

# TABLEAU

THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO | SPRING 2016



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### ON THE COVER

The exhibit *Integrity of the Page: The Creative Process of Daniel Clowes* features the work of award-winning cartoonist Daniel Clowes, LAB'79, and runs through June 17 at the Special Collections Research Center. *Sketch of Marshall*, ca. 2007–2011, Daniel Clowes Archive, University of Chicago Library. Copyright Daniel Clowes.







*Emblem for an Unknown Nation*, by George Cohen, X'48, is part of the Smart Museum's *Monster Roster: Existentialist Art in Postwar Chicago*, running through June 12. *Monster Roster* is the first major exhibition of the group of artists who created figurative work during the postwar period, which is often seen as dominated by abstraction. Drawing on classical mythology and ancient art, the work of the *Monster Roster* established the first unique Chicago style.

FROM LEFT: GEORGE COHEN, *EMBLEM FOR AN UNKNOWN NATION*, 1954, OIL ON MASONITE. COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART CHICAGO. GIFT OF MURIEL KALLIS NEWMAN, 1978.45. PHOTO © NATHAN KEAY. ART © GEORGE COHEN ESTATE; PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERT KOZLOFF

## Dear Alumni and Friends,



Martha T. Roth

THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES remains committed equally to foundational fields of knowledge and to the pursuit of new lines of inquiry. The first of these commitments is exemplified by a new endowed chair to support the study and teaching of the intellectual traditions of Hinduism, made possible by a generous \$3.5 million gift to establish the Anupama and Guru Ramakrishnan Professorship in Sanskrit Studies. Sanskrit is the language of the texts written for more than two millennia by the philosophers, poets, and scientists of Southern Asia and continues to be used in Hindu and Buddhist rituals today (p. 8). With this endowment we solidify one of our strengths in South Asian studies for generations to come and demonstrate our investment in the study of languages, ancient and modern, as a means of rich engagement with the world's cultures and global heritage.

Our commitment to traditional and rigorous disciplinary training yields new knowledge when coupled with innovative tools and a decidedly contemporary perspective. *Digital humanities* is the term used for the array of research that employs the tools of computation science to ask new questions in the humanistic disciplines. A number of technologically inflected projects now thrive on campus, including such diverse enterprises as data mining the connections within twentieth-century modernist poetry, using digital tools to trace the musical shifts in Bob Dylan's oeuvre, or

the digital recreation and mapping of sites such as Renaissance Florence and ancient Buddhist caves that are no longer extant.

In this issue you will hear from two faculty members, archaeologist David Schloen (NELC) and music theorist Steven Rings (Music), who have thought deeply about the relationship between disciplinary practice and the possibilities of the digital humanities (p. 6). Scholars like David and Steven are at the forefront of investigations that deploy modern digital tools; just as important, they are at the forefront of investigations into how these new tools inflect and transform our established modes of humanistic inquiry.

Sanskrit studies and the digital humanities are but two of the many important areas of research and teaching pursued by the 200-plus faculty members in the 18 departments and programs in the Division of the Humanities. We rely on those individuals, like you, who recognize the significance of humanistic inquiry in the modern world, to support our scholarship and our teaching of the future leaders in the academy, industry, and the public sector. On behalf of all the students and scholars in the Division of the Humanities, thank you.

*Martha T. Roth*

Martha T. Roth  
Dean of the Division of the Humanities



The New Frankenstein: A Glimpse of the Horrible Fate in Store for Jeff Davis at the Hands of the Monster Rebellion, by Henry Louis Stephens, appears on the cover of Christopher Freeburg's book, *Melville and the Idea of Blackness*.

# THE IDEA OF BLACK CULTURE

Christopher Freeburg on Melville, aesthetics, inner life, and Black Lives Matter.

BY CARRIE GOLUS, AB'91, AM'93

VANITY FAIR, MAY 10, 1862; PHOTO COURTESY CHRISTOPHER FREEBURG



When **Christopher Freeburg**, AM'99, PhD'06, was an undergraduate at Xavier University of Louisiana, his mentor, noted African American studies professor Joseph Brown, told him, "You can't understand race in American literature unless you read [Herman] Melville."

Freeburg listened—to some extent. "As an undergraduate I read what I wanted," he says. "Often I was not reading at all."

When he began his graduate work in English Language and Literature at UChicago, Freeburg focused on postcolonial readings of early modern literature. He wrote his master's thesis on *Othello*, supervised by **David Bevington**, the Phyllis Fay Horton Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus, and **Richard Streier**, the Frank L. Sulzberger Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus.

He also read African American literature. And he noticed that again and again, writers he admired referenced Melville. Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992). C.L.R. James in *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (1953). Ralph Ellison in *The Collected Essays* (1995). "This Melville guy just kept coming up."

Eventually his work became the subject of Freeburg's dissertation. *Melville and the Idea of Blackness: Race and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) takes as a starting point Melville's observation about Nathaniel Hawthorne: "that blackness in Hawthorne...that so fixes and fascinates me." Freeburg finds plenty of "blackness" in Melville's own work, by which he means "the violence of subjects' experience of existential limits and the destruction of subjects' social viability."

While Melville scholarship from the 1950s through the 1970s focused on his notions of evil and depravity, Freeburg says, in the 1980s and 1990s critics were more interested in racial conflicts and slavery. His work brings the two strands together. Freeburg contends that in Melville, moments of blackness arise during encounters between people of different races—for example between Ishmael and Queequeg, or Pip and Ahab, in *Moby-Dick*. "Melville stages it in so many different ways," says Freeburg, "with traumatic moments centering on people of color and otherness."

Freeburg, an associate professor of English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, teaches American and African American literature. He writes about that side of his life in "Teaching Literature and the Bitter Truth about Starbucks," published in the Modern Language Association's journal *Profession* (2012). In the essay, Freeburg repeats a question he's often heard from the student-baristas: "What good is what I teach, and is it relevant to the real world?"

At a time when the value of the humanities is routinely questioned, Freeburg argues in the essay, "We need a stronger sense of vocation in our courses." Students need to understand that "critical thinking is not just stating your opinion," he says. For any text, they should be able to "come up with a serious question and a number of ways to answer that question."

In his critical work, Freeburg frequently mentions his own teachers, such as **Lauren Berlant**, the George M. Pullman Distinguished Service Professor; **Kenneth Warren**, the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor; and former UChicago professor Gerald Graff, AB'59.

In the book, Freeburg examines major African American artists "whose work is aimed directly or indirectly at specific black political goals," he says, and tries to get at "the rich, deep, mysterious person, the ongoing and elastic sense of the individual—that part of the black tradition." At the same time, Freeburg says, "we have to realize the utter ambiguity or the limits of what we can not know about black subjects is an equal, if not more forceful, part of black aesthetics."



## Critical thinking is not just stating your opinion. —Christopher Freeburg, AM'99, PhD'06

"The workshop system was invaluable," says Freeburg. "You learn how to answer really tough questions about your work. There were times when I completely disagreed with my professors, but nine times out of ten, they were right."

Freeburg recently completed his next book project, "Black Aesthetics and Inner Life," which looks at "major moments of depersonalization in African American literature and culture," he says. The book begins with a shocking image, *The Lynching of Frank Embree, July 22, 1899*—shocking because the man in the photo is still very much alive and looks directly at the camera.

"The photograph of Embree provokes a broader question that this book explores: How can places where personhood vanishes simultaneously uncover a forceful sense of the person?" Freeburg writes. "Embree's remarkable gaze into the camera...affirms his desire to create meaning that is his alone."

Freeburg takes a similar approach in his current book project, which has the working title "Slavery, Performance, and the Idea of Black Culture." Scholars often look at slavery in an overly simplistic way, he says, reducing their lives to either fighting against white masters or succumbing to them. His analysis "shows the inadequacy of those categories," he says. "The life and mind of a slave was just as mysterious and complex as anyone else's life."

And Freeburg continues to do work on Melville. He's organizing a Melville Society panel, called "Melville and Black Lives Matter," at the 2017 MLA conference. Suggested topics include racial violence, police brutality, prison reform, totalitarianism, New World slavery, and US-Middle East turmoil. Freeburg hopes to discuss "what it is in Melville's work so that black writers have continually turned to him," he says. "It's absolutely crucial." ■

READ FREEBURG'S ESSAY ON JAMES BALDWIN at [tableau.uchicago/FreeburgOnBaldwin](http://tableau.uchicago/FreeburgOnBaldwin).



# IDEAS IN ACTION

Graduate students raise understanding of political movements—and save lives.

BY JEANIE CHUNG

Mathews Ngwenya at his Place in Sherwood Heights, Smit Street, by South African photographer Guy Tillim, exemplifies the postapartheid photography Leslie Wilson is studying.

Academic research can dovetail with current events in unexpected ways. This academic year two graduate students are honing their research skills abroad, using historical knowledge to help shape the present and future. Both are also addressing global issues beyond the academy—through scholarship as well as direct aid and activism.

### *Learning from the past*

**Leslie Wilson** spent time last fall and winter at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in South Africa. In addition to researching art history, she watched police officers at the station next door training in crowd management and protest confrontations. The past year has seen nationwide movements to remove statues of colonialist Cecil Rhodes from university campuses, protests over student fee increases, and a growing push for the ouster of South African President Jacob Zuma.

“It was disturbing,” she says, “to see uncanny resemblances to photographs of protests from decades earlier.”

In Johannesburg for the first year of a two-year fellowship, Wilson is working on her dissertation, tentatively titled “Past Black and White: The Color of Photography in South Africa, 1994–2004.” Her work, she says, contributes to an understanding of activism through a variety of media—in South Africa and beyond.

An international relations major as an undergraduate at Wellesley, Wilson found that the history of photography was another way to grapple with questions she’d been asking since high school: “What does it mean to make change? What does it look like? How do people make the case for a cause?” As a PhD candidate in the Department of Art History, Wilson is asking, “Can certain images really change minds? Can they change policies?”

Documentary photographs of South Africa during apartheid helped to spark Wilson’s interest. She wondered how much the images of anti-apartheid protests were illuminating for those outside the country or “reinforced stereotypes of black Africans as perpetually in distress,” and



Leslie Wilson

also wondered what South African photographers chose to depict when apartheid ended.

Her current research examines the work of four photographers—David Goldblatt, Gideon Mendel, Santu Mofokeng, and Guy Tillim. All were deeply critical of apartheid, and all except Goldblatt had worked in a collective called Afra-



pix that was closely tied to the antiapartheid political movement. As apartheid ended in the early 1990s and the world's attention turned to Rwanda and other parts of Africa, many South African photojournalists—who had spent most of their careers covering protests and similar events—moved toward artistic photography. They began capturing different images, and in some cases chose color rather than the black and white more prevalent in art and documentary photography, signaling a further break from their previous work.

Exhibiting their work in galleries rather than in mass-market publications “wasn’t always a comfortable or easy fit, especially for the hardcore documentarians anxious about showing photographs of township life to wealthy city-center audiences,” Wilson said. But artistic venues and contexts for their work gave the photographers freedom to make both artistic and political statements, through images documenting the HIV/AIDS crisis as well as daily life in Johannesburg.

Although some photographers were reluctant to use color, since at the time it was “the



*As part of his work with Yazda, Barber (center) helped provide Yazidis like 96-year-old Haider (right) with sturdier housing for the winter.*

Civilizations because of its emphasis on early Islamic history. “People who are not grounded in the medieval history of Islam are at a disadvantage,” says Barber, a third-year PhD student, “even when trying to engage with important religious issues today.”

Barber has used his scholarly grounding in the history of the Yazidis, a Kurdish-speaking ethno-religious minority in northern Iraq and Turkey, to advocate on their behalf in the wake

of a vicious attack from the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

Barber became interested in the Yazidis—whose religion is based on oral tradition rather than written scripture—after taking a course on ethnic and religious minorities in the Islamic world as an undergraduate at Portland State University. While living in Syria in 2010, he backpacked into northern Iraq and subsequently did research on local legal systems and their effect on women and minorities, particularly Yazidis.

Barber has prioritized finding professional therapists for the kidnapped Yazidi women and girls who have managed to escape or otherwise return home. Other projects, such as documenting the mass graves of Yazidis in the Sinjar region, draw more directly on his academic background. He’s also launched a project called Qalama Zerin, or Golden Pen, to provide academic, intellectual, and emotional support for Yazidi university students, many of whom were displaced from Sinjar.

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“This is a way for me to bring that knowledge and background into a practical, meaningful form of public advocacy,” he says, “that can have real, life-changing results for people in the community.”

Barber, coeditor of the online newsletter *Syria Comment*, plans to come back to campus this fall, returning his focus to the study of Syrian and Iraqi history and Islamic thought. Regardless of his studies, he says, “I will be involved with the Yazidi community for the rest of my life.” ■

## What does it mean to make change?

—Leslie Wilson, Art History PhD candidate

stuff of advertising, not hard news,” Wilson says, it also gave the images greater immediacy. More than that, with the end of apartheid, experimentation seemed politically more possible at the same time that color photography technology became cheaper.

In and of themselves, Wilson concludes, photographs don’t produce change—or even knowledge, necessarily. Yet, she says, “I do think that photo essays can connect viewers in local and far-flung places with a valuable sense of what people are experiencing.”

### *Preserving culture, fighting oppression*

**Matthew Barber** chose the PhD program in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and

of a vicious attack from the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

Barber was doing research in Dohuk, near the Yazidi homeland in northern Iraq, in August 2014 when Islamic State forces attacked the area, killing hundreds of Yazidi men and forcing thousands of Yazidi women and girls into sexual slavery. Given his understanding of the Yazidis and how they fit into predominantly Islamic Iraq, Barber was the first person to talk to the Western media about the conflict and spread the word about the kidnapped women.

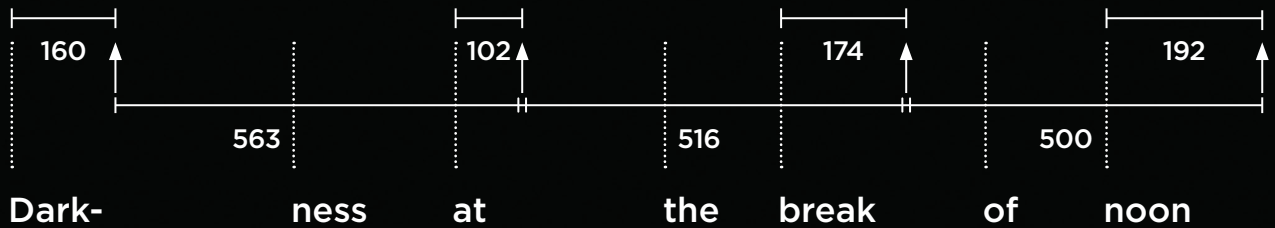
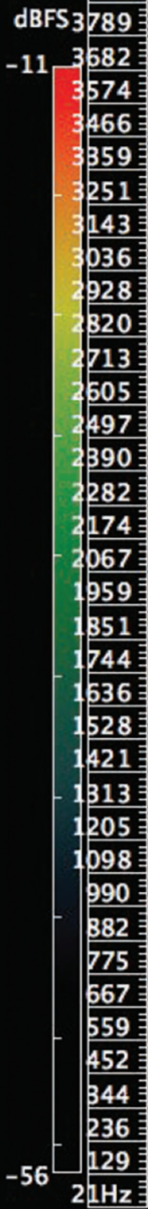
He then spent the 2014–15 academic year struggling to balance his full-time studies with full-time advocacy work for the Yazidi community. At his request, the department granted him the 2015–16 year off to serve as executive di-

READ MORE ABOUT BARBER’S WORK at [mag.uchicago.edu/mbarber](http://mag.uchicago.edu/mbarber).



# TWO PERSPECTIVES ON THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES

In this spectrogram image of the first line of Bob Dylan's song "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)," the numbers along the left side indicate pitch frequency, or hertz. The numbers across the bottom represent time. Color intensity represents volume. The vertical arrows represent guitar strums.



What does the growth of the “digital humanities”—a host of technologically aided approaches ranging from algorithmic analysis of data to digital mapping to the analysis of technology itself—mean for the field? **Steven Rings** from Music and **David Schloen** from Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations offer their opinions.

*This text is edited and condensed from remarks given at “Humanities Research: The Future of an Idea,” a program in honor of the Franke Institute for the Humanities’ 25th anniversary in November 2015.*

1990  2015





**Steven Rings** is an associate professor in Music.

The history of the humanities is arguably untellable without a parallel history of the once-new technologies that provided its conditions of possibility. To pluck the lowest-hanging fruit first, there is of course Gutenberg’s printing press. But what about an ancient Egyptian scribe’s palette, which predates the press by at least 1,000 years? To call one a technology but to exclude the other is to draw an arbitrary line. Human expressive culture has always been inextricably bound up with tool use and the technological: think of cave paintings, bone flutes.

Today, those of us who spend our days in humanistic pursuits move fluidly and effortlessly among technologies, our laptops switching applications with ease. Google alone has become so ready-to-hand that it can even recede from our awareness: we perform a search almost without realizing we have done so.

So where does this leave us with respect to the digital humanities? Is this merely a difference in degree—more technologies, and more powerful—or have we crossed some sort of qualitative Rubicon? My opening gambit suggests the former, but I don’t want to seem overly sanguine, or undialectical, about our present moment. The digital humanities are not merely a value-neutral adrenaline shot for the discipline, turning our technological commitments “up to 11” but leaving our intellectual and ideological ones untouched.

Nevertheless, I don’t share the worry that the advent of digital humanities will cause the humanities to be subsumed into the sciences or—more nefariously—to become somehow lost in the technology itself, subsumed in a sea of 1s and 0s. On the contrary, in my experience, new technologies have a way of bringing into focus precisely those humanistic surpluses that elude quantification: questions of significance, identity, phenomenology, affect, and so on.

For example, I’ve used a spectrogram—a visual representation of the spectrum of sound frequencies—of the first line of Bob Dylan’s song “It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding),” from his January 1965 studio performance to explore what music analysts call “micro-timing.” Arrows beneath the spectrogram show the beats marked by Dylan’s guitar downstrokes; as the other annotations show, Dylan consistently begins singing before each downstroke, anticipating the beat by around 150 milliseconds.

In performances in later eras, as on the 1974 tour with The Band, when his voice and guitar were in precise alignment, Dylan explicitly indexes white vernacular traditions—especially country—as opposed to the black rural traditions he mimics on the studio recording. This granular visualization thus reveals one way in which Dylan’s body of work encodes racial difference, via a performative detail that is extremely easy to miss without spectrographic assistance. And with this, vexed questions of ideology, embodiment, performance, and race come flooding back. The ghost in the machine, as it turns out, is all too human. ■



**David Schloen** is an associate professor in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and the Oriental Institute.

Examining the contexts and effects of digital technology plays to the strengths of humanities researchers. By investigating how and why currently dominant modes of digital knowledge representation have arisen, we can put them in proper perspective, seeing them not as universal and logically necessary, but as historically contingent creations that reflect particular concerns. Not surprisingly, most software reflects the interests of large hierarchical organizations, be they commercial or governmental, which have paid for the creation of the software and want it to suit their purposes.

A good example is the digital representation of texts by means of long strings of character codes interspersed with special embedded codes called “markup.” Markup specifies formatting, style, font, and more—for example, “<italic>.” This simple method of text representation emerged from the business world and is well nigh universal. It was borrowed by humanities researchers and has become deeply rooted in digital humanities. But it is not the only way to represent texts digitally and is far from being the best way to represent complex literary or historical texts that can be read in many different ways. This method of text representation was not designed with scholars in mind. It makes it difficult to represent multiple readings of the same text in a way that is conducive to scholarly study.

From the point of view of software design, the historical study of computing systems as cultural products is not just an ornamental frill of no practical value. It brings to the surface assumptions about what is deemed to be worth knowing and how one ought to manipulate knowledge. It reveals the extent to which the conceptual models that underlie particular data formats and algorithms are not universal but are dictated by particular needs and assumptions. For example, in the corporate world, it is assumed that there is an anonymous authority that will impose a standardized mode of thinking and expression on the members of the organization.

But there are multiple modes of thinking and expression in many fields of the humanities—I know this is true in archaeology, my own discipline. This is not simply the result of egotism but reflects different research questions and interpretations. We should not be forced to conform to an alien mode of thinking and sacrifice the authority of our own expression just because widely used software was designed in a different institutional setting under the assumption that there was one correct way to say something. Nothing inherent in digital computing requires such standards.

The challenge is to design software that captures the conceptual distinctions and relationships of interest to scholars and to do so in a way that is faithful to our own research practices. In so doing, we are not abandoning traditional practices but drawing attention to them and rehabilitating them. Perhaps the digital tools are taking us “back to the future”—realizing in a new way an old vision of the pursuit of knowledge. ■

READ RINGS’S AND SCHLOEN’S COMPLETE REMARKS at [tableau.uchicago.edu/digitalhum](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/digitalhum).

FROM LEFT: SPECTROGRAM BY STEVEN RINGS; PHOTOGRAPHY BY VALERIE BOOTH O.; PHOTO COURTESY DAVID SCHLOEN



# AN EPIC ENDEAVOR

As SALC turns 50, a Sanskrit translation gains new life.

BY JEANIE CHUNG

Contemplating the death and destruction likely to follow from the first successful nuclear test, physicist Robert Oppenheimer was well known for quoting a line from the Bhagavad Gita, “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.”

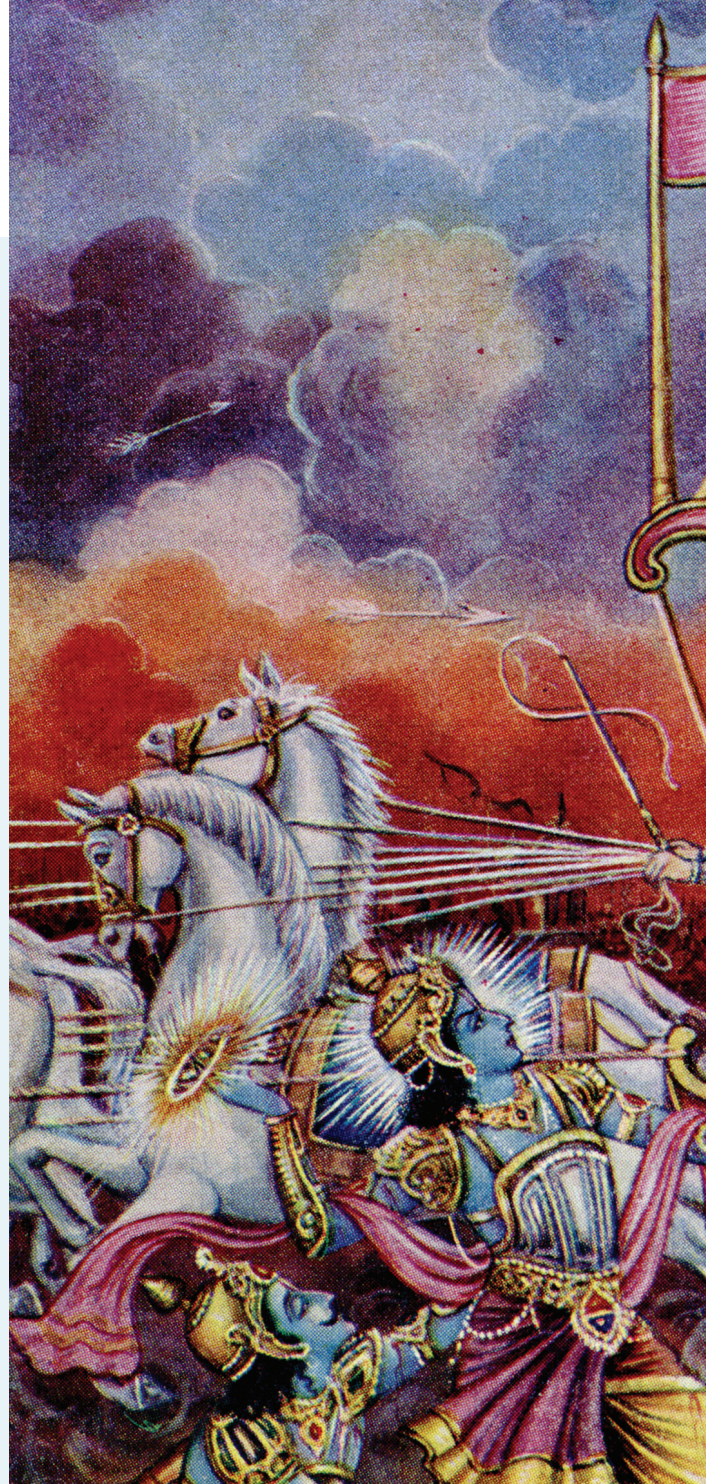
The Gita, as it is familiarly known, is one section of the *Mahabharata*, a Sanskrit poem dating to about 300 BCE that is one of South Asia’s great epics. Depending on the version, the *Mahabharata* is seven to eight times as long as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined.

**Gary Tubb**, the Anupama and Guru Ramakrishnan Professor in Sanskrit Studies in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, describes it as “bigger in every way than anything else.” As a result, Tubb is thrilled to be involved in a comprehensive translation of the epic: “something I’ve wanted to see happen all my life.”

A complete translation of the *Mahabharata* from the critical edition of the text was the dream of **J. A. B. van Buitenen**, who came to the University as a research associate in 1957, two years after the Committee on Southern Asian Studies was established. The Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations (SALC) was formed in 1966. Subsequently a professor of Sanskrit and Indic studies and then department chair, van Buitenen translated the first five of the epic’s books—which are still in print today—but died in 1979 before he could finish the remaining 13. The project is now in the hands of **James L. Fitzgerald**, AB’71, AM’74, PhD’80, van Buitenen’s student and a professor at Brown, with Tubb as associate editor, and Tubb expects to see the work finished before he retires.

South Asian Languages and Civilizations professor **A. K. Ramanujan**, who died in 1993, famously said, “No Hindu ever reads the *Mahabharata* for the first time,” because over the centuries its stories have become interwoven throughout South Asian literature, music, and visual art.

For example, **Nell Hawley**, a third-year graduate student in SALC, studies plays and poetry from the medieval and classical periods in India inspired by the *Mahabharata*, which she calls “a text you can work on your entire life and never get bored.”

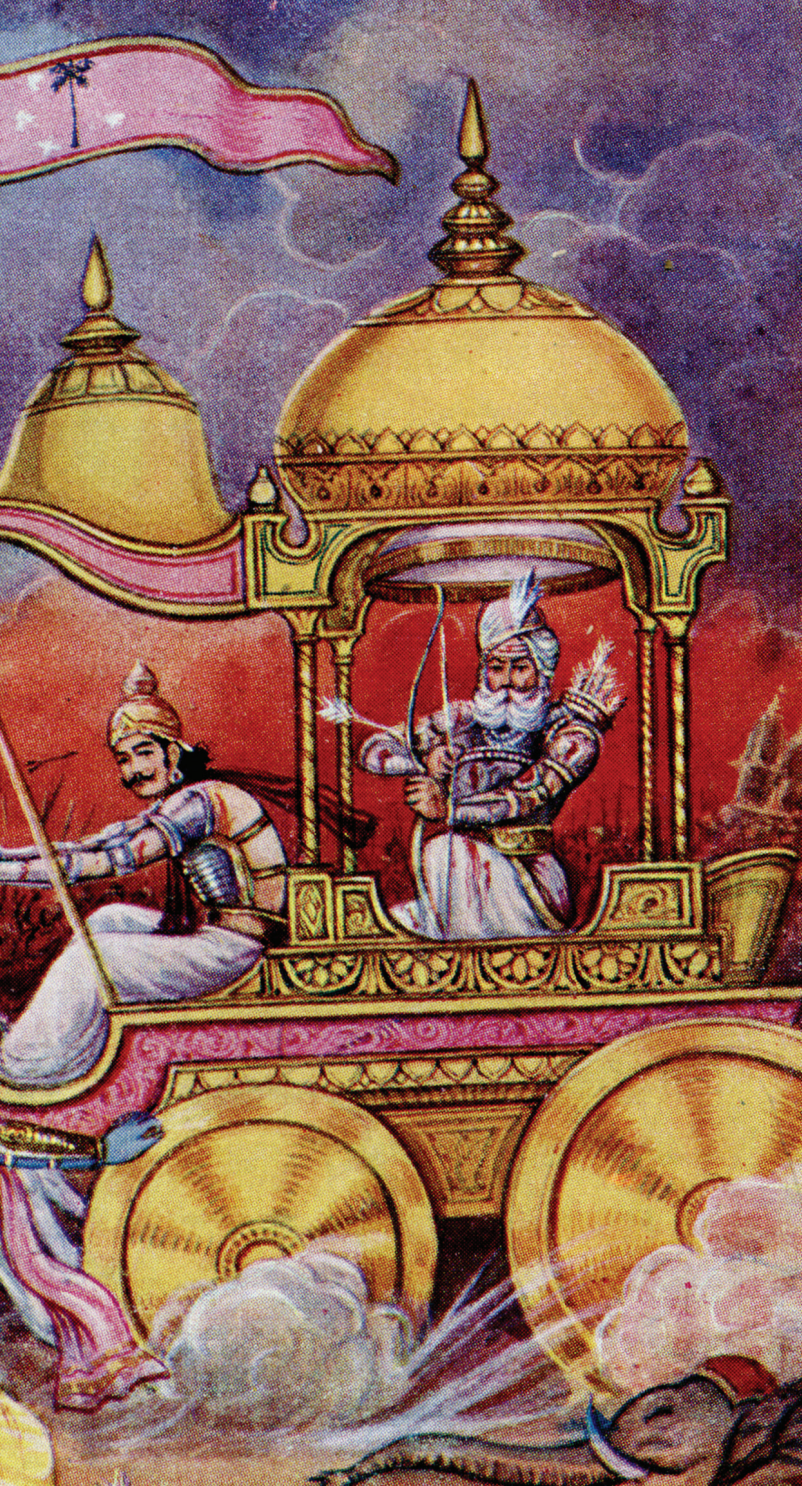


*“It’s not just tragic because everybody dies.”*

“It’s a peculiarly modern story in a lot of ways,” says SALC associate professor **Whitney Cox**, PhD’06, who calls the *Mahabharata* the first Sanskrit text he fell in love with and teaches it in the College Core as part of Readings in World Literature. The narrative employs flashbacks and flash-forwards, and, Cox says, “the moral gray areas of all our major characters are substantial, up to and including Krishna, who’s God.”

The *Mahabharata* tells the story of an apocalyptic war between the five Pandava brothers—the heroes of the story—and their cousins, the Kauravas, who are the villains. The text, taking up 18 to 19 large bound volumes, contains numerous digressions: an explanation of the beginning of the universe, Aesop’s fable-like tales, legal texts, prayers, and hymns.





Bhishma Pitamaha Para Bhagavata Srikrsna Ki Krpa depicts a battle from the Bhagavad Gita, one section of the Mahabharata. SALC professor Gary Tubb is part of a group of scholars working on an English translation of the complete Sanskrit epic.

It's bigger in every way  
than anything else.

—Professor Gary Tubb  
on the *Mahabharata*

cause everybody dies—and everybody does die. It's tragic because everybody fails to do the right thing.”

Although it's not a religious text in the sense of the Bible or Qu'ran, Doniger says, “If you define religion as dharma, which is the Hindu law of the way a human being should live her life, then the *Mahabharata* is a great Hindu religious text.”

#### *The language of the Mahabharata*

Like the *Mahabharata*, Sanskrit is interwoven throughout South Asian history, scholarship, and culture. The language of the earliest Hindu and Buddhist scriptures, Sanskrit was the primary scholarly language in South Asia for centuries and is still the primary language of Hindu religious ceremonies.

Doniger refers to South Asia's tradition of scholarship and literature, dating back thousands of years, as “intertextuality in the most intense way. Every text you read is in conversation with other texts, which ultimately are Sanskrit texts.”

Linguistically or culturally, Sanskrit is related to all of the ten other South Asian languages taught at the University of Chicago—more than any other university outside South Asia. As one of the three prominent ancient scholarly languages along with Greek and Latin, Sanskrit was the first foreign language taught at the University.

As SALC marks its sixtieth anniversary, a \$3.5 million gift in January from **Guru Ramakrishnan**, MBA'88, and his wife Anupama to endow Tubb's professorship will help the department to sustain its tradition in South Asian scholarship, the future of which is increasingly moving beyond simply studying the language as “a musty old artifact,” says Tubb, who is also faculty director of the University's Center in Delhi.

“There's a much more active interest now in history and in the historical setting of Sanskrit texts: their economic, their political, their military history,” he says. “It's so much livelier than in the past.” ■

The *Mahabharata* also illustrates the impossibility of living a truly moral life, according to **Wendy Doniger**, the Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions, “because in a number of the most important situations in life, there are two conflicting things that you ought to do.”

For example, Arjuna, the third Pandava brother, hesitates to go into battle against his cousins, knowing he will have to kill innocent people. Krishna appears to him and persuades him that the victims' lives are not important, only their immortal souls. More important, Krishna says, by not fighting and killing the enemy, Arjuna will endanger the lives of his parents and other innocent people depending on him for protection.

“If he does his job, he's going to kill a lot of good and innocent people,” says Doniger. “There's no way he can do the right thing. And that happens all the time in the *Mahabharata*. It's a tragic book. It's not just tragic be-

READ MORE ABOUT UCHICAGO SANSKRIT STUDIES at [tableau.uchicago.edu/sanskrit](http://tableau.uchicago.edu/sanskrit).



# CROSSING BORDERS

Romance Languages and Literatures assistant professors span centuries and disciplines.

BY TOM POPELKA

“My way of approaching reality was always filtered by literature,” says **Maria Anna Mariani**, one of six assistant professors in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. “This is the only thing I could do.”

Mariani is part of a department that offered its first classes in 1893, with a five-person faculty studying language and literature in Spanish, Catalan, French, Portuguese, and Italian. Today the department has grown more than fivefold from its origins, with research interests that regularly intersect with cinema and

media studies, philosophy, and literary theory. The six assistant professors, says department chair and Frank L. Sulzberger Professor **Larry Norman**, reflect a “new generation of innovative scholars” representing “the future of a field whose multilingual reach is truly transhistoric and global.”

This innovative scholarship extends to classic topics like the Renaissance. Although today we see the Renaissance as a golden era of ideas and culture, according to **Rocco Rubini** it wasn’t always so simple. His 2014 book, *The*



*Victoria Saramago, Rocco Rubini, Laura Gandolfi, Miguel Martínez, Larissa Brewer-García, and Maria Anna Mariani (not pictured) continue the department's long tradition of scholarship.*



# Studying the role of objects within texts “can say a lot about the function of literature.”

—Assistant professor Laura Gandolfi

*Other Renaissance: Italian Humanism Between Hegel and Heidegger* (University of Chicago Press), outlines how nineteenth- and twentieth-century Italian intellectuals incorporated Renaissance philosophy into their own thought, often with surprising results.

As one example, during the Italian unification, or *Risorgimento*, in 1861, many rejected the Renaissance and viewed Renaissance thinkers—leading lights of modernity like Petrarch and Leonardo Bruni—as failed statesmen. “Italy inaugurated modernity but unified last politically,” says Rubini. These nineteenth-century revolutionaries believed Italy’s inability to unify earlier proved a failure of Renaissance ideas. “It took a while,” Rubini notes, “to get to the Renaissance period as a ‘great’ period.”

Rubini’s interest in tracing the Renaissance in the Italian intellectual tradition connects two of his long-standing interests: Renaissance literature and literary theory. Having taught at UChicago since 2009, he tries to make similar connections for his students in the classroom. “To study Italian literature,” says Rubini, “is to study the beginnings of modern poetry, how we came to write in prose, and the birth of the short story or novella.”

Three of the six assistant professors—Mariani, **Laura Gandolfi**, and **Victoria Saramago**—specialize in modern Italian and Latin American literature. Mariani, who arrived at UChicago in 2015, studies the theme of trauma and survival in the works of Italian authors like Primo Levi. She was influenced by the words of Nobel laureate Elias Canetti, who wrote in his *Crowds and Power*, “The moment of survival is the moment of power.”

In many of the texts she has studied, survivors move between feelings of power in having escaped death on one hand, and a heightened sense of vulnerability and loss on the other. This opposition is at the center of Mariani’s research, extending beyond the borders of Italian litera-

ture and incorporating elements of philosophy, comparative literature, and the social sciences. “My approach to problems is theoretical,” she says, “and not too geographical.”

Also interested in theoretical matters but in a different region, Laura Gandolfi investigates the presence of objects—ranging from pre-Columbian antiquities to imported goods from Europe—in Mexican literature and literary texts after independence. Gandolfi, who joined UChicago in 2013, hopes to finish revisions on her book this year as a Franke Institute for the Humanities Faculty Fellow.

Her research focuses largely on texts from the turn-of-the-century Latin American modernismo movement. Studying the role of objects within texts, she says, “can say a lot about the function of literature.” Using a variety of sources like *crónicas*—a Latin American form of writing including essays, fiction, and nonfiction in one volume—as well as journals, letters, and advertisements, Gandolfi traces the construction of Mexico as a place in fiction and reality.

Another Latin American literature scholar, Victoria Saramago, researches twentieth-century Brazilian regionalist novels to investigate the relationship between literature and environment. Saramago, who arrived at UChicago in fall 2015, is interested in the way the regions depicted in these novels shape the materiality—the form, subject, or conventions—of the text.

Saramago is also a published fiction writer. Although her writing is more contemporary and plot-based than the writers she studies, Saramago can see the influence of her research on her fiction. “Certain ideas come up in very different forms,” she says.

**Miguel Martínez**, at UChicago since 2011, and **Larissa Brewer-García**, a fall 2015 arrival, both study sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish texts but on different continents. Martínez researches writings by Spanish soldiers, while Brewer-García focuses on black Africans in Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador. Despite the difference in subject matter, “we have a lot of points of conversation,” notes Brewer-García.

Brewer-García highlights the presence of black Africans—both enslaved and free—and their participation in civic and cultural life as interpreters of histories, plays, trials, and religious texts. By studying their translation work, she says, we can see how they “participate in shaping what it means to become black in the Americas.” Black Africans’ exclusion from historical sources in the colonial period “has similarities with the exclusion of black populations from national imaginaries,” Brewer-García notes. As a native of Colombia, she adds, “it is something that matters to me.”

Martínez’s research indicates that Spanish soldiers were more politically attuned and less monolithic than previously thought. In their writings, “many soldiers use highly complex literary traditions,” such as epic poetry, to raise questions about political protest, empire, and violence.

“I enjoy archival work the most,” Martínez says. His research has taken him to archives throughout Spain, and a new project on the Spanish empire in East Asia will take him to Mexico and the Philippines. “Writing is fun—sometimes,” he adds with a laugh. But he finds “the real excitement of finding material, discovering the unknown,” in the archives. ■





# PROTECTING THE PAST

Three alumni discuss their careers in historic preservation.

BY SUSIE ALLEN, AB'09

*For Barry Bauman, restoring a painting is a combination of art and science.*

**Barry Bauman**, AM'71, spent 11 years restoring paintings at the Art Institute of Chicago before starting his own conservation company, the Chicago Conservation Center. After selling the business, Bauman began donating his services to institutions across the country; he has restored more than 1,500 works of art free of charge since 2004.

*How did you first get interested in conservation?*

One of my professors at the U of C, Harold Haydon, LAB'26, PhB'30, AM'31, took his students to the conservation lab at the Art Institute as part of a behind-the-scenes look. I thought, well, this is pretty interesting—I'm looking at three Monets lying along the wall. Once I received my

degree, I made an appointment to talk to the conservator at the Art Institute and told him I wanted to apprentice with him. He asked me for ten years of training. I told him I wasn't doing anything for the next ten years, and that would be fine.

*What is the training process for a conservator?*

I didn't even touch a painting for two years. I was learning other kinds of materials and techniques. The philosophy was that if you knew how to make something you would know how to fix it. I studied medieval painting techniques, egg tempera techniques, and Venetian techniques. I had to have a very clear understanding of how the old masters put their paintings together so

that I would be able to know how to recreate that during conservation.

You have to have patience for what you're doing. I'm a crazy man in a traffic jam, but when it comes to my work, don't ever ask me if I'm done yet. I'm working on a painting that's 350 years old, and if it takes me six months to work on it, it'll just be 350-and-a-half when I'm done.

*Do you ever feel intimidated when working on a priceless work of art?*

If you were going to have an operation and you said to your doctor, "Are you scared to do this operation?" and he said, "Yes," what would you do? You'd find another doctor.

It's the same for me. This is what I'm trained to do.



These are very sad, real problems,  
but I'm excited I can be part of the solution.

—Martha MacFarlane-Faes, AM'89,  
on preserving parts of postindustrial cities



Catherine Dewey

**Catherine Dewey, AM'97**, left her studies in Egyptology to focus on architectural conservation. Now she works with the National Park Service as the chief of resource management for the National Mall and Memorial Parks in Washington, DC.

*What does architectural conservation entail?*

It's preserving structures using science. We look at, for instance, the type of stone and determine what mortar mix is best and most compatible. We look at a stain on a building and determine which chemicals might get that stain out, always making sure that we use the least aggressive method possible and testing in a discreet location.

*What qualities make someone successful in the field?*

Patience—what you think might work often may not. The ability to work with others—very rarely does someone in the world of preservation or architectural conservation work on their own. They're often on a team. Flexibility—what you do might not always work. Perseverance—sometimes you have to educate colleagues and superiors as to why a project is taking longer than they would like or expect.

*What is unique about working for the National Park Service?*

My job is about preserving America's special places for future generations, most importantly. We are leaders in the field of preservation—and look forward to the challenge of preserving these places. It's a great organization to work for. ■



Martha MacFarlane-Faes

**Martha MacFarlane-Faes, AM'89**, studied art history with a focus on architecture. Today she's the deputy state historic preservation officer for Michigan's State Historic Preservation Office.

*When did you get interested in historic preservation?*

My grandparents lived in a historic home on the Spencer-Peirce-Little Farm in Newbury, Massachusetts, which was built around 1690. It's one of the oldest houses in America. I would spend all my summers there. It connected me to my family and to other generations, and I really enjoyed exploring it.

At UChicago I studied things related to preservation, but it wasn't really called historic preservation. I was studying architecture and the policies and ideas surrounding why we build things the way we do and how we look at the past.

I was living in Michigan, and then along came this job opportunity at the State Historic Preservation Office—which I didn't know much about. But I

had the right skill set, and I thought, I'll give it a try. It was more by good fortune and by accident than completely by intention that I found my way here.

*What are you working on now?*

It's no secret we have some very distressed cities in Michigan—we call them legacy cities, postindustrial cities faced with a lot of blight. I'm frequently working with officials in Detroit and other communities to address how we deal with the historic fabric of the city, what we preserve and what we don't, and how these communities are going to go forward in the future. This is an amazing issue of our time. These are very sad, real problems, but I'm excited I can part of the solution.

*How has your work changed since you started?*

When I started, people were abandoning cities right and left to go live in the suburbs. I see a bit of a reversal of that trend. Cities are becoming the dominant paradigm. Young people and even retirees want to be downtown and active. That is a huge change—and it tells me now we have much more of a market than we did for historic downtowns.

The amount of investment occurring in downtown Detroit in the last decade is staggering. The \$33 million Merchant's Row Project was one of the earlier ones, followed in 2008 by major redevelopments of two of our "white elephant" properties: the Book-Cadillac and Fort Shelby Hotels. Each of these developments involved close collaboration with our office to review plans and designs and ensure that appropriate preservation practices are followed. What's exciting is that each of these big projects leverages millions more in job creation and local economic impact.

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