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Fall 2015

The Spartan Tablet, Fall 2015

San Jose State University, Department of English and Comparative Literature

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THE Spartan Tablet

Department of ENGLISH and COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Spartans Reign in Silicon Valley

Adobe, Hewlett Packard, DreamWorks, PlayStation—*What do all of these high tech firms have in common?* Our recent alumni are making a splash at these and other companies throughout the Bay Area, drawing upon their training in reading, writing, and critical thinking that they obtained as English majors. The companies in which many of our alumni have found homes have found their writing abilities—in all kinds of forms—invaluable for their businesses. Whether producing newsletters, editing technical manuals, copyediting, or writing for the web, writing and strong communication skills form the backbone of our alumni's contributions.

Pollyanna Macchiano

As Pollyanna Macchiano, who is moving into her new role as a Mobile Product Brand Specialist at Adobe, underscores, "Being a good communicator in a tech-driven environment is critical." She didn't intend for her English and Art History background to lead her into the work of tech companies, but the constantly evolving tech environment is exhilarating. At Adobe, she has combined the editing, writing, and design skills that she honed in her major, and as the Art Editor and Art Director for *Reed Magazine*. For Pollyanna, the range of opportunities for



"Being a good communicator in a tech-driven environment is critical."

Pollyanna Macchiano
Mobile Product Brand
Specialist at Adobe Systems

Welcome

to the first issue of *The Spartan Tablet*. We hope to keep you abreast of our department's activities and our alumni's successes in a format that records the range of reading and writing practices in which our alumni are engaged. Our title aims to be inclusive of technologies old and new; it gestures to the physical tablet inscriptions of our classical past, the early etch-a-sketch notebook or "tables" in which Hamlet will record his father's command to "Remember me" (1, v, 97, 98), and the e-reader tablets upon which many of you will access this newsletter. Our department's investment in training our students in canonical literature intersects with our concentration and certificate in Professional and Technical Writing. The English major is where practicality meets passion. We'll be documenting our multiple identities as readers and writers through stories about faculty, students, and alumni, while updating you on upcoming events. Please also visit our [English webpage](#) for current activities and events.

Sincerely,
Shannon Miller
Chair, Department of English
and Comparative Literature

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storytelling has been one of the most exciting parts of working at Adobe, and will be central to her new role at the company where she will “be building community and engagement and storytelling around that mobile story.” Yet as is the case with so many of our alumni, writing takes multiple forms in her work and life. Her editorial think piece for *Inspire Magazine*, “Your Most Important Design Project,” allowed her to include a lot of her personal experiences and thoughts about how we need to design a life that we love.



Michelle enjoys the challenge of working at a start-up company.

Michelle Wellwood

Michelle Wellwood works at a small start-up that would seem the inverse of a major tech company like Adobe, but she has the same passion about what her writing skills are making possible. The documents that she produces at Cannon Quality Group draw upon her attention to

detail, cultivated, she says, by the extensive reading required of an English major. Course work in the major gave her a great grounding in reading unfamiliar material, as well as formatting, editing, and, of course, writing. When combined with her company’s fostering of further education and advancement, she says, “I can actually hold my own with bio-medical engineers.” Her work is essential for bringing to fruition what those engineers are producing, and it is that synergy she likes the most: “my favorite part [of the job] is that I’m helping small companies get their devices to market, which could potentially better the lives of patients.” Like Pollyanna, this is not where she thought her English major would lead her, but she loves her work: “I can honestly say that I don’t see myself working in any other field.”



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Support our talented students in their pursuit of an education! You can help support student success by making a donation today.



Alumna Wins Outstanding Lecturer Award:

Cindy Baer starts down path towards tenure at SJSU

Professor Cindy Baer is a homegrown Spartan. She first stepped onto the San José State campus in 1977 as a freshman with a passion for reading and a desire to teach. After earning her B.A., she had that opportunity on our own campus, teaching SJSU composition students while earning her M.A., and again while finishing her Ph.D. at the University of Washington. She has been teaching continuously at SJSU since 1988, showing a dedication that so rightfully earned her the “Outstanding Lecturer Award” for 2015, an award in which she was selected from lecturers across every department and college at SJSU. And this fall marks another milestone for Dr. Baer; she is starting a position as an Assistant Professor in the English and Comparative Literature Department, stepping into the role of Assistant Director of the Writing Program.

Second Time at Bat:

An Interview with Nick Taylor

Associate Professor of English/Creative Writing and author of four novels, including his two mystery novels with protagonist Johnny Adcock: *The Setup Man* and the forthcoming *Double Switch* (Doubleday, March 2016). Taylor has been teaching Creative Writing in the English Department at San José State since 2007. He is also the Director of the Martha Heasley Cox Center for Steinbeck Studies.

Spartan Tablet: Your first two novels, *Father Junipero's Confessor* and *The Disagreement*, are historical fiction, a different genre than your two baseball novels featuring Johnny Adcock. What drew you to this new genre, and what kinds of overlaps do you see between the two?

Nick Taylor: In a word, readers. I was looking to connect with a larger audience with the detective novels. The audience for crime fiction is second only to romance, and I don't think anyone wants to read my romance. The connections I would say are that both styles, or all my books, require me to immerse myself in a world different from the one I'm living in. *Father Junipero's Confessor* was set in California in the 1770s, and Johnny Adcock is a professional baseball player.

ST: Who are your major literary influences on your writing, and have those shifted in writing baseball mysteries?

NT: Raymond Chandler—place, mood, dialogue are things that he does well. He has always been a major influence even before I began writing a detective novel. I always admired his evocation of place, specifically L.A., where I'm from, and I think that I learned lessons from reading him that I was able to use in historical fiction as well as crime fiction. Place is important. *The Disagreement* was shaped by William Styron's book *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. One unusual one: Grant Brisbee. My baseball writing has been influenced by a blog called *McCovey Chronicles*, which is written by SJSU alumnus Grant Brisbee (BA English/Career Writing '09). He has a smart way of writing about baseball that I admire, and it has influenced the way I imagined Johnny Adcock's world.

ST: You have published *The Setup Man* and will publish *Double Switch* under the pseudonym of T.T. Monday. What drew you to take on a literary alias in writing these two books?

NT: It was an opportunity to create a new brand, a new persona. The publisher gave me the option to use my real name, but I went with Monday because I thought it would be fun. Sort of the same thing that Mark Twain did. Using pseudonyms was more common during the 19th century. In *Double Switch*, I changed the author's bio to reveal myself as T.T. Monday.



Photo by Greg Koch

ST: Can you give us a preview of some of the new adventures that Johnny Adcock will have in *Double Switch*?

NT: Absolutely! Adcock is the client of a woman named Tiff Tate, a high-priced stylist who advises baseball players on their clothing, hair, and walk-up music. Her specialty is beards. She is worried about a client of hers, a Cuban defector being blackmailed by the gangsters who smuggled him off the island. This book includes more sex than the last, and I believe that it's a tighter story (it reads faster). I would be surprised if it takes anyone longer than a day to read.

ST: How do you come up with the crimes Adcock must solve?

NT: You have to start with a body. In crime fiction nothing but murder will do. So, it has to be a murder, relevant to baseball, and it has to feel new. It also has to be something that Adcock can reasonably solve without help from the police.

ST: Are there any crossovers between yourself and your narrator Johnny Adcock?

NT: We are almost the same age. That's about it—and we are both from L.A. and we look similar. I thought making him look like me would be reasonable, but he's probably more ripped than I am. Well, he's a pro athlete, so he must be more in shape.

ST: Pete Rose has been denied entrance to the Baseball Hall of Fame for his gambling activities, a decision that many have found controversial. Do you have any thoughts on Pope Francis's decision to canonize Father Junipero Serra?

NT: Well, I think there's a connection between Pete Rose and Junipero Serra which is they both performed at the top of their professions, but we tend to evaluate them using criteria other than professionalism. They may not have been great men, but Serra was a successful missionary and Pete Rose was a great ball player.

ST: Do you have any plans for a third Johnny Adcock mystery, a third time at bat, as it were?

NT: I do, but I can't reveal any specifics. I will say that the third book might find Adcock playing ball on another continent. Let's hope *Double Switch* does well and the publisher asks me to write another installment!



Center for Literary Arts

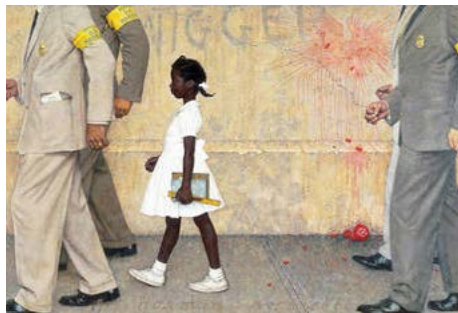
*All upcoming readings
in MLK Library 225/229:*



*Claudia Rankine
December 2, 2015, 7 p.m.*

*Ann Packer
February 10, 2016, 7 p.m.*

*Cristina García
March 8, 2016, 7 p.m.*



Ruby Bridges Accepts Steinbeck Award

*February 24, 2016
SJSU Student Union*

Fall Scholarship Awards

The generosity of alumni and emeritus faculty members make these scholarships and awards possible for our best students.

W.O. Crockett Scholarship
Robert Holmes

**Jack and Maxine Fink
Scholarship**
Boris Slager

Roberta Holloway Award
Shane Diven

**Ruth MacLean McGee
Scholarship**
Jessica Keaton *Graduate*
Cecellia Alvarado *Undergraduate*

Doritt Sibley Award
Kimy Martinez *Graduate*
Vinnie Lopez *Undergraduate*

Catherine Urban Scholarship
Hannah Wiltbank
Daniel Marovich
Bethany Callahan

**Dorothy Wright Children's
Literature Award**
Jenna Glover

**Josephine Chandler
Scholarship**
Thao Nguyen
Brooke Blankenship
Roya Lillie
Sheldon Hentschke

Lois King Thore Short Story
Richard To *Graduate*
Neilson Vuong *Undergraduate*

Harvey Birenbaum Prize
Samantha Crain

Owen Broyles
Aubrey Laughlin

**Ida Fay Sachs Ludwig
Memorial Scholarship**
Kym Cunningham

**James O. Wood
Shakespeare Award**
Kym Cunningham