Marilyn’s Mysteries

By Phil Radoff

“Marilyn the Mystery Maven,” as she has come to be known in BOLLI circles, has devoured mystery novels since she was a tyke of five. Her love of mysteries accompanied her through her formative years in Brooklyn, marriage to husband Bob, college at Worcester’s Clark University, and professional career.

Marilyn retired and joined BOLLI about eight years ago, after 17 years as the academic administrator of Brandeis’s Latin American and Latino Studies program, which offers an interdisciplinary major and minor and draws on faculty from nine departments in the College of Arts and Sciences as well as the Heller and International Business Schools.

Since joining BOLLI, Marilyn has enjoyed the variety of our course offerings. She particularly liked Art Finstein’s musical theater courses and Billy Flesch’s Shakespeare and film seminars. Although she was reluctant to offer her own courses, having had virtually no previous teaching experience, she decided to share her enthusiasm for mysteries by starting a blog, marilynsmysteryreads.com, in 2010. The site, which features her weekly detailed reviews of current mysteries, has an estimated readership of more than a thousand.

Despite the success of the blog, it wasn’t until two years ago that Marilyn could be prevailed upon to share her love of mysteries with other BOLLI members. After her first offerings of mysteries—Murder in New England and Murder in Ethnic Communities—she led her third successful course, Murder in Scandinavia. (She notes that her students seemed to enjoy the Nordic mysteries despite the challenge of keeping track of all those characters with their impossibly complex Nordic names.) Her current course, Murder Most British, gives Marilyn’s students the chance to enjoy works by one of her favorite authors, Agatha Christie. Other favorites—American authors Sarah Paretsky, Sue Grafton, and Tony Hillerman—will no doubt be featured in future course offerings. Despite her early hesitation, Marilyn happily reports that her students have been welcoming, encouraging, and enthusiastic about the three Whodunit? courses she has taught.

Marilyn and husband Bob, who have been married for 54 years, have two sons and four grandchildren. Bob, a clinical psychologist at Harvard Medical School, will be BOLLI’s lunchtime speaker on May 14, providing advice on nurturing a resilient mindset and lifestyle.

Marilyn Brooks, BOLLI’s own “Mystery Maven”
From the Managing Editor

By Jack Curley

It’s good to be back. I’m not sure about others, but I find March, with its gray skies and icy sidewalks, to be the toughest month of the year. Enough winter already! The return to a full BOLLI schedule may not cure my seasonal woes, but I’m certain the time we’ll spend together this semester will ease the passage to spring. Of note:

I’m pleased to welcome Joyce Lazarus to the Banner team. A BOLLI Study Group Leader, published author, and former college professor, Joyce comes to us well prepared to immediately lend a hand with several aspects of our work. Watch for her first article in the next issue.

Thanks to Megan, back copies of the Banner have been rescued from an obscure, soon-to-be deleted webpage and are now readily available for viewing.

Your comments, questions, and suggestions are always welcome at: jackcurley@outlook.com.

Welcome, New Members!

Our 42 new members from 17 different communities bring us to a total membership of 445.

Andover: Stephanie Segall
Bedford: Carol Rissman
Belmont: Margery Miller, Joel Semuels
Boston: Jennifer Coplon, Carole Mittelman, Ann Reisen, David Reisen, Maddy Segal
Brighton: Shoshana Ernst
Brookline: Roberta Gianfortoni, Abby Greenberg, Susan Rack, Emily Stahler
Chestnut Hill: Myra Cohen, Paula Thier, Sam Thier, Paula Witkin
Framingham: Kay Collins
Hudson: Lee Jacobs, David Low
Lincoln: Marilyn Hallock
Needham: Marcia Brier, Ron Ludman, Elizabeth Tober
Newton: Arnie Bauchner, Jim DiNatale, Nurit Eini-Pindyck, Esther Fortress, Lana Mendelsohn, Jim Miller, Renata Selig, Kathy Woodward
Walpole: Marie Trask
Waltham: Ruth Minden, Gerrie Stewart
Watertown: Lisa Galen, Carl Taplin
Wayland: Sandra Narinian, Linda Schwartz, Charlie Strigler
Wellesley: Daniel Vogel

The BOLLI Banner is published by The Banner Committee: Jack Curley, Managing Editor/Articles Co-Editor

Na’ama Ansell, Secretary/Staff Writer
Sam Ansell, Cartoonist
Joyce Lazarus, Staff Writer

Contributing Writers: Arlene Bernstein, Marilyn Brooks, Marie Danziger

Banner Archives: On the BOLLI home page (www.brandeis.edu/bolli), click on the link beneath the Banner image and follow the link found at the bottom of the next page.

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BOLLI Leaders’ Retreat

By Jack Curley

In recent years, BOLLI has successfully increased the number of both members and classes. However, some of the resources essential to further advancement have lagged, in particular the availability of Study Group Leaders and meeting space. How do we secure the resources necessary to maintain and build upon our recent success? What are the best ways to nurture and harness our considerable existing resources, among them a diverse and talented base of members, dedicated staff, strong relationships with Brandeis and the Osher Foundation, and ever-improving technology and analytics? These are examples of the issues and questions posed at 60 Turner Street on the morning of January 16 to attendees of BOLLI’s semiannual Leaders’ Retreat. The approximately 30 participants were mostly seasoned members active in the organization, along with a representative number of newer members.

The conference began with discussion of a recent piece in the New York Times Magazine regarding “Latitude Margaritaville,” a new, “55 and better,” senior community in Daytona Beach inspired by the music and lifestyle of singer Jimmy Buffet. While it quickly became apparent that life as a Parrot Head is the antithesis of the retirement dreams of most conference attendees, the subject proved a helpful entry point to further conversation regarding BOLLI’s aspirations.

Next on the agenda was a strategic planning exercise. Acting as “student stakeholders,” participants engaged in substantive and candid discussion with staff and committee leaders about their experience in the BOLLI classroom and community. This exercise, along with work currently being done in other committees and working groups, will help guide the way forward.

For additional information about where we’ve been and where we may be headed, members are encouraged to read BOLLI’s 2017/2018 Annual Report (see below) and watch for updates in the Banner and other organizational communications.

BOLLI’s 2017/2018 Annual Report can be accessed by clicking the “Learn About Us” tab on the home page.

Above, leaders in action at Turner Street. (Photo by Jack Curley)
Winter Faculty Seminar: “Measure for Measure”

By Marilyn Brooks

*Measure for Measure* is considered one of Shakespeare’s “problem plays.” But for Brandeis Professor Billy Flesch, the only problem he encountered in teaching the December seminar was how to accommodate all the BOLLI members who wanted to attend. The solution was a first for BOLLI: after one section was fully subscribed within 48 hours, a second section was added to allow 20 more students to sign up.

Unlike the Bard’s tragedies (in which nearly everyone dies), his comedies (ending in marriage) and his histories (portraying past events), “problem plays” are those in which “no one feels good about the way they end,” Billy said. He noted that Coleridge called *Measure for Measure* “a hateful play…a poison pen letter to the world.”

The play’s main question revolves around Angelo’s character. At the beginning, we see him as a moral if rigid man, someone who reluctantly takes over the dukedom temporarily at the duke’s request in order to increase adherence to its laws. But soon we see another side to Angelo—his morality leaves no room for mercy; his rigidity takes over his humanity.

*Measure for Measure* shows Shakespeare’s strengths: his ability to present his characters in shades of gray, not as black or white caricatures; his stagecraft, “how to make a play compelling all the way through”; and his introduction of what Billy calls the *parallax view*, allowing the audience to see the same conversation or incident from more than one point of view. In this regard, the play illustrates the experience we often have of liking a character at one phase of a novel or play and reacting differently toward that character at a later phase.

This seminar showed Billy’s strengths as well. He has an amazing ability to bring seemingly disparate topics into the discussion, including rap music, *Beavis and Butthead*, Sigmund Freud, Ginger Rogers, and Agatha Christie, to name just a few. Through these connections, he showed us the timelessness of Shakespeare’s play.

Billy also emphasized that the author’s plays should be both read and performed. Although both are important, in his opinion “The play started with the pen, not the voice.” His review of the film version of this play shown in class, a 1979 production starring Kate Nelligan and Tim Pigott-Smith, is that “it’s unusually good—the acting and the staging seem right to me.”

When asked what he enjoys about teaching at BOLLI, Billy says that, here, “people understand what the issues are—they know what life is, and I want to teach material that's about life.” Billy’s gift is making every seminar he teaches come alive for the BOLLI members who are fortunate enough to take part in it.
Winter Faculty Seminar: “Barber and Beyond”
by Arlene Bernstein

During the week of January 7th, Enterpe and Terpsichore, the muses of poetry and music, hovered over the Gathering Space as Georgia Luikens skillfully led the Winter Faculty Seminar, Barber and Beyond: The Poetic Muse in 20th Century American Music. The seminar focused on the intersection of poetry and music, specifically poetry as song. Twentieth century American composers were attracted to the works of prominent nineteenth and twentieth century poets, resulting in the birth of the American art song. This genre followed in the tradition of nineteenth century German lieder, which were themselves preceded by earlier religious works.

We explored Samuel Barber’s vocal tone poem, Knoxville, Summer of 1915, Charles Ives’s tone paintings based on the poetry of Emerson and Longfellow, and Aaron Copland’s Song Cycle of twelve poems by Emily Dickinson, among other examples of the genre. Special emphasis was given to Leonard Bernstein’s musical interpretations of poetry, concentrating on Songfest (1977), Bernstein’s settings of the works of poets Edna St. Vincent Millay, Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, Frank O’Hara, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Langston Hughes, among others. Georgia enhanced our reading and listening with interesting vignettes on the background and idiosyncrasies of the composers and, where applicable, on the relationships between the composers and the poets they chose.

Georgia also introduced us to Nadia Boulanger, the grande dame of the Paris music world for several decades of the twentieth century. A composer and conductor, she was probably best known as a teacher who mentored many American and European composers. Copland chose to study with her in lieu of attending university or conservatory back home. She championed his music, and, upon Copland’s return to America, he sent her his works before they were released; she commented but never edited. He was the only one of her students permitted to call her by her first name. Their 57-year-long correspondence is housed in the Library of Congress.

Under Georgia’s masterful guidance, we were encouraged to do close readings of the poems, together with concentrated listening to the musical settings. We noted that, often, there is tension between the poem and the musical score. This may occur when the cadence of the poem does not seem to fit the timing or mood of the vocal or orchestral work; in other pieces, the music and poetry are synchronous. Barber’s works are an example of the latter, whereas Copland often purposely wrote against the text, resulting in a seeming distortion of the poem. Bernstein’s Songfest contains examples of both tension and continuity.

In all, the seminar paid appropriate homage to the dual muses, and the participants left the Gathering Space fully satisfied.
Winter Lecture Series: “Perspectives on Genetics”

By Marie Danziger

In this exciting era of almost daily biotech breakthroughs, many of us find ourselves wishing we had focused more on those undergraduate science courses we overlooked. A large group of BOLLI members were given a second chance, though, with the wonderfully rigorous winter lecture series offered by Laura Laranjo, *In the Face of a Revolution: Scientific and Ethical Perspectives on Genetics*.

Laura had offered a very popular genetics course in the 2017-2018 season, and these four lectures, sponsored by Benchmark Senior Living, covered even more ground. Her amazing diagrams and videos illustrated topics ranging from the complex helical structure of DNA to the genetics of human diseases, from the legal consequences of genetic fingerprinting to the safety of genetically modified crops.

In her lecture series, Laura’s teaching style combined scientific rigor and personal warmth, which helped us to navigate the latest discoveries along with their sometimes troubling implications. To what extent are we determined by our genetic heritage? Should we trust the disease predictions of companies like 23andMe? How is genetic fingerprinting uncovering major mistakes in our criminal justice system? And what is the truth about genetically modified food?

Laura alternated lively lectures with group discussions of difficult ethical questions and real-world case histories. The lawyers in the audience helped us analyze legal details, and many listeners asked probing questions related to genetic mutations, cloning, and CRISPR gene editing.

Laura’s colorful PowerPoint diagrams clarified the ideas presented in both the assigned textbook, James Watson’s *DNA: The Secret of Life*, and the additional articles recommended each week that covered the very latest developments in this emerging field. Crick and Watson’s sequencing of our genome has led not just to the possibility of preventing and treating a range of inherited diseases but also to the ethically controversial manipulation of the genetic structure of unborn babies.

While there are no easy answers to the various ethical dilemmas raised by all of this recent progress, those of us who took part in Laura’s lectures feel much more prepared to ask the right questions.

*Having now taught a course and delivered a lecture series at BOLLI, Laura Laranjo has become a familiar face. Her ability to make a complex subject manageable for those who consider themselves to be non-scientists is remarkable. Laura will receive her Ph.D. later this year. We hope she’ll be back.*
Winter Lecture Series: “Reading Haiti”

by Jack Curley

How did Haiti, a land rich with natural resources, including gold, mahogany, iridium, and bauxite, come to be the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere? The answers, which are complex and often infuriating, offer stark evidence of the dark forces often unleashed by powerful nations in pursuit of wealth.

Haiti’s troubles began with the arrival of Christopher Columbus, who, after visiting Hispaniola (the current Haiti and Dominican Republic) in 1492, noted in his journal that the island “… is a miracle! … there are many wide rivers of which the majority contain gold… and great mines of gold and other metals.” Columbus’s portentous words, which ignited the era of Caribbean colonialism, also served as the jumping-off point for the Winter Lecture Series, Reading Haiti Through History, Literature, and Film, led by social critic, photographer, and poet Patrick Sylvain, who teaches in the Africana Studies Department at Brown University and is a Brandeis lecturer.

In what he termed “a difficult trip through the past,” Patrick first told the story of how Haiti’s people, trapped in a geopolitical maelstrom of greed and violence, have suffered under the rule of international and homegrown despots for the better part of 500 years. Haiti’s history, and the complicity of the United States in bringing the nation to its current state of despair, are little spoken of or understood here. But many of today’s problems can be traced to the period 1915 to 1934, when American occupation of a previously self-governed Haiti led to massacres, seizure of property and wealth, forced labor, and militarization of an army answerable solely to the United States. Patrick screened several documentaries of the era, pointing out that the occupation was encouraged and supported by large American companies which greatly prospered by reaping the benefits of Haiti’s natural resources.

Patrick’s third lecture focused on Haitians both at home and abroad who have contributed to a growing body of Caribbean literature. Readings included Immaculate, a short story by Man Booker Prize winner Marlon James, and excerpts from Roxane Gay’s novel, An Untamed State. Key to Patrick’s interpretation of the pieces is the concept of “intertextuality,” which he defines as a conversation among different works, authors, and texts.

The final session marked the release of Patrick’s first English language collection of poems, Underworlds. His compelling readings of selected pieces underscored the poet’s anguish while struggling to “talk with history” to “excavate the silences” of the Haitian experience. The series ended on a celebratory note, with Patrick, his wife, and academic colleagues joining attendees for cake and servings of Joumou, a traditional Haitian soup, prepared by BOLLI member Mary Kerr.
Current and Upcoming Campus Events

Compiled by Ellen Moskowitz  For complete information on all Brandeis events, visit www.brandeis.edu/events (Brandeis photos online)

SLOSBERG MUSIC CENTER

Andrea Segar, Violin, with Angela Kim, Piano.  Sunday, March 10, 3-4:30 p.m. Lydian String Quartet first violinist Andrea Segar performs with frequent collaborator, pianist Angela Kim. General Public: $20, Brandeis Community and Seniors (55+): $15, Students: $5.

The Lydian Octet.  Sunday, March 31, 3-4:00 p.m. Lydian String Quartet players, past and present, reunite to perform the delightful Mendelssohn Octet to benefit the Mary Ruth Ray Fund. General Public: $20, Brandeis Community and Seniors (55+): $15, Students: $5.

Lydian String Quartet: Love and Death, Part III. Saturday, April 13, 8-9:30 p.m. with preconcert talk at 7:00 p.m. The quartet will perform Puccini’s Crisantemi, Britten’s String Quartet no. 3, and Schubert’s String Quartet no. 14 in D minor, Death and the Maiden, D. 810. General Public: $20, Brandeis Community and Seniors (55+): $15, Students: $5.

ROSE ART MUSEUM

Howardena Pindell: What Remains to Be Seen.  Through May 19. For nearly five decades, Howardena Pindell has explored the intersection of art and activism. What Remains to Be Seen spans the New York-based artist’s five-decades-long career.

AN INVITATION TO ALL BOLLI MEMBERS

The BOLLI Journal is now accepting submissions for our 2020 showcase of work by BOLLI writers, photographers, painters, potters, printmakers, carpenters and other crafts specialists. Details regarding the submissions process can be found on the BOLLI website home page.

Submissions will be accepted up to September 30, 2019. We hope to see your work included in this very special volume.