INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND SERIALITY (FRIDAY PLENARY)

MICHAEL COHEN, University of California, Los Angeles

Associate Professor Michael Cohen teaches at UCLA, where his research and teaching focuses on nineteenth-century poetry, primarily in the United States, but also across the broader English-speaking world. Professor Cohen examines the ways that people used poems: the means by which they received and circulated them (via books, broadsides, letters, oral recitation, and so on), the reading practices that made up their encounters with them (memorization, group reading, singing), and the theories of genre and media that informed the way they understood poems.

STATEMENT ABOUT PROJECT: I am at work on a project entitled "Learning in Verse," which is an institutional history of poetry as a scholastic subject in the American public school system. I focus on the hundred years between 1840 and 1940, during which time schooling in the U.S. transformed from a series of discrete, isolated, largely non-professional and non-coordinated endeavors, through which few people passed, to an institutionalized, interconnected, compulsory system that captured most of the child population in a rapidly-expanding nation. The discipline of English was crucial to this transformation, and the study of poetry crucial to the rise of English.

"Seriality" in this context functions somewhat differently from the way we may customarily think of it. Rather than considering seriality as a kind of leading-edge cyclicality that works through disaggregation (embodied in serial publication, for example), seriality in the public school system is a kind of recurrent return that works through a thickening or accumulation over long stretches of time, embodied especially in the school's most potent institutional form, the curriculum. Schools and curricula are slow moving by design, and are meant to resist change. Thus, year after year, students learn the same things as students before them have, and as those after them will. School systems, through the interconnection of their parts, transmit a body of learning repeatedly, building particular forms of knowledge--and practices of reading--among what eventually amounts to generations of people, who read the same texts, stretched over lengthening periods of time. Curricula are modes of suspension, whereby texts reach readers who were never the intended recipients of authors who generally wrote in vastly different times and places, with intentions that were usually not expressly pedagogical. In some cases, certain titles circulated very widely within American schools, but nowhere else. When a text entered a curriculum, then, it moved into a kind of suspended animation. Always new to new readers, the literary curriculum re-contextualized old works within an institutional setting that made them meaningful in new ways.

After around 1880, I argue, students became the single largest audience for poetry in the U.S., and the school became the primary institution in which readers first encountered and understood poetry, and by extension, literariness more generally. This shift dramatically transformed the ordinary experiences of literature, reading, and writing, with effects that continue to reverberate today.

MIKE CRONIN, Boston College Ireland

Professor Mike Cronin has been the Academic Director of Boston College Ireland since 2005. He has published widely on various aspects of Irish history, and is a renowned scholar in the area of sport. He is a regular media commentator on aspects of Irish and sporting history. While at BC, Professor Cronin has developed a series of major public history projects based around Irish topics including the 2008-12 GAA Oral History Project, and since 2013, the major online repository and real time history project for the Irish Decade of Centenaries, Century Ireland.

KATE FLINT, University of Southern California

Kate Flint is Provost Professor of Art History and English at the University of Southern California. Her research and teaching is both interdisciplinary and transatlantic. Her areas of specialization include Victorian and early twentieth-century cultural, literary, and visual history; and the history of photography from its inception to now. Her most recent book, *Flash! Photography, Writing, and Surprising Illumination* has just been published by OUP, and she's working on a project that looks at Victorian concerns about making close, attentive observations of the ordinary and everyday, and how contemporary visual artists have taken up these emphases in their own, environmentally self-conscious work.

STATEMENT ABOUT PROJECT: My comments will speak to one particular work in progress: an essay on Robert Dudley's paintings of the Atlantic Cable. The laying of the transatlantic cable was an effort to 'establish a new material link between the Old World and the New' – to quote journalist W. H. Russell in *The Atlantic Telegraph* (1865). The artist Robert Charles Dudley was on the 1865 *Great Eastern* cable expedition, and made a series of over 60 watercolors commemorating this ultimately unsuccessful attempt. 24 of the watercolors were turned into lithographs illustrating *The Atlantic Telegraph*. I ask how visual representation could both do justice to the labor and the immense geographic scale involved, and also capture the conceptual concerns of telegraphic transmission. In particular, I explore how one series of paintings conveys a particular narrative of effort and failure. The gaps and discontinuities created by this visual sequence speak both to the uncertainty of knowing what was happening beneath the water's surface, and to the uncertainties inherent in early cable transmission – despite the claims of transnational connectedness that were made for it. The essay considers the productive tension between Russell's verbal narrative, which, focusing on the material challenge involved in transporting and sinking the thick ropes of gutta percha, emphasized manufacture and technology, and Dudley's images, which stress the role of human activity pitted against the vast and unpredictable Atlantic. Yet the very fact of depicting the cable laying in a series of connected but discrete images also draws attention to role of interference in network topology, and in the sending of telegraphic messages themselves.

The essay, moreover, is part of a series in a different sense: one that draws attention to the importance of a sequence of events around one particular collaborative research project: "Scrambled Messages." Jointly run by King's College London and the Courtauld Institute, this project has asked how the transatlantic telegraph entered the C19th public imagination – and has been very receptive to transatlantic input! See http://www.scrambledmessages.ac.uk/

ANNA GIBSON, Duquesne University

Assistant Professor Anna Gibson teaches nineteenth-century British literature at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Her research focuses on narrative, history of the novel, and Victorian science. Her current book project examines how the formal features of Victorian novels shaped new ways of thinking about human psychology. She is also interested in digital scholarship and pedagogy and is the director of the Digital Dickens Notes Project (dickensnotes.com), which is digitizing and exploring the working notes Charles Dickens kept as he wrote his novels.

STATEMENT ABOUT PROJECT: The Digital Dickens Notes Project explores Charles Dickens's Working Notes--pages on which he wrote ideas, plans, and memos while he was writing--in order to reveal how his novels developed during their serial composition. Directed by Anna Gibson (Duquesne University) with co-principal investigator Adam Grener(Victoria University of Wellington, NZ), the DDNP (http://dickensnotes.com) is in its early stages of development. By presenting color digitizations and transcriptions of these manuscripts in interaction with the novels to which they refer, the DDNP will interpret the Notes as laboratories of experimentation rather than mere blueprints for the novels. Throughout his extended writing process, Dickens used these pages to test out combinations of characters and events. He asked himself questions, returned to answer them, and changed his mind in the process of writing—all in different colored inks not visible in the extant black-and-white facsimile print edition (Stone 1987). Our initial research using the notes to *Our Mutual Friend* reveals the importance of reading these temporal layers in the Notes as an essential facet of Dickens's serial form. The DDNP will provide tools—including scholarly introductions, annotations, pedagogical resources, and integration of notes and novel text—for users to explore and interpret these notes as interactive serial documents. It aims to create new methodologies and technologies within digital humanities for engaging the temporal dynamics of serial form.

MARLENE TROMP, University of California, Santa Cruz

Marlene Tromp is Campus Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor at the University of California Santa Cruz and Professor of Literature and Critical Race and Ethnicity Studies. Her work connects contemporary issues to cultural history with a focus on social justice. She is the author of books on Spiritualism, domestic violence, sensation fiction and has edited volumes on xenophobia, freak shows, Mary Braddon, and economics. She has new projects on the Titanic and is at work on a new book, *Intimate Murder: Sex and Death in Nineteenth Century Britain*.

STATEMENT ABOUT PROJECT: The phrase, "serial killer," was first used in 1975, long after we began fashioning the modern construct around figures like Jack the Ripper. Several Victorian murderers fit our modern definition of serial killer, and the concept of seriality was well understood by the public. However, the term was not applied to crime during the nineteenth century. Seriality instead described music festival tickets[i] (1859), cattle show catalogues (1865)[ii], visual art works (1873)[iii], as well as novels. Though seriality often signaled a significant success—well-received works of art, a run of performances—in crime, it indexed (and continues to index) a failure. These failures of both the criminal justice system and, more broadly, the culture to prevent or detect crime typically represent a failure even to recognize the first item in a series.

It is at the point of this very failure that an interdisciplinary approach proves critical. I will briefly discuss the cases of both Sarah Chesham and Edward Pritchard, two very different Victorian poisoners. Both committed murder and remained undetected, a fact that permitted them to murder again. These repeated acts of violence exposed fissures in the cultural architecture and exploring these points can provide insight into social tensions. Meaningful interruption of serial murder, in the nineteenth-century as well as today, requires an interdisciplinary approach. We must bring to bear not only tools like forensic science, but also careful narrative and cultural analysis—or risk fostering violence by failing to understand those crimes that are likely to remain culturally invisible.

[i] "Bradford Musical Festival." *The Times* (London, England), Saturday, Aug 27, 1859; pg. 7; Issue 23396.
[ii] "Smithfield Club Cattle Show." *The Times* (London, England), Thursday, Dec 13, 1866; pg. 8; Issue 25680.
[iii] Turner's Work For The Engravers. *The Times* (London, England), Monday, Mar 24, 1873; pg. 12; Issue 27645. (2231 words)

ALEX WOLOCH, Stanford University

Professor Alex Woloch is Chair of the English Department at Stanford University, where he teaches and writes about literary criticism, narrative theory, the history of the novel, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature. He is the author of *The One vs. The Many*, which reestablishes the centrality of characterization — the fictional representation of human beings — within narrative poetics. His current projects include a book in progress, provisionally entitled *Partial Representation*, which will consider the complicated relationship between realism and form in a variety of media, genres and texts