



University of New Hampshire
College of Liberal Arts

REvisions: UNH English

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banner courtesy of Kayla Barron, UNH '20

Professor of Medieval Literature Samantha Seal Discusses Her Next Book on Chaucer

Professor Samantha Seal, author of *Father Chaucer: Generating Authority in The Canterbury Tales*, published this year by Oxford University Press, begins writing and researching, with the help of a fellowship year funded by *American Council of Learned Scholars*, her second book, *Chaucerian Dynasty: The Father of English Poetry and His Family*. She explains:



It's the first-ever biography of the Chaucer and de la Pole families, the descendants of the poet, Geoffrey Chaucer. Although Chaucer himself was born to a common London family, his poetry and court connections allowed him to launch his son into Parliament and turn his granddaughter into a duchess. My book tells the story of how the Chaucer family drew closer and closer to the British throne throughout the fifteenth-century (a Chaucer descendent becomes the heir to the crown!), before disaster struck with the triumph of Henry Tudor at Bosworth Field, and they became exiles and rebels on the European continent.

It's some really fun history— lots of murders and plotting, romance, intrigue, and even pirates! But I'm really hoping that my book also demonstrates how we can never really talk about the genius of one man alone; lots and lots of people help to build the status of a single author by reading, commissioning, and promoting his work. In Chaucer's case, many of those people were the ones who were tied to him by blood, and who thus saw a real advantage in exploiting the memory of their famous poetic ancestor. In that sense, I argue, we should talk not only about the importance of

Geoffrey Chaucer as a poet, but also about the Chaucer family's importance as a literary dynasty at the end of the Middle Ages.

This is my second book on Chaucer, and I think there are many reasons why our English majors should read about him! For one thing, Chaucer has historically been one of the foundational figures of the English literary canon, and his memory has been closely associated with trends of English nationalism, imperialism, and racial exclusion. Therefore, as we continue to decolonize and diversify the canon, I think it's crucial to study Chaucer and debunk many of the misuses to which his poetry has been put. For one example, my book argues that the Chaucer family didn't die out at all; they simply became French after a few decades on the continent! The study of Chaucer and of the Middle Ages as a whole is much more about the study of a transnational, global world than we've ever really acknowledged, and I hope that my new book contributes to that crucial scholarly revision.

I teach classes on Chaucer at UNH, and I'm definitely looking forward to sharing what I learn this year with my students! However, I think the kinds of arguments that I'm making in the book— about authorship, literary community, and the global nature of English identity— can be applied to all my classes. When I teach the digital humanities, in particular, I emphasize the tension between the collection of data and its analysis. Digital tools offer



us so many opportunities to collect and structure ever more endless amounts of information. But the study of literature teaches us how to interpret that data, how to pick through the minutiae and recognize what's important, what's the story. I'm so looking forward to figuring out how to tell the Chaucer family's stories, and I'm even more excited about getting back in the classroom next year to share the storytelling process with my students.

Watch for Prof. Seal's fall 2020 courses:
English 510: Intro to Digital Humanities and
English 925: Graduate Study of Literature

The Graphic Narrative Goes to China:

UNH English Professor Monica Chiu Introduces Asian American Studies and Graphic Narrative to Chinese Students and Scholars

Monica Chiu, professor of English, recently returned from China where she served as a Fulbright Specialist, a short-term opportunity offered by the Department of State. For four weeks, Nov. 20 to Dec. 21, 2019, Chiu worked with faculty in literature, translation and education at Minnan Normal University, located in the southern city of Zhangzhou.

At Minnan Normal, Chiu introduced faculty and students, both graduate and undergraduate, to Asian American studies and graphic narrative.

“Graphic narrative is a new topic for scholars in China,” says Chiu. “While the curriculum in many Chinese universities like Minnan Normal is often tightly tailored to address state exams, thus prohibiting the introduction of the medium, many expressed an interest in how to teach it.”

The one-month exchange has resulted in a long-term translation project between Prof. Yi Liu of Minnan Normal University and Chiu. Yi will translate Professor Longhai Zhang’s 2018 study “Reading Asian American Literature” (Xiamen University Press), and Chiu will edit the book and look for a U.S.-based publisher. The project will assist scholars in the field of Asian American studies, American Studies, and transnational studies in discovering how the literature is read and taught on various shores, says Chiu.

Chiu was previously a Fulbright Scholar at The University of Hong Kong in 2011-12. She lived in Hong Kong with her family and taught Asian American



Photo courtesy of Monica Chiu

literature, film, and a survey of American literature. That exchange resulted in her edited collection *Drawing New Color Lines: Transnational Asian American Graphic Narratives* (Hong Kong University Press, 2015), the first study to address this topic.

Compiled by Susan Dumais '88 '02G | College of Liberal Arts
See more at

<https://www.unh.edu/unhtoday/2020/01/graphic-narrative-goes-china>

Watch for Prof. Chiu’s fall 2020 courses:

*English 650: Studies in American Literature and Culture: The Graphic Novel and Race in America and
English 938: Seminar: Studies in 20th-Century American Literature*



2019-2020
Department of English
Writers Series

Author of “Live From the Mood Board”

CANDICE REFFE

Thursday
March 26th, 2020
5:00 p.m.
Hamilton Smith
Room 210

