

VOICE 4

œ VOLUME 18 œ SPRING 2011 œ DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH & THEATRE œ ACADIA œ

30th Annual Atlantic Undergraduate English Conference



Acadia English students Tiffany Morris, Corey Liu, Rebecca Dobson, Marc Muschler, Danielle Pierce, and Shawna Stone (not shown) were selected to present academic and creative papers at the 30th Annual Atlantic Undergraduate English Conference which was held at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax March 11-13, 2011. The conference coordinator was Acadia MA English student, Kim Wallace.

ATLANTIC UNDERGRADUATE
ENGLISH CONFERENCE

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THEATRE REVIEWS

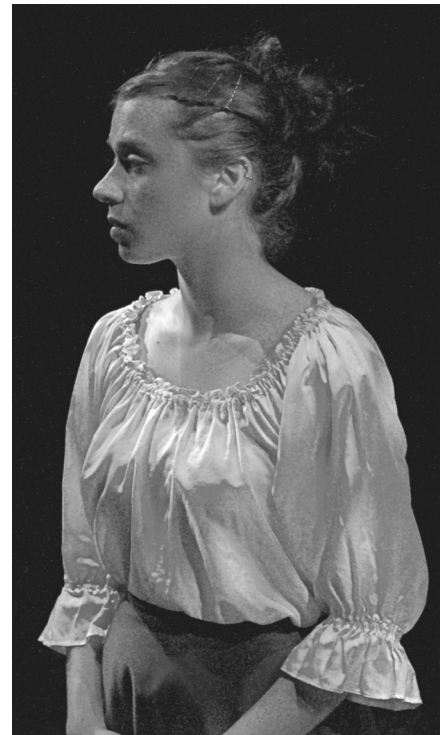
Moscovitch x3

by Sarah Williams

This fall, the Acadia Theatre Company performed *Moscovitch x3*, directed by Anna Migliarisi. Canadian playwright, Hannah Moscovitch, created the three mini-plays which were titled *The Russian Play*, *Essay*, and *Mexico*. On a crispy, cold, November night I walked to Lower Denton Hall to enjoy the play. The audience was small. In between two sets of seating was the stage upon which dried leaves were strewn. The atmosphere was intimate. On the left hand side from where I was sitting there was also a little plot of earth. The innovative stage props and setting promised an original experience. As I took my seat and waited for the last of the audience to file inside, I wondered what to expect.

The first play is set in a small, impoverished Russian town, and powerfully captures the disturbing suffering of Sonja, a young girl who lives and works in a flower shop. She becomes embroiled in a love affair with Peter, the local gravedigger who is well known for his trade. However, this title has earned him little respect. Peter and Sonja are seen carrying out their love affair in the cemetery, where she visits him as he works. We assume that Sonja is trying to keep their love a secret, and throughout this scene there is an air of subdued, secretive happiness. Unfortunately for Sonja, her life is about to unravel. She becomes pregnant and finds out Peter has a wife. Peter, who insists he is knowledgeable about certain medical procedures, aborts the pregnancy for Sonja, outside, in the graveyard. It is a solemn scene as we watch Peter bury the small fetus swathed in blankets. Upon returning home, Sonja is

greeted by the flower shop owner who meanly kicks her out for having consorted with the gravedigger. So, Sonja moves to Moscow. Here she is "kept" by an old acquaintance from her home town. But she is not in love with him and when she tells him so, he becomes enraged. This man is connected with the police and has



Sonja played by Amberly Fletcher

Sonja thrown in jail for some obscure reason. As with the beginning of the play, even though Sonja is steadfast in her love for Peter, those around her are unwilling to accept it. So, Sonja stays in jail. The plot takes an interesting twist here when Peter visits Sonja in the jail. He tells Sonja about how his wife in Moscow died some time ago. This hurts Sonja deeply as she realizes, it seems, her love for Peter may have been greater than his love for her. She had been pining for him for years; meanwhile he was a single man mourning his dead wife. In parting, Peter gives the emaciated Sonja a piece of bread. This turns out to be her demise. Guards enter her

cell soon after Peter leaves and Sonja dies trying to safeguard the identity of the man who gave her the bread. A heady aroma of rotting leaves, death, and undying love linger above the set as the play closes.

The next play was titled *Essay*. It centered around a student named Pixie, her history professor, and the head of that department. This play was set in one place, the professor's messy office. In this scene papers were dumped from the ceiling that scattered across the stage floor. His desk was covered in haphazard stacks of books. The student, Pixie, chose to write an essay on a female war hero from history. Both her professor and department head viewed this as unorthodox. However, the department head felt Pixie deserved a fair grade. He argued that he wanted Pixie to have a good grade, partially, because history was not her major subject. Pixie's professor was not supportive of Pixie's essay because he didn't believe she was complying with his guidelines. The play consisted of much back and forth arguing between the two men. When Pixie came to meet with them to discuss her essay, their treatment of her was sub-standard. They began arguing with each other like buffoons and barely noticed she was there. They even felt

at liberty to speak on her behalf, on several occasions. Although I found this second play somewhat dry due to the



Danny McFarlane, Will Guthro, and Kristin McCurdy

monotonous arguing, it raised some interesting points about gender politics and the integrity of grading.

The third and final play was called *Mexico*. This was the shortest of the three plays revolving around a couple trying to find romantic inspiration on a trip to Mexico. The couple consistently got on each other's nerves. Their trip to Mexico is one seen through the lens of their rocky relationship. It is full of fights and tension. That is until they end

up stuck in an old ruin while a rainstorm pounds the countryside. This is where their passion is rekindled

and they end up revisiting their love. The play ends with them entangled in each other's arms.

Altogether, *Moscovitch x3* was enjoyable. Though the plays were not all equal in length, they did all manage to express points of interest. The unusual stage setting allowed the atmosphere in each play to permeate the audience easily. The actors spoke out and into the audience which created an interactive effect. I found myself sitting in the front row, mostly enraptured in the play. *Moscovitch x3* was definitely a worthwhile experience.



Rosemarie Sabor and Jacob Sampson (photo by John Cann)

Why Torture is Wrong and the People

Who Love them

by Jacob Verhagen

The experience one receives from the Atlantic Canadian premiere of *Why Torture is Wrong and the People Who Love Them* at Acadia University is a



*Actors Sarah Crowell, Hillary Schroeder, Gabe House,
Matt MacDonald, Stephanie Sommerville*

kind of awakening. The theatre of the absurd genre does not involve any suspension of disbelief or audience immersion, but instead creates an illogical and bizarre world that highlights the absurdity of our own. One of the most famous authors of this style is Edward Albee, who wrote such plays as *The Zoo Story* and *The American Dream*.

Why Torture Is Wrong explores the absurdity of the last decade's post 9-11 hysteria. The contemporary subject is strikingly relevant to every member of the audience, young and old. Every part of current society is stabbed and prodded in this piece, from the overzealous responses to anything slightly suspicious to the deterioration of culture. Every character in this play is an absurd, yet unfortunately very recognizable stereotype in our time. The unpredictable foreigner with a temper and a penchant for date rape (played by Kheon Clarke), the hard line conservative American agent imbedded with 50's values (Matt MacDonald), the abused mother

constantly distracted by the 'theatre' (Sarah Crowell), and the one sane protagonist who alone realizes the irrationality of everyone around her (played by Stephanie Sommerville).

What truly hits home to the audience is that many of the unbelievable lines these characters utter are not fiction. We all remember the "freedom fries", the talk of shadow government, and of course the paranoid delusion that at any moment we will be attacked. This generates hilarity, for it was once said that hilarity is derived from truth, and the truth of this play is incredibly macabre.

The actors pulled off their roles perfectly, being able to balance their near caricature roles, yet also managing to give them heart. Timing is everything in this genre and the rapid-fire lines with attention to comedic rhythm makes this play an incredible joy to watch. The black humour and subject matter requires skill from any ensemble, and here both the script writer and actors are sure to please.

Minife(mini)st

by Billy Van Ekris

I haven't been before, but looked forward to the Minifest experience. I present for you my run-down of this exciting event.



Written by Andrew Wade, *Mannequin Men* questions the conditions under which characters and stories exist. Student Emma struggles to create a life of success and romance for a living statue busker, Tom. Emma's supervising professor, Lorraine, reviews the resultant piece of writing and longs to rescue Tom from his mediocre fate. The juxtaposition of these roles manifests in a tug-of-war over Tom, leaving him somewhat helplessly in limbo. He dutifully recites the lines written for him, full of aspirations for a genuine, fulfilling life. This was an excellent, well-realized piece

I was also inspired to reflect by the second play, *A Problem with Friends*, this time on close ones long gone. Janet Godsell presents Mike and Marcie over coffee, a couple struggling to grieve independently and co-exist harmoniously. With both boisterous and bashful moments, Marcie and Mike illustrate two distinct individuals becoming a dynamic unit for the sake of love and each other. The loud moments make the tender moments all the more sweet, and Godsell captures these sentiments with what Mike and Marcie become together.

It was poignant for the next piece to be *What I'd be Without You*; after recognising the collaboration of a couple, the third play, from Andrew Wade, puts forth the agony of separating two loving people. Gary and Moira go through the motions of a romantic date that is admittedly a bit off. Their place is a mess, they look worse for wear, setting up for the sorrow that can accompany love. This is not the most comfortable environment to bear witness to, but I am glad I was not expected to lazily take in the evenings performances.

Janet Godsell went one step further in taking me out of my comfort zone, with her piece *Rude Words*. I was accosted by a grandmother in regards to my position on the word "copulate." Florence, Mary, Elizabeth and Eddie have differing opinions on foul language, and the audience is asked, directly or not, to consider their stance on rude, sexually oriented terms. I have never had a more enjoyable voyeuristic experience stemming from a game of Scrabble to date.

I had gone into Minifest acknowledging that the word is an anagram for feminist, and the last piece, *Tough Girls* was my last hope of finding a feminist agenda. Asher Wyndham writes to "concentrate on school violence between girls" by presenting T-Rex and Robbie, sisters with more than a glimpse into bullying. It becomes clear that the adage "boys will be boys" does not have to be so gender specific, and that the cyclic nature of violence is as cruel as it is present. An emotional end to a Minifest with messages worth taking in.



AUTHORS @ ACADIA

Alexander MacLeod

by Sarah Williams

Alexander MacLeod recently participated in the *Authors at Acadia* event. On October thirteenth I went to the K.C. Irving Auditorium to sit and listen to the young author read from his work of short stories entitled *Light Lifting*. This work, MacLeod's debut selection of short stories, has been nominated for the Scotiabank Giller Shortlist. The author has written for various Canadian and American journals and holds degrees from several universities in North America. Currently, he is a teacher at St. Mary's University in Halifax. He is also the son of noted Canadian author, Alistair MacLeod. Even so, no one in that auditorium really knew what to expect. So, as students, faculty, and members of the community

alike filed into the room there was a lingering air of wonderment. The reading by Alexander MacLeod began on a warm note. A former professor of his introduced him with praise. Then, Alexander MacLeod took himself to the podium. He offered up some of the key points delivered in his stories as well as a bit of his background as a distance runner, an academic, and a father. Most of his stories take place in and around Windsor, Ontario, where he grew up. MacLeod divulged some of the background of his stories and their connection to his life, iterating that most of them were born from the idea of crazed commitment and the fact that in life we all have to make choices. Everyday is filled with choices, the repercussions of which are dramatic. He spoke philosophically as he described the story "The Miracle Mile," from *Light Lifting*. This was a story filled with tension,



and almost, disaster. In it two young men compete as mile runners, trying to outrace trains chugging from Detroit to Windsor. He spoke of running through a train tunnel, dodging to the side, and hearing the train's whistle blow as the lights illuminated his friend, running behind. He described these tense moments with detailed anguish, his use of which enhanced the excitement of the plot.

I suspect Alexander MacLeod could make even the most banal of daily encounters seem riveting. His approach to writing was enjoyable. The basis of the story he read, in reality, probably lasted a fraction of the time in which MacLeod retold the story. In the beginning of the reading MacLeod said, "something has to be significant to care about it." Based on the story, "The Miracle Mile," I feel safe in saying that Alexander MacLeod writes about what is important to him with care. He shows us that it is the detail that is truly significant in life.

Shafquat Towheed

by Quinn MacKenzie

Authors@Acadia presented Dr. Shafquat Towheed's "Locating the Reader, or

What do we do with the Man in the Hat?" a discussion of his online project, the *Reading Experience Database* on Friday, October 22, 2010.

Dr Towheed is a Professor of Victorian Literature at The Open University in the UK and a Project Supervisor for

of these primary sources, Towheed and his colleagues are extracting a reader response, or as he put it, "a recorded engagement with a written or printed text" as they combine data with interpretation. All this information is entered into the database

"The impossibility that any individual could read even a small proportion of the cumulative human output of books implicitly urges us to engage with the broader issue of collecting the quantitative, statistical evidence of reading, a methodology that allows us to examine broader trends in reading practices...."

this database. He spoke for an hour to about 30 attendees about the challenges of analysing his voluminous data on personal readership in British History. Dr. Towheed and other contributors are analysing historical documents such as personal letters, diaries, journals, library records, censorship committee records, letters to the editor and many other sources to examine what texts people read and how they responded to them. Dr. Towheed used a Power Point presentation to show samples of these documents, explaining the difficulty of deciphering them. From each

which is available to the general public. The Reading Experience Database provides a keyword search for authors or readers in British History between 1450 and 1945 to explore either how people responded to a certain author or how certain people responded to texts. Dr. Towheed gave a very interesting, succinct presentation on his research, maintaining a receptive audience, and hopefully his work will expand to other countries to produce an even bigger database of readership in human history.

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Gugu Hlongwane

by Quinn MacKenzie

On Wednesday, November 24th, Authors@Acadia presented Dr. Gugu Hlongwane and her presentation “Contextual Readings and Teachings of Narratives about Africa: Heart of Darkness, Disgrace, and District 9.”

Dr. Hlongwane was born in South Africa and speaks Zulu as her first language. She explained how she had to learn English and Afrikaans, the Dutch dialect of the country, as she grew up. While Most of Dr. Hlongwane’s family still lives in South Africa, she eventually moved to Canada to teach African literature, and she now teaches at St. Mary’s University in Halifax. Dr. Hlongwane spoke in the Vaughan Library Quiet Reading Room for an hour to roughly 20 attendees about the negative representations of black South Africans in the Joseph Conrad’s book *Heart of Darkness*, J.M. Coetzee’s book *Disgrace* and its 2008 film adaptation, and Neill Blomkamp’s 2009 film *District 9*.

She explained how in each of these narratives black Africans are represented as lifeless, limp, desperate and

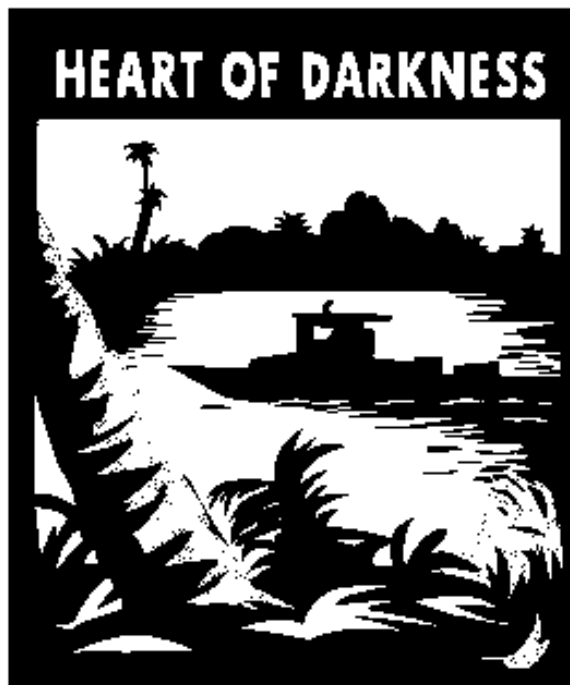
in need of rescue from the white man. Black men in these contexts are portrayed as almost animalistic, beast-like, lusting after the flesh of white women. Dr. Hlongwane explained how these portrayals are so problematic because

cans have meaningful lives, fully capable of surviving on their own without the support from whites. She went on to explain how her fellow black South Africans also have deep family ties, intellectual relationships, and in her words: “vibrancy and life!”

Dr. Hlongwane passed around various magazines to supplement her argument. She looked at a South African black woman’s magazine that showed many examples of healthy relationships, positive images of black men and women and also conveyed an idea of South African identity. The images in these magazines show that black South Africans lead complex,

sophisticated, and positive lives. She also pointed out how many of these advertisements are selling European or American products that promote a Westernized way of life, which emphasizes her argument that the black South African is still faced with colonialism. Dr. Hlongwane’s presentation was an interesting, insightful look into the reality of life in South Africa and she provided a critical analysis of our Western perception of African countries.

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Westerners come to believe in them. She went on to use the 2010 FIFA World Cup as a contemporary example of this. She explained how Westerners hesitated to travel to South Africa because numerous media outlets criticized South Africa for being unsafe, chaotic, and unable to organize such an event. Dr. Hlongwane explained her counter-argument to these accusations as she explained that South Africa is actually a happy place for blacks. She argued that black South Afri-

Matt Robinson

by Jacob Verhagen

It's unfortunate, but the intimacy and personality of poetry is often lost in a rigid academic environment. It's easy to forget how much the personality of the poem can be enhanced by a reading from the poet himself. That's why it was so refreshing to see Matt Robinson read, Friday the 1st of April, in The Quiet Reading Room at Vaughan Library. The reading was decidedly accessible and definitely brought the word to life. Coming from Dalhousie University, Matt read from a selection of his work including his newest book, *Against the Hard Angle* (ECW Press 2010), after which he took questions from the audience. Matt writes what he knows, and writes of his place, Nova Scotia. His work is, as he describes it, trying to reach a 'middle ground'. For instance, in his hockey poetry (there's a whole book of these in *no cage contains a stare that well*), he tries to write a piece that both a poet and a hockey player would find agreeable, as in these lines from "handshakes" (*no cage contains a stare that well*):

Matt Robinson's style shows a playfulness of language but also great attention to meaning. He writes about his own life, his tragedies and experiences: to hear him read is a powerful experience.



game's done. and the scoreboard's
wrong-enders—the losers, put plain and simple—
stumble their way towards the centre circle

to concede. their hands less purposeful now;
a limp collection

of weathered flags in the stark, still windless
day that is the end of overtime.



Doug Hergett's *War Changes Everything: Aftershocks of Battle Exhaustion*

Acadia Student
Doug Hergett recently published *War Changes Everything: Aftershocks of Battle Exhaustion*, an excellent historical investigation of World War II and its effects on his family. In a book that illuminates the meaning of events like Dieppe and The Battle of Normandy, Hergett pieces together his father and his uncles' experience of the war—from recruitment and the battlefields of Europe to the return home to Nova Scotia in 1945. One of the most intriguing aspects of *War Changes Everything* is the meta-historical theme: it's fascinating to read as Hergett foregrounds the construction of his narrative, tracking down archival material, conducting interviews, and chancing upon unexpected but crucial information. Beyond the general history of World War II, the story is also a deeply personal study

as Hergett attempts to discover what happened to his father, Harold, during his tour of duty. The war profoundly altered him as a person, forever complicating his relationship to his wife and his son. After several years as a soldier, during intense fighting at Caen,



Hergett's father, amidst "the pounding, the noise and the concussion of shell explosions...lost consciousness." He only remembered fragments of the events that led to his 'battle exhaustion' (now recognized as post-traumatic stress syndrome), but he re-

counts disturbing images of the hospital tent: "He spoke of it as a hole in the ground where men were crying and mumbling, some of them were clawing at the ground." Doug Hergett spent twenty years writing what has become *War Changes Everything*; it captures the complexity of large

historical events, but just as importantly confronts his difficult, emotionally charged relationship with his father. Hergett writes that "War almost killed, perhaps did kill, part of my Dad's sensitive and gentle spirit... In many ways, the very qualities which enabled him to survive partially made him unsuited for living in a peace-time world." *War Changes Everything: Aftershocks of Battle Exhaustion* is highly recommended.

Hergett never resorts to easy answers in his quest to make sense of social and personal trauma. His ability to stay close to the untidy nuances of life makes this a difficult but rewarding book.



English Society Halloween Pub Night

By Rebecca Dobson



The Acadia English Society held its third annual Halloween pub night on October 28 at Paddy's Pub/Rosie's Restaurant in Wolfville. This event gives Acadia students and faculty a chance to dress up as their favourite characters from literature and to share their favourite spooky stories and poems in a relaxing atmosphere. This year, the evening was a big hit. There were many new faces from the English & Theatre department present and the event saw its largest attendance yet. Though not everyone was brave enough to dress up, Dr. Who and a couple of fairies made a brief appearance, as well as a piece of paper with accompanying markers to write on her—a very unique costume! After some great food, beverages, and conversations were enjoyed, the mood changed to one much more appropriate for the occasion as classic

spooky poems and short stories were read and told. Many students chimed in as Robert W. Service's "The Cremation of Sam McGee" and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" were read aloud, and there were a few shivers as stories of students' encounters with ghosts were told. Though more laughter than blood-curdling screams could be heard at the pub night this year, it was a perfect way to kick-off the Halloween events at Acadia.

The Acadia English Society is a forum for all Acadia students to participate in both academic-based and fun activities related to the English discipline. If you would like to join the society or keep up to date on its events, please contact the 2011-2012 VP Communications, Allie Fournier, at english.society@acadiau.ca.

*by Meaghan Smith and
Quinn MacKenzie*

The English Society held their final event of the year, Poetry on Tap, on March 31st in the Michener Lounge of Acadia's Student Union building. The event was extremely successful with more than 30 people in attendance. Students from all different departments attended, as well as several professors from the English department. All were invited to share their poetry in a relaxed style poetry reading and indulge in food and drinks provided by the Axe Lounge. Over 10 students, as well as Dr. Wanda Campbell and Dr. Andrea Schwenke Wylie, shared their original works. The student poetry readings included Becky Dobson's Mexican-inspired poems,

Poetry on Tap



Carey Bray's personal collection, Meaghan Smith's cowboy poetry, and several others. There were also musical performances throughout the night, including a Spanish guitar display, a classical guitar performance, and a comical duet of Rebecca Black's pop song "Friday" on ukelele and guitar. Memorable performances came from Johnny Cann and Charlie Grant, two very talented musicians. The open mic portion of the night was so successful that a second portion was added later in the night to accommodate all of the interested performers. This included a Celtic music trio and a few students singing and playing their own music. It was a great night overall and a great opportunity for Acadia students and faculty to showcase their literary and musical talents. The success of Poetry on Tap is very encouraging for the English Society and plans for a similar event are already in the works for next year.



estuary

acadia's creative arts magazine

Print Edition Launch

By Rebecca Dobson

On the last day of classes, Friday, April 8, *estuary*, Acadia's Creative Arts Magazine held its annual magazine launch in Acadia's Art Gallery. The launch had an excellent turnout as approximately 30 students, professors, and Wolfville community members came to support the magazine's efforts. The event began with refreshments and a chance to view the gallery's latest exhibit "Cellblock Visions: Prison Art in America." After introductions were made by the editor in chief of the magazine and Dr. Wanda Campbell, professor and faculty advisor to *estuary*, a few students selected to appear in this year's print and online editions had a chance to share their poetry and short fiction with the audience.

As the editor in chief of *estuary* for the last three years, the launch was particularly emotional for me. It has been the greatest pleasure to see the magazine evolve and increase in its readership. Though I am graduating from Acadia this year and my time here is

finished, I have complete confidence that *estuary*'s next editor in chief, Jillian Glasgow, will maintain the magazine's presence on the Acadia campus. I wish her the best of luck!

Estuary accepts students' original works of poetry, short fiction, visual artwork and music. The magazine publishes two online editions each year, one per semester, and one print edition that is comprised of the best submissions from the two online editions. The magazine is also student run with an editorial board that selects the submissions for each edition and designs both the online and print magazines.

Copies of this year's print edition are still available at the Information Desk in the Students' Union Building and in the English & Theatre department. This year's online editions, as well as previous years' online editions, can be found at www.acadiau.ca/estuary. If you would like more information about submission guidelines or if you would like to become a part of the *estuary* team, please visit our website or email the current editor in chief at estuary@acadiau.ca.

RETIREMENTS

Richard Davies

Dr. Richard Davies joined the Acadia English Department in 1970 and has served the department faithfully as Professor of Eighteenth Century Literature and as Chair, as well as a stint as Director of Research and Graduate Studies. In a 2001 interview with *Voice 4*, he stated that life in the English Department was “as exciting as it ever was” and Dr. Davies has seen a lot of changes in his decades with the Department, especially with an influx of new professors. He was always willing to share his wealth of experience as a teacher and his expertise on Thomas Haliburton, *Tristram Shandy* and all things Welsh, including the delicious Welsh cakes he treated us to on St. David’s Day.

He strongly supported the Authors @ Acadia series and other faculty and student efforts. We are very grateful for his wide-ranging knowledge, his generosity and his enthusiasm. We wish him well as he takes more time to enjoy writing fiction as well as fact, his family, and his lovely home by the shore.



Christine Reed

For many years now the **real** voice of the 4th floor has been the English and Theatre Department’s Administrative Assistant and Administrative Coordinator for the Acadia Theatre Company, Christine Reed. She was the one



who welcomed students with a smile and untangled all manner of messes for both students and faculty. She was always willing to answer questions and help where she was able, and she was almost always able. It’s hard to imagine the Department without her. Her generous spirit, her wealth of knowledge and wit, her sincere support of student and faculty initiatives, and her enduring good cheer will be deeply missed. We wish her the very best as she continues to travel the world and enjoy her own backyard.



VOICE 4, The Voice of the 4th Floor BAC Department of English and Theatre is typeset in Times New Roman and printed at the Acadia Print Shop

The online version and more about **Acadia’s Department of English and Theatre** can be viewed at <http://english.acadiau.ca/>

Are you interested in participating in the English Society or working with *Voice 4* or *estuary*? Get in touch with The Department.

