatory remarks. "The Greek roots of the word encyclopedia remind us," they write, "that a text like this one provides merely a general education, an overview--a place to begin one's discovery," and *The Robert Frost Encyclopedia* fulfills that provision quite admirably.

The entries are ordered alphabetically and cover Frost's poems, his published books, his poetic and philosophical theories, and some of the persons and places important to his career and life. Over one hundred scholars, ranging from graduate students to well-known Frost scholars, wrote the entries. Although the editors have made some effort "to achieve a fair amount of consistency in tone and style" in the entries, they did not "strive to erase all evidence that the volume is the combined effort of many points of view." They see these different voices and views "as a celebration of the rich, multiple, sometimes opposing perspectives that continue to define the emerging

state of scholarship on Frost."

The Frost Encyclopedia has an entry on each of Frost's collected poems and one entry on the uncollected poems as well as one entry on Frost's plays. The entries on the collected poems give the poem's first appearance and the collection in which it appeared, provide a general background and description of the poem and usually some critical views about the poem. As might be suspected, these entries are uneven. Some, like the one on "After Apple-Picking," seem to be written by someone who delights in Frost's poetic skills. That entry, though brief, focuses on the poem's relationship to the idea of the human fall from God's grace and directs the reader's attention to some of the ways that Frost crafts the language of his poem. Some, however, seem written by a reader who has little or no interest in the poem under discussion. Such an entry is the one on "The Death of the Hired Man," that says little more than that poem "has many of the characteristics one might look for in a Frost poem: ordinary people using language that, itself ordinary, has somehow been transmuted to poetry; a certain static view of characterization that hold that people don't really change; and a picture of the universe that could arguably be described as bleak."

One problem with this volume is that, though it has an entry for Frost's biographers, it has none for his critics. The "Philosophy" entry does provide a semi-critical overview beginning with Yvor Winters' response to the relationship he perceived between Frost and the transcendentalists and concludes with Richard Poirier's view that Frost's poems are strongly related to

the philosophy of William James, but that entry does not focus on the critical reception of Frost's poetry.

The entries on the persons important to Frost's life and career all follow a similar pattern: a third of the entry on that person's life and career followed by the significance of that person to Frost's life and career. Among the poets who have individual entries are E.A. Robinson, Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Stevens, Amy Lowell, and Carl Sandburg. Only two people who played major roles in Frost's personal life--his wife, Elinor, and Kathleen Morrison, "Frost's secretary and confidante from 1938-1963"--have their own entries.

The editors have provided a chronology of Frost's life at the head of the Encyclopedia and a bibliography, an index, and information about the contributors and editors at its foot. All of these are helpful additions. The index provides one way for a reader to find a thread of a

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PCAS NEWSLETTER

The Writing Program
James Madison University
MSC 2103
Harrisonburg, VA 22807

Phone: 540-568-6004
Fax: 540-568-2742

Editors:
Shelley Aley and Beth Brunk

e-mail: aleysb@jmu.edu

Thanks to Christina R. McDonald,
Director of The Writing Program,
James Madison University,
for her support of the *Newsletter*

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subject through the labyrinth of the entries.

Although *The Robert Frost Encyclopedia* is relatively small as such works go, it is handy, and chocked-full of all sorts of information about the career and life of one America's foremost poets. It is a work that almost any level of reader interested in Frost's work would find useful. The editors are to be commended on a superior job of providing the reading public with such a volume. It is a work that's appropriate for public and university libraries.

Reviewed by Larry Vonalt
University of Missouri--Rolla

The Simpsons and Philosophy: The D'oh of Homer; edited by William Irwin, Mark T. Conard, and Aeon J. Skoble, Chicago:Open Court Publications, 2001. 303 pp. \$14.36 paper.

Like its predecessor, *Seinfeld and Philosophy*, *The Simpsons and Philosophy* contains essays using television characters and themes to "explore a variety of philosophical issues for a general audience" in order to "reach readers outside the academy." The book meets this goal admirably, for its contributors pedagogically employ *The Simpsons* as entryways into the more complex elements of various philosophical and cultural studies theories. What follows is an overview of some of the many highlights.

In Part I, "The Characters," readers are introduced to Aristotle's ethics through Raja Halwani's use of *Simpsons'* characters to explain Aristotle's types of character (virtuous, continent, incontinent, and

vicious) and his concept of *phronesis* (practical wisdom), which, not surprisingly, Homer lacks. Following Halwani, Aeon J. Skoble uses Lisa's highly-developed (and often overbearing) political and moral sensibilities to discuss what many feel is a long-standing United States' anti-intellectual tendency. Readers of Mark T. Conard's essay, "Thus Spake Bart," receive an introduction to Nietzschean philosophy through Conard's comparison of Nietzsche as philosophy's "bad boy" and Bart as Springfield's. Sadly, perhaps, Bart is not the *Übermensch*, "the Nietzschean self-overcoming, self-creating ideal," but a person "still looking to identify himself reactively, in response to others, through the mediation of others."

William Irwin and J. R. Lombardo open Part II, "Simpsonian Themes," with an essay exploring allusion in *The Simpsons* as a method the show employs to "prompt the audience to consider the cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical issues whose surface the show only scratches." Dale E. Snow and James J. Snow examine the show's sexual politics. They find that while the show exhibits some liberatory aspects, Marge's role as "the guardian of the home and refuge" and Lisa's as "moral exemplar" keeps them both in the background, so to speak, while Homer and Bart exist center stage as a reflection of traditional patriarchy.

Part III, "I Didn't Do It: Ethics and *The Simpsons*," introduces readers to various philosophical approaches to ethics and their realization in *Simpsons'* characters. James Lawler explores Kant's perspective on duty by applying it to

some of Springfield's residents—Homer rationalizes his desires into "duty," Moe lacks any sense of duty. Also using Kant, David Vessey explores duty through Ned Flanders's Christian hypocrisy in that Ned fails to act consistently on principle and independently of his interests. Paul A. Cantor explores the socio/political aspects of the show to argue that the Simpson family, while appearing to subvert the image of the traditional American family, actually reveals "elements of [family] continuity that make *The Simpsons* more traditional than may at first appear." Bart, Cantor maintains, is a lovable Huck Finn-like trouble maker, Marge and Lisa are not bad role models, and Homer, for his many failings, "loves his family because it is *his*" and is at least willing to work to support them.

Part IV, "*The Simpsons* and the Philosophers," provides readers with a Marxist analysis of Springfield by James M. Wallace, an introduction to semiotics a la Roland Barthes through David L. G. Arnold's reading of the show, and an exposition of Heideggerian thought through Kelley Dean Jolley's positing of Bart as a Heideggerian thinker. Wallace does set up Springfield as something of a "straw man" which he easily topples by demonstrating that *The Simpsons* is not as subversive of capitalism as it may first appear, but he does not provide evidence that the show attempts to reach anywhere near the level of subversiveness Wallace assigns it. Nevertheless, his essay gives readers a thorough introduction to Marxist cultural critique.

The Simpsons and Philosophy
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succeeds in accomplishing what its editors hope for it: providing an introduction to philosophy and cultural studies for those who are new to the subject and a review for those with some familiarity. Teachers of introductory classes in philosophy and cultural studies would do well to consider this book. The book is, saying with selfless pleasure what Monty Burns selfishly hisses, "Excellent."

Reviewed by Kenneth R. Wright
James Madison University

The Masculinized Woman in America: 1890-1935, by Laura Behling. Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 2001. 280 pp. \$34.95 hardcover.

As Laura Behling states, *The Masculinized Woman in America* explores "how the U.S. woman suffrage movement's emphasis on securing social and political independence for women was translated by a fearful society, . . . into a movement of women whose assumption of the prerogative to vote was perceived to have altered them into 'masculine women' and female sexual inverts." Behling's primary areas of interest are relationships between masculine and feminine women, the connection between the suffrage movement and the rise of theories in sexology and psychology, strategies authors used to disenfranchise masculine women, the seduction plot as a remedy, the subversive nature of parody, and the removal of masculinized female inverts from society. To ground her ideas, she begins the text with an informative section on theories of sex, gender, and sexuality as well as a detailed

definition of masculinized women, who were assumed to be sexual inverts.

Each of Behling's chapters begins with a presentation and discussion of material from the popular press. Some actual newspaper accounts of masculinized women appear, but most often these examples are political cartoons of women who have grown demon-like with power or have aberrantly assumed male roles because of their desire to vote. Behling then focuses on literature that echoes similar complaints against these "abnormal" women. This somewhat interdisciplinary approach to the issue gives readers the sense that the fear of the masculinized woman was pervasive at the time. Many of the texts she draws from are not typically well known, although she does include a discussion of texts by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, and Henry James. Behling does a superb job of locating pieces that exhibit these sensibilities, and they are well suited to her ideas. I found chapter 6, "Distant Relations: 'Put out of Town for Gettin' Too Int'mate'" to be the most interesting and cohesive chapter. Here she cogently discusses how masculinized women were forced outside the bounds of society.

While I enjoyed and learned much from this book, I would appreciate an even stronger connection between the texts Behling examines and the suffrage movement itself. Discussions of the movement appear mostly at the beginning and conclusion of each chapter. Timing seems to be the main connection between the movement and the literature; maybe that is sufficient. However, I would appreciate more

actual suffragist and anti-suffragist rhetoric. The popular press examples and the opening chapters do help, but if the fear of the masculinized woman is a result of suffrage, I'd like to see stronger evidence of such. Additionally, Behling neglects race and class issues. The masculinized woman seems to be a white middle-class phenomenon, and there is no acknowledgement of that.

Despite these few drawbacks, those interested in the portrayal and treatment of women in the popular press and literature, specifically in terms of sexuality, will find *The Masculinized Woman* an interesting and informative read.

Reviewed by Beth L. Brunk
James Madison University

Beth Brunk, PCAS Newsletter co-editor



Beth Brunk, co-editor of the PCAS
Newsletter

I am happy to announce that my colleague, Beth Brunk, in the James Madison University Writing Program, will be co-editing the PCAS Newsletter with me, beginning with this issue.

Beth, who has been teaching at JMU for two years, received her
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Larry Vonalt, former Newsletter editor, finds personal value in PCAS

When Shelley asked me to write a little bit about myself for the newsletter and I began to think about my relationship with PCAS and what it has meant to me, I realized that this fall marks my entry into the third decade of membership.

During this period I have attended all but two of the meetings. I attended the first meeting in Mobile at the invitation of Jeanne Bedell, a colleague at the time. Jeanne had enjoyed an earlier meeting of PCAS and thought that I might also find the PCAS meetings a valuable experience. Until she moved to Massachusetts, Jeanne was a very active member in PCAS, serving as Program Chair for the Charleston meeting and then later as President.

PCAS has proved, as Jeanne had thought, a very valuable experience for me both professionally and personally. Professionally, PCAS has provided me ample opportunities to meet editors who were putting together collections of essays and accepted work I had done for the meetings as part of their collections. Although I have never published in either journal sponsored by PCAS/ACAS, I am proud to be associated with an organization that has such substantial outlets for professional work in the areas of popular and American cultures.

Personally, PCAS has helped me develop some strong and abiding friendships. PCAS prides itself, rightly so, on being a very friendly organization. I look forward every fall to seeing old friends and making



Larry Vonalt, former editor of the PCAS Newsletter

new ones. The meeting also makes me remember those friends who have passed on or who are no longer able to meet with us.

As a long-time member, I have tried to serve PCAS in whatever way I might be able. I was a member-at-large on the Executive Committee and the Editor of the *PCAS Newsletter* for four years. I hope that every member of PCAS finds this organization to be as valuable as I find it to be and that each of you works to make it even more valuable for us all.

Larry Vonalt

University of Missouri--Rolla

President, continued from Page 1
myself to the next PCAS meeting!

“Richness” is the word I associate with our organization. There is the richness of the sessions themselves in which we all broaden our understanding of popular culture and find new ideas and opportunities for teaching, scholarship, and publication from music to manikins and the Vietnam war to virtual reality. I’ve had quite an education in the X-Files, body piercing, Elvis Presley impersonations, and the ghosts of Savannah.

Then there is the richness of meeting new colleagues who

Chair, continued from Page 1

Oliver North, Virginia author William Hoffman, the tobacco industry, William Faulkner, Rita Mae Brown, and vanity license plates.

In addition to his work with PCAS/ACAS, Buchanan keeps busy with his position as Division chair of Communication Technologies and Social Sciences (in which he provides administrative oversight for over 110 faculty) and Professor of Composition and Rhetoric at Northern Virginia Community College in Manassas, Virginia. He has been at NVCC-Manassas since 1998 and has been honored as outstanding teacher three times in his career. In addition to television evangelists, his research interests include nonfiction as literature, William Hoffman, and rhetoric and popular culture—most recently his focus is a rhetorical and linguistic study of vanity license plates. Honk if you see a Virginia plate sporting VA-GNTMN; maybe Ron will honk back.

Beth Brunk

James Madison University

welcome friends from widely divergent disciplines—journalism, anthropology, sociology, art history, literature, history, communications. And finally, the rich business of the association itself with its development of two journals, endowed prizes for student papers, and increased professionalism of the conference program itself.

I am looking forward to seeing you at the 2001 PCAS Conference and acknowledging my debt to all the past, present, and future officers who have made this organization so rich and gratifying.

Elizabeth Cummins

University of Missouri--Rolla

PCAS/ACAS OFFICERS

Office	Name	E-mail Address
Executive Secretary	Dianne Calhoun-French	Diane.Calhoun-French@kctcs.net
President	Elizabeth Cummins	Cummins@umr.edu
Vice-President	John Zubizarreta	jzubizarreta@colacoll.edu
Past President	Rhonda Wilcox	Rhonda@aol.com
AC Member-at-Large	Bill Klink	billk@charles.cc.md.us
PC Member-at-Large	Jim Coon	coon@wingate.edu
PC Member-at-Large	Robert Holtzclaw	rholzcl@mtsu.edu
Tech Member-at-Large	Christine Hait	chrishait@colacoll.edu
Grad Member-at-Large	Hugh Davis	hughdavis@hotmail.com

Publications Editors

Studies in Popular Culture

Editors	Michael Dunne	mdunne@frank.mtsu.edu
	Sara Lewis Dunne	sdunne@frank.mtsu.edu

Studies in American Culture

Editor	Elizabeth Bell	lizb@aiken.sc.edu
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PCAS Newsletter

Editors	Shelley Aley	aleysb@jmu.edu
	Beth Brunk	brunkbl@jmu.edu

Co-Editor, continued from Page 4
 Ph.D. from The University of Texas at Arlington in 1999. Her dissertation and research interests involve rhetoric, autobiography, and womens studies. She teaches composition, American literature, and rhetorical traditions.

Beth presented at PCAS/ACAS last year at Nashville on VH1's *Behind the Music* as autobiography. In the paper, she discussed the rhetorics of the down-and-out as well as recovery within the show's episodes.

In this issue, she reviews Laura Behling's *The Maculinized Woman in America* (see Page 4) and profiles Program Chair Ron Buchanan (see Page 1). She will be writing articles and reviews as well as copy editing. Welcome, Beth!

Shelley Aley
 James Madison University

Check out the PCAS/ACAS Web Site

<http://gandalf.colacoll.edu/academic/english/pcas/>

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The Writing Program
 James Madison University
 MSC 2103
 Harrisonburg, VA 22807