FEATURES

CROSSING OVER
Hakim Abderrezak follows North African migration p. 4

FLORENCE IN THE SPRING
Italian students live like natives p. 6

WHAT’S OLD IS NEW
Susan Noakes finds connections between the Middle Ages and today p. 8

FINDING THE THIRD SPACE
Vlad Dima connects French & African film p. 10

STAGING CHAOS
Sylvie Ngilla is fascinated by African francophone theater p. 11

EVERY ISSUE

FROM THE CHAIR p. 2

NOTA BENE
Film and book recommendations from the faculty p. 2

LIFE OF LANGUAGE
The shifting and shaping of French & Italian p. 3

ALUMNAE PROFILES
Lucia Watson & Ruth Redhead p. 12

DEPARTMENT NEWS p. 14

GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION
How studying abroad makes better citizens p. 16
Language Matters

In 1783 the Royal Academy of Berlin gave two awards for the best essay on why French had become the preeminent, cosmopolitan lingua franca it was. One of the prizes went to the Frenchman Antoine de Rivarol whose self-congratulatory essay claimed “What is not clear is not French.”

Anyone who has studied a language—even one’s own first language—senses its special character. Certain words and phrases, even vowels and consonants, evoke particular feelings—those earthy nasal sounds, that deep-throated or staccato r, that sensual u. Linguists insist these feelings about the specialness of a particular language are based on nothing more than cultural stereotypes. Yet when we hear or speak French or Italian, for instance, we sense their imaginary specialness, even if we don’t quite agree with Antoine de Rivarol about the essential clarity of one language over against another. (Incidentally, none of the participants in the 1783 Berlin Academy competition thought English would become a world language.)

Language matters, but not in the way that Rivarol had in mind. In this season of election politics, we see daily how important it is to pay attention to how words are used. They communicate ideas and solve problems, elicit feelings, and shape realities, sometimes by confusing and sometimes—hopefully—by inspiring. Students in the Department of French and Italian know that language matters, and they’re drawn to those powerful texts—novels, plays, poetry, articles, or films—whose language helps us imagine, analyze, and understand other times, other worlds, and other experiences.

Students see firsthand how language matters when they study abroad. They move outside their comfort zone in terms of language, culture, and sense of self. They experience language in action—in university courses and through hands-on internships. I’ve heard great stories about what our students have seen, done, learned, and experienced while studying abroad. In today’s world, the deep understanding that comes from studying abroad is vital for our students, especially at a time when financial realities make it harder for our students to gain that understanding.

I hope you’ll find that the language of Verve matters too. In this issue you’ll discover Susan Noakes’s and Hakim Abderrezak’s research on border-crossing experiences in very separate times and cultural contexts—the Middle Ages and the contemporary Mediterranean world. Don’t miss the achievements of our faculty members and graduate students, as well as some tips on recent books and movies. As always, I invite you to participate in our work in Folwell on language that matters, with your own words of support, your ideas, or your gifts.

Daniel Brewer
Professor and Chair

Nota Bene

Looking for something to read or watch about France, French-speaking countries, or Italy? Note well this cultural cornucopia.

Books

In a scintillating and resourceful mix of personal observation, scholarly insights, and history, Robb Graham recounts how the French character and the French state were formed in The Discovery of France.

Author of La Haine de la musique (The Hatred of Music), Pascal Quignard wrote the novel—and the musically lush screenplay—Tous les matins du monde (All the Mornings of the World), based on the life of the 17th-century viola da gamba player Marin Marais and his teacher, Sainte-Colombe.

Olivier Bernier and Umberto Eco team up to deliver a fascinating voyage in an armchair—Italy: The Best Travel Writing from the New York Times.

With a novelist’s eye for the gripping story and rich detail, and a connoisseur’s eye for secrets hidden in the corner of a painting, Margaret Anne Doody unpacks the richness of the city called “the Bride of the Sea” in Tropic of Venice.

Films

In La Grande Séduction a much-needed boost, in the form of a new factory, is promised to the residents of a tiny fishing village in Québec, provided they can lure a doctor to take up full-time residence on the island. Inspired, the villagers mount a no-holds-barred crusade to bring in a big-city doctor.

The comedy Bienvenue chez les ch’ti (Welcome to the Sticks), which was hugely popular in France, exposes the French people’s regional prejudices as it tells the story of a man from the south of France who finds himself transferred to the north. The film has sparked great interest in regional languages and cultures, ch’timi or ch’ti being the name of both the Picard language and its speakers.

Cédric Klapisch’s latest movie, Paris, tells the story of Pierre, a professional dancer, who suffers from a serious heart disease. While he is waiting for a transplant that may (or may not) save him, he views the Paris around him from the balcony of his apartment.
T raveling to Québec and to Louisiana gives the linguistically minded American a good chance to explore calque, defined as “loan translation.” A French word or expression may be based exclusively on North American usage. In France one orders une glace for dessert, but in Québec the ice cream is literally la crème glacée. In France the reply to merci is de rien, while in Québec the reply is bienvenue! based on the North American “you’re welcome.” If you want to have fun in New Orleans, laissez les bons temps rouler! just like the Anglophones in other states. When you hang up the phone in Québec, you need to say bonjour instead of au revoir, because you are literally saying “Have a good day!” And in both Louisiana and Québec on tombe en amour: one falls in love North American-style.

When hens will have teeth)

les poules auront des dents

“Have a good day!” And in both Louisiana and Québec the reply to you’re welcome. “you’re welcome.” If you want to have fun in New Orleans, you need to linger. In France the reply to laissez les bons temps rouler! is “merci” and in Québec the reply is just like the Anglophones in other states. When you hang up the phone in Québec, you need to say bonjour instead of au revoir, because you are literally saying “Have a good day!” And in both Louisiana and Québec on tombe en amour: one falls in love North American-style.

Calque is a confusing concept because it encourages non-native speakers to experiment with literal, word-for-word translations. For example, the idiomatic expression J’ai d’autres chats à fouetter (“I have other cats to beat”) makes no sense to a speaker of English unless the translation is something completely different: “I have other fish to fry.” “When pigs fly” is translated as Quand les poules auront des dents (“When hens will have teeth”).

Guido assured me that in Italy the fast-paced American lifestyle can only lead me down the wayward path to the dreaded brutta figura (making a fool of myself). “Don’t try to do everything. When you do something, do it perfectly,” he advised.

Even walking down the street is a refined art. Your clothes must be pressed and, most importantly, your sunglasses perfectly clean. Hold your head high and never rush as if your life is out of control. The big test is the Sunday passeggiata (stroll) when the whole town walks down the Via Emilia to chat and show off the latest fashions. The Italian verb pavoneggiarsi ( strut like a peacock), sums up this weekend ritual. Rather than risk the crowds on the main drag, the old men usually stay in the piazza dressed in their tailored suits and Borsalino hats.

Guido is quick to dispel the stereotype that Italians are lazy, though. After all, it was Italian futurist F. T. Marinetti who waxed eloquent about how “the world’s magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed.” This is the land of Maserati, Lamborghini, and Ferrari. Drive as fast as the laws of physics permit in the sleekest machine made, but then relax in the shade with a Campari and soda. I took his advice but had to settle for an aging 1963 Lambretta scooter that left a trail of blue smoke. At least I got noticed.

“I don’t live to work, but I work to live,” Guido told me about his job in the post office. Somehow Italians manage to make work look easy, or perhaps the famous five weeks of vacation keep them well rested. Or maybe it’s the smell of fresh tortellini wafting in the windows that calls everyone to a long lunch and a nice nap. Back in Minnesota, I’ll quickly eat a cold sandwich—sometimes even in my car—to save time. In Modena, businesses close from noon to four, and there’s no pretense of “saving time.” What are you saving time for? To relax? I’ve come to love this slower pace and I try to take the strikes and other interruptions as another challenge to my American view of wanting to go as fast as possible. Unless I’m on my Lambretta, of course.

Despite efforts by the Académie Française to keep the French language as far away as possible from North American influences, it is noteworthy that many common expressions in France are based on English: lune de miel (honeymoon), planche à neige (snowboard), assurance santé (health insurance), gratte-ciel (skyscraper). Many contemporary terms related to the latest technology are based on calque: Jouet refers to the MP3 player or iPod.

For those who want to take calque where it has never gone before, check out the ever-popular book Mots d’Heures: Gousses, Rames (“Mother Goose Rhymes”) by Luis d’Antin van Rooten (1967, and still in print). English words take on new meaning when they are pronounced à la française.

Lydia Belatèche
Senior Lecturer of French

Dolce Far Niente
Lifestyle and language intermingle in Italian
to sample my new batch of honey grappa. Being rich in Italy was the life for me.

As a poor college student with a few hundred dollars in my pocket, I realized my dreams of affluence in the bel paese were reserved for wealthy (and lucky) millionaire professors. Instead, Guido rescued me and showed me that living well in the Mediterranean is more about attitude than about cash flow. He explained the Italian mantra dolce far niente (how sweet it is to do nothing). Remember Marcello Mastroianni in La Dolce Vita? Sure, he’s a journalist, but what does he actually do? He cruises around from party to decadent party in his Alfa Romeo Spider as beautiful women fawn all over him.

“Drive as fast as the laws of physics permit in the sleekest machine made, but then relax in the shade with a Campari and soda.”

Eric Dregni
Eric Dregni is author of Midwest Marvels, Weird Minnesota, and Grazie a Dio non sono bolognese. His latest is In Cod We Trust: Living the Norwegian Dream.
Hakim Abderrezak follows the twists and turns of the North African migration story.

BY DANNY LACHANCE

Cannibales, a recent Moroccan novel, a group of North and sub-Saharan Africans gather on the northern Moroccan shore preparing to make a clandestine crossing to Europe. “All your papers,” demands the captain of the boat that will deliver them to their new home. “Passport, I.D., birth certificate, address book: in short, any document that could be used to identify you.” One by one, they hand over their identifying documents. It will all be burned, they know—a step necessary to ensure...
that they cannot be deported if they are discovered by European authorities.

Moments like this one capture the imagination of Hakim Abderrezak, assistant professor of French and francophone studies. In an age of globalization, Abderrezak says, “African papers link these people to countries that have not been able to offer them the opportunities that they long for. African passports limit.” Burning them sets characters like those in *Cannibales* free from those limits.

Abderrezak studies the influence of these complex circumstances on the identities of Moroccans and other Maghrebis, those who hail from the North African nations of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. A scholar of literature and film, he studies the representation of Maghrebi identities as they undergo changes in a globalized world. These identities, he says, are tightly tied to the movements of Maghrebi people to and from Europe and the rest of the world.

The nature of those movements has changed dramatically in recent years, Abderrezak says. “When we used to talk about migration, it was about émigrés going to France. They’d settle, have families, and would not leave because their children were born there and were French,” he explains.

That model is quickly growing outdated. Time, globalization, and immigration politics have changed migrations—and the cinematic and literary representations of those migrations. In the past decade, a whole new set of novels and films emerged to describe new kinds of migratory experiences in the western Mediterranean.

Take, for instance, several recent novels and films set in Spain, which used to be a footnote in the experiences of migrating Maghrebis, “a country of transit” for those moving to France. But a bullish Spanish economy has caused many Maghrebis to settle in Spain, leading to new relationships between the French-, Spanish-, and Arabic-speaking worlds.

The children and grandchildren of Maghrebi immigrants in Europe, meanwhile, are increasingly returning to the Maghreb region in order to rediscover their roots. This reverse migration is striking, Abderrezak says: “Some people want to go back to their family’s country of origin because they’ve been shown or told that they’re not completely French,” he explains. Once they are there, of course, they discover that neither are they Moroccan or Algerian or Tunisian. “They don’t speak the language, they don’t have a job there, they don’t have an identity there. When they’re in France, they’re called immigrants. But when they’re in the Maghreb, they’re still immigrants,” he says.

Abderrezak is particularly interested in what he calls “illegal literature,” novels about migration in an age when access to Europe has been restricted by stricter immigration policies, forcing many to depart illegally. The literature, he says, is a counterpoint to international news coverage of perilous, clandestine crossings of Maghrebis into Europe. “Images of distraught men, women, and children being rescued or escorted by the authorities, or of bodies being fished out of the sea, are often seen in newspapers and on television shows all over the world,” Abderrezak says. European media coverage emphasizes illegality. “The image is monolithic: North Africans are shown as criminals,” Abderrezak says, “as invaders trying to breach Spain.”

That’s where literature and film come in. They offer an alternative to media coverage of illicit migrations that helps us to understand the complex and ambiguous experiences of Maghrebis. Describing the lives that those who cross led be-
Learning a new language is never easy. You toil away in Folwell classrooms, writing *esercizi* and practicing *diologo*, conjugating verbs every which way, wondering if you'll ever really get it, or use it. Eleven Italian language students, however, reaped the rewards of four semesters of language study when they visited Florence in May for what could be called a working vacation.

Developed and taught by Italian instructor Dr. Sabrina Ovan, this first-time May term course, Italian Reading Composition and Conversation, immersed the 11 undergraduates in the language and culture of Florence for 24 days. They spent three hours each day in class, but “time flew by because we had so much fun with the material we were learning,” says Madeline Mason, a junior journalism major. Students read the novel *54* by the Italian writers’ collective Wu Ming, and their grammar and vocabulary lessons were built around the book. That kept studying manageable, says Mason, “even while we took weekend trips to Rome, Bologna, and Cinque Terre.”

Ovan designed the course specifically to create a bridge between the classroom and the “real world.” “A study-abroad experience makes it possible to take what’s learned in the classroom and apply it in everyday experiences,” she says. “Moreover, it brings the experience of the world into the classroom.”
in the Springtime

A new May term course in Italy immerses students in la dolce vita | BY KELLY O’BRIEN

A native of Italy herself, Ovan chose Florence in order to give her students a deep cultural experience to augment their class work. Besides visiting the cultural high points of Florentine history and culture—the Uffizi Palace, the Galleria dell’Accademia (where they saw Michelangelo’s David)—the students were encouraged to go off the beaten tourist path. Thus they discovered Santo Spirito, located across the Arno River. A trendy neighborhood where young Florentines hang out, the students had a chance to meet and hang out with “real” Italians.

“Since I could actually communicate with the Italians, I really felt like I was living in Italy,” says Katherine Hannon, a senior journalism major. Like other students in the program, she counted shopping, eating gelato, meeting people in cafes, and other everyday experiences as highlights.

These everyday experiences also improved the students’ language skills—the primary goal of the course. “Aside from classroom learning, immersing myself in the language opened doors I’d never known existed in the Italian language,” Mason explains. “My confidence, vocabulary, and oral skills skyrocketed.”

The exchange rate created challenges: a small gelato in central Florence cost four dollars or more, a cappuccino more than five dollars. Even bread, traditionally the least expensive food in Italy, has become less affordable; a slice of focaccia cost almost four dollars. Many of the students still managed to shop for clothes and souvenirs, avoiding the big fashion names like Prada and Gucci, by browsing the more affordable stores that regular Italians shop in. The upside of the situation, however, was that because they had to count their euros carefully, they started living less like American tourists and more like Italians, shopping at local markets and cooking in their apartments.

Study-abroad experiences undoubtedly change lives. As an enthusiastic Hannon says, “Spending May term in Italy opened my eyes to the fact that there are so many possible directions your life can go in.”

Mason would do it again in a heartbeat. “Being in a non-English-speaking country, far from everything that’s familiar, taught me immeasurable things about myself,” Mason says. “People always told me that being in college gives you a great sense of independence, but it doesn’t compare to the sense of independence I tasted in Florence.”

Photos: Rachel Lindstrom (above) and Katherine Hannon (above right)
here was a time when Susan Noakes had to send her graduate students to the subbasement annex of Wilson Library to get 19th-century books out of storage for her French Literature and the Crusades course. The books—French poems about the Crusades—were so old, they crumbled in students’ hands. That was before 9/11. Now this material has been reissued in France in fresh new paperbacks. Noakes says it’s one sign of the resurgence of interest in all things medieval, especially contact among diverse cultures.

A medievalist and professor of French and Italian, Noakes is on a mission to bring the 12th century into the 21st. Her research has shown that hot-button issues such as ethnic displacement, immigration, religious tolerance, and global interconnectedness were as incendiary 10 centuries ago as they are today. Now she is leading the Scholarly Community for the Globalization of the Middle Ages (SCGMA) in an effort to reconfigure medieval studies through innovative initiatives that encompass everything from crunching data in giant computers to bringing scholars together across a broad international spectrum.

Noakes’s work on the sites of cultural exchange among Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the medieval Mediterranean is an example of the scholarship that has enlivened the field and made it relevant to contemporary students in a multicultural world. East Asia, for example, was once studied mostly in terms of its products carried along the Silk Road and through the Middle East during the Crusades; now it is now increasingly explored for its powerful and complex cultural and economic influence on Europe.

The presence of Muslim Arabs and Jews on Sicily in the 10th and 11th centuries is an early example of this influence, says Noakes. These populations interacted successfully for generations before the Norman invasion in 1060. Eventually, however, the Normans became nervous about these “others,” driving the Muslims off the island and onto mainland Italy around 1200. “According to one school of historical thought, the economic decline of Sicily dates from that removal because the Muslims and Jews were learned, multilingual, skilled artisans and traders,” Noakes says.

She also notes the importance of Muslims in works of medieval French literature like La Chanson de Roland that explore not only the conflict between Muslims and Christians but also issues of intermarriage, conversion, and competing cultural ideas. In La Chanson de Guillaume, for example, the adventurous Guillaume journeys from southern to northern France and along the Mediterranean coast, encountering many Muslims as well as Jews. “Issues such as the relative strength and moral character of Muslims and Christians are examined,” says Noakes. “They come from a multicultural France in the 12th and 13th centuries. People in that period were investigating differences among French Christians, Muslims, and Jews. It’s important for students to know that, given current issues of immigration and the rise of religious fanaticism and new anti-Semitism.”

In fact, medieval studies is so hot these
days that it has entered the rarefied realm of the supercomputer.

In November 2007 Noakes, who was in her sixth and final year as director of the University of Minnesota’s Center for Medieval Studies (CMS), and Geraldine Heng, director of the medieval studies program at the University of Texas, assembled specialists from all over the world to talk about how to globalize medieval studies. The group included medievalists like Noakes and Heng who study European culture, historians and archaeologists who study places like Sudanic Africa, and specialists in humanities computing. The group discovered that it needed to develop an infrastructure that would allow huge bodies of data in different languages to be organized in ways that have both depth and breadth—what Noakes calls “a thick global texture.”

Enter Kevin Franklin, executive director of the Institute for Computing in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (I-CHASS) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Impressed by the diversity of the workshop and SCGMA members’ eagerness to apply computer technology to their scholarship, Franklin encouraged Noakes to provide a model for other humanities initiatives.

It became a perfect storm of artificial intelligence and medieval studies: scholars who wanted to provide an infrastructure for the several hundred thousand manuscripts and data scattered all over the world; the support of I-CHASS; and the help of Fermilab, a national science laboratory in Illinois with plans to build what will be the largest computer in the world. Fermilab’s computer, says Noakes, will be used for petascale computing, which she describes as “crunching larger amounts of data and analyzing big problems.”

Noakes credits CLA dean James A. Parente, who specializes in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, with encouraging her in this vast undertaking. “Without his learned presence and vision, I would not have pursued this project,” says Noakes. Likewise, Parente praises Noakes’s initiative and innovation as director of the CMS. “Susan’s work is in keeping with the University’s mission to put teaching in a global context,” he says. He also mentions her innovation in developing a K-12 outreach program that brings graduate students, medieval manuscripts, swan quills, and gold leaf into Twin Cities classrooms.

Indeed, attracting more students to medieval studies is one of Noakes’s goals. “Gerry Heng and I realized early on that the globalization movement would have to engage the affection many young people feel for warfare and knights, often leading them to learn something of the period through visual and digital technologies, says Noakes. “So many students develop an interest in the Middle Ages through movies like Lord of the Rings and video games like Oblivion. We must capture and build on that interest, rather than look down our scholarly noses at it.”

History is a living force that affects our lives, says Noakes. “We all use our history. We define ourselves in terms of our past, or against our past.”

Old is New

Professor Susan Noakes finds connections between the Middle Ages and today | BY LINDA SHAPIRO
In 2004, after completing a master’s degree at the University of Minnesota with an emphasis on feminist Quebecois writing, I found myself at an academic crossroads. While I still had more to understand about feminine identity in Quebecois writing, my interest in film was continuing to grow. I had taken film courses in college and graduate school, but my interest in film was sparked by a stay in Dakar, Senegal.

During the few months I spent in Dakar, I had the great good fortune to attend the premiere of *Faat Kiné*, directed by Ousmane Sembene, one of Africa’s most influential filmmakers. Little did I know at the time that out of a personal and emotional attachment to Senegal would grow an entire dissertation chapter about Sembene’s film. Being a Romanian who studies French and francophone cinema in the United States, I found in Senegal my perfect “third space.” While I was in Dakar I felt more at home than anywhere else in the world. Its cinema and its marginalized characters resounded within me. It was only natural that I should want to unveil more of that place and its cinema to this side of the world.

Courses on Western African film and on Italian neo-realism and the French New Wave, together with the exciting opportunity to teach my own version of an introductory film course, intensified my interest in cinema. Alongside my studies, I have tried my hand at actual filmmaking, as a way to put in practice the theories I was studying, and I managed to write and shoot two projects, *Still Life* (2005) and *At the Gates of Levant* (2007), both of which had very successful screenings on campus.

My current research brings together two fields, French New Wave and Senegalese cinema, which have never been analyzed in relation to one another. The critical issue I am exploring through my dissertation research is how film can help us understand the idea of modernity and its effects. My dissertation aligns the films of three pairs of Senegalese and French directors. Jean-Luc Godard and Djibril Diop Mambety, for instance, directed films that play out the struggle between image and meaning, as their films turn in upon themselves to create, recreate, and permutate the stories they tell. Ousmane Sembene and François Truffaut make modernity visible by casting an indirect gaze upon characters who dwell in marginality. These characters recall the flâneur depicted by the 19th-century poet Charles Baudelaire. For Baudelaire, the flâneur, or stroller, was the epitome of modernity, a person who moved through the city and through life propelled by idleness and curiosity, always detached and alone. Agnès Varda and Safi Faye create female characters who emerge from marginality, struggling to assert their own voices and undermine the primacy of the male subject in cinema on the level of image and sound. The work of all six directors explores modernity thematically but also technically, through their fascinating characters but also through the wandering, witnessing work of the camera.

As I begin my last year of graduate school, I plan to complete my dissertation and begin the next chapter in my intellectual adventure and academic life. My passion for film will continue, and I look forward to developing it further in my research and sharing it in the classroom.

Vlad Dima, Ph.D. candidate
he play *Jaz* by the Ivorian Koffi Kwahulé inspired my interest in contemporary African francophone theater. Fascinated by the musicality and juxtaposition of words in *Jaz*, I read all Kwahulé’s plays and discovered other contemporary African playwrights such as Kossi Efoui (Togo), José Pliya (Benin), Dieudonné Niangouna (Congo), Caya Makhlélé (Congo), and Marcel Zang (Cameroon). These writers use very different styles to express the experience of exile, yet a common thread in their work on language and narrative structure can be called “chaotic.” I became deeply intrigued by the encounter of theater, music, dance, and poetry that makes these contemporary African plays nontraditional.

The notion of chaos defines much of postcolonial African francophone literature. During the 1960s and 1970s, Congolese writer Sony Labou Tansi illustrated the emergence of writings on African chaos by depicting the violence of dictatorships and numerous crises in Africa inherited from colonial domination. Although contemporary African francophone playwrights assume an affiliation with the chaotic subversive grammar in Labou Tansi’s works, I am more interested in demonstrating how they made a leap from an existing conception of chaos to one that is more dynamic, and based on transformations-in-motion. At this point, I have been inspired by the discourses of chaos in contemporary science that define chaos as a constant paradox, and I focus on the dynamic of “order” and “disorder” in contemporary African francophone theater and cinematographic techniques that break the rhythm in these writings.

Through my research I came into contact with Professor Sylvie Chalaye, an internationally recognized specialist in African francophone theater at the University of the Sorbonne (Paris III). I am excited to be working with Professor Chalaye in Paris and Professor Mária Brewer at the University of Minnesota in a joint Ph.D. program. Thanks to a doctoral dissertation fellowship, I am currently finishing my research on some of the most innovative theater being produced in the contemporary African francophone sphere. I plan to go to Africa soon to continue my research, and then to complete my dissertation before beginning a research and teaching career.

A Graduate Research Fellowship from the Department of French and Italian enabled me to go to France, pursue archival research, and attend the latest contemporary African francophone performances. Contemporary black African francophone theater research is an exciting field of endeavor. The African francophone avant-garde theater is widely recognized in France, but it remains relatively unknown to theater scholars and specialists in the United States and globally. Thus my goal as a scholar and teacher is to make African francophone playwrights’ voices heard, and to contribute to understanding the singularity of their approaches and the common ground their works share.

During my research I started to combine the fragmentation of text with the chaotic identity of the new generation of African playwrights. It seemed to me a crucial issue because this new generation has to face critiques of the “authenticity” of their African plays. The avant-garde of African francophone playwrights is creating a new way to think about African literature through a new “chaotic” approach to literature. I like the fact that they challenge current assumptions of what is an “African play.” These writers are deeply engaged in a critical dialogue on the interconnections between fissured identities and the opening of space for new artistic voices. This “chaotic” approach to literature is related to how African playwrights are contributing to innovative and experimental ways of understanding identity in a globalized world.

Born and raised in Paris, of Cameroonian descent, and currently a student in Minneapolis, I recognize myself in this chaos of plural identities.

Sylvie Ngilla, Ph.D. candidate
Lucia Watson always knew that she wanted to cook, but buying a house in France was never part of her plan. “It was a serendipitous, impulsive thing,” she says, having said yes to a pair of friends who were looking for a partner to buy a 400-year-old house in Brittany. After seven years, four of them spent under major renovation, Maison de Granit is a second home, a place where Watson practices her French and finds inspiration in centuries-old French food practices.

Watson is known far and wide as the owner and chef at Lucia’s, the restaurant she opened in 1985 in the Uptown neighborhood of Minneapolis. Her commitment to locally grown, “honest” food has made her place a favorite among Twin Cities food lovers, and no less an organization than the James Beard Foundation has nominated her for a Best Chef in the Midwest award three times. In 2006 the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) awarded her its Commitment to Community award for her work with local farmers.

It’s this commitment that set her apart at the beginning of her career. Besides being one of the first restaurateurs to go local, she was among the first in the Twin Cities to open a wine bar. Her latest “opening”? A first-of-its-kind dog bar. Yes, a dog bar. On the sidewalk outside the wine bar sits an artist-designed tiled drinking fountain for dogs—a perfect addition in this pedestrian-oriented neighborhood.

Lucia is excited about the dog bar, but she really lights up when talking about her new Lucia’s To Go, essentially a deli featuring many of the foods that have helped her make her mark. She proudly shows off the homemade jams, hand-harvested wild rice, and sea salt from Brittany (more on that later), along with cases of tiny cakes, huge quiches, salads, and sandwiches—all sourced locally and made in the shop. Her two cookbooks—one on fresh fish, the other on cooking in the heartland—are also available. “I wanted it to feel like a Paris bistro,” she explains, and it does, with its casual tables, high-quality food, and fabulous white marble countertop.

“I’ve always loved languages,” says Watson. She came to the University of Minnesota to major in French after taking “a lot, a lot” of French and Latin in high school. Thinking she wanted to be a translator, she also took some Norwegian. Since college she’s added Spanish, and in one of her latest roles, as IATP board member, she hopes to put her language skills to a new use. “They go on global investigations, and I hope to go along to learn more about their work but also contribute” as a trilingual interpreter.

When she stays at Maison de Granit, she immerses herself in the culture of this unusual place, where all of the road signs are in both French and Breton and the villages have Celtic-sounding names. “I would love to learn Breton,” she says. “I’m taking it on two words at a time, while still improving my French.” The Web site for the house includes Watson’s accounts of Brittany’s festivals, unusual sites, and of course cooking for friends.

Clearly, one of the most exciting aspects of her second home is the community of like-minded people she has found in France. “One of my new friends in Brittany speaks Breton and harvests salt from his ancient marsh. He is passionate and knowledgeable about the ‘old ways’ of Breton and the simplicity and purity of cooking with what is available and seasonal. To be immersed in these traditions inspire and confirms what I am already doing.”

Watson finds these practices affirming, especially coming from a country with such ancient cultural roots. “They have certain ways of making cider in Brittany that have been practiced for centuries, and that’s very precious. That’s what I’m about too—being true to the food.”

FIND OUT MORE:
www.lucias.com or www.maisondeganit.com
A Tale of Two Continents
Life in France is irresistible to alumna Ruth Redhead | BY LINDA SHAPIRO

Alumna Ruth Redhead has led two lives for more than 50 years. She has divided her time between France and the United States, relishing the differences between the two cultures. While she taught French at South Dakota State University from 1963 to 1993 and has lived in Minneapolis since 1995, she frequently travels to France. “Life is slower in France,” she says. “People take a long time for meals and strolls. There are lively public gardens to read and walk in,” says Redhead.

When she is in Paris, Redhead stays in the lively Fifth Arrondissement. “I have housing with shops nearby,” she says, “and I’m near the Luxembourg Gardens, away from traffic and tourists, but close enough to walk everywhere. Transportation is so easy—I can go anywhere. I attend courses at the nearby Collège de France, where anyone can go for free. It was established by Cardinal Richelieu in the 17th century.”

Redhead received a Ph.D. in French from the University of Minnesota in 1971 after studying at the University of Vermont and in Grenoble, France. Her area of concentration under Professor Armand Renaud was 17th-century French literature. “My thesis was on Madame de Lafayette, a woman who was liberated for her time. She lived in Paris, while her husband resided at their château in the country,” says Redhead. “She wrote four successful novels that were, of course, published anonymously, had her own salon, and was a close friend of Madame de Sévigné.”

Redhead’s peripatetic life, lively curiosity, and independent spirit are reminiscent of Madame de Lafayette and the influential women who enlivened French cultural and intellectual life in the 17th century. After earning a master’s degree from the University of Vermont in 1954, she returned to Grenoble, where she had studied French, to take up philosophy. During her teaching years she traveled frequently to France, spending two sabbaticals to do research and write several articles and a book and often taking students on summer study trips. She recommends that students spend as much time studying and living abroad as possible.

“It’s important to go to a place where you are forced to use the language. I went to Grenoble in the 1950s because there were few Americans and English speakers there,” says Redhead. She recommends that students stay with a French family and become “part of the life” by making French friends. “And students need to take courses that will really make them work,” she says.

Why should students today consider a degree in French? “Besides the fact that it is such a beautiful language, the literature is very rich and rewarding. French is spoken in many countries all around the world,” says Redhead. She points out that French equips students for jobs in a variety of fields; one of her former students became an investment banker in Switzerland.

“Because the French are well-versed in the history and literature of their country, the language is an entrée into the culture,” says Redhead. She goes on to describe some of the differences between French and American culture. American friendships are more casual, she says. But although it is more difficult to make friends in France, “once you make them, you really keep them.” Redhead is still in touch with the daughter of the family she stayed with in the 1950s. She also points out the emphasis on aesthetics in every area of French life. “Of course, there is an emphasis on cultural events like plays, concerts, exhibitions,” says Redhead. But the appreciation of beauty and intellectual stimulation extends to everyday life: exquisitely arranged shop windows, excellent cuisine, invigorating conversation around a variety of topics. As Redhead puts it, “Even the bridges are beautiful.”
During the past year, faculty members and graduate students in the Department of French and Italian were engaged in producing new knowledge and sharing their research in print and at conferences throughout the United States and abroad.

**FACULTY**

Hakim Abderezzak presented several papers on such topics as “the modern harem” in the films of Nadir Moknèche, narratives of trans-Mediterranean journeys, Morocco’s modernity, the filmmaker Ismaël Ferroukhi, and the (in)visibility of Maghrebi/Beur (sub)culture in French society.

F. R. P. Akehurst gave the invited plenary address at the Canadian Society of Medievalists annual meeting: “Nine Points of the (Medieval) Law.” He also presented a paper on editing medieval legal texts and another on courtly literature. He is co-author of a forthcoming bilingual edition of two medieval texts titled *Our Lady’s Lawsuits*.

Daniel Brewer is the author of a new book, *The Enlightenment Past*, published by Cambridge University Press, and an article on epigraphs in Stendhal. He presented papers on the emergence of the passions in 18th-century literature, the idea of the sketch, and paradigms of cultural exchange.

Mária Brewer published an article on Samuel Beckett and the notion of the incommensurable, and another on symbolic reinventions in contemporary theater titled “The Banquet and Its Aftermath.” She delivered papers on theater in Scotland and Paris.

Mary Brown had two articles accepted for publication: one on the medieval encyclopedia as a memory site and the other on “prosimetrum” to appear in the *Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages*. She presented papers on the medieval encyclopedia, medieval courtly poetry, and lyricism in *Le Roman de la rose*.

Bruno Chaouat’s edited volume, *Reading and Writing Shame*, was published by the Presses Universitaires de Lyon. He also published the articles and reviews “Islam on the Couch,” “New Jewish Questions after September 11,” and “In the Image of Auschwitz.” His paper on Jean Genet will appear in *Scroll and Scarf: Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in the Francophone Context*.

Juliette Cherbuliez published an article on exile and spaces of intimacy in the work of 17th-century writer Lafayette and a review discussing the French view of American culture. She presented a paper titled “Ovid and the Morally Indescribable.”

Betsy Kerr is a coauthor of *Deux Mondes*, one of the most widely used college textbooks of French, which just appeared in its sixth edition.

Susan Noakes published an article on Dante, “Dante in Red, White, Green—then Black,” and two reviews on medieval culture and literary history. She gave presentations on the Minnesota Manuscript Research Laboratory, Dante and medieval cultural traditions, and “the business of cosmetics.”

Judith Preckshot organized a Minnesota Humanities Commission seminar for K-12 teaching, “The Changing Faces of Republican France.” She gave two presentations: “Students and Workers: Africans In and Out of France” and “Representations of Africans—sans papier.”

Eileen Sivert presented a paper on maternal connections in the work of Quebecois novelist Anne Hébert.

Christophe Wall-Romana published numerous articles and reviews on film and poetry. Forthcoming articles and reviews will address silent film, surrealist desire in cinema, Léo Malet and the *roman noir*, and surrealist space. He also gave papers on “Cinopoetic Imagination,” “Cinécriture,” and the poetic image, and he co-organized the film and lecture series “Hyperfootage” at Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.
family financial resources to fall back on, small surprises can become big problems. A U of M professor who had mentored Ana graciously offered an emergency loan to bridge the gap.

The benefits of study abroad, though, are immeasurable. During her final semester abroad, Ana studied business and French in Paris with an international class of students ranging widely in age and hailing from countries as diverse as Colombia, Sweden, New Zealand, and China. When the professor explained a French business practice, he would turn to a student and ask in French, “How do you handle this in your country?” With students sharing cultural and practical information from their respective countries, each class became a lesson in international awareness.

Ana has her long-term sights set on a career in international economic development. Having experienced economic hardships throughout her life, she knows that families and children need help to help themselves. Her experiences have made her realize all the more clearly the power each of us has to help those in need, regardless of who we are, where we come from, or what we have.

Helping promising students with travel scholarships is a key department priority. As Ana knows, even $1,000–$2,500 can mean the difference between participating in a life-changing study-abroad experience and having to stay home.

If at some time you were changed by a travel or study-abroad experience, please consider setting up a study-abroad fund in the Department of French and Italian. From experience, you know that study-abroad will surprise, challenge, and improve these young new leaders of the world.

Happy travels,

Lynn Argetsinger
612-625-5378, lpa@umn.edu

continued from back page

An impressive number of dissertations were defended during the 2007–2008 academic year. “Power, Violence, and Resistance in the Sub-Saharan Novel and Film” was the topic of Benjamin Ngong’s dissertation; he has accepted a position as assistant professor at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Nathalie Gaillot defended “The Mothering Nation,” which focused on Caribbean women writers. Laura Burch wrote on “Translating Friendship” in the works of early modern women writers and has joined Dominican University in River Forest, Illinois, as an assistant professor. Catherine Pulling analyzed the theme of cuckoldry to understand social order and disorder in the early modern period. Mira Reinberg accepted a position as visiting assistant professor at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. Mamadou Samb is a visiting assistant professor at Colby College in Waterville, Maine.

A Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship was awarded to Sylvie Ngilla, and Fawn Wilderson-Legros received a Doctoral Fellowship for International Research from the Office of International Programs. In the department, summer research fellowships were awarded to Robert St. Clair and Lauren Fichtel. Vlad Dima and Melanie Bowman received Graduate Research Partnership Program awards to work with Hakim Abderrezak and Juliette Cherbuliez, respectively.

The Graduate Student Teaching Award was presented to Vlad Dima.

This year was an especially productive one for graduate students in the Department of French and Italian, as they shared the diverse and innovative results of their research at venues in the United States and abroad.

Melanie Bowman presented a paper titled “Decolonizing Early Modern Discourse on Exoticism.”

Vlad Dima presented the paper “Old New Women” on the work of Mario Martone.

Isaac Joslin’s translation of an article by Hakim Abderrezak on two films by Nadir Moknèche appeared in print.

Sylvie Ngilla spoke on the theater of Koffi Kwahulé at a conference at the Sorbonne in Paris.

Anna Rosensweig gave a paper on the question of feminine identity in the work of Assia Djebar, Marguerite Duras, and Annie Ernaux.

Robert St. Clair shared his research on poetry and war in a paper titled “A Sleepy Cadaver.”

Mamadou Samb presented a paper on memory and ethnology in the work of Michel Leiris.

Fawn Wilderson-Legros presented the paper “The Children of the Fatherland.”
Global Transformation

Just a few years ago, Ana Mihaila was the valedictorian at her suburban Minneapolis high school and working as a coffee shop barista. Now she is a University of Minnesota honors graduate in international business and marketing—finishing up an additional major in French—and a business analyst for a major corporation.

Not bad for a young woman who emigrated to the United States as a young child, didn’t know a word of English, and was raised by a single mother who faced economic obstacles throughout Ana’s childhood. As an adult, Ana supported herself through college while she was also struggling to help her family when she could.

“No matter how hard you strive, no matter how strong your work ethic, it all comes down to finances,” Ana told me.

Only through a combination of savings from paid internships, small scholarships, financial aid, and loans was Ana able to not only complete college, but also to participate in several study-abroad programs in Europe. Ana’s story convinces me yet again of the importance of providing study-abroad scholarships to immensely talented and seriously needy students.

At times, thriftiness went only so far. Although Ana tried every way to economize during her study-abroad semester in London, the punishing exchange rate left her with no way to cover her last month’s expenses. When a student like Ana is an ocean away from home and doesn’t have any...