DEAN’S WELCOME

Welcome to the first newsletter from the School of Cultural Studies and Humanities. I hope you enjoy updates on the range of activities undertaken by colleagues and students, and I encourage you to share our successes with a broader audience.

The articles contained in this edition are testament to how well students and staff are meeting the challenges of the pandemic to produce outstanding work across English, Creative Writing, History and Media. We are immensely proud of the way everyone has adapted in order to continue learning, teaching and research, and we do not underestimate how hard that has been and continues to be. We are there to support you and to encourage one another, and we will get through this.

Finally, I wish everyone a peaceful and relaxing break over the Christmas period, with the hope that 2021 will bring less disruptive times.

Prof Andrew Cooper

STUDENT FOCUS – LEEDS LOVE LETTERS


Ali writes: ‘Back in February I started a non-profit “social experiment”. I wrote letters for strangers, filled with encouragement and positivity to brighten their day and to remind them they are worth it. It began as a way for me to feel better, I have no shame in admitting. I would write words for someone that I wanted to hear myself. Finding a stray letter addressed to you from some mystical stranger feels like the universe has your back, that things aren’t all that bad. The more I wrote, the more cathartic the release. I was motivated by the promise that whoever you are and whatever state of mind you’re in, finding a letter telling you you’re loved could make the world of difference. It could make someone’s day, or it could save a life. Letter writing is a brilliant way to not only provide a remedy for loneliness but also to resuscitate a fading tradition and address feelings of loneliness, especially in this age of virtual communication and technology.’

‘As a “writing aficionado”, I urge you to try writing your own letter of love. It can be addressed to a friend, left for a stranger or even for yourself. The act of writing is not only therapeutic, but it could provide some clarity on some unaddressed issues you’re trying to cope with. Just try it, trust me. You might make a hobby out of it.’

You can read Ali’s full blog here: https://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/blogs/school-of-cultural-studies-and-humanities/2020/06/leeds-love-letters/

ALUMNI FOCUS – Q&A WITH JESSICA ALLEN

What course did you study?
BA (Hons) Media Communication Cultures

What has been your career progression since graduating?
Just before I graduated my family came to visit me for brunch. The topic of conversation went on to university and I couldn’t stop talking about my modules and passion for everything I’d learned. Little did I know, my mum’s new fiancé owned a small media company doing digital asset management and I was basically giving him my resume. Just a few weeks after that conversation he contacted me to offer an internship. At first, I felt reluctant to accept family help, yet I decided it made sense, it was a job right out of uni and that felt great. I jumped into that role and began helping to redesign the website, graphics and all things marketing. I loved the job, yet, after studying media communication cultures I knew I wanted to do something that had a positive contribution to the world, so, I began to question what else I could do.

After looking at jobs online and feeling a little helpless I spoke to someone who mentioned they worked for a
company that had just launched some new online maths resources. “Maths” I laughed; I really can't even do my times tables. She mentioned there was a part-time temp role going to help with customer service. It wasn't the dream marketing role I’d hoped for, but she did say they had a marketing job that might be up in a few weeks. I decided the risk was worth it and I handed in my resignation to my internship. I wouldn't get the security I had but I knew that right after uni is the best time to move around and find the right job for the future. After a few weeks of working non-stop customer service the time came for me to interview for the marketing role.

I’d rehearsed my entire interview script and was playing it in my head as I sat down. He asked my “So Jess, why do you want to work here?” It was the perfect question and I just began on my entire script about all the reasons I loved working in education. I left out the part where I'd loved working in education. I left out the part where I'd loved working in education. I left out the part where I'd loved working in education. I left out the part where I'd loved working in education. I left out the part where I'd loved working in education. I left out the part where I'd loved working in education. I left out the part where I'd loved working in education.

I had the job and the woman I interviewed with also got the job, win-win. I now work as a marketing assistant, it's beyond what I ever dreamed of what life could be like doing pretty much everything I did at my internship and every day I get to say I work for education.

I love everyone I work with; I love my job title but most of all I love that I took the risk to work somewhere that means something to me because every day I get to say I work for education.

How did Leeds Beckett equip you for life in this role?
Leeds Beckett equipped me for a role in marketing in so many ways. From the inspirational teachers that would always be impressed at my logos and websites to the modules themselves that allowed me to explore many different career paths. When I started university, I knew I loved media, but I truly didn’t know what topic I wanted to study. I began to realise in the final year when I did my racism module. We had to build a campaign that combatted racism and me and Megan, my classmate, created “End Beauty Bias”. We built an entire brand to go with our campaign and I ended up creating a logo and a website. After we’d presented to our teacher Dan, he spoke to someone in a Leeds based marketing agency about our campaign and if it could be developed further. Megan and I couldn’t believe the opportunity and we went to the marketing agency who said they thought the campaign would be great for The Body Shop. It was this moment I realised that I was truly proud, happy and excited in the work I was doing. The agency had all these post-it notes on the wall with brand names written everywhere, they had magazines laid on the table and there was this buzz. Okay, so maybe my dream wasn’t the specific topic of makeup, but the meaning behind our campaign truly was. From there I set out to find a marketing role that made me feel as if I was making a positive impact on the world.

What did you enjoy most about your time studying in the School of Cultural Studies and Humanities?
In my last year, I began to panic and feel scared, not because I was heading into a world of work but because I truly didn’t want to leave Leeds Beckett. Having the opportunity to study Media Communication Cultures truly opened my eyes. I began to think of things in a different way and even remember theorists’ names.

I was immersed in this world of questioning the media and I was terrified that leaving university would mean that all the incredible learning would stop. That was my absolute favourite thing about my course, I never wanted to stop learning and I never knew what I was about to learn. Each module would be fascinating in a different way and open my eyes to something new. While I certainly don’t learn as much now as I did when I was in uni, I have carefully preserved my lecture notes and browse through them regularly, it sends me back to that place of questioning, learning and developing for the greater good.

PARIS TRIP 2020

Up until very recently, the School has prided itself on organising regular student trips abroad, every two years. Earlier this year, Emily Zobel Marshall, Rachel Rich and Gaspard Pelurson took 28 students on a Cultural Studies three-day trip to Paris.

They visited the Palace of Versailles, Sacré-Cœur Basilica and Les Invalides, among other memorable cultural sites. A wonderful time was had by all – the weather was bright and cold, and the students were full of energy for both partying and sight-seeing.

Here’s hoping that normal service will resume when the pandemic is over and students will be able to enjoy the opportunity again!

CSH RECOMMENDS…
If you need some reading or viewing inspiration over the upcoming Christmas break, how about trying some of these:

- The Godfather – a classic!
- Girl, Woman, Other - Bernadine Evaristo – a fantastic book, 2019 Booker prize winner and loved by a wide variety of readers
- Richard Powers - The Overstory – an ecological story in which trees are the main protagonists
- Educated - Tara Westover – uplifting memoir about growing up in a strict Mormon family
- Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker (2020) (Netflix series)
- The Trial of the Chicago 7 (2020) (Netflix series)
SCHOOL EVENTS - BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The School of Cultural Studies and Humanities organised a Black History Month programme of events throughout October.

An Interview with journalist and author Gary Younge and Dr Emily Zobel Marshall.

Watch the online event here.

The racialization of gratitude in the nineteenth century, and beyond.

Watch the online event here.

Tupac Shakur and the embodiment of black history.

Watch the online event here.

Caribbean and Black British writing and the publishing industry: In conversation with Leeds-based publishers of Caribbean fiction and poetry, Peepal Tree Press.

Watch the online event here.

MEDIA FOCUS

During the summer, Dr Dan Kilvington co-created and launched the Talking Race podcast series with Vini Lander, Professor of Race and Education and Director of the Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality (CRED) in the Carnegie School of Education.

The series covered a range of topics including Critical Race Theory, and racism in children's literature, education, sport and cyberspace. The show featured an array of guests including Kehinde Andrews, Jessie Daniels and David Gillborn. In episode 3, Dr Emily Zobel Marshall, of CSH, stepped in as guest host to discuss ‘race’ and children’s literature with Darren Chetty and Lisa Stephenson.

The podcast, funded by CRED, is a valuable resource for students, academics, researchers, industry professionals and activists with an interest in ‘race’ and how racism operates across institutions and systems. The podcast was highlighted by the Yorkshire Post in July: https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/people/we-cant-be-not-racist-we-have-be-anti-racist-new-podcast-

exploring-racism-hopes-inspire-positive-change-2923734

You can listen to the podcasts via the following links:

Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/episode/0kUYE130k2mH4Pw95JUv4?si=1YqTmFvTSqC5vFN1RrhgA

Apple: https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/talking-race/id1523519574

Series 2 will be released in February 2021.

ENGLISH FOCUS

Professor Susan Watkins gave the lead academic talk at the Cosmia Festival of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Speculative Fiction in conjunction with the University of Huddersfield on 29 October 2020. Prof Watkins’s talk, ‘It’s the End of the World as We Know It, But Does That Really Matter? Contemporary Women’s Post-Apocalyptic Fiction’, argued that contemporary women’s post-apocalyptic fiction shows us ways to revise and transform our society, culture and literature after an apocalyptic event. You can view the talk here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0iz_NOE5wvk

HISTORY FOCUS

Dr Henry Irving is running a digital event on hidden air raid shelters in Leeds as part of the national Heritage Open Day programme. The event, in collaboration with a local heritage artist, will give visitors the opportunity to explore a 3D model of a Leeds ‘trench’ shelter. The council built 31 of these structures at the beginning of the war, including in Beckett Park and on Woodhouse Moor. The shelters were bricked up at the end of the war and most remain to this day. Henry’s event was recently featured by the Yorkshire Post and is the subject of a blog for the Institute of Historical Research: https://blog.history.ac.uk/2020/09/the-hidden-shelter-local-and-national-histories-of-the-second-world-war/

The event forms part of a wider research project on civil defence and provides the foundations for the module ‘Public History Project’, which will give students the opportunity to create their own digital resources commemorating the 1941 Leeds Blitz.

COMPETITION TIME!

Your course is an integral part of the school of Cultural Studies and Humanities but what does Cultural Studies mean to you?

Submit a blog post style response to this question for a chance for it to be published on the school website and win a £20 National book token. Entries to be submitted to CSHinbox@leedsbeckett.ac.uk by the closing date of 31st January 2020. Terms and conditions apply.