A newsletter created by postgraduates for postgraduates
The pleasure of reading with friends: The Postgraduate Short Story Reading Group

If you happen to walk through the deserted and dark corridors of Cornwallis on a Friday afternoon, you might notice some signs directing you to a mysterious Postgraduate Short Story Reading Group (PSSRG). And if you follow the signs, you will find a cozy little room with people chilling out on a sofa and armchairs, and a big bottle of wine on the small table in the middle. What makes the PSSRG so special is that it creates a friendly, relaxed atmosphere where everyone feels welcome.

The group was founded in January 2011 by Krista and Angelos, two PhD students from the Schools of Arts and Comparative Literature respectively, who wanted to meet regularly with friends to discuss literature in an intellectual but non-academic context. They decided to create a reading group for short stories mainly for length reasons: a short text is perfect to read in a short time, it can easily fit into students’ busy schedule and it encourages people to join the discussion.

In the beginning, meetings were in K Bar but, Krista says, “It was difficult to organise our meetings there. Plus, it was noisy and people felt forced to buy drinks.” So, a better venue was found in Cornwallis, where the group has had its meetings ever since.

The philosophy of the PSSRG is that it is run by postgraduate students for postgraduates and that everyone is on the same level. There are no right or wrong ways of reading a text and, no matter what your field of study or your background, everyone’s opinion is interesting and important. What’s more, wine, crisps and biscuits, sometimes even homemade cakes, circulate around the room and make the discussion even nicer.

Openness and contribution are the main values of the group. Everyone across departments and disciplines are welcome. The short stories we read come from all over the world, as long as they are not too long. So far there has been a range of short stories from different periods and genres, even including excerpts from the Bible and Chinese tales.

The reading list is made by the group itself: every member can contribute by suggesting stories they like. If you love reading and want the perfect start to your weekend, come to the PSSRG!

Meetings are every Friday at 5pm in Cornwallis. Find us on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/groups/KentPostGradShortStory/

Barbara Franchi
PhD English
A Pioneer for Social Change

The face behind the building: Virginia Woolf

Literary genius with a tortured soul

I have been studying at the University of Kent for three years now and have come to realise that I know very little about the history of the University itself.

As I begin my final year, I thought it would be an interesting idea to look into the people behind the buildings; those whom the University saw fit to name buildings after. As this is the newsletter for postgraduate students, it seems appropriate to begin with Virginia Woolf, our college’s namesake.

Virginia Woolf was born Adeline Virginia Stephen in Kensington on the January 25 1882, to parents Sir Leslie Stephen and Julia Prinsep Jackson. Both parents had been previously widowed, and Virginia was the second-youngest of eight children in the family home, with three full siblings and four half-siblings. Writing was important to Virginia from an early age, she collaborated with her sister Vanessa Bell (then Stephen) and brother Thoby Stephen on the ‘Hyde Park Gate News’, a family newspaper documenting family anecdotes.

As well as Woolf’s rich literary and artistic legacy, she is also famous for her emotional instability, having suffered several nervous breakdowns. At the age of six Virginia suffered sexual abuse at the hands of her half-brothers George and Gerald, traumatising her, which was further worsened by her mother’s sudden death in 1895, sparking her first nervous breakdown. Her second came in 1904 at the death of her father, at which point Virginia and her siblings decided to move out of Hyde Park Gate to Bloomsbury. Virginia found herself acquainted with members of the ‘Bloomsbury Group’, a collection of writers, artists and intellectuals made famous by the 1910 Dreadnought hoax. The group involved important 20th century thinkers, including John Maynard Keynes and Leonard Woolf, whom Virginia married in 1912. The couple founded a writing press, and together published many important works, by authors such as TS Eliot, Robert Graves and Sigmund Freud. Despite her mostly happy marriage to Leonard, Virginia struggled to deal with her continuous mental instability; in 1941 she put a large stone into the pocket of her coat and walked into the River Ouse. In her suicide letter to her husband she spoke of her certainty that she was ‘going mad again’ and would not be able to recover.

As well as Woolf’s name being used for the college, each block also derives its name from Woolf’s life and works. For instance, Hogarth being the inspiration behind her 1927 novel, the Lighthouse.

Woolf had strong views on the need for the inclusion of females in the education system. These views were cultivated by the injustice she felt at being denied the chance to pursue a formal education by her father, while her brothers were able to. This greatly influenced her writing and general view on life. As well as producing great works of fiction such as Mrs Dalloway and To the Lighthouse, she also wrote insightful and advanced social critiques, focusing on the lack of opportunities for women in society.

Perhaps the most powerful and well-known of her critiques is the extended essay A Room of One’s Own, originating from two papers she read at both the women’s colleges of Cambridge University, Newnham and Girton. This essay discusses the limitations facing intelligent women in society, specifically in the field of writing, famously stating that, “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.”

To illustrate the problems facing female writers she used the example of William Shakespeare’s fictional sister, whom she named Judith. Judith possessed the same natural gifts in writing as William, but was denied the chance to cultivate and develop them due to her gender. As Woolf herself experienced, Judith had to stay at home while William went to school and was able to hone his skills. In the end Judith takes her own life due to the injustice she suffers. The tale is a clever and vivid illustration of the waste of talent and potential that denying women access to education leads to.

Woolf’s values on the importance of education for women was the main reason that Woolf College was named after her, with the University of Kent stating that it, “is proud to name its new college after a figure who, in many ways, embodies its values and aspirations.” Interestingly Woolf had links to Kent, spending time in Moat House in Blean, which is very close to the Canterbury campus. She also wrote in a letter to her sister that, “there is no lovelier place in the world than Canterbury – that I say with hand on my heart as I sit in Florence – and I have seen Venice too.”

And so it seems fitting that the University of Kent’s newest college is named after Virginia Woolf. All in higher education today should appreciate the work and influence of pioneers for social change such as Woolf, who espoused the values and views that contemporary society can take for granted.

Catherine Murphy
MA Intl Security and Politics of Terror
Jay Crush
MA Politics
To study on the Creative Writing MA feels like a tremendous privilege. Part of the package is a series of talks given by published writers, open to Creative Writing students and anyone else who is interested.

Speakers read selections from published and soon-to-be-published works, allowing us a little insight into their own writing process. This term speakers have ranged from the young Joe Dunthorne, writer of *Box of Broadcasts* and sagacious Iain Sinclair, who treated us to a preview of his forthcoming book *Smoke*. Creative Writing (University of East Anglia) and indulges us in the thought that we may follow in his steps and reach publication.

Hollie Mackenzie joined the University of Kent in September this year to undertake the MA in Political Theory and Practices of Resistance. She studied at the Art University College in Bournemouth for her BA in Fine Art.

She has recently been awarded The Signature Art Prize: People’s Choice Award 2012 for her piece, ‘Downfall’. The sculpture, made of pine wood, depicts a life-size staircase, shaped in such a way as to give the illusion of melting.

Hollie’s sculpture concluded her undergraduate course at Bournemouth, and was exhibited as her end of degree piece. Striving to produce something different to the usual, Hollie devised the piece with the intention of standing out from the crowd. By being so creative, she gained a considerable amount of attention for her work in her AUCB degree show, *Feral* at London’s Free Range in Brick Lane. As Hollie herself said, ‘what’s more absurd than melting wood?’

The concept behind the work has political undertones, as can be easily seen when admiring the sculpture. The melting staircase symbolises the strive for utopia, but the inability to ever reach it fully. The eye is drawn up the free-standing staircase to the perfectly formed step attached to the wall: separate from the unstable stairs below, and out of reach.

While creating ‘Downfall’, Hollie deepened her interest in the politics behind her work, finding that she was able to convey honesty and ideals within her creativity. Her chosen Master’s course of Political Theory and Practices of Resistance will allow her to support and inform her art practice.

As well as the excitement of the People’s Choice Award for ‘Downfall’, Hollie has also been recognised elsewhere. At her graduation she was awarded a different ‘The People’s Choice Award 2012’ by Dorset Visual Arts. Then, while being displayed in the AUCB exhibition, Hollie was approached to be involved in this year’s The Affordable Art Fair at Battersea Park, London. With each opportunity leading to another, ‘Downfall’ was then featured in *The Sunday Times Style* magazine, bringing her work further into the public eye. With such an acknowledgement of her talent in the few months since ‘Downfall’ was first exhibited, it seems the future holds great hopes for Hollie, and that hers is a name we will undoubtedly hear in the future. Despite this, Hollie has not become complacent. She believes that the competition and strive to push the boundaries of her imagined deviant realities and absurd logic within her art: developing new and different ideas for the next big sculpture, is ‘what makes art addictive’.

Watch this space: [www.mackenzieartist.co.uk](http://www.mackenzieartist.co.uk)

Catherine Murphy
MA Intl Security and Politics of Terror
Focus on research

ACTnow Conference
October 11-12 2012

Freiberg, Germany
When I arrived at the gate for my plane from London to Basel to attend the ACTnow Conference (Accuracy, Completeness and Transparency in health research reporting), and saw Iain Chalmers sitting among others faces I realised just how valuable this conference was going to be. A bit unsure of myself, and the poster I was gripping tightly in my fist, I found my way to my seat, and discovered I was sitting behind even more delegates. After some discussion of medicinal plant use in South Africa, and a reconne ction with Iain Chalmers, I followed the people who seemed to know their way, and after an hour’s bus ride, I found myself at the Freiberg Central Hauptbahnhof (central bus station) where I made my way through a maze of ancient (or so I thought!) cobblestone streets to my hotel. Iain Chalmers, in his address, later explained that everything in Freiberg had been rebuilt following the Second World War.

The first day of the conference was jam-packed with presentations lasting from 9.30am to 9pm. The venue was an incredible historic building tucked among the city’s central market place, and adjacent to the church (which became particularly evident as some presenters had to battle the chiming bells to deliver their information). The conference covered topics from presentations relating to perspectives on “practice, their problems and consequences” with presenters like Doug Altman, to topics concerning “initiatives to improve transparency of health research” and research initiatives that explore transparency, including a presentation from Sally Hopewell on CONSORT (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials).

The first day of the conference culminated in a cocktail, drinks and food networking session amongst the posters on display. Our poster received quite a bit of attention from BMJ editorial staff members. This time also provided me with the opportunity to speak with individuals who had questions about the changing landscape of trial registration procedures, and some important clarifications on practice were made at this time; most notably, that the WHO International Clinical Trials Registry Platform is host to a comprehensive list of clinical trials that are registered in all WHO-aligned registries, providing more information about the global clinical trial landscape than any one clinical trial registry can provide. Following the poster session, I was asked to take part in a focus group discussion on the challenges of getting trial work published. I felt being a part of this focus group was important, and as the only African representative in the group, I hope I was able to convey the unique challenges that trialists in our region face.

The second day of the conference covered presentations on topics like “teaching, learning and practising good reporting” which included perspectives from educators of evidence-based healthcare and “power and responsibilities of organisations” which included a presentation from the editorial director of PLOS (Public Library of Science). The conference culminated in the EQUATOR Annual Lecture, which was presented by Dr John Ioannidis, Professor of Medicine, Health Research and Policy, and Statistics at Stanford University. His presentation on reporting and reproducible research was both inspiring and posed challenges for future evidence-based healthcare researchers.

Amber Abrams
PhD Anthropology

The British Science Festival and Science Communication

During the first week of September I spent a week as an events assistant in the silver city of Aberdeen for the British Science Association’s annual festival. Having some free time on my hands, I felt this would be a perfect opportunity to experience top-quality science communication in action, before embarking on a Master’s degree in the subject.

The Association has had a long history, spanning over 178 years. Initially its role was to facilitate an annual meeting for scientists around the UK to discuss their work; however it has now developed into the focal organisation for public scientific engagement.

Today, the Association plays a number of roles and hosts a number of initiatives. The annual National Science and Engineering week is one such initiative, designed to engage the public in science through a mixture of workshops, demonstrations and competitions, held all over the country. The association also runs conferences for science communicators or those involved in research. However the pinnacle of the Association’s activity is its week-long annual festival, held in a different city every year. The week is designed to provide a plethora of lectures, workshops, children’s activities and demonstrations, for those with or without a scientific background.

My role as an events assistant was a perfect chance to listen to some fascinating talks, but as part of the job description, to critically evaluate each one. By doing so I began to reflect carefully on what good science communication looks like, ideas which I have explored in much greater depth since starting at Kent.

While I had to stick to the events on my rota, the majority of the talks were fascinating and presented really well. The majority of the presentations constituted a Powerpoint presentation with a talk, however there were exceptions such as the conceptually innovative speed science event.

The premise of this event was to give scientists a chance to talk for five minutes with a range of different groups about their research. A public vote then decided who would have the privilege of giving a further 20 minute talk. This event in particular began to broaden my horizons in thinking about how not just to inform, but also to engage the public in science in new and creative ways. These ideas about science engagement have been a focal point for my time in Kent thus far. Without a doubt, my week in Aberdeen was the highlight of the summer and played an important role in demonstrating how many of the theories I am currently learning about, can be put into practice.

Jessica Miller
MSc Science, Communication & Society
Many of you may be unaware that a host of wild creatures are living just outside of Canterbury. Located in grounds sprawling over 90 acres is Howletts Wild Animal Park, where you can find tigers, rhino, African elephants, gibbons and wild dogs, to name but a few.

Howletts was established in 1958 by the late John Aspinall who died in 2000. What began as a private collection is now open to the public and involved in a wide range of conservation projects overseas. Aspinall’s approach towards his menagerie was often considered controversial, for example he would regularly enter the enclosures with the animals as a means of establishing bonds. Howletts’ keepers follow this example, and in fact several have been killed in the line of duty. This is a stark reminder that even though captive and dependent upon humans, they are still wild animals. Howletts and its sister park Port Lympne (also located in Kent) are currently run by the Aspinall Foundation, an animal conservation charity which works to save species from extinction. This is no simple task, but the foundation is taking an active approach through breeding programmes which aim to release captive-born animals into the wild. This requires long-term investment, financial resources and co-operation between staff in the UK and the release countries.

Endangered animals bred at Howletts, including black rhino and western lowland gorillas, have already been released into protected areas in Tanzania and Congo respectively. These animals face threats such as poaching and habitat loss, thus reintroduction projects aim to help boost numbers as well as raise awareness of conservation issues. Furthermore, although the scientific community may not always have supported Aspinall’s ideas, he and his staff at both parks have had considerable success in breeding a range of animals, including the snow leopard, the first to be bred in captivity.

The keepers aim to make life interesting for the animals who reside there by creating a wide range of different activities for them. Encouraging the animals to be active and use their natural skills can relieve the stress or boredom of captivity, which is often an issue in zoos. The most recent idea was a gorilla garden created by the Howletts’ gardening team, as shown in the picture. The park has the largest collection of western lowland gorillas in the world, and so a variety of different edible plants were grown in order to create colours, tastes and scents which replicate their natural forest habitat.

If you fancy a visit, the park is open all year round, except Christmas Day. Look online for 20 per cent off ticket prices. To get there by public transport, take a train from Canterbury East’s platform two to Bekesbourne, the next station on the line towards Dover Priory. It only takes four minutes and costs £2.20. This is followed by a short walk to the park from Bekesbourne station. If you are driving the journey takes about 20 minutes via the A28 and A257.

Kelly Greenway
PhD Biological Anthropology

Gorillas in the… garden
Take a walk on the wild side in Howletts Wild Animal Park

Image courtesy of Dave Rolfe, Howletts Wild Animal Park silverback gorilla Djanghou
The Medieval approach to Kent

Well not quite, but even so, there are any number of historical places of interest across this county that are available to visit for anyone with the remotest historical, and particularly, medieval interest. Here at the University of Kent the School of History is rated second across the country for its research, and with that there is a combination of modern historians of the military or of science and those who study the Medieval and Early Modern periods. With such a historical following, and the academic staff available, Kent is clearly the place to be for historical research.

Nonetheless, academia aside, Kent also has its own array of historical sights to visit, some of which can be accessed by Kent students at either reduced prices or absolutely free of charge.

Three sites include castles at both Dover and Leeds, and the cathedral closer to home in Canterbury. Of these, Dover Castle is probably the most expensive, but there is opportunity to join English Heritage. Once joined you can visit again and again for free, or spread out to Deal and other local areas, and make your money back after about three visits. Leeds Castle is a little cheaper, but once a ticket has been purchased it is then valid for a full year in which time various events occur and may be visited for free. Canterbury Cathedral for local students is the cheapest option, as all you need to get in with is your student card, although for family members it is still reasonably priced.

At Dover there is opportunity to visit not only the castle, but also the medieval church next to it as well as the tunnels that run beneath. Within the castle the rooms depict the colourful decoration that would have existed in the period, rather than simply highlighting what remains today. There are members of staff posted throughout who are willing to answer questions, or direct you further into the past. On the theme of tunnels, for more modern historians, there is also opportunity to visit one that holds a history of medicine, and another that offers a Second World War hideaway and interactive information on the Blitz.

At Leeds Castle, history is steeped in the Tudor period. Here the building is set up so you can follow the same path as all other visitors, but there is no speed restriction, so visitors are able to move at their own pace. Surrounding the castle there are vast grounds to walk through and happily get lost in, as well as water features to picnic beside in good weather. At both Dover and Leeds there are days of jousting or falconry, not to mention seasonal events for specific times of year that are good for all the family.

Canterbury Cathedral encompasses a complete range of history from the time of its creation through to its current use today. Regular guided tours are offered by volunteers who include the chance to find out about Thomas Becket and his martyrdom. The crypt is cool and quiet for those wanting to meditate on the religious ideals of the cathedral, or for the artist there are the stained glass windows depicting Becket’s martyrdom among other things.

As can be seen here, there is vast opportunity across the county for anyone of a historical mind, but there is always far more to this county becoming available to visit, and for the student in Kent, there really is little excuse not to get out there and discover all of its places of interest.

Pippa Gregory
PhD History