January 2015

Professor John Howard Birss, Jr. Memorial Series – Native Son by Richard Wright

JANUARY 30, 2015 8:41 PM
By Christine S. Fagan Collection Management Librarian

A Celebration of the 75th Anniversary of Native Son by Richard Wright

Each year Roger Williams University celebrates a significant anniversary of the publication of a great work of literature, starting in 2001 with the 150th anniversary of Herman Melville’s Moby Dick and continuing in 2015 with the 75th anniversary of Richard Wright’s Native Son. When Native Son was published in 1940 it was one of the first major novels about African-Americans written by an African-American. This protest novel was an immediate bestseller and chosen as a Book-of-the-Month Club selection. Still, it was a controversial work banned by many public high schools and libraries throughout the United States. The novel was adapted for the stage several times with the initial production directed by Orson Welles on Broadway.

When Native Son was selected in 2014 the Birss Committee could not have predicted how reflective it would be of the current explosion of racial tension within our society. This tragic novel remains a moving and accurate testimony of the plight of the African-American man in the United States. While strides toward equality have been made since the 1930s, there remains a significant socio-economic divide between white and black America. Racial profiling and unfair treatment of African-Americans still occurs within the criminal justice system.

Bigger Thomas, the protagonist in Native Son, commits two murders and is captured, imprisoned, tried and sentenced to death. The irony of the story is that while it unfolds, despite the horror of the crimes committed, the reader comes to understand the forces of society that fuel the anger causing Bigger to commit these murders. In the end one wonders who is really at fault — Bigger Thomas or American society.

Today one wonders who is really at fault in two recent cases involving the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in New York City — the suspects or the police officers. In the face of these dilemmas and the current racial tension in our society, Richard Wright’s Native Son continues to tell us what it is like to grow up black, poor and angry in America. The fact that this story remains so relevant is an indication of how far we still have to go to achieve racial equality in America.

Events & Exhibition
Library Exhibition
February 1 – March 31, 2015
“Richard Wright’s Native Son: Then and Now”
Prepared by

Professor Christine S. Fagan Collection Management Librarian, Roger Williams University
Sponsored by The Professor John Howard Birss, Jr. Memorial Library Fund

Featured in the exhibition is the first edition of Native Son along with photographs of Richard Wright and a controversial unpublished essay by Wright entitled “I Chose Paris.” The exhibition also juxtaposes photographs of South Side Chicago in the 1930s, the novel’s setting, and contemporary photographs of protests in response to recent events in Ferguson,
Missouri and New York City. Artifacts on display are courtesy of: Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library New Haven, Connecticut; Kent State University Libraries, Special Collections and Archives, Kent, Ohio; Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC; Douglas and Judith Krupp Library, Bryant University, Smithfield, Rhode Island; Redwood Library, Newport, Rhode Island

Book Discussion Group
Tuesday, February 10, 2015
7:00 p.m. – 2nd-Floor Mezzanine, RWU Library
Moderators: James Tackach, Professor of English
Abigail DeVeuve, RWU Honors Program Student
Co-sponsored by the University Honors Program and RWU Library

Panel Discussion
Wednesday, February 25, 2015
5:00 p.m. – Mary Tefft White Cultural Center, RWU Library
“Reading Native Son in the Twenty-First Century”
Keith Stokes, President of Development and Planning, Mayfield Group
Diana Hassel, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs & Professor, RWU School of Law
Moderator: Dean Robert Eisinger, Feinstein College of Arts and Sciences

Panel discussion will juxtapose the timely and relevant plot and characters of Native Son with recent events involving interracial tensions, justice, and law enforcement in Ferguson, Missouri, New York City, and other communities across the country.

Keynote Address
Wednesday, March 4, 2015
4:00 p.m. – Feinstein College of Arts and Sciences, CAS 162
“Life had made the plot over and over again”: Violence, Stigmatization, and the Ongoing Relevance of Richard Wright’s Native Son
Jennifer Jensen Wallach, Associate Professor of History, University of North Texas
Sponsored by The Professor John Howard Birss, Jr. Memorial Lecture Fund

All events are free and open to the public

New Learning Commons Partnership Council
JANUARY 29, 2015 5:36 PM
By Peter Deekle, Dean of University Library Services

Located within the Roger Williams University Main Library, the Learning Commons is an active, collaborative environment that integrates information resources, services and expertise offered by several academic and central service departments in a single location – each focused on the support of successful teaching and learning. In addition to University Library operations, it currently includes several partners – each contributing to the academic support of students and faculty: University Advising Center, Instructional Design Department, Media Services/MediaTech, Student Accessibility Services, Student Advocacy, and Tutorial Support Services.

The newly created Learning Commons Partnership Council (through its monthly meetings and ongoing communication) recognizes and reinforces three over-arching principles: Connecting, Collaborating, and Creating, among students and faculty at the University. The Council’s members foster an ongoing (1) communication among partners, (2) consultation and advice toward the overall goals of the Learning Commons, and (3) coverage and scheduling of services to optimize access for its student and faculty users.

Scholars at Risk
JANUARY 29, 2015 5:31 PM
by Adam Braver, Writer-in-Residence

Last semester, the Scholars at Risk (SAR) students launched an internal visual campaign that showed photos of them with duct taped mouths, asking the question about how would
one feel if his/her freedom of expression were taken away. In an effort to expand upon the poster campaign, our students designed an ambitious plan to extend it to other universities. Following a meeting in New York with the SAR leadership, we developed the #free2think campaign (which utilizes SAR’s hashtag). It was tested out internally at RWU, and once it met mutually met ours and SAR's standards, it was taken nationally on December 2, 2015. Out students are reaching out to students at other campuses, people in their communities, etc., while SAR will begin reaching out to people internationally (and throughout their network) — all asking people to show what they are most grateful to be free2think about. Poster will be posted on SAR’s website and Facebook page, as well as on the RWU-SAR Facebook page and other social media.

Research, the Old-Fashioned Way

JANUARY 29, 2015 4:09 PM

By Barbara Kenney, Instructional Services and Campus Initiatives Librarian

What happens when 14 students from Mt. Hope High arrive for a research session at the RWU Library and the internet goes down? Rather than sitting at a computer screen searching for books and journals, our young scholars learned the basics of the Library of Congress Subject Headings, got into the stacks, and collected books on their topics. They used the print reference collection for background information, and, before the witching hour of 1:30PM struck and they were on their way home, the students had whittled down large research topics (think “General Dwight D. Eisenhower”), to clear and succinct research questions. Our “Ike” scholar was thrilled to find the 3-volume set, “The Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower.”

Plan B plus serendipity equals success!
Cool Things the Digital Repository DOCS@RWU Can Do

JANUARY 29, 2015 3:59 PM
by Mary Wu, Digital Scholarship and Metadata Librarian

Did you know that the Library has had a digital repository called DOCS@RWU since 2006? DOCS@RWU is a library service that provides open access to an online collection of scholarly and creative works produced by faculty, students and other members of the RWU community. It currently hosts 3,049 papers and other materials in multi-media format, including but not limited to online journals, faculty publications, student theses, and image galleries. Thanks to its rich and interesting content, DOCS@RWU has yielded 400,894 full-text downloads to date since its inauguration. As a matter of fact, there are many ways for DOCS@RWU to boost scholarly communication and to showcase your research as well as academic achievements. We will introduce to you one amazing thing about DOCS@RWU every month this year to demonstrate why DOCS@RWU should matter to you!

#1 DOCS@RWU: A Showcase for RWU Student Work

The collection of scholarly and creative works of RWU students is a centerpiece of DOCS@RWU. Currently, 245 papers are available in the RWU Theses collection, which includes: Capstone Projects, Honors Theses, Master Theses, and Senior Theses. The RWU Community Partnerships Center (CPC) also maintains a presence on the DOCS@RWU platform. The CPC Collection exhibits final reports documenting projects completed by RWU students to benefit the local community. Additionally, a number of student publications have been digitized and are now accessible online through DOCS@RWU. They are: Hawk's Eye, Hawk's Herald, The Messenger, The Quill, and the literary journal, Aldebaran. Publicizing student work on DOCS@RWU provides students with a visible and lasting place to showcase their academic achievements with potential employers, graduate schools, parents and peers. It also shows prospective students around the globe what kind of education they can expect to receive at RWU.

As colleges and universities across the country answer the call for student research and experiential learning, digital repositories on many campuses have become an essential part of the effort. Below are a few examples of digital repositories that facilitate and showcase student research:

- The Journal of Purdue Research at Purdue University publishes the best research papers written by undergraduates who have collaborated with faculty.
- The Undergraduate Economic Review is a student-led publication that aims to improve student learning outcomes and prepare for research careers at Illinois Wesleyan University.
- The Montana Tech Student Research Day Projects shows off the results of service-based learning with its annual undergraduate research day at Highlands College, Butte, Montana.

If you would like to include your work in DOCS@RWU, or use the platform to publish, please contact Mary Wu (mwu@rwu.edu), the Digital Scholarship/Metadata Librarian.

Stay tuned for the next cool thing that DOCS@RWU can do for you!
Good House by Peyton Marshall

Farrar, Straus & Giroux

October 2014

Cracking the spine on Peyton Marshall’s debut novel Good House, I was nervous. Not that the writing would be poor or the story boring, but that it would be redundant. From the synopsis on the back I could tell that Good House was going to be a novel headed for a category. A category comprised of works such as: The Hunger Games, Divergent and The Maze Runner. All of them great books, in my opinion (well, with the possible exception of the latter), but all revolving around a theme that our culture seems to be addicted to at the moment. Namely, futuristic time, the world in a state very unlike it is today, and teenagers in distress at the hands of some form of experiment being imposed on them by greater society.

Admittedly, Good House does, in many ways, fit snugly between these other stories, and it tackles a very similar situation. The setting is the future and it does involve teenagers suffering at the hands of an experiment being conducted by the society they live in. The story revolves around teenage boys who attend a school that is referred to as one of the “Goodhouse campuses.” These campuses are half boarding school and half prison. The boys who find themselves hung up in these establishments have tested positive for a specific genetic marker that scientists have deemed to be consistent with criminal behavior. So, we see many similarities to the aforementioned titles.

Where Marshall differs, however, is in the breadth of her characters and the grace of her storytelling. In the previously named works, (especially The Maze Runner) one gets the sense of watching a television show like Breaking Bad. Not that there is anything innately wrong with that, but the problem is that the pace of storytelling is rushed and almost rollercoaster-like at times. In such a narrative, much of the depth and complexity that readers of novels have come to love and cherish becomes lost.

Marshall seems to resist the urge to bring her readers from one gut-wrenching moment to the next. Though it is true that the story does have moments when it moves along quickly, and a climactic type writing is present throughout the novel, Marshall never leaves her characters behind. The story is not solely about the action and the gut-wrenching plot twists. It is much more about the main character James and his experience as a human being.

There are no characters in the novel that seem at all like cardboard cutouts. In some of the other works in this “apocalyptic, teenage struggle” type of category there may be a handful of well-developed characters and then a plethora of characters that seem like nothing more than cartoon figures. In Good House we get to know James like we know ourselves. His roommate, Owen, is as real to us as our own roommates, and the boys who rule over him on the Goodhouse campus are multi-faceted and difficult to judge. Beyond that, there are so many more characters that you will come to know and love (or hate) once you get to know them. But regardless of how you decide to judge them, you will have a credible basis for your judgements because you will know each character in Good House inside and out. You will feel your gut yanked and twisted out of its comfort zone as they are whirled around on the tide of a compelling and adventurous storyline.

Upcoming Books in Brief

Once in the West, Poems by Christian Wiman
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
September 2014

Once in the West is Christian Wiman’s fourth poetry collection, in which he explores themes of love, life, death, and life after death. He draws readers into his intimate and powerful poetry about his West Texas roots, his religion, and his family. While he does employ his usual sharp humor, this collection also features more tender subjects: love poems to his wife, poems for his children, and glimpses of peace. We are excited to explore this new side to Wiman’s poetry.
Father and Son: A Lifetime, by Marcos Giralt Torrente
Translated from the Spanish by Natasha Wimmer
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux
September 2014
Father and Son: A Lifetime is a powerful memoir that won Marcos Giralt Torrente Spain’s highest literary honor, the Spanish National Book Award. In this memoir, Giralt Torrente grapples with his father’s cancer diagnosis and death. He writes about his struggle as honestly as possible, brilliantly baring all to the reader and sparing nothing as he explores his tumultuous relationship with his father. Translated from the Spanish, this raw memoir confirms Giralt Torrente’s successful arrival on the U.S. literary scene.

Sailing the Forest, Selected Poems by Robin Robertson
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
October 2014
Sailing the Forest features a selection of visionary poems spanning the career of Robin Robertson, a “wild-hearted” superstar in Scottish poetry. Robertson’s sparse poetry features ancient and mythological themes, bringing readers into a dreamlike world crafted expertly to inspire awe and wonder. These beautiful, haunting poems, selected as some of the finest of Robertson’s vast array of award-winning work, are on our must-read list.

Things to Make and Do in the Fourth Dimension, by Matt Parker
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
December 2014
This book makes math cool. No, really. Stand-up comedian and mathematician Matt Parker wrote Things to Make and Do in the Fourth Dimension to convince his readers to come back to the subject they were put off from an early age and actually be enthralled by it this time around. His book explores the topology of beer logos and features the Optimal Dating Algorithm – what’s not to like about that? It may seem an unlikely choice for the bookish type, but we are excited to get out of our comfort zones for Parker’s hilarious novel!
Limbo, A Novel by Melania G. Mazzucco
Translated from the Italian by Virginia Jewiss
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
November 2014

Limbo, translated from the Italian, is award-winning novelist Melania G. Mazzucco’s ninth novel. It depicts the life of a female Italian officer in the war in Afghanistan, which is a perspective not yet covered by the vast array of Afghanistan war literature. Mazzucco’s expert storytelling allows the reader to fully experience her strong heroine’s struggles with war and love, both on the battle front and once she returns home. We are looking forward to the arrival of this captivating novel.

One Thousand Things Worth Knowing, Poems by Paul Muldoon
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux
January 2015

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Paul Muldoon’s twelfth poetry collection, One Thousand Things Worth Knowing, spans a wide range of subject matter that keeps readers constantly surprised and engaged. Muldoon quickly swings from one mood to the next, even within a single poem, keeping readers on their toes. Muldoon has been praised as one of the most innovative and ambitious modern poets and we are eager to crack open his newest collection.

Copyright Confusion

Imagine this scenario: you find the perfect image to include in a presentation, lecture or paper, but you can’t track down the source for your citation. Or maybe you’re unsure whether or not the usage will qualify under one of the copyright law’s exception clauses. You start asking around and become inundated with terms like “public domain,” “fair use,” “TEACH Act,” and “creative commons,” but you really aren’t sure what they mean and how they might apply to your scenario. Under these confusing circumstances, many students (and some scholars) get frustrated and lose sight of the standards of academic integrity that we hold so dear in academia.

Can we make a suggestion? Take a deep breath, stop pulling at your hair, and call the library! As librarians, we understand the frustrations that come along with copyright, and we’re here to support the Roger Williams University community in sorting through these issues. Whether you’re a student with questions about finding copyright-free images for a project or presentation, or a faculty member needing help with reserves and providing online resources for your course in Bridges, we’re here to lend a helping hand. Every situation is different, and requires an individual analysis, so we ask for your patience in receiving a response! Please call or email the reference desk, and you will be forwarded to a librarian that can help you.

401-254-3375
libref@rwu.edu

Also, be sure to check out our Copyright Libguide to get you started.

From the Nightstand: Karen Bilotti

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Interview conducted by Ryan Monahan
Karen Bilotti, Coordinator of Writing Tutorial Services and Adjunct Instructor of Writing, has been at RWU for 26 years.

Current Read
Although between books at the moment, Karen Bilotti intends to re-read The Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison. Published in 1952, the narrator begins the novel by claiming that he is an “invisible man,” as other people refuse to see him as a person. As a black man growing up in the 1940s and ’50s, the narrator details the enormous struggles his race faced in America during the 20th century. Powerfully written and compelling, and Karen highly endorses Ellison’s novel.

Memorable Reads
Karen has a long list of memorable reads, most of which she wants to re-read. Among many others, Karen listed The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert, Housekeeping by Marilynne Robinson, Long Day’s Journey Into Night by Eugene O’Neill, and The Year of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion. Didion writes a heartbreaking novel about her grief in response to her deceased husband and daughter, both lost within two years of each other. Karen raved about the writing techniques Didion applied, and has used the novel in her Expository Writing classes in the past.

Karen shared with me a story of meeting one of her favorite authors, Junot Díaz. One day while she was working in the Writing Center, two of her tutors exclaimed that Díaz was presenting that day at Johnson & Wales University. Immediately, Karen, abandoning work, drove to Providence to see him speak. Karen describes “this mob of students, which had to be illegal and unsafe” at the doors of the auditorium, but nevertheless she and her tutors shouldered their way to the front of the throng, claiming front row seats amongst the JWU faculty. Afterwards, the members of the front row had the good fortune to receive an autographed copy of The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, on of Karen’s personal favorites.

Upcoming Reads
Recommended by Karen’s colleague, This Side of Brightness by Colum McCann tells the story of the “sandhogs” in New York City at the turn of century, who were tasked with digging the tunnels under the East River that would carry the trains between Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Also on Karen’s “to-do” list of books is Gilead by Marilynne Robinson. After reading Housekeeping by the same author, Karen can’t wait to pick up Robinson’s second novel, about the relationships between fathers and sons ranging from the Civil War to the twentieth century.

Essential Read
To the Lighthouse by Virginia Woolf, about the complex relationships and allegiances of the family of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey, is to Karen “the closest I’ve seen in a novel where what the author describes is a painting.” Woolf’s writing techniques and style are strikingly impressive to Karen, and she highly recommends it to any avid reader.