The Transformation of Early Modern Japan

Mary Elizabeth Berry is the Class of 1944 Professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley and the first recipient of the Founders’ Fellowship at the National Humanities Center. An authority on the history of premodern Japan, she has been working this year on a project examining the remarkable changes in Japanese life that occurred in the midst of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868). She sat down with us this spring to share a bit about her research.

The Tokugawa period in Japan is remarkable for many reasons, but one of the most astonishing may be the incredible growth in the population of the country and the expansion of its cities.

BERRY: It is astonishing, and I don’t think people put their minds around it properly. Some people think that London was the largest city in the world in the early modern period, but Edo [the pre-1868 name for Tokyo] held over a million people by 1700.

There were gigantic cities on the European continent eventually—for instance, London and Paris—but they were singular giants. In Japan, though, there was Edo, with over a million, along with Osaka and Kyoto, each approaching 400,000 people. And there were twenty other cities over 30,000.

One thinks of Japan as being a relatively small place.

BERRY: Well, it’s about the size of California. The important thing, though, is not its size, but the amount of arable land, which is only 12 percent. At the beginning of the Tokugawa period, the population was between 12 and 15 million and by the 1700s it had more than doubled to over 30 million. So this was a country that was far more densely populated than France, for example, which was the most densely populated country in Europe.

How did they grow enough food for all those people with such a small amount of farmable land?

BERRY: Well there’s the harvest of the sea. Japan was and remains a prolific consumer of fish, sea grasses, and seaweeds, but there was also an agricultural revolution of very great importance around this time.

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One of the basic tenets of literary modernism, as proclaimed by Ezra Pound, was “make it new!” That supremely modernist poet, T. S. Eliot, however, argued in his essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” that artistic creation never occurs in a vacuum and that novelty emerges only through thorough engagement with tradition. As Eliot remarked, “Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum.” When one steps into the rich and luminous tradition of the National Humanities Center, as has been my fortune, it makes sense to absorb it fully while simultaneously seeking new pathways of expression.

Since my arrival on July 1, I have been accommodated warmly by our excellent staff, enjoyed conversations and counsel from many trustees, communicated almost daily with counterparts in the Triangle area and across the country, and picked my way carefully through the construction debris that has surrounded and invaded our building. As our new class of Fellows arrives, we have dazzling pristine glass, leak-proof roofs, new interior paint and carpets, and the feel of fresh possibilities.

This class of thirty-seven Fellows hails from Australia, China, Germany, and the UK, as well as from across the US. Fellows are interrogating topics that stretch chronologically from fragmentary Republican Latin and the care of souls in medieval Italy to girls and their zines in the 1990s and narrative ethics in twenty-first-century fiction. Their work will teach us, for example, how wampum shaped early America, how we might discern a unified foundation for evolutionary theory, and how civic monuments of the Civil War reconstruct memory. Our informal lunchtime conversations in the Commons and the more formal Fellows’ presentations to each other and to the Research Triangle community will both influence and disseminate their work. The overhaul of our website, which we have undertaken, also will facilitate broader communication about the accomplishments of our Fellows and the excellence of our educational programs, and will permit us to enhance our public outreach.

I wish to welcome our new Director of Institutional Advancement, Heidi Camp, who joins us after an initial career running her own healthcare consulting company, followed by eleven extraordinarily successful years as Assistant Dean for Advancement at the College of Humanities, University of Utah. Heidi helped elevate significantly the College’s donor pool, overall giving, external grants, and the success of its public events. I am confident she will perform similar magic at the NHC.

Much of my time this summer has been spent learning about and reaching out to individuals and institutions who have been our partners and to encourage others to collaborate with us. The response has been welcoming, the ideas wide-ranging. Already, discussions and proposals involving programs on American satire, the rock and roll novel, assessment in the humanities, dialogues on the experience of war with North Carolina veterans, and information literacy are developing.

In senior staff meetings and in consultation with the Board of Trustee’s newly formed Strategic Initiative Committee, we have launched a series of strategy sessions focused on better integrating the three key components of our mission—scholarship, education, and
public engagement. Much of the impetus for our thinking derives from an etymological lesson. The Latin root of the word “educate” is educare, “to lead out.” As the only center in the world for advanced study in all areas of the humanities, we believe it is our mission, indeed our destiny, to incubate ideas and to guide discussion concerning the most crucial issues involving humanities and the human condition. Absent a humanities perspective, important concerns of our time will remain incompletely addressed.

In my attempts to steep myself in the tradition of the NHC, I have been reading the work of my predecessors, from Charles Frankel’s powerful pieces on the purpose and place of humanities to Bob Connor’s thoughtful considerations of moral knowledge and civil society to Geoffrey Harpham’s penetrating considerations of the foundational role of the humanities in American democracy. Here is Frankel on the tensions inherent in the humanities: “The humanities are a curious combination of involvement and detachment; of the search for scientific objectivity and irrepressible personal idiosyncrasy; of piety toward the past and critique of the past; of private passion and public commitment.”

These tensions, mutatis mutandis, always have infiltrated and propelled our subject matter and methodologies. They distinguish us and explain our core significance. “All men by nature desire to know,” Aristotle tells us in his Metaphysics. This drive, and the pleasure it yields, remains the source of our embrace of mystery and our desire to solve it. While digital humanities have allowed us to embrace technology for scholarly and pedagogical enhancements, distinctions between technological and humanistic enterprises persist. While technology can permit a deferral of mortality and allow us to invest hope in infinite deferrals, the humanities force us to confront mortality and its impact on life. While technology allows us to conduct our social relationships virtually and in isolation from face-to-face contact, the humanities still thrive in personal encounter, debate, and community. Technology cannot assess the multiple masks of evil, the complicated ethics of choice, the pain of loss, the joys of love, or the frustrations and celebrations our yearning to be both human and more than human produce. Technology is premised on answering the hows and the whats, but not the whys. Only in the humanities do we continue to have that conversation despite its often exasperating indeterminacy.

I look forward to the National Humanities Center elevating its leadership in this essential conversation and to your engagement with it.

Robert D. Newman
President and Director
First of all, paddy-raised rice was Japan’s major crop and it is a perfect crop. It’s very, very hard to grow because you must have the irrigation pools, the irrigation channels; you must also plant it properly and tend it carefully. It requires pretty inspired and disciplined labor. But it is the most productive grain in the world. So small paddies can generate a great deal of nutrition. And Japan became the most efficient farming country in the world in the seventeenth century.

There was also significant reclamation of land that increased what could be farmed, much more systematic farming of what they had, and increasing use of commercial fertilizers made out of sardines. So you have incredibly fastidious farmers mastering very difficult skills for profit.

Taxes were originally very high, as much as 50 percent of the harvest, maybe higher. But after the comprehensive surveys ordered by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the late sixteenth century, the lands were not routinely and systematically resurveyed, and new farmland—and more productive farmland—was not being registered and taxed aggressively, so there was incentive to farm brilliantly. But this was not a revolution of new machines. It was much better irrigation, much more attention to rice hybrids, of which there were hundreds, a lot of testing about how early you should transplant from nursery beds. Farmers were taking notes, and there was a great deal of agricultural knowledge shared in manuals. One was written by Miyazaki Yasusada, who traveled around thirty provinces taking notes on what he saw, then organized his book according to different crops. And his main advice to farmers was to talk to one another, keep notes, and when they found a particularly effective farm, find out why it worked.

I think one of the important things about this period is the sense that the pie could get bigger, and that if you were more prosperous, it didn’t mean I was less so.

**What led to this radical growth and radical urbanization?**

**BERRY:** Well, again, this is really an amazing story. From 1467 through the 1580s, Japan was embroiled in an awful period of civil war, and by the 1580s Japan was raising the largest armies known to the contemporary world. The majority of able-bodied males age fifteen or older were being conscripted for battle, and by the late stages of this very long war, there were mass casualties because of the introduction of firearms by the Portuguese.

So the warlords of the time, the successful daimyo, did this amazing thing: they chose alliance with one another in order to survive. They didn’t fight it out to the bloody, horrible end. Oda Nobunaga, whose campaigns were the fiercest in many ways in the period, exposed to his contemporaries the consequences of war as they were fighting it—the likelihood of mutual annihilation.

When Nobunaga died in 1582, the two leading contenders [to take his place] were Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, who would later become the founder of the peacetime shogunate. After Nobunaga died, they were involved in two major confrontations. Tokugawa Ieyasu was the victor in the first, and the probable victor in the second, when the two made peace. When I tell my students about this, they ask, “Why would Tokugawa Ieyasu do that?” Because losing would not be good, but winning would not necessarily be good, either. The winner would become the target of other would-be conquerors. And not only did they turn to what I call a federal form of alliance to save themselves—Japan was eventually divided into over two hundred individual domains in this period, each headed by daimyo—they also addressed the problem of maintaining peace throughout the country. They went at this full-bore.

The landscape was covered with petty fortifications that enabled border contests. They leveled them. They stripped agrarian communities and armed monasteries of weapons. Then there were all these samurai fighters. With their families, samurai made up something like 8 to 9 percent of the population. They took these samurai, who lived in villages with a fair amount of independence, and confined them in their own castle towns. This began a mass migration and changed Japan from an agrarian to an urbanizing world.

Kyoto, the imperial capital, had a population of over 100,000 toward the end of the seventeenth century. But these castle towns were pretty rudimentary. They were not ready to supply the goods and services that the samurai migrants needed, but it worked out. It shouldn’t have.

**What, then, do you think were the keys to their success?**

**BERRY:** Parts of the story scholars know a lot about. The agrarian revolution—well, really the work revolution—was crucial. The initiatives of the state were also crucial—both Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu were pretty inventive redesigners of a new world—developing currency,
standardizing weights and measures, building roads. The tax policies toward trade were also very, very generous. But I’m writing about what I’m calling economic culture and the spirit that inspired players of all social levels to remake their lives—to fashion a commercial market and to embrace novelty. There were deep reasons for the readiness for change, but there were also major problems to be dealt with.

There was no legal guarantee of private property, for instance, so commercial exchange, contracts, land sales—all these transactions—required instruments of protection that generated trust. I’m very interested in how economic trust among traders and within the larger population developed. It was generated largely by urban commoners who developed elaborate contracts and neighborhood rules about land sales, the registration of heirs and wills, and other transactions. And neighbors had to give collective assent to these internal matters.

Another problem that’s particularly interesting has to do with consumption. This was a world in which frugality and savings were a kind of religion. You find these values everywhere in texts from the period. Yet it was also a world, particularly after major constraints were placed on foreign trade, that had to grow financially through very vigorous domestic consumption.

How did they justify the level of consumption that took place?

BERRY: Every society has what I’d call rules of consumption—the rules that legitimate or authorize or valorize buying. Nobody writes them down, but you can usually figure them out, and we all know what they are in terms of our own lives.

They differ by place and period, but I put them in three categories. One is the category of utility. We can always buy—freely, happily, and virtuously—things that are useful. We give our children socks and books and learning games. The category is wonderfully expansive, of course. In Japan there was a great deal of emphasis on things like books, tools, the fertilizers that transformed agriculture. You can go on and on.

Then there’s this middle category concerned with propriety. It was appropriate for a shop owner to have a decent shop, to offer customers tobacco and tea, to have a flower display, to have proper clothing with proper crests. This is also an expansive category. There are many sumptuary laws during the period because the government wanted total correspondence between status and presentation. Samurai were a privileged elite. Commoners were not. Samurai could wear certain kinds of fabrics—the finest silks—that were theoretically forbidden to farmers. On the other hand, headmen in villages, elders in neighborhoods, were excused from the restriction because their dignity demanded silks.

Finally, there’s a vast category associated with sociability. It was important to be a gentleperson, and if you wanted to be a gentleperson, you needed to send letters, you needed to be able to compose poetry, practice the tea ceremony properly, give and exchange gifts. The cultivation of all these arts is expensive and involves a whole lot of “stuff”—for instance, calligraphy requires all the different papers, the brushes, the ink, the rests for the brushes, the weights for the paper, the carved-jade signature chops, the precious old bamboo holders for brushes. Consumption in the service of sociability becomes more and more elaborate.

So, in a variety of ways, this was a society that became deliriously interested in the material world and very, very expensive things. But it also highly valued productivity and profit. The commercial ethos is pretty amazing. One thing that was included in every primer for merchants is this little saying associated with the head of the Shirokiya family, who were major cotton merchants. It became something of a mantra throughout this world: if you never sell at high profit—just modest profit—and sell good, honestly made products, you will become rich. The main thing was to make sure that shinyo, trust, was pervasive; that is, if you buy from me the thing is well made, no cut corners. You can rely on it. It’s an object of virtue.

One book of the time called the “Illustrated Encyclopedia of Humanity” lists about five hundred different employments, and in each case talks about the value of the goods people are making, how they have been crafted faithfully by real individuals with names and addresses. There was a real veneration of craft, hard work, smart work, and an understanding of the high prices excellent goods entail.

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Your project involves chorography, the ancient practice of descriptive writing about a region and its qualities. What drew you to chorography as a methodological approach?

WITMORE: I think it has to do, at least to some degree, with my background. I grew up on a small farm near the Carolina border, and that experience—one now exceedingly rare among those of my generation—colored my particular relationship to land—to place—to people's investment in their locales and what those locales offered to that investment. Later, as an undergraduate, I was trained in anthropology, classics, and geography, and much of my graduate training was as a landscape archaeologist in Greece. Certainly, there were many other influences, but life experience and training have played a major role. Of course, one's approach is also responsive to a particular scholarly community.

Linear narratives through time tend to lock the Mycenaean bridge into the Bronze Age. And yet from another angle the Bronze Age is not over yonder in a separate realm of the past; something of it is here in the present, enmeshed with what has become of other eras. When moving through the Argive countryside one gains this other sense of time and space. A portion of a Bronze Age road acts as an agricultural terrace, pooling moisture-rich sediments for olive trees. A Mycenaean bridge makes a difference in the line taken by a nineteenth-century cart path, paved over in the middle of the last century. Exchanges between such things constitute pleats between these eras, or at least what has become of them. Multiplied many times over, these things and their polychronic rapports make up the land, which we experience now, as did others within their life-worlds.

How does one craft a regional synthesis that respects the pleats and folds between periods otherwise kept at a distance along a line? One answer may be found in simply writing as one moves down paths, along roads, over land, or across water. Antiquarians traveling through Greece wrote in this way, at a time prior to places acquiring the level of definition to which we have become accustomed, and they often felt themselves obliged to contend with those things encountered along the path.

By being true to the object that mediates the experience one might be led to all kinds of observations, or even discover unanticipated connections. An olive tree may prompt reflection on familial investment in land or mixed-crop regimes. Weeds on the side of the road may raise questions about the wisdom of promoting plants with particular medicinal properties by agrarian past, or weigh the loss of that wisdom today. We might pursue a variety of linkages without being overly concerned with those divisions of labor as specified by academic discipline. Specialized focus is valuable, of course, but it can foreclose on the experience of being there, of being faithful to the thing encountered, and to connections.
that arise through a confrontation with the object at hand. This is chorography.

That seems somewhat impressionistic, phenomenological—taking note of things as they are encountered, contemplating them, and incorporating them into an accumulated account.

WITMORE: That is one way of looking at it. What one notes along a path may arise from an impression or on a whim. There is also a major phenomenological component to the book. The question is: What do you do with it? Just as with other narratives, chorography requires refinement. These are not raw field notes and one cannot be attentive to everything.

Walking a path between Hermione and Troezen, driving along a section of the A7 motorway, these experiences nudge one toward a particular angle or lesson. Once the angle arises it creates a space disposed to suggestions by particular things that were encountered or, perhaps, overlooked. It has taken many years of research and numerous return trips for these angles or lessons to gel. One segment of my book, for example, ponders the new mobility initiated by trains in the nineteenth century and the radical changes that ensued within Greece. Another segment focuses on the differences between history and archaeology at Mycenae. Yet another segment discusses dead bodies, burial, and the appropriation of land between Mycenae and the Argive Heraion. As these angles acquire shape in one segment they come to impact the angles taken or lessons learned in others. Under these influences things suggest themselves in ways they would not have otherwise, but one has to pose a problem and each segment has its own.

Overall, the book is divided into twenty-seven of these segments. Some segments take place in the past—in 1899, the late seventeenth century, or in 272 BCE as retold in 100 CE. Some segments play out in discussion with other interlocutors—village residents, shepherds, other archaeologists, students. Some are mixtures of story and experience. As with the genre of conversation, the narrative through can be an accretion of connections that aren’t necessarily happening on the ground in that moment or a mixture of perspectives that are not entirely my own. In many cases, I am able to return to a problem and develop it further along another path.

You are writing about Eastern Morea—the Peloponnes. Is there something about that region that lends itself to chorographic treatment?

WITMORE: All places could be written about in this way, and with contemporary realities eating away at the material memories of a rural world centuries and often millennia in the making, it is important to do so. The Eastern Morea constitutes one of the most archaeologically saturated regions in the world. This is the heartland of Greece. More work has taken place here than elsewhere, so one may access an incredible archive of achievement from different times with different emphases. This richness lends itself to numerous, even unforeseen, possibilities. It also allows one to get a sense of changes and transformations over the long term. There are instances of this at every turn. And, of course, I’ve been visiting and working in the region for over two decades. So it’s a place that I have come to know well and to care for deeply.

Movement seems central to this method, which suggests certain elements, like a point of origin and a destination, perhaps a sense of motivation, an awareness of personal time or pace.

WITMORE: That’s right. There is movement with things, along things, and to things. Some segments are on foot or on the hoof, others in a car or a boat. These varying modes, moving at different speeds, are taken at different times of year, under different weather conditions, along an actual road here or an old way there. And these segments move between specific things—a crossroad and a ruin, a village square and a monastery, an archaeological site and a riverbed. Not all of these have distinct histories that we can access or fully recover, but they do have memories that are unique to them.

Can you clarify that distinction—between history and memory?

WITMORE: The memory of which I speak is held in an old terrace wall or a line of olive trees or a berm between agricultural plots. It’s the memory kept by the worn surface of an old bridle path or borne by an edifice of exposed mudbrick. It is lodged in the contiguities of strata exposed in the profile of a Bronze Age mound. These things are not passive carriers of meaning; rather, they hold memories related to themselves, to their own peculiar qualities and idiosyncrasies. And with this memory follows a species of

Map of Peloponese, Greece

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MARTIN BERGER
University of California, Santa Cruz, Inventing Stereotype: Race, Art, and 1920s America (Archie K. Davis Fellowship)

REINHARD BERNBECK
Freie Universität Berlin, Material Traces of Nazi Terror: Reflections on History, Experience, and Memory (William C. and Ida Friday Fellowship)

SARA BERNSTEIN
Duke University, What Might Have Been: Causation and Possibility (Philip L. Quinn Fellowship)

THOMAS BROWN
University of South Carolina, The Reconstruction of American Memory: Civic Monuments of the Civil War (Delta Delta Delta Fellowship)

PETER J. CARROLL
Northwestern University, “This Age of Suicide”: Modernity, Society, and Self in China, 1900–1957 (Benjamin N. Duke Fellowship of the Research Triangle Foundation)

TIMOTHY CARTER
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Let ‘Em Eat Cake: Political Musical Theater in 1930s America (Kent R. Mulliken Fellowship)

NANCY F. COTT
Harvard University, World-Venturing: Cosmopolitan Self-Invention after the Great War (Birkelund Fellowship)

JUDITH B. FAROUHAR
University of Chicago, Gathering Medicine in the Mountains: Nation, Body, and Knowledge in China’s Ethnic South (NEH Fellowship)

ANNEGRET FAUSER
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, The Politics of Musical Thought, 1918–1939 (NEH Fellowship)

OWEN FLANAGAN
Duke University, The Geography of Morals: Varieties of Moral Possibility (Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship)

KATE FLINT
University of Southern California, Flash! Photography, Writing, and Surprising Illumination (Allen W. Clowes Fellowship)

GREGG HECIMOVICH
Winthrop University, The Life and Times of Hannah Crafts: The True Story of The Bondwoman’s Narrative (Josephus Daniels Fellowship of the Research Triangle Foundation)

JAMES HEVIA
University of Chicago, Animal Labor and Colonial Warfare (GlaxoSmithKline Fellowship)

ANTHONY KAYE
Pennsylvania State University, Taking Canaan: Rethinking the Nat Turner Revolt (Robert F. and Margaret S. Goheen Fellowship)

NORMAN KUTCHER
Syracuse University, Eunuchs in the Age of China’s Last Great Emperors (Henry Luce Fellowship)

LAURA LIEBER
Duke University, Staging the Sacred: Orchestrating Holiness in Late Antiquity (Duke Endowment Fellowship)

BEATRICE LONGUENESSE
New York University, Self-Consciousness and the First Person (Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation Fellowship)

COLLEEN LYE
University of California, Berkeley, The Asian American Sixties (NEH Fellowship)

APRIL MASTEN
State University of New York–Stony Brook, Diamond and Juba: The Rise and Fall of Challenge Dancing in America (John G. Medlin, Jr. Fellowship)

JANE O. NEWMAN
University of California, Irvine, Auerbach’s Worlds: Early/Modern Mimesis between Religion and History (M. H. Abrams Fellowship)

DANIEL NOLAN
Australian National University, Theoretical Virtues (William J. Bouwsma Fellowship)

AKINWUMI O. OGUNDIRAN
University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Cultural History of the Atlantic Experience in the Yoruba Hinterland (West Africa), ca. 1550–1850 (Delta Delta Delta Fellowship)

MICHELLE O’MALLEY
University of Sussex, Botticelli and the Workshop Image (John E. Sawyer Fellowship)

PAUL OTTO
George Fox University, Beads of Power: Wampum and the Shaping of Early America (NEH Fellowship)

D. MARK POSSANZA
University of Pittsburgh, Fragmentary Republican Latin, vol. VIII, “Lyric, Elegiac and Hexameter Poetry,” a volume to be published in the Loeb Classical Library (Frank H. Kenan Fellowship)

ANFENG SHENG
Tsinghua University, National Assimilation and Cultural Resistance: A Study of Contemporary Amerindian Literature (Luce China Fellowship)

BRENDA STEVENSON
University of California, Los Angeles, Fanny’s World of Women: Generations of Enslaved Black Females in North America, 1620–1860 (John Hope Franklin Fellowship)

SHARON STROCCHIA
Emory University, Cultures of Care: Women, Knowledge, and the Pursuit of Health in Late Renaissance Italy (Ruth W. and A. Morris Williams, Jr. Fellowship)

JAVIER VILLA-FLORES
University of Illinois at Chicago, Perjurers, Impersonators, and Liars: Public Faith and the Dark Side of Trust in Eighteenth-Century Mexico (Hurford Family Fellowship)

JUDITH WALKOWITZ
Johns Hopkins University, Feminism and Urban Space in London in the 1970s and 1980s (Donnelley Family Fellowship)

BING ZHOU
Fudan University, What History Will Be: To Do History in a Digital Age (Luce China Fellowship)

In addition to Fellows, these scholars are also in residence at the Center during the 2015–16 academic year:

MARCUS BULL
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

J. KAMERON CARTER
Duke University Divinity School

CAROL HARRISON
University of South Carolina

LYNN OTTO
George Fox University

DAVID PICKELL
Independent Writer

JULIA REID
University of Leeds

JACK M. SASSON
Vanderbilt University

JOHN H. SMITH
University of California, Irvine

DANIEL WALKOWITZ
New York University

D. Mark Possanza
University of Pittsburgh

Fragmentary Republican Latin, vol. VIII, “Lyric, Elegiac and Hexameter Poetry,” a volume to be published in the Loeb Classical Library (Frank H. Kenan Fellowship)

Janice Radway
Northwestern University

Girls and Their Zines in Motion: Selfhood and Sociality in the 1990s (Founders’ Fellowship)

Grant Ramsey
Independent Scholar

Toward a Unified Foundation for Evolutionary Theory (NEH Fellowship)

Bill Schwarz
Queen Mary University of London

Complete two books coauthored with Stuart Hall: (1) The Politics of the Cultural Turn and (2) Politics and Culture in the Age of Neoliberalism (Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship)

Daniel Scroop
University of Glasgow

The Politics of Scale in Modern American History (Walter Hines Page Fellowship of the Research Triangle Foundation)

Neslihan Senocak
Columbia University

Care of Souls in Medieval Italy, 1050–1300 (Fellows’ Fellowship)

Biwu Shang
Shanghai Jiao Tong University

Narrative Ethics in Twenty-First-Century Fiction (Luce China Fellowship)
anonymity as to whatever exists apart from the wall, the berm, the path.

We tend to approach such things as if they were lodged within history. But, as an archaeologist, I don’t begin with the past that was, but with what becomes of it. Here, history must be put on hold. If you engage with a particular place as if it’s connected to a specific event, or locked into a particular time, then you foreclose on other relationships that are happening simultaneously. One does this all the time in writing. Every segment involves choices. However, this becomes particularly relevant when your intervention fundamentally transforms your object of study, as in an archaeological excavation. Those archaeologists who excavated Mycenae as if they confronted the citadel of the Atreidae neglected what it had become and, as a consequence, they obliterated much of what was enclosed within the Bronze Age walls. What remained of the Archaic Mycenae destroyed by Argos in 468 BC? What about the vestiges of the Hellenistic kôme? What of the ruined citadel that offered itself for tinkling flocks when Heinrich Schliemann began digging there? All the associated deposits, augmentations, and residues were displaced in looking for a particular type of history. And the moment that happened, these things and their other pasts were relegated to oblivion. These points are not necessarily central to the book, but they are of major concern within several segments.

How available are these memories? Are they ephemeral or can we access them in some oblique way?

WITMORE: Often when people think of memory, they think of a particular type of willful, recollective faculty that is associated with gray-matter recall. Of course, I am not talking about a memory that is exercised by humans among themselves, but a kind of involuntary quality manifested in the form of things out in the world.

Archaeology routinely returns things lost to contact. We tend to think of this in terms of what the Greeks called “anamnesis,” a return to memory. This is not quite the right expression. This process is more akin to “anamorphosis,” which is a return to form—a form that’s held in things, that allows one to get a sense of what was, by working with what it has become. At Prosemna, near Mycenae, an erstwhile chamber tomb was reused as a garbage dump after its roof had collapsed; another lent its form to a kiln; another may have become a focal point for paying respect to ancestors, forging connections with land perhaps by appealing to those buried in it.

Time can be seen as welling up at the intersection of these things. And this welling up—this percolating assemblage—is something that is incredibly chaotic. It passes at different rates, and archaeologists can pace that in particular ways. In any case, it demands a very different understanding of time, and we need to imagine other ways of telling this story.

This would seem to require a certain projective quality in the writing.

WITMORE: The book pivots on moments of transformation, some subtle, some radical, which have implications for understanding space as much as time—the demise of the Greek polis, the tapping of distant water sources under the Romans, the one-sided travels of Northern Europeans, the mapping of the Peloponnesian interior, the introduction of the train to the region, the construction of large motorways, and so on. I tend to situate these changes comparatively in terms of what they enact, what they anticipate, and what they leave behind, so you are correct in your intuition. At the same time, I hope to acknowledge both the gains and the losses of these changes, at least in some small way.

Ultimately, my aim in writing a chorography is to achieve an understanding of these spatial metamorphoses and their implications for how we relate to these old lands—such an achievement is neither exclusive to archaeology nor to any other field of knowledge. Here, a predisciplinary genre becomes quite relevant.
This summer, the Center underwent major renovations—replacing the glass throughout the building and resurfacing roofs as well as addressing regular upkeep and cosmetic repairs.

Completed shortly before the arrival of the Fellows in September, the scope of this work is evident in the pictures here and we look forward to sharing the rejuvenated vistas of the Center with Fellows and friends throughout the coming year.

these present challenging primary resources in a classroom-ready format, with background information and strategies that enable teachers and students to subject texts and images to analysis through close reading.

In addition to these resources, upcoming webinars from America in Class® include sessions on Kate Chopin’s The Awakening (November 5), Ralph Waldo Emerson (November 12), the Underground Railroad (November 19), and cultural encounters with East Asia during the Cold War (March 3). Along with these topics, America in Class® will host a special series of webinars in early 2016 on teaching war fiction, illuminating how the depiction of war evolved from the romance-tinged realism of The Red Badge of Courage (January 21) through the unsparing naturalism of All Quiet on the Western Front (January 28) to the knowing irony of The Things They Carried (February 4).

For more information about other new additions, upcoming webinars, or other America In Class® resources, visit AmericaInClass.org.


*Supported by an endowment fund established by the Research Triangle Foundation

GREGG HECIMOVICE (Fellow 2015–16) was one of the inaugural group of recipients of the National Endowment for the Humanities Public Scholar fellowships for the project he is working on this year as a Fellow at the Center, The Life and Times of Hannah Crafts.

On September 10, EVELYN BROOKS HIGGINBOTHAM (Fellow 1993–94, 2013–14) received the National Humanities Medal at a ceremony at the White House. Higginbotham was honored for her work “illuminating the African-American journey” and “deepen[ing] our understanding of the American story.”


The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism by Robert E. Buswell Jr. and DONALD S. LOPEZ JR. (Fellow 1996–97) has received the 2015 Dartmouth Medal from the Reference and User Services Association of the American Library Association. It has also been recognized as one of Choice magazine’s Outstanding Academic Titles Top 25 Academic Books for 2014.

JOSEPH LUZZI (Fellow 2004–05) has written a new memoir, In a Dark Wood: What Dante Taught Me about Grief, Healing, and the Mysteries of Love (2015).

PAULA MICHAELS (Fellow 2008–09) has been awarded the 2015 Frances Richardson Keller–Sierra Prize by the Western Association of Women Historians for Lamaze: An International History (2014).

On October 22–23, 2015, JACK SASSON (Fellow 1994–95, 2015–16) was honored for his contributions to Judaic and biblical studies at a conference entitled “Telling Mesopotamian History: Bringing to Life the Stories of Cuneiform Writing” at The Center for Ancient Studies at New York University.

DAVID SCHIMMELPENNINCK van der OYE (Fellow 2002–03) has been elected to the Royal Society of Canada. Established by Parliament in 1882, the Royal Society is “the senior Canadian collegium of distinguished scholars, artists and writers.”

JOHN WALL (Fellow 1980–81, 2013–14) and his colleagues at North Carolina State University have received a digital humanities implementation grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to further their work on a three-dimensional, immersive model of the visual and aural environment of St. Paul’s Cathedral in the time of John Donne. The project will also further develop and publicly release open-source software for the modeling and representation of sound in other historic spaces.

NOTED: A SAMPLING OF NEWS FROM TRUSTEES, FELLOWS, AND STAFF


Former staff member MONA FREDERICK was honored October 12th by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as an Outstanding Alumna. Frederick is currently the executive director of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities at Vanderbilt University.


Fellows SALLY HASLANGER (1995–96) and KATHERINE N. HAYLES (2006–07) were among the 2015 Class of Fellows elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.
So, did the rising tide of success and wealth extend throughout the society?

BERRY: No. Japan has one of the most level societies in the world, in terms of income. But, no, there was the creation of an urban underclass. There were unsuccessful farmers. There was real suffering.

And what happened to those individuals? Was there a notion of social responsibility for the poor, for instance?

BERRY: The most important institutions in the society were the individual blocks in the city and the corporate villages in the countryside. They were extensively self-governing, and these villages and blocks took responsibility for abandoned children, for example. Beggars were registered and authorized to collect alms in certain neighborhoods, where they then owed services such as policing and cleanup. There was an extensive organization of poverty and collective responsibility for suffering.

But there was also a lot of surveillance. As I said, the neighborhood was a pretty powerful instrument. You couldn’t buy or rent property unless the neighborhood agreed to let you. And enterprises that were noisome they tried to exclude—shamisen teachers because they made so much racket, or dealers in charcoal because the traffic was so heavy, certainly public baths because the fire to heat the water was dangerous. Once you went into a neighborhood, most major life decisions needed the approval of the community. And, at night, the gates were closed and watchmen were set. Very safe, very regulated.

This was a society that encouraged a lot of experimentation and also a lot of conformity. Remember, this was a dense, tight society that was essentially isolated from foreign encounters. The Dutch and the Chinese were trading in Nagasaki, but there was significant control on outside encounters and even imported books.

Did the growth and success of this insular society continue once encounters with the outside increased?

BERRY: Sure. The economic explosion of the Meiji period, when Japan was “opened” to the international community, is a well-known story. And it owed a great deal to the Tokugawa experience—to an early modern society with a robust market economy, pervasive schooling and literacy, strong families, and exceptional cohesion.

Tokugawa Ieyasu

Center Receives Education Grant Honoring Former Director

GLAXOSMITHKLINE FOUNDATION AWARDS $50,000 IN RECOGNITION OF W. ROBERT CONNOR

The GlaxoSmithKline Foundation has awarded the National Humanities Center (NHC) a grant in honor of the Center’s former president and director W. Robert Connor who recently retired as a director for the Foundation.

The $50,000 grant will provide for the development of asynchronous, online, self-paced professional development modules for teachers of American history and literature. These modules will complement the Center’s award-winning live webinars and other professional development offerings for teachers.

“We are incredibly grateful for the continued generosity of the GlaxoSmithKline Foundation,” said NHC Vice President for Education Programs Richard Schramm. “By honoring Bob Connor in this way, the Foundation is adding to his legacy as a tireless advocate for excellence in liberal arts education at all levels.”

After his tenure as president and director of the National Humanities Center in 2002, Connor served as president of the Teagle Foundation from 2003 until retiring in 2009. He continues to act as a senior advisor for the Foundation and as an emeritus trustee of the National Humanities Center.
Astonishing things happen when people join together to accomplish visionary goals. At the National Humanities Center, new insights and knowledge are developing constantly as people from a wide range of disciplines and life experience work together to discover ways to transform the world around us.

INVEST IN THE HUMANITIES’ FUTURE

Include the Center in your will or trust today and make a powerful impact on tomorrow’s humanists—Fellows, teachers, and students.

“My year at the National Humanities Center renewed me, restored my love for what I do, and reminded me what scholarship was about. It was a magical year whose effects have stayed with me, and I want to do everything I can to preserve the Center for other scholars.

I decided that the best way to do this was to include the National Humanities Center in my estate plans. I’m very pleased to have made this investment in the future of the humanities and I encourage you to do the same.”

JENANN ISMAEL, associate professor of philosophy, University of Arizona (NHC Fellow 2003–04)

You can use gift planning, including life income gifts and bequests, to provide meaningful support for the Center while enjoying financial and tax benefits for you and your family.

To learn more about how you can invest in the Center’s future, call Heidi Camp, director of institutional advancement, at 919-406-0101 or e-mail hcamp@nationalhumanitiescenter.org.

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Join us in this important work by making a donation to the Center today!

To make a gift, visit nationalhumanitiescenter.org/support/ or e-mail Martha Johnson, mjohnson@nationalhumanitiescenter.org.
Upcoming Events at the National Humanities Center

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12 | 6:00 P.M.
The Invention of the American Soldier Monument
Thomas J. Brown, University of South Carolina

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10 | 6:00 P.M.
From the Underground to the Archive in Ten Years: Girl Zines, Feminist Networks, and the Politics of Memory
Janice Radway, Northwestern University

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11 | 6:00 P.M.
The True Story of Hannah Crafts, America’s First Black Female Novelist
Gregg Hecimovich, Winthrop University

THURSDAY, MARCH 3 | 6:00 P.M.
Emperors and Eunuchs: A Complex Relationship
Norman Kutcher, Syracuse University

On Exhibit
JANUARY 4 – MAY 16
Works by Anthony Ulinski

Stay Connected For the latest news from the Center, about its Fellows, programs, and events, “Like” us on Facebook, “Follow” us on Twitter (@NatlHumanities), or subscribe to the National Humanities Center’s channels on iTunesU, YouTube, and Vimeo.