Professor Vivian Nun Halloran (CMLT) specializes in contemporary Caribbean literature written in Spanish, English and French. Her book *Exhibiting Slavery: The Caribbean Postmodern Novel as Museum* was published in 2009 by the University of Virginia Press. In it, she analyzes representational and pedagogic strategies in a range of museums and postmodern historical novels that address slavery.

While pursuing a doctorate in Comparative Literature at UCLA, Halloran visited a number of Los Angeles-area museums that got her thinking about relationships between art and literature, and when she came to Bloomington in 2002 she drew upon resources in the IU Art Museum to develop her courses. In time, she began tracking down some of the paintings mentioned in the novels about slavery that she had studied for her dissertation. Considering these works of art in the context of slavery, she told me, and traveling to Ohio’s new Underground Railroad Freedom Center “sparked an idea about how I could revitalize my doctoral project and make it truly interdisciplinary.” At about the same time, the faculty workshop “Variations on Blackness,” which she co-directed with Matthew Pratt Guterl, provided a forum for “trying out” her ideas about museums dedicated to slavery. “From there,” she says, “it was just a matter of learning more about museum studies and seeing the connections between postmodern museology and postmodern literature.”

*Exhibiting Slavery* explores these connections by examining how specific novels and museums work to represent national history, contextualize art, create ethnographic dioramas, perform “living history,” rehabilitate architectural monuments, and facilitate mourning. In the process, Halloran suggests how individual, family, group, national, and transnational identities can be differentially constructed; but she also considers how these sites of display make slavery relevant to populations that have never been enslaved and can do nothing to change the past. She agreed to talk more about what she learned during this interdisciplinary research process.

“Halloran: Exhibiting Slavery,” cont. on page 2
"Halloran: Exhibiting Slavery," cont. from page 1

• DEC: What surprised you about writing this book?

VNH: I was surprised to discover how manipulative museum displays can be. I also hadn’t expected to spend so much effort theorizing the reading process demanded by these novels. Usually, I shy away from reader-response analysis, but this interdisciplinary project opened my eyes to how profoundly interactive postmodern fiction is.

• DEC: Many contemporary museums aim to “reveal” through juxtaposition and signage—to encourage connections, address assumptions, provide contextual information—even as they attempt to present experience as multifaceted. The novels you studied are intensely, and often allusively, intertextual. Does this refusal of overt “labeling” affect their accessibility?

VNH: Intertextuality may have operated as a gatekeeping mechanism before the advent of the Internet, when few had access to all of the obscure texts referenced by people who wanted to sound extra smart. So, no one could really hope to match Borges’s level of erudition, but devoted students could aspire to it one day. Nowadays, as I try to point out in the book, search engines have placed unimaginable resources at our fingertips. It’s my contention that postmodern novels such as the ones I analyze will not only prompt readers to check their facts with Wikipedia, but they might also make these same readers wary of placing wholesale trust in electronic arbiters of “truth” or “accuracy.”

• DEC: Museum exhibits and “living history” displays are often celebrated as forms of historical immediacy: visitors come face-to-face with evidence that can be touched and thus (apparently) acknowledged. Yet you suggest that postmodern historical novels can create comparably more direct connections with those who experience them. Could you say more about how this is accomplished?

VNH: When people go to a museum or view a “living” presentation, they are aware that this experience removes them—physically and intellectually—from the realm of their everyday lives. In other words, they agree to participate in a fictional conceit—“Let’s behave as if what I am seeing were real.” When those same individuals pick up a novel, they tend to agree to a different kind of exchange of meaning—“I will suspend my disbelief in order to enter the world of this book.” Readers willfully inhabiting an alien territory—not their world, but that of the novel—are often more jarred by direct addresses from a disembodied narrator, gestures that remind them that they are engaged in an artificial experience constructed by a figure distinct from the characters and plot of the book. Any reminder of the reader’s outsider status, especially when made by a narrator or character, is more shocking than watching a “living history” interpreter snap out of character and “back” into the reality both audience and performer share.

• DEC: You note that these novels “curate” forms of cultural expression and experience—painting(s) and carving(s), popular songs, mourning rituals, vernacular languages—by “situating them . . . within a larger historical framework . . . and recasting the works of art as part of a larger discourse on nationalism, citizenship, and the question of belonging” (64). Scholarly criticism entails exactly this kind of display and contextualization. How, for instance, does Exhibiting Slavery differ from the books and museums it features and explains?

VNH: I would argue that Exhibiting Slavery analyzes the effects of these acts of narrative curation and display by placing them in the broader context of the reading experience. Hopefully, this book moves the discussion away from exclusively focusing on what novels do, and towards a greater understanding of the interaction these postmodern texts and museum exhibits imagine engaging in with their respective ideal audiences.

• DEC: What do you hope readers will take away from Exhibiting Slavery?

VNH: I sincerely hope people will visit a museum and look at the displays with a new perspective. It would also be nice if they were more aware of how novels try to show readers things, but maybe people don’t want to think about that when they are enjoying a nice book.

• DEC: What’s the focus of your current research? How does it resonate with American Studies?

VNH: I’m looking at non-fiction food narratives and American contemporary culture. I have been writing several articles dealing with this topic in the context of African Americans and health, immaterial labor and the restaurant industry, and culinary memoirs. My next book-length project analyzes how culinary memoirs written by immigrants to the United States or their children portray the act of eating and/or cooking as key parts of the process of assimilation.

~ Danille Elise Christensen
On sabbatical: American Studies abroad

Greetings from England’s North East, where I’m spending a sabbatical year with my family—officially, I’m a Visiting Scholar in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures (MLAC) at Durham University. When I visited here three years ago I was impressed by both the colleagues and the university, and I fell in love with the city (which is dominated both visually and spiritually by Durham Cathedral, a stunning 900-plus-year-old UNESCO World Heritage Site used as a Hogwarts location in the Harry Potter films). And so the idea was born.

My top academic priority while I’m here is to finish the book that I began some three children ago, which focuses on the promotion of Latin American literature in the United States during the Cold War. I am also interested in meeting with people with shared interests and in learning more about programs such as the Clinton Institute for American Studies at University College Dublin, Comparative American Studies at the University of Warwick, and the American Tropics Project at Essex, among others—programs that share the hemispheric and transnational interests of our own American Studies program.

This year is about more than academics, though (don’t tell . . .). As children, my husband and I both spent time abroad due to our parents’ jobs or sabbaticals, and our experiences have stayed with us in important ways, so we wanted to give our children a similar opportunity.

“Cohn, Letter from Durham,” cont. on page 4
Preparing to come was a logistical challenge. The sabbatical application was just the first step. We spent months arranging for housing and schools for the boys, renting and clearing out our house, and so on. And then there was the actual relocation, for which we were faced with a simple mathematical calculation: 5 people = 10 suitcases. For a full year. Ten suitcases might sound like a lot, but when you figure that in addition to holding clothes for the family, the library here is weak in my area(s), interlibrary loan costs 2.5 pounds (c.$4)/book, and I do archival research and have thousands of pages of copies that I’ll need for my work, ten bags start looking like a drop in the bucket. I am indebted to modern technology, that is, to the scanner—and to Cara Kinnally, Carol Glaze, and Paula Cotner—for lightening my load considerably. I ended up bringing the ten books that I consult most, but using ILL is still inevitable. It is also frustrating, since all the books that I request are confined to use in the library because they are considered “rare” or “valuable”—library-ese, it turns out, for “foreign,” which in my line of work is an occupational hazard. So this has been a lesson: don’t take the IU library for granted.

At Durham, I share an office with four part-time lecturers in Spanish, and I’ve spoken more Spanish since I arrived here than I have in years. It’s ironic that I had to go to England to do this. As a child of U.S. diplomats living in Central America in the early ’80s and, more recently, as a Latin Americanist, I have spent the better part of my life trying to avoid being pegged as an “American” (though of course in England, being from the United States has VERY different connotations than it does in Latin America). These conversations with my office mates are comforting as well as enjoyable, for in speaking Spanish, I don’t feel like I stand out as an “American.”

Over the past few months, people have often asked me why a Latin Americanist would go to the UK for sabbatical. I admit that the UK is not the obvious choice for someone in my line of work, but Durham has what I need (except for books . . . ) and is where I want to be, both professionally and personally. The situations of my office mates suggest that I am not alone: one of them is a Spaniard who’s doing his PhD on Old English at a Spanish university and teaching Spanish here; another is a Catalan who came to England to do his PhD on indigenous languages in Mexico. What has drawn each of us to Durham is not obvious from a traditional, nation-based standpoint, but it is, somehow, the place that allows us to do what we want to do. This serves as a reminder—as if more were needed—of the decreasing relevance of “nation” as an organizing principle for academic research, and of how the transnational may bore sideways through the national, opening up unforeseen possibilities.

Durham is very different from what I’m used to. In some ways, it’s much more disciplinary than I’m used to. There’s no American Studies at all (a bit of a shock to the system), though there are a number of Americanists in different schools across the campus. The English Department is primarily structured around British literary studies, with no courses on U.S. literature this year. There are also only two Latin Americanists in the Spanish faculty.

On the other hand, the university is highly ranked, and MLAC serves as home base to a number of exciting interdisciplinary initiatives, such as a new MA in Culture and Difference (in which I’ve gotten involved and for which I offered a class session); a number of programs on visual cultures, film, and photography; and interesting initiatives in gender and sexuality studies. Also, the Transatlantic Studies Association will be holding its annual conference here next July, and I’ve been talking to organizers and colleagues about it. I’ve also been in touch with people at a number of other UK institutions, including a Cold War workshop based out of the University of Sheffield that I was fortunate to happen upon. So I’ve found being here to be very exciting.

I’ll return to Sheffield in December to give a lecture and will also present elsewhere during my stay here. Having time to do my own research is invaluable, but so is the opportunity to be somewhere new, and to challenge myself by learning new systems and ways of approaching problems.

Wishing everyone a smooth end of term, and a happy winter break,

Debbie
**Accolades**

In 2009, a number of institutions recognized Professor Candy Gunther Brown’s (REL) ethnographic and historical research. A $50,000 Lilly Foundation New Frontiers Fellowship and a $150,000 grant from the Templeton Foundation are supporting the development of four book projects, including “Divine Healing and Deliverance in America, 1860-2010.” In February, Brown was invited to Virginia Commonwealth University, where she lectured on “Miracle Cures? Divine Healing Networks and the Global Expansion of Christianity.” In addition, she published “Touch and American Religions” in *Religion Compass* 3(4) and in November contributed to the panel “Making Sense of, in, and as Religion: Lessons and Questions from Sensory Anthropology” at the AAR meetings in Montreal.

**Professor Denise Cruz** (ENG) has published an edition of Filipina American author Yay Panlilio’s 1950 memoir *The Crucible: An Autobiography by Colonel Yay* (Rutgers, 2009). The book documents Panlilio’s experience as part of the guerrilla resistance in the Philippines during the Pacific War.

Congratulations to Professor **Mary Gray** (CMCL), who received the American Anthropological Association’s prestigious Ruth Benedict Book Prize for her recent *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* (NYU Press, 2009).

**Professor Stephanie Kane** (CJUS), along with Phil Parnell, co-editor of *Crime’s Power: Anthropologists and the Ethnography of Crime*, was interviewed in *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 32(1). Kane also presented “Carnival Contained: Beach Crime as Popular Culture in Bahia, Brazil” at the first International Crime, Media and Popular Studies Conference at ISU on October 5.

**Professor Brenda Weber** (GNDR) published *Makeover TV: Selfhood, Citizenship, and Celebrity* (Duke, 2009) in November. The book, which explores narratives of empowerment accomplished during dramatic juxtapositions of “before” and “after” bodies, was featured in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on October 18.

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**ASA 2010: CALL FOR PROPOSALS**

**“Crisis, Chains, and Change: American Studies for the 21st Century”**

San Antonio, Texas

November 18-21, 2010

The Program Committee for the 2010 Annual Meeting of the American Studies Association seeks proposals that explore “the socio-spatial, cultural, political, educational, and economic dimensions of crisis, chains, and change in the spasmodic context of neo-liberalism’s death-throes.” Presentations might explore “chains” as literal or metaphorical restraints, but also in terms of linked phenomena that lead to change, either by precipitating crises or by addressing them. Projects that “engage broadly with the ways ordinary people create power” are especially welcome. Planners “anticipate special focus on convergences and divergences in the Americas, in Islam in the Americas and beyond, and in the Atlantic or Pacific worlds, and hope as well to highlight comparative methods.”

**Who Can Participate?**

The Committee invites colleagues in American Studies and related disciplines to submit proposals for papers, sessions, exhibits, films, workshops, conversations, or other formats on any topic dealing with American cultures.

**Submission Guidelines:**

Proposals must be submitted through the ASA’s online system, which will open 12/1/09 and close 1/26/10. Visit www.theasa.net/annual_meeting/page/submitting_a_proposal/ for complete details. The site includes tips about getting on the ASA program for the first time.
Fellowships open to junior, senior scholars

Newberry Library Humanities Fellowships

Long-term Fellowships support research and writing by scholars with a doctorate. Fellowship terms range from six to eleven months with stipends of up to $50,400. Deadline: January 11, 2010.

Short-term Fellowships enable travel to collections for Ph.D. candidates and post-doctoral scholars. Usually awarded for a period of one month, most are restricted to scholars who live and work outside the Chicago area. Stipends are $1600 per month. Applications from two or three scholars who plan to collaborate intensively on a single, substantive project are welcome. Teams should submit a single application, including cover sheets and CVs from each member. Deadline: March 1, 2010.

To download application materials, visit www.newberry.org/research/fellowships/fellowshome.html

Lomax Fellowship in Folklife Studies, LOC

The Library of Congress's Kluge Center invites qualified post-doctoral scholars to conduct advanced research based on the Alan Lomax Collection, a major collection of ethnomusicology, ethnography, ethno-history, dance, folklore and folklife, history, literature, linguistics, and movement analysis, with particular emphasis on the traditional music, dance, and narrative of the United States, England, Scotland, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and the Caribbean. Interdisciplinary projects that combine disciplines in novel and productive ways are encouraged.

Alan Lomax Fellows are in residence at the Library for a period of up to 8 months and expected to develop research of publishable quality; they also present at least one public lecture and participate actively in Library events and programs. Deadline: February 28, 2010. For application details, see www.loc.gov/loc/kluge. For more on the Lomax Collection, see: www.loc.gov/folklife/lomax/

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