Where Mathematics Meets Poetry

by Na’ama Ansell

From Ankara, Turkey, where he was born, to the UK, where he earned his first graduate degree in political science at Warwick University, then on to Brandeis, where he is in his fourth year of Ph.D. graduate studies in English literature, Onur Toker is breaking new ground with his course at BOLLI that combines mathematics, literature, and the social sciences.

Onur’s interest in the social sciences began when he was young. In Ankara he went to English-speaking schools, where his classmates were the children of diplomats and business people. Everyone spoke English, regardless of country of origin, so he considers himself “bi-cultural.” He says that “later, I figured out that what was more important was economic class—middle-class students had more in common than students of the same ethnicity.” He credits his interest in science to his family, “which was very secular, believed in science, and was uninterested in religion. My grandmother used to tell me not to believe in fairy tales.”

After he graduated from university in Istanbul with a liberal arts degree and went on to the UK for graduate work, Onur looked for a program that combined mathematics, literature, political science, and poetry. He settled on a degree in political science because “it’s about people, but also because it uses mathematics. I wanted to see how the humanities and the more quantitative sciences could work together. I’d like to see the human sciences get more involved in the mathematical side, like using mathematical modeling. Humanities and mathematical sciences never talk to one another, and that is very wasteful.” In analyzing social situations, Onur says, “we tend to use verbal analysis rather than mathematical modeling, but that’s because mathematics is not as familiar a language for us.”

Bringing mathematics and literature together is what Onur does in his course titled A Poet and a Mathematician Walk into a Bar: Shakespeare and Infinity. Taking portions of three Shakespeare plays, he asks the class to assess and try to resolve conflict situations by using game theory: quantifying the problem by using mathematical data. One example is the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets in Romeo and Juliet. Can the warring fathers offer each other an advantage that will be acceptable and therefore allow the families to make peace? Can factors like money, land, and status be given numerical values in an exchange resulting in a win-win situation? Or do cultural, historical, and other qualitative factors have to be (Continued on page 6)
A Visit to Elm Bank

by Jack Curley and Phil Radoff

Located along the Charles River just west of Wellesley Square, Elm Bank Reservation has long been a favorite destination for locals in search of exercise, relaxation, or the opportunity to see some of the region's most beautiful gardens. The modest green signs on Route 16 and pot-holed entranceway belie the beauty of what awaits visitors after crossing a one-lane bridge to access the park's 180 acres of fields, trails, and open spaces. Situated entirely in Dover (only the entrance is in Wellesley), the Reservation was in private hands until the 1940s when it was purchased by the Stigmatine Brothers for use as a seminary and school. Three decades later it was sold to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and was initially the site of a technical school.

Since 1996, Elm Bank has served as the home of Massachusetts Horticultural Society, which leases 36 acres and several buildings from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation to house the Society's various programs, events, and magnificent gardens. The Society's Gardens at Elm Bank, which are handicap-accessible, are the only part of the reservation for which an admission fee is charged ($10), but children under 12 are admitted free if accompanied by an adult. With payment comes the opportunity to view the Society's many gardens, among them the historic Italianate Garden, the James Crockett Memorial Garden (named in honor of the first host of WGBH's Victory Garden), and the beloved Weezie's Garden for Children, which offers different areas for learning, play, and discovery. The Goddess Garden features three statues by sculptor Martin Moore that once graced the exterior of Horticultural Hall, the Society's late 19th century headquarters, which stood at the corner of Tremont and Bromfield Streets in Boston. The statues depict three Roman goddesses: Ceres, goddess of agriculture; Flora, goddess of flowers; and Pomona, goddess of fruit trees. Boston-based Moore (whose student, Daniel Chester French, sculpted the Lincoln statue in Washington) was also the sculptor of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument on Boston Common and the American Sphinx located in Mount Auburn Cemetery.

Behind the statues, you'll see the stately Manor House. Once a magnificent private residence and later the site of Horticultural Society events, in recent years, the property has fallen into disrepair. Happily, a volunteer committee will soon be established to develop a plan for its restoration.

In addition, the grounds include several buildings, including the Putnam Horticulture Building, used for lectures and workshops; the Horticultural Education Center, home to the Society's library; and the Hunnewell Building, a former carriage house used for staging major events and also available for private rentals. Upcoming events include the Festival of Trees and Snow Village (December 10 and 11) and Designing the Winter Landscape (January 17).

One of the Mass Hort's programs may be of particular interest to BOLLI members (especially those with young grandchildren). On weekends, from 10:30 to 12, the Society's education staff offers the BOLLI BANNER is published by The Banner Committee: Phil Radoff, Managing Editor/Articles Co-Editor

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family programs focusing on garden science and hands-on activities targeted to young children. There are no additional charges for this program. Information about all Mass Hort programs can be found at the Horticultural Society website (www.masshort.org).

If, after taking in the sights, you feel the need for refreshment, turn left on Route 16 after exiting the Reservation and stop by the Charles River Coffee House, just down the road in South Natick. If you’re still feeling adventurous get your coffee “to go,” cross the street, and behind the South Natick Library you’ll find a small park with several benches affording close up views of the Charles River Dam.

All in all, a visit to Elm Bank Reservation before winter takes hold can be a very pleasant way to spend part of your weekend.
In May of this year, Brandeis announced the appointment of Luis Croquer as the new director of the Rose Art Museum. Croquer was recommended for the position by a search committee consisting of Brandeis faculty members, students, and members of the Rose board. He replaces Chris Bedford, who left the Rose in 2016 to become director of the Baltimore Art Museum. (See the May 2017 issue of the Banner.)

For this article, we sat down with Director Croquer to discuss his plans for the Rose and his vision of the museum’s role both within the university and beyond.

Luis Croquer is a friendly and engaging man, who welcomed us warmly and personally led us on a tour of Body Talk, an exhibition spanning a century of paintings, collages, sculpture, video, and multimedia works from the Rose’s permanent collection currently on view in the Fineberg Gallery.

Croquer, who was born in El Salvador, is the son of a Venezuelan diplomat father and Salvadoran mother; he has traveled extensively and lived in numerous countries in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. He studied anthropology and communications at the University of London and earned a master’s degree in modern and contemporary art history, theory, and criticism at the State University of New York at Purchase. He has been the recipient of Fulbright, Guggenheim Museum, and Warhol Foundation fellowships.

Now a resident of Boston’s South End, Luis comes to Brandeis from Seattle, where he was the deputy director of exhibitions, collections, and programs at the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington. There he headed all of the gallery’s major artistic and creative areas and integrated the activities of the curatorial, collections, and education departments. Before joining the Henry, Croquer was the first permanent director and chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Detroit, where he established an international reputation for presenting ambitious contemporary exhibitions and drew a regional following through innovative community outreach.

Croquer was attracted to the Rose because of its “extraordinary collection of modern and contemporary art.” He points to works by world famous artists like Warhol and De Kooning and praises his predecessors for their early identification of the significance of these artists and for acquiring their works at the right time. Rather than focus on the value or fame of a work of art, however, Luis believes a museum should help bring out the ideas the artist had at a work’s conception. In the case of Warhol, for example, he notes that the artist’s work was intended as a commentary on the prevailing “culture of consumption and celebrity.”

New Rose Art Museum Director
by Phil Radoff and Jack Curley

Brandeis’s new Rose Art Gallery Director, Luis Croquer (Brandeis press release photo)
The role of the contemporary art museum, says Croquer, is to “connect the viewer with the cultural Zeitgeist.” He claims that “a personal process of discovery happens in a museum.” If a show is successful, the viewer feels as if his “feet lift off the ground.” He recognizes that new art is often difficult for viewers to appreciate, but argues that the role of contemporary art is to “challenge the canon and move the project forward.”

Luis points to the traditional Brandeis focus on social justice and says that by making informed decisions regarding exhibits and acquisitions, museums like the Rose can play a role in achieving a more equitable world. He views artists as activists, often making political comments without being literal. For example, feminist artists have helped to change the way women view their bodies and have helped to draw attention to the AIDS crisis in America. The Body Talk exhibition, which includes several works by women artists, is a case in point.

Now that the Rose has achieved a considerable measure of stability--nine years after the uproar over its abortive plan to sell off some of its major works--Croquer feels free to shape the future of the Rose as he believes most appropriate. However, he still senses the need to continue to demonstrate that the Rose is and will remain a permanent part of the community.

Croquer’s international contacts, interest in community outreach, and curatorial experience will serve him well in his new position at the Rose. He wants to extend outreach to the larger community and at the same time to increase Rose viewership. In this regard, he wants to bring the work of new artists into the collection. He plans to do this in part by broader collaboration with other institutions. Museums, he feels, should be both producers and collaborators for the display of art to the community. He stays abreast of what’s happening in the art world by speaking with artists and colleagues, who, he says, are “always thinking of interesting things,” and by visiting museums, galleries, and studios.

Luis particularly feels the need to diversify. Most museums, he says, “are populated by white males.” He wants to encourage women artists and artists of color, who have been historically under-represented, and to ensure that women and persons of color also continue to have an equal place on the staff.

Croquer wants the Rose’s upcoming exhibitions to have impact on the community. They need to be the right choices, he says, to be able to engage the Brandeis community and the general public. There

(Continued on page 7)
Where Mathematics Meets Poetry (Continued)

taken into account? Onur says that both quantitative and qualitative factors are essential in solving thorny problems.

In *Troilus and Cressida*, if the abducted Helen had been given back to the Greeks, the seven-year war between Greece and Troy would have ended. Troilus and Cressida would have wound up together. It would have been a win-win situation, and the play wouldn't have ended badly!

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Onur says, “the two lovers gain immortality due to the sympathies of the audience. Caesar, calculating how to keep control of Rome, winds up the loser because, as emperor, he will always have to watch his back. He will never have a friend, nor enjoy love or friendship.”

Onur suggests that the lesson we learn from Shakespeare is that quantifying conflict results in winners and losers. Often, to win through calculation is to lose in the long run. We sometimes feel forced to calculate because we don’t trust one another. We should “just do the brave thing, be generous, and hope the other side will reciprocate.”

How did Onur get to Brandeis? After completing his graduate degree at Warwick University in the UK, he went back to Istanbul and took a teaching post at Bilgi University. There he met his wife to be, Emily Coolidge, a Boston area resident and graduate of Bryn Mawr. Alarmed by the second term Bush election, she left the US and also took a teaching post at Bilgi University. The two married, and, after a seven-year stint in Istanbul, Emily wanted to go back home to be with elderly grandparents. Toker decided that it would be the right time to study for a Ph.D. in literature and was accepted at Brandeis. Emily, who has a library science degree, is now a librarian at Harvard’s Lamont Library.

I asked Toker what it was like for him to teach older people. “I wish I could tell you that there are huge differences,” he told me, “but there aren’t. The dynamics are much the same as teaching an undergraduate class. We learn by bringing our experiences to the classroom. Older people have the advantage of having more experiences, but it’s a matter of degree. Young people don’t have the categories to understand reality. Older people have already categorized their many experiences, but they are still willing to add more categories. That’s an amazing skill. With younger people you can impress them more.”

For relaxation from the stresses of teaching and thesis work, Onur goes running and hiking with his wife, although he says he prefers nature from the easy chair. Swimming is his favorite sport, especially in the ocean, which reminds him of his childhood trips to the beach. “My goal is to dip my toes in the water at all the beaches in the US.”

Coming Attractions: CAST Performance, December 7

On Thursday, December 7, Special Interest Group CAST (Creative Acting, Storytelling, and Theatre) will present a world premiere production of *Carrying On* for BOLLI’s lunchtime audience. The play consists of six short scenes set in or near Carey Village, an upscale senior living facility on the campus of Carey College, a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania. Enjoy light comic and poignant moments in this new work by (very) local playwright, our own Sue Wurster.

*CAST members Phyllis Walt and Eileen Mitchell rehearse “It’s All in the Name,” a scene from Carrying On to be presented at 12:45 on December*
needs to be more outreach to Waltham schools and other educational institutions. He notes that teenagers are particularly important and points with pride to the successful effort to attract teens in his previous position with the Henry Gallery. As part of the Rose's outreach, Luis has continued the Close Looking program, in which the public is invited to participate in discussions regarding particular works on display.

When we met, Luis noted that four exhibitions were on display. He was pleased to point out that two additional exhibitions were in the planning stage. They are now on view: the first large-scale museum exhibition in North America devoted to the work of celebrated New York-based artist Joe Bradley; and a site-specific mural by Chicago based artist Tony Lewis “that grows out of his ongoing investigations of the relationships between drawing, abstraction, and language.” Also of note: The Baltimore museum and the Rose have collaborated to cosponsor the work of artist Mark Bradford at the U.S. Pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale, the world’s premier showcase for contemporary art. Bradford’s work was featured at the Rose in recent years.

Although no date has yet been set, we are reliably informed that Director Croquer will be a BOLLI lunchtime speaker in 2018, an event not to be missed.

On display at the Rose, “Ernst” and “Avery Fish,” works from Joe Bradley’s exhibition as well as Tony Lewis’s mural, “Plunder.” (Photos online.)

Winter Seminars and Lecture Series

Two of BOLLI’s truly favorite seminar leaders will return to 60 Turner Street during the upcoming winter term. Billy Flesch will lead Encountering the Great Falstaff in Henry IV, Part I (December 18-22), and Gil Harel will take seminar participants into The World of Johann Sebastian Bach (January 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8).

Eric Elder, Brandeis Instructor of Music, will provide a series of weekly lectures (January 16 to February 13) on The Harlem Renaissance: Musical Expressions in Historical and Literary Context. Contact Lily Gardner for more information about these programs and how to register: 781-736-2992 or lgardner@brandeis.edu.
Upcoming Campus Events
Compiled by Ellen Moskowitz

SLOSBERG MUSIC CENTER

**BRANDEIS JAZZ ENSEMBLE. Bob Nieske, Director. Saturday, December 2, 8:00-9:30 p.m.** Free and open to the public.

**LYDIAN STRING QUARTET. Saturday, January 20, 8:00 p.m.** Brandeis’s resident string quartet—violinists Andrea Segar and Judith Eissenberg, violist Mark Berger, and cellist Joshua Gordon—perform music of Mendelssohn, Schubert, and Thomas Adès. $15 for Brandeis community and seniors (55+); $5 for students. Purchase tickets online, by phone at 781-736-3400, or in person at Brandeis Tickets.

**MESSENH SING at SHAPIO CAMPUS CENTER ATRIUM. Monday, December 11, 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.** The beloved Brandeis Messiah Sing tradition returns. All members of the Brandeis community, as well as family and friends, are welcome to celebrate the arrival of the holiday season with the sing-along concert of Handel's masterwork, Messiah.

**FAFALI: MUSIC AND DANCE FROM GHANA. Ben Paulding, Director. Monday, December 14, 7:00-8:30 p.m.** Free and open to the public.

THE ROSE ART MUSEUM


**JOE BRADLEY. Through January 28, 2018. The Lois Foster Gallery.** This exhibition is the first large-scale museum exhibition in North America devoted to the work of celebrated New York-based artist Joe Bradley, who is widely known for his powerful abstract paintings and spontaneous drawings.

**BUCKDANCER’S CHOICE: JOE BRADLEY SELECTS. Through January 28, 2018. The Lower Rose Gallery.** In conjunction with Joe Bradley’s solo exhibition in the Foster Wing (October 15, 2017–January 28, 2018), the artist will select a group of works from the Rose collection for an innovative display that draws upon masterworks and lesser-known gems of the museum's holdings.