

# Letters

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## Borderlines of Power: Women and Borderline Personality Disorder

By Susan K. Cabn

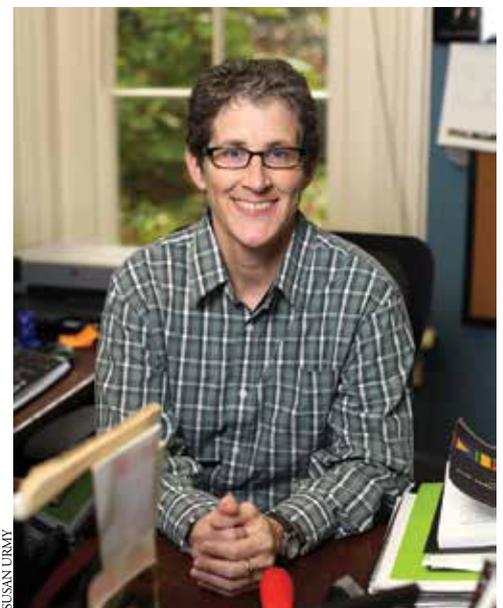
A *New York Times* article from November 2012 described a curious group of “orphans and outliers” who occupy “a colony of misfit characters on their own island: the bizarre and the needy one, the untrusting and the crooked, the grandiose and the cowardly.” Who are these people whose “customs and ritual are as captivating as any tribe’s, and at least as mystifying” (Carey)? What “tribe” could elicit such dated anthropological language of strangeness and objectification? While the article’s subject is the American Psychiatric Association’s failed attempt to redefine personality disorder in the upcoming publication of the *DSM-V* (the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*), the *objects* of the article are mentally ill persons with personality disorders. However, this account of disordered *people* could just as easily apply to the diagnostic category itself; personality disorders are misfits in today’s world of biological psychiatry and neurochemical treatments. They describe defects of character, not biochemistry: enduring and debilitating behavioral or emotional traits that signify an inability to function within established norms of interpersonal and social behavior.

The *Times* description could almost be laughable if it did not matter so much. Within 48 hours the article elicited over 350 written responses. Many argued about the “reality” of personality disorders, critiquing or defending the legitimacy of such illnesses. Some reported on the military’s use of “Personality Disorders Not Otherwise Specified” as a diagnosis for soldiers with symptoms of trauma (frequently women sexually assaulted by fellow soldiers). Viewed as a pre-existing characterological condition, the diagnosis provides grounds for discharge and denial of

ongoing treatment or benefits. Others, assuming validity, drew connections to recent mass killings and pointed to our society’s lack of mental health care, early diagnosis, or proper understanding of dangerous mental pathologies. Personality disorders are a timely and important topic of public debate. But what are they? And what is their history?

This year, as part of the Robert Penn Warren Center’s “Diagnosis in Context” Fellows Program, I am researching the history of one such disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), in the United States. BPD is a diagnosis assigned primarily to women (70–77%), which unlike “depression” or “anxiety,” also gendered female, is not viewed sympathetically (Becker). “Borderline traits” of emotional lability, marked impulsivity, unstable self-image, and chaotic interpersonal relationships have led psychiatric professionals to label women with BPD the “most difficult patients,” unresponsive to psychopharmacology or psychotherapy. Family members and ex-spouses often describe them as “abusers.” As a medical entity, BPD has always been contested and contradictory. Clinicians describe some women with BPD as pathologically dysfunctional, dependent and unlikable, but others as attractive, successful, and charming manipulators who lure others, including therapists, into destructive relationships. As a catchall or wastebasket diagnosis, “borderline” has been called little more than a “sophisticated insult” (Herman, 1997, 123) or, like hysteria a century ago, a pejorative expression “for troubling aspects of womanhood” (Lunbeck, 1994, 226).

My research explores a contested history in which BPD has become as common as it is confounding. It is the personality disorder most frequently assigned to women and to



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hospital inpatients, and by some estimates affects from 2–5% of the American population. It appears in multiple domains, from low-cost mental health clinics to high-priced hospitals, in courtrooms and prisons, and on talk shows like *Oprah* and in films like *Fatal Attraction*. By standard definitions of validity, BPD does not meet scientific criteria for a distinct illness. Yet the figure of the borderline is powerfully real in the eyes of beholders; therapists and loved ones recognize a “type” of woman who displays certain traits and evokes strong reactions. Similarly, painful feelings of emotional emptiness and engulfment, despair and need, terror and anger are real in the lives of women labeled as borderline.

Hotly debated within psychiatry, attacked for its indeterminacy and underlying sexism, BPD has been the subject of psychiatric, sociological, and feminist critique. A historical analysis adds new dimensions, tracing the disorder’s origins and development, as well as its encompassing concept of pathological personality disorders. It asks how the concept of disordered personality developed; how the specific entity of “borderline” personality emerged and changed over time; and what it can tell us about gender dynamics and women’s experience in psychiatry and the broader culture. In a therapeutic culture in which having a *DSM* diagnosis has become almost de rigeur, how do we understand a characteristically female disorder that, while assigned to severely mentally ill women, is defined by traits that might apply to most women at some time in their life: “excessive” anger and neediness; fear of abandonment; sexual allure, “promiscuity” and manipulation; emotional intensity and dysregulation?

To explore this history, I examine the evolution of BPD as a medical pathology that emerged from within specific cultural and political contexts of the twentieth century. I also interrogate the meanings invested in the figure of “the borderline” by medical professionals, the mentally ill, and in popular culture. Finally, I probe the cultural and intellectual “work” BPD has done within psychiatry, within broader cultural and political discourses of gender, and among people affected by BPD. As Warren Center Fellows Program co-directors Arleen Tuchman and

Vanessa Beasley explain in the previous issue of *Letters*, diagnoses are simultaneously speech acts that have the power to name people and change identities, social acts that influence interactions within and beyond clinical medicine, and political acts, in that the effects of diagnoses often have socio-political consequences, intended or not.

The story is significant in its own right, because of the importance of BPD within our mental health system and for the many people affected by the diagnosis. But it also puts the analysis of BPD in dialogue with scholars interested in the development of a twentieth-century “therapeutic culture,” others who are integrating mental illness into disability studies, and feminists who have long searched for the connections between “mad women,” male dominance, and women’s empowerment. The analysis is informed by scholarship from across the humanities: feminist studies, disability studies, theories of affect and subjectivity, and the medical humanities.

I argue that “the borderline” as a sick *person* has obscured scientific, therapeutic, and political relations of power that have been defined and negotiated through the diagnosis of BPD. It has operated to stabilize psychiatric knowledge and authority, at the same time functioning as a metaphor for a particular kind of troublesome woman. Culturally, I suggest that BPD has an intriguing relationship with the history of feminist movements, perhaps reflecting an unconscious dialogue between psychiatry and second-wave feminism’s critique of the profession. Finally, I emphasize the importance of listening to women’s articulations of mental suffering and expressed need for a coherent “self,” even in an era of post-structuralist doubt about the existence of a unified self.

Approaching the project as a “biography” of an illness, I trace the multiple narratives—medical, popular, and personal—which constitute the history of this disorder. To better understand personality *disorders*, I begin by looking at how the concept of personality itself took root in psychiatry, the mental hygiene movement, the “culture and personality” school in social science, and popularly as the public manifestation of an interior “self” that could be measured and adjusted. As the concept of

personality replaced the “symptom” as primary to diagnosis, psychiatric professionals gradually expanded their reach from the asylum to the sphere of everyday life (Lunbeck, 1994).

From the 1940s through the 1970s Freudians theorized multiple ways of conceptualizing the term borderline—as various states, traits, personality organizations, or disorders. “Borderline” typically designated an in-between location: between two other specified disorders; sanity and insanity; neurosis and psychosis; or being well- or ill-suited to psychoanalysis. By mid-century the “new borderline personality” became part of a much broader discussion of a modern type of patient who presented distinctly different symptoms than the Victorian neurotic of old. Rather than men of sound character who struggled with the sexual repression requisite for a civilized society, this new “borderline patient” shared the characteristics of post-war society that cultural critics most disparaged. “He” (as he was addressed) exemplified the shallow, inauthentic search for immediate gratification that critics like David Riesman and Christopher Lasch associated with a permissive, pleasure-oriented consumer culture (Reisman; Lasch). As cultural critics and analytic popularizers attributed these qualities to a new “modal personality,” psychoanalysts created an image of these flaws in extreme, naming them as the grandiose narcissist and the manipulative borderline (Lunbeck, 2006). Throughout this period, the varied meanings and applications of the term left a very loose clinical notion about the exact nature, or even existence, of borderline personalities and whether both the symptoms and etiology of the condition could fairly be categorized as a distinct mental illness.

Then a confluence of events reshaped BPD as an “official” illness in the 1980 *DSM-III*. The revised volume took an entirely different, systematizing approach to psychiatric diagnoses and classification. Encountering challenges to its authority, psychiatry sought to regain scientific credibility by creating clearly defined diagnostic categories that would pass the test of scientific reliability and validity. In the same period, powerful pharmaceutical companies developed psychotropic drugs mass-marketed not only to the “mentally ill,” but to the

## Women designated as “borderline” frequently use the image of being skinless, feeling every emotional sensation as if through exposed nerve endings.

anxious housewife or businessman suffering from “the blahs.” And as psychiatrists began prescribing pharmaceuticals to treat problems of everyday living, millions of Americans utilized health insurance policies to subsidize treatment. Managed health care bureaucracies sought clearly delineated mental illnesses responsive to medical treatment, especially newly developed drugs and, if necessary, short-term psychotherapy—renamed “talk therapy” (Mayes). A product of these related historical developments, the new “official” diagnosis of BPD transformed a previously vague psychoanalytic concept into a disorder recognized as scientifically valid by doctors, hospitals, therapists, and insurance companies.

None of these changes bode well for the women who, more than ever before, were labeled “borderlines,” as BPD became both a female and despised diagnosis. This shift in meaning occurred largely in the 1970s and 1980s, decades in which radical feminists fought to legitimate women’s anger and sexual expression, at the same time asserting a right to protection from physical or sexual abuse and launching a sustained critique of psychiatry for its role in women’s subjugation. In feminism’s wake, right wing “pro-family” activists sought to shore up “traditional” families and reverse the gains of feminism (Buhle). It is during this period that a new concept of BPD consolidated into a medical narrative, casting women’s anger and allegedly immoral sexual behavior in the light of mental pathology.

Recent iterations of the diagnosis identify confused sexual identity, promiscuity, and sexual manipulation—of lovers and therapists—as borderline traits. Yet there is a haunting dissonance here. Although an astoundingly high rate (67–75%) of women with BPD diagnoses have reported childhood sexual and physical abuse, this appears nowhere in the diagnostic discussion (Herman, 1987). Examining debates within and outside of psychiatry, I trace these tangled tales of sexual aggression and vulnerability as they shape medical diagnosis and women’s experiences.

The diagnosis of “borderline” has persisted, despite experts’ own awareness of its many internal contradictions. In 1984 Dr. Hagop Akiskal described “borderline” as an adjective

in search of a noun (549). But in fact, professionals employ the word as a noun far more than an adjective. Diagnosed with BPD, one becomes simply “a borderline.” Since the term does not describe a specific state or behavior, like depression or obsessive-compulsive disorder, “borderline” functions as a metaphor, employing an indeterminate descriptor to create systemic order where there is none. Indeed, most clinicians and theorists characterize BPD in part by its very indeterminacy and paradoxical nature. Researchers have remarked upon the borderline patient’s peculiar blend of amiability and evil, of superficiality and intensity. Other odd couplings include being charming but angry; professional over-achievers or unable to hold down a job; overly rigid but highly adaptive; primitive yet sophisticated; severely dysfunctional yet apparently competent (Gunderson). The Director of the Yale Psychiatric Institute concluded in all seriousness, “the most important thing about borderlines: they are more different than they are similar.” What they share, explained Thomas McGlashan, is the ability to make “a clinician’s hair stand on end” such that as professionals, “We know when we have borderline patients in front of us even though we don’t know exactly what the illness is” (qtd. in Cawels, 30–31).

The literature on BPD and countertransference suggests that a primary indicator for clinicians is their own frustration and tendency to cross boundaries they routinely maintain with other clients. Historically, their response has been to focus on the reputed manipulative skills of female clients, accusing them of breaching the therapeutic boundaries established to protect both client and therapist (Wirth-Cauchon). Many therapists observe professional ethics and do effective, sometimes innovative, work with people diagnosed with BPD. Nevertheless, experts maintain that “borderlines...force whatever part of you is chaotic and crazy to get mixed up in their problems” (qtd. in Cawels, 282). Dr. David Hellerstein described “glittering,” coquettish patients who “strike like a cobra,” seducing therapists into boundary violations, including sexual relationships (128). By determining that it is in the nature of the *illness* to cause such problems for clinicians, the “fact” of

BPD secures the boundary between a pathologized patient and expert professional, redirecting psychic weakness and moral judgment from the therapist back to the client.

The final sections of my analysis concern non-medical narratives of BPD. I look first at representations of “borderline” characters in the popular press, films, and self-help publications to analyze the cultural work BPD does outside medical settings. Here I will also investigate questions of race and class. The disorder is racially unmarked in psychiatric literature but has been culturally scripted as a “white” illness. Popular movie characters associated with borderline traits have been cast as beautiful white women, including Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction* and Jennifer Jason Leigh in *Single White Female*. However, the few studies that consider race and ethnicity as variables have found BPD to be equally prevalent in populations that include high numbers of poor women and women of color (Castaneda; Jordan). Significantly, these studies have been conducted in prisons or public hospitals, suggesting that while BPD may be culturally coded as white and middle-class, this may not accurately describe clinically diagnosed women, especially those in carceral institutions. If the seductive allure attributed to borderlines evokes, through racist standards of beauty, a cultural reading of BPD as “white,” any woman who presents to psychiatric professionals a set of specified emotional and behavioral traits—and strikes them as very difficult to deal with—has a good chance of acquiring this illness.

I end with a close reading of autobiographical narratives by women diagnosed with BPD. Informed by anthropological and literary scholarship on “illness narratives,” I ask how women narrate their pain through common genres—such as the recovery narrative—using vocabularies and concepts available from the surrounding culture. Women designated as “borderline” frequently use the image of being skinless, feeling every emotional sensation as if through exposed nerve endings. At the same time authors offer detailed accounts of emptiness, feelings of being “nothing,” or selfless. To counter such feelings, they employed strategies they recognized, then or later, as counter-productive and contributing to their

status as “difficult.” Frequent rages, seeking a “savior” in therapy or love, and incessant demands for reassurance all tended to end badly. States of utter exhaustion—mental, physical, and emotional—along with feelings of invisibility and hopelessness invited a testing of borders between inside and out, life and death. The memoirists turned to various forms of self-injury, ranging from self-starvation to head banging and cutting, scraping or burning their skin. Tempting fate through injury eventually joined up with thoughts of suicide, both a product of inner terror and a source of pleasant relief. In *Girl Interrupted*, Susanna Kaysen recalls debating the question endlessly, until the debate itself wore her out. Ingesting fifty aspirin, she performed “a kind of self-abortion” (38).

Clear about the many varieties of suffering that attend their illness, women labeled “borderlines” show much greater ambivalence about the diagnosis itself. Some find the diagnosis useful, others see it as more of a trap than the feelings and behaviors that elicited it. No matter what their level of acceptance or ambivalence, every author felt degraded by the cultural connotations of “being borderline.” Moreover, none failed to note the proximity between “borderline behavior” and the emotions and activities of women deemed normal.

“Borderline” in this sense might be understood as a conceptual space used by women to comprehend their own bewildering psychic agony and to communicate their pain. Asking whether this makes BPD a “real” illness misses the point. It is real in the sense that a wide and contradictory collection of behaviors and expressed emotions form enough of a pattern that mental health professionals knit them together into some recognizable “it” that garners the label borderline. It is equally real in the sense that, as a diagnostic entity, it operates powerfully to shape the self-understandings and treatment options of women labeled as borderline. But a collection of symptoms, even if recognizable, does not hold up under closer scrutiny, as it fails to successfully delimit or explain experiences of mental illness. Under the pretense of a distinct psychopathology, BPD implies expertise about extremely painful psychic experiences that in reality continue to baffle experts.

Studying Borderline Personality Disorder provides critical insights into “diagnosis” as a practice of identifying “disease entities,” the effects of diagnoses once assigned to particular patients or populations, and the cultural life of a diagnosis beyond the clinical setting. The metaphoric “the borderline patient” masks the significant cultural work done by BPD. The diagnosis creates a pathologically disordered “character” that cloaks the intellectual incoherence and implicit moral viewpoint of purportedly discrete *DSM* diagnoses, in the process affirming the power of today’s biologically-oriented psychiatry. Furthermore, the diagnosis covers up boundary confusion among therapists who treat so-called “borderlines,” redirecting responsibility for therapeutic failures or ethical violations back onto the client. In all, the highly volatile “borderline” helps stabilize psychiatric knowledge, and thus authority, in the face of its own instabilities.

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## ROBERT PENN WARREN CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

*Celebrating our 25th Anniversary*

### Warren Center Celebrates 25 Years

*By Amy Gant Tan*

The Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities celebrated its 25th anniversary on September 19–20 with a program that brought together scholars from disciplines across the humanities and from institutions throughout the United States and beyond.

The program began with the premiere of a documentary film highlighting the centrality of the humanities in our world as well as the role of the Warren Center in fostering humanistic inquiry. The film features interviews with current and former faculty affiliated with the Center and with leaders in the humanities from around the country. By accessing the ideas of such a wide variety of contributors, the film contains many poignant reminders of the ways in which scholars in the humanities can serve as catalysts to unite and interpret work in diverse fields—and, of course, to help us understand what it is to be human.

The film, “Speaking for the Humanities,” was directed and edited by Roosevelt Noble, Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Vanderbilt, and produced by Mona Frederick, Executive Director of the Warren Center. A reception following the premiere provided ample time both to discuss the film’s themes and to welcome back to Vanderbilt many former Warren Center Fellows who would be participating in the events of the following day.

The panel presentations on September 20 provided further opportunities for thoughtful dialogue, as current and former Fellows, Directors, and community members gathered in Vanderbilt’s First Amendment Center to consider how discourses in the humanities have changed over the past quarter century. Four thematic panels brought together scholars from a variety of chronological, geographical, and disciplinary specialties, which provided a space for exciting and meaningful



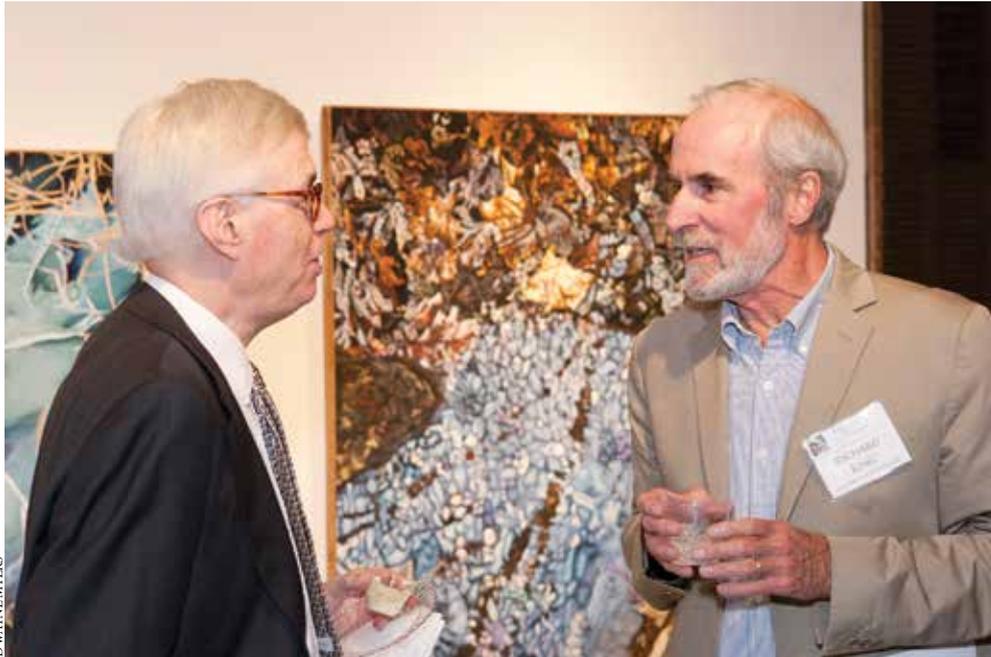
*Roosevelt Noble and Mona Frederick, who collaborated on the “Speaking for the Humanities” documentary, enjoyed a reception following the film’s premiere.*

interchanges to occur.

The first panel, moderated by Charles E. Scott (Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, Emeritus; Director of the Warren Center, 1987–1993) explored the way that conversations about gender, sexuality, and race have developed. Jean Feerick (English, John Carroll University; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 2005–2006) and Richard King (History, University of Nottingham; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 2001–2002) each began by addressing ways that changing views of race have influenced their own work; each also addressed broader views of the ways that discussions on race have influenced both historical studies and contemporary thought, including the question of what a “post-racial”

age might entail. Gilbert Herdt (Human Sexuality, California Institute of Integral Studies; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 1997–1998) considered the growing prominence of sexuality studies as a catalyst for positive change, and Benita Roth (Sociology, Binghamton University; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 2004–2005) addressed the evolution of “women’s studies” (by many names) within the university setting.

Edward Friedman (Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of Spanish and Professor of Comparative Literature; Director of the Warren Center, 2008–present) moderated the panel on theory and culture, which began with the comments of Susan Hegeman (English, University of Florida; Warren



DWAYNE MYERS



DWAYNE MYERS

*Edward Friedman and Richard King (top, l-r) and Richard Grusin and Michael Bess (bottom, l-r) were among the conference attendees.*

Center Visiting Fellow, 1996–1997) on the importance of interdisciplinarity even after the cultural turn and the cultural re-turn. Anne Morey (English, Texas A&M University; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 2010–2011) contributed a survey of the changes in theory in English departments and elsewhere over the past years, and Arkady Plotnitsky (English, Purdue University; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 1994–1995) discussed the significance of linkages between the sciences—especially biology and information theory—and the humanities. Finally, Maurice Stevens (Comparative Studies, Ohio State University; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 2008–2009) used a personal lens to consider the importance of interdisciplinarity and commented that it allows scholars to counter critiques that humanistic studies are too specialized.

The third panel, considering the roles of media and technology for the humanities, was moderated by Helmut Smith (Martha Rivers Ingram Professor of History and Professor of European Studies; Director of the Warren Center, 2005–2008). Cara Finnegan (Communication, University of Illinois; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 2006–2007) began with a visual presentation as she discussed how digital tools for photography can impact the types of questions we ask and the studies we engage in, changing the manner in which images are produced, shared, archived, and understood. Richard Grusin (English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 1999–2000) emphasized that digital tools have key social and political implications along with an impact on traditional humanistic studies, and Steve Rachman (English, Michigan State University; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 2003–2004) traced changes in interdisciplinarity and technology through both the 19th and 20th centuries.

The final panel, moderated by Paul Freedman (Chester D. Tripp Professor of History, Yale University; Director of the Warren Center, 1993–1997), considered the themes of globalization and diaspora. Deborah Cohn (Spanish, Indiana University; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 2000–2001) addressed the ways the humanities are understood by leaders in our increasingly diverse society, and she discussed human movement as part of multi-directional community formation. Nihad Farooq (English, Georgia Tech University; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 2012–2013) reminded attendees of the growing importance of networks in the current world. Sharryn Kasmir (Anthropology, Hofstra University; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 1998–1999) and Jemima Pierre (African American and Diaspora Studies, Vanderbilt University; Warren Center Visiting Fellow, 2009–2010) interrogated the terms “globalization” and “diaspora” respectively; Kasmir emphasized how discourses of globalization are being formed and shared, and Pierre warned that “diaspora” as a catch-all term risks standing both for too much and for too little.

The conference brought together a remarkably wide variety of voices to discuss the significance, value, and potential challenges of the humanities. Having taken part in such an energetic period of collaboration, participants and attendees left the conference with the challenge to continue questioning the direction of humanistic studies and the encouragement to continue pursuing their own work with renewed vigor.

The “Speaking for the Humanities” documentary and videos of panel sessions are available on the Warren Center website ([http://www.vanderbilt.edu/rpw\\_center/speaking-forthehumanities.php](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/rpw_center/speaking-forthehumanities.php)).

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*Participants enjoyed a dinner in Vanderbilt's Buttrick Hall following the conference.*



*Many Vanderbilt faculty members involved with the Warren Center attended the event, including (l-r) Christina Karageorgou-Bastea, Charlotte Pierce-Baker, and Vivien Green Fryd.*



*Participants in the “Gender, Sexuality, and Race” panel explored changes to their fields over the last 25 years. From left to right: Charles E. Scott (moderator), Jean Feerick, Gilbert Herdt, Richard King, and Benita Roth.*

## Andrew W. Mellon Foundation President Earl Lewis to Present Harry C. Howard Lecture



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION

Earl Lewis

Earl Lewis, President of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, will present this year's Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture at 4:10 p.m. on Thursday, February 20 in the Central Library's Community Room. His talk is entitled, "Three Cents, Three Senses: Philanthropy, Higher Education, and the Future." Prior to his appointment at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Lewis held faculty appointments at the University of California at Berkeley (1984-89), the University of Michigan (1989-2004), and Emory University (2004-2012). At Emory, he served as Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the Asa Griggs Candler Professor of History and African American Studies.

The author and co-editor of seven books as well as the eleven-volume *The Young Oxford History of African Americans*, Lewis has written numerous essays, articles, and reviews on different aspects of American and African American history. Among his books are the critically recognized, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class and Power in 20th Century Norfolk* (University of California Press, 1991); the award-winning *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans* (Oxford University Press,

2000); and the widely acclaimed *Love on Trial: An American Scandal in Black and White* (WW Norton, 2001). His most recent books are *The African American Urban Experience: Perspectives from the Colonial Period to the Present*, (2004), and *Defending Diversity: Affirmative Action at the University of Michigan* (2004).

Lewis has been a member of several academic and community boards, founding co-editor of the award-winning book series *American Crossroads* (University of California Press) and, since 2008, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In recent years, Lewis has championed the importance of diversifying the academy, enhancing graduate education, re-visioning the liberal arts, exploring the role of digital tools for learning, and connecting universities to their communities.

The Harry C. Howard Jr. Lecture Series was established in 1994 through the endowment of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas E. Nash Jr., and Mr. and Mrs. George Renfro, all of Asheville, North Carolina. The lecture honors Harry C. Howard Jr. (B.A., 1951) and allows the Warren Center to bring an outstanding scholar to Vanderbilt annually to deliver a lecture on a significant topic in the humanities.

**2013/2014 Faculty Fellows.**  
Pictured from left to right: Laura Carpenter, Susan Cahn, Mark Schoenfeld, Arleen Tuchman, Gregory Barz, Vanessa Beasley, Kenneth MacLeish.



ANNEMATNER

# What We Are Writing

What books are our colleagues in the College of Arts and Science writing and editing? *LETTERS* has asked Vanderbilt University's humanities and social sciences departments to share their faculty members' 2013 publications. Their answers give us a glimpse into an active and diverse scholarly community.

**Phillip I. Ackerman-Lieberman.** *The Business of Identity: Jews, Muslims, and Economic Life in Medieval Egypt.* Stanford University Press.

**Phillip I. Ackerman-Lieberman** and Rakefet J. Zalashik, co-editors. *A Jew's Best Friend? The Image of the Dog throughout Jewish History.* Sussex Academic Press.

**Scott F. Aikin and Robert B. Talisse.** *Why We Argue (And How We Should): A Guide to Political Disagreement.* Routledge.

**Richard J. M. Blackett.** *Making Freedom: The Underground Railroad and the Politics of Slavery.* University of North Carolina Press.

**Robert Ford Campany,** Jessey J.C. Choo, Yang Lu, and Wendy Swartz, co-editors. *Early Medieval China: A Sourcebook.* Columbia University Press.

**Lauren R. Clay.** *Stagestruck: The Business of Theater in Eighteenth-Century France and Its Colonies.* Cornell University Press.

**Lenn E. Goodman** and D. Gregory Caramenico. *Coming to Mind: The Soul and Its Body.* University of Chicago Press.

**Max L. Goldman,** Rebecca F. Kennedy, and C. Sydnor Roy, co-editors. *Race and Ethnicity in the Classical World: An Anthology of Primary Sources in Translation.* Hackett Publishing Company.

**Sam B. Girgus.** *Clint Eastwood's America.* Polity.

**Sam B. Girgus,** and Peter Bailey, co-editors. *A Companion to Woody Allen.* Wiley-Blackwell.

**Lisa Guenther.** *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and its Afterlives.* University of Minnesota Press.

**Joel F. Harrington.** *The Faithful Executioner: Life and Death, Honor and Shame in the Turbulent Sixteenth Century.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

**Lutz Koepnick,** Roger F. Cook, Kristin Kopp, and Brad Prager, co-editors. *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema.* Intellect.

**Vera M. Kutzinski** and Ottmar Ette, co-editors and translators. Alexander von Humboldt *Views of Cordilleras and the Monuments of the Indigenous Peoples of the New Continent. A Critical Edition.* University of Chicago Press.

**Amy-Jill Levine** and Warren Carter. *The New Testament: Methods and Meanings.* Abingdon Press.

**Peter Lorge,** editor. *Debating War in Chinese History.* Brill.

**Kenneth T. MacLeish.** *Making War at Fort Hood: Life and Uncertainty in a Military Community.* Princeton University Press.

**Larry May.** *Limiting Leviathan: Hobbes on Law and International Affairs.* Oxford University Press.

**Thomas A. J. McGinn,** editor. *Obligations in Roman Law: Past, Present, and Future.* University of Michigan Press.

**Kevin D. Murphy** and Sally O'Driscoll, co-editors. *Studies in Ephemera: Text and Image in Eighteenth-Century Print.* Bucknell University Press.

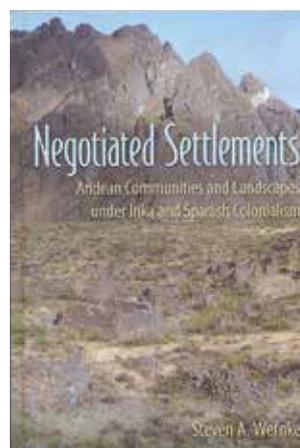
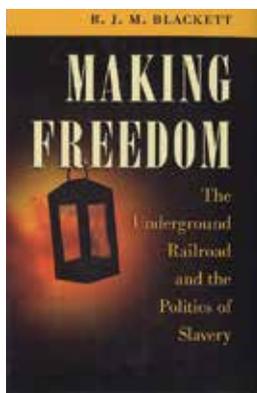
**Dieter Sevin and Christoph Zeller,** co-editors. *Heinrich von Kleist: Perspektiven der Forschung.* Walter de Gruyter.

**Paul Stob.** *William James and the Art of Popular Statement.* Michigan State University Press.

**Benigno Trigo,** editor. *Kristeva's Fiction.* SUNY Press.

**Meike G. Werner,** editor. *Eduard Berend und Heinrich Meyer Briefwechsel, 1938–1972.* Wallstein.

**Steven A. Wernke.** *Negotiated Settlements: Andean Communities and Landscapes under Inca and Spanish Colonialism.* University Press of Florida.



## 2013/2014 Warren Center Graduate Student Fellows Lecture Series

**N**ow in its eighth year, the Warren Center's annual Graduate Student Fellows Program currently sponsors seven outstanding Vanderbilt graduate students in the humanities and qualitative social sciences in a year-long fellowship program. These awards are designed to support innovation and excellence in graduate student research and allow the students a service-free year of support to enable full-time work on the dissertation. It is expected that students who receive this award will complete the dissertation during the fellowship term. Additionally, one graduate student from Queen's University in Belfast is selected to participate in the Graduate Student Fellows Program.

As part of their affiliation with the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, Fellows are integrated into the center's interdisciplinary scholarly community through participation in a weekly seminar, occasional seminars with visiting speakers, and special events. The capstone of the fellowship is the delivery of a public lecture during the spring term. The Graduate Student Fellows Lecture Series is an intellectually invigorating time at the Warren Center and we encourage you to plan to attend one or more of these talks by these outstanding young scholars.

Following is the schedule for this year's talks which **will all take place at 4:10 p.m. in the Warren Center's conference room unless indicated otherwise.**



*Pictured from left to right: Whitney N. Laster, Aubrey K. Porterfield, Emily M. August, Jamie E. Shenton, John T. Maddox, Aoife Laughlin, Paul C. Morrow, Ansley L Quiros.*

Thursday, March 13

**Jamie E. Shenton**

*Department of Anthropology*

“Adolescence and Aspirations: Indigenous Youth on the Edge of Modernity in the Ecuadorian Amazon”

Thursday, March 20

**Whitney N. Laster**

*Department of Sociology*

“Racial Hierarchy and Liminality in South Africa: A Case Study of Coloureds’ Social Location, Attitudes, and Experiences”

Friday, March 21

**Ansley L. Quiros**

*Department of History*

“‘The Devil and Jesus in Americus, Georgia’: Lived Theology in the Civil Rights Movement in Americus, GA, 1942–1978”

Wednesday, March 26

**Aubrey K. Porterfield**, Elizabeth Fleming Fellow

*Department of English*

“Modernism’s Choreographies of Stillness: Space, Race, and Contested Humanness in Twentieth-Century Fiction”

Friday, April 4

**John T. Maddox**, Joe and Mary Harper Fellow

*Department of Spanish and Portuguese*

“A Bigger Black Atlantic: Manuel Zapata Olivella, a Precursor to Paul Gilroy”

Wednesday, April 9

**Emily M. August**, American Studies Fellow

*Department of English*

“Cadaver Poetics: The Reinvention of the Body in the Nineteenth Century”

Monday, April 14  
3:10 p.m.

**Aoife Laughlin**

*School of History, Queens University (Belfast)*

“Rebels, Revolutionaries, and the Right to Self-Government: American Perceptions on the Caste War of Yucatán and the European Revolutions of 1848”

Tuesday, April 29

**Paul C. Morrow**, George J. Graham Jr. Fellow

*Department of Philosophy*

“Social Norms in the Theory of Genocide and Mass Atrocity”

## Spring 2014 Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities Seminars

*The following is a list of seminars and reading groups that will be hosted by the Warren Center in the spring semester. For more detailed information please contact the seminar coordinators or the Warren Center.*

**18th-/19th-Century Colloquium:** The colloquium brings together faculty, graduate students, and visiting scholars to explore ground-breaking scholarship on the arts, cultures, and histories of the 18th- and 19th-centuries. While loosely focused around British culture, the group also invites scholars from other linguistic and geographic fields to share work and join in the discussion. Seminar Coordinators: Rachel Teukolsky (English) [rachel.teukolsky@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:rachel.teukolsky@vanderbilt.edu), Scott Juengel (English) [scott.juengel@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:scott.juengel@vanderbilt.edu), and Humberto Garcia (English) [humberto.garcia@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:humberto.garcia@vanderbilt.edu).

**Behind Bars: The Complex Politics of Incarceration:** This seminar seeks to have conversations with scholars in a wide range of fields and disciplines about a major social and political concern in the twenty-first century: the prison industrial complex. Through an examination of critical race and queer theory, transnational feminisms, and the work of grassroots activist organizations, the seminar will engage discourses of prison reform and prison abolition as two distinct methodologies that attempt to address the same pervasive social problem. Reading scholarly work as well as the work produced by activists, we hope to explore how the academy can engage these issues productively and materially. Seminar coordinators: Alex Chambers (philosophy) [alexandra.e.chambers@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:alexandra.e.chambers@vanderbilt.edu) and Tatiana McInnis (English) [tatiana.d.mcinnis@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:tatiana.d.mcinnis@vanderbilt.edu).

**Brazilian Studies Reading Group:** This graduate student led seminar provides a forum for the discussion of contemporary Brazilian topics. Each semester the group will facilitate interdisciplinary dialogues with precirculated readings, discuss works-in-progress by graduate students and faculty, and invite recognized scholars to present new work. We will consider issues in the context of the recent protest movements, which began in São Paulo as a response to increased bus fares, before spreading through most urban centers across the country. Topics for discussion may include traditional power structures, social movements, access to equal education, work-

ers' rights, political corruption, race relations, and income disparity. Meetings and lectures will sharpen our analyses and understanding of contemporary Brazilian problems and the issues facing its citizens. Seminar coordinators: Ashley Larson (Latin American Studies) [ashley.d.larson@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:ashley.d.larson@vanderbilt.edu), Max Pendergraph (history) [joseph.m.pendergraph@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:joseph.m.pendergraph@vanderbilt.edu), and Guilherme Russo (political science) [guilherme.russo@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:guilherme.russo@vanderbilt.edu).

**Circum-Atlantic Studies Seminar:** This group reads and treats scholarship that is interdisciplinary in nature, focuses on at least two of the following regions—Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, and North America—and treats some aspect of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, and/or postcolonialism. Seminar coordinators: Celso Castilho (history) [celso.t.castilho@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:celso.t.castilho@vanderbilt.edu) and Jane Landers (history) [jane.landiers@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:jane.landiers@vanderbilt.edu).

**Digital Humanities Discussion Group:** The Digital Humanities seminar brings together colleagues from across the university who are interested in issues related to this area of study. The seminar participants will explore theories, practices, and methodologies of DH and explore ways to best support this type of work on our campus. Seminar coordinators: Lynn Ramey (French) [lynn.ramey@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:lynn.ramey@vanderbilt.edu) and Mona Frederick (Warren Center) [mona.frederick@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:mona.frederick@vanderbilt.edu).

**Exploring Boundaries: Race and Ethnicity in the 21st-Century United States:** How racial and ethnic boundaries continue to shift and transform is an exciting and important topic of intellectual pursuit for scholars of all disciplines. This year-long seminar is designed to facilitate discussion, debate, and collaboration among individuals across campus who are interested in contemporary issues of race and ethnicity. At each of the monthly meetings, participants will bridge theory with practice, engaging with foundational texts in the field as well as with the work of their peers and that of invited speakers. Thematic topics of discussion will include methodological issues in studying race, heterogeneity within racial and pan-ethnic groups, and contemporary social

problems. Seminar coordinators: Samantha Perez (sociology) [samantha.l.perez@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:samantha.l.perez@vanderbilt.edu) and Courtney Thomas (sociology) [courtney.s.thomas@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:courtney.s.thomas@vanderbilt.edu).

**Film Theory & Visual Culture Seminar:** This seminar aims to foster dialogue among faculty and graduate students across campus working in film, visual culture, art history, literature, and cultural studies interested in theories of the image, philosophies of perception, aesthetic and critical theory, media histories, and the history of vision. The group will meet monthly to discuss readings, share work, and engage the research of invited scholars. Seminar coordinators: Jennifer Fay (film studies and English) [jennifer.m.fay@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:jennifer.m.fay@vanderbilt.edu), James McFarland (German) [james.mcfarland@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:james.mcfarland@vanderbilt.edu), and Paul Young (film studies and English) [paul.d.young@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:paul.d.young@vanderbilt.edu).

**Gender and Sexuality Seminar:** This seminar provides an interdisciplinary forum for the development of critical perspectives on gender and sexuality. The seminar examines how gender and sexuality shape human experience within and across cultures, in different time periods, and as part of social practice. Participants will choose the format with an aim toward balancing new scholarship by graduate students and established scholars, as well as exploring topics of particular interest to the group. Seminar coordinator: Katherine Crawford (women's & gender studies and history) [katherine.b.crawford@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:katherine.b.crawford@vanderbilt.edu).

**Geographic Imaginations and the Spatial Humanities:** The spatial humanities, extending from the spatial turn in geographic studies and overlapping with digital humanities, were born of the promise of innovative humanities research that reaches beyond demonstrative mapmaking to spatial analysis of humanities data. Scholars have used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to document historic and literary action through space and time, map linguistic and cultural relationships, and model or predict behavior based on specific parameters. This seminar will collaboratively explore the historical contexts and theories of the spatial turn, examine specific case studies

## 2013/2014 Warren Center Seminars (cont.)

of spatially-oriented humanities research, and practice mapping our own data with existing spatial technologies. The seminar will include a monthly reading group and complementary workshops, along with visits from two scholars in the field of spatial humanities. Seminar coordinators: Courtney Campbell (history) courtney.j.campbell.1@vanderbilt.edu, Beth Koontz (anthropology) beth.koontz@vanderbilt.edu, and Scotti Norman (anthropology) scotti.m.norman@vanderbilt.edu.

**Group for Pre-modern Cultural Studies:** The purpose of the group is to serve as a forum for those with interests in pre-modern studies, including not only history, but also language and literature, chiefly, though not exclusively, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin, as well as music, art, and culture. The group meets monthly to discuss ongoing research by a faculty member, recent publications in the field, or the work of a visiting scholar. Seminar coordinator: Bill Caferro (history) william.p.caferro@vanderbilt.edu and Leah Marcus (English) l.marcus@vanderbilt.edu.

**Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life:** The Warren Center and the American Studies Program are co-sponsoring this group to provide opportunities for exchange among faculty members and graduate students who are interested in or who are currently involved in projects that engage public scholarship. Vanderbilt is a member of the national organization, "Imagining America," a consortium of colleges and universities committed to public scholarship in the arts, humanities, and design. Seminar coordinators: Teresa Goddu (American Studies) teresa.a.goddu@vanderbilt.edu and Mona Frederick (Warren Center) mona.frederick@vanderbilt.edu.

**Literature and Law Seminar:** This reading group will meet to discuss current approaches, new challenges, and new possibilities that are offered to legal and literary scholars when they use insights from both fields to illuminate

their work. The seminar welcomes anyone interested in the many topics now addressed in this field, including the use of obscenity laws to regulate creative work, the representation of law in literature, law as literature, the application of literary methods to legal texts, the challenges of constructing "characters" appropriate to literary and legal settings, and the revitalization of law through reference to humanistic texts and approaches. Seminar coordinator: Robert Barsky (French and Italian) robert.barsky@vanderbilt.edu.

**Material Culture in Context:** This new seminar explores objects and materiality from multiple perspectives. It will examine the meanings attached to objects by the people who made and used them, partially through looking at the contexts (cultural, social, historical, spatial) in which objects appear. Participants will also explore how objects are transferred through space and time. This seminar should be of special interest to specialists in archaeology, anthropology, sociology, history, and history of art, as well as cultural and media studies, and philosophy. Seminar coordinators: Beth Conklin (anthropology) beth.a.conklin@vanderbilt.edu and Mireille Lee (history of art and classical studies) mireille.lee@vanderbilt.edu.

**Mexican Studies Seminar:** The goal of this group is to raise the profile of research related to Mexico on the Vanderbilt campus and support members' individual scholarly endeavors regarding this important nation bordering the United States. The group brings together faculty and graduate students from history, political science, literature, sociology, art, anthropology, music, and Latin American studies. At monthly meetings the group will discuss work-in-progress authored by members and invited scholars from beyond Vanderbilt. Seminar coordinators: Helena Simonett (Latin American Studies) helena.simonett@vanderbilt.edu and Edward Wright-Rios (history) edward.wright-rios@vanderbilt.edu.

## THE ROBERT PENN WARREN CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

### Staff Changes

The Warren Center warmly welcomes Terry Tripp, our new activities coordinator. Terry comes to us from the Vanderbilt Arts and Science Dean's Office, where she worked with Deans Campbell, Jones, and McIntire. We are excited to have Terry join the staff at the Warren Center.

### Warren Center Staff

Edward H. Friedman, *Director*  
Mona C. Frederick, *Executive Director*  
Allison J. Thompson, *Seminar Coordinator*  
Terry Tripp, *Activities Coordinator*  
Tyler C. Bittner, *LETTERS Editor*  
Amy Gant Tan, *HASTAC Scholar*

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Nashville, Tennessee 37235-1534.  
(615) 343-6060, Fax (615) 343-2248.

**For a listing of Warren Center programs and activities, please contact the above address or visit our website at [www.vanderbilt.edu/rpw\\_center](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/rpw_center).**

### Statement of Purpose

Established under the sponsorship of the College of Arts and Science in 1987 and named the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities in 1989 in honor of Robert Penn Warren, Vanderbilt alumnus class of 1925, the Center promotes interdisciplinary research and study in the humanities, social sciences, and, when appropriate, natural sciences. Members of the Vanderbilt community representing a wide variety of specializations take part in the Warren Center's programs, which are designed to intensify and increase interdisciplinary discussion of academic, social, and cultural issues.

*Photos: Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Dwayne Myers, Anne Rayner, and Susan Urmey.*

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