

13 January 2018

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

I am writing to apply for post-doctoral position in English. In May 2018, I will graduate with my PhD in English from the University of Arizona; my dissertation, “The Ability to Not-Find: Failure, Memory, and Hope in the American Novel,” is already completed, and my final oral defense is scheduled for January 26th. As an Americanist with a specialization in the long 19th century, my teaching emphasis in transatlantic literature of the 18th and 19th centuries supports my diverse and interdisciplinary research interests. My dissertation examines American novels from a broad range of historical periods—from the late 18th century to the 21st—and geographic regions; my conference presentations and publications-in-progress reflect a similar breadth of topics.

My dissertation’s central concept of constitutive failure comes from revisiting Georg Lukács’ foundational text *The Theory of the Novel* and re-translating select passages to recover compound nouns Lukács coined that have been until now lost in translation. While Lukács deploys these terms across his *Theory*, this single sentence in the original German of *Die Theorie des Romans* is key both to his argument about the interrelationship between time and form in the novel and to his terminology: “Nur im Roman, dessen Stoff das Suchen-müssen und das Nicht-finden-Können des Wesens ausmacht, ist die Zeit mit der Form mitgesetzt.” The Bostock translation, which English-speaking scholars have been using since the 1960s, is mostly correct here, aside for the tricky middle with the hyphenated constructions, which bear far more complex connotations than the simple translation of “seeking and failing to find the essence.” Considering the fluidity of meaning for each term, I translate this sentence as “Only in the Novel, whose very substance unveils the imperative-to-seek and ability-to-not-find of being, is time posited together with form.” While “Nicht-finden-Können” can also plausibly be read as “the inability to find,” my positive, paradoxical rendering as “the ability to not-find” is more useful for an analysis of novelistic form and temporality.

My dissertation deploys this “ability to not-find” as a formal focus and an experimental methodology for analyzing exemplary American novels: from the haunting voices of the repressed past in Brown’s *Wieland*; to Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, where Pip’s near-drowning brings the watery grave of the middle passage out of the undercurrents of memory and into the material of language; through the embodied temporality of Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*; to a conclusion considering the impossible hope of Lemuria, the Atlantis-like island imagined in Pynchon’s *Inherent Vice*. Lemuria stands in as a replacement for the lost frontier, offering a potential future in a world that seems to have none. The hope of Lemuria—likewise the hope for American literary studies—comes not from the continued repression of our history of genocide and colonialism, but from the full recognition of that inescapable past. Hope in the novel—and hope for the future of novel theory—appears in the vision that “this blessed ship is bound for some better shore, some undrowned Lemuria, risen and redeemed, where the American fate, mercifully, failed to transpire.” Notably, this hope only emerges through *merciful failure*; for the American novel, failure is generative for both form and content. The residues of the corrosive past and the uncertainty of a coherent national future haunt the content and form of these novels, appearing as contaminations and mutations in the language and structure of each text, serving as traces of the formal effects of time—in particular the temporal forces of memory and hope, which Lukács describes as key “creative forces” essential to novel form. By exploring diverse methodologies, experimenting with digital methods of computer-assisted reading combined with the traditional rigor of close reading, my dissertation navigates vital new approaches to literary critique emerging from generative failure and the “ability to not-find.”

My dissertation’s exploration of the material foundations of American literature has inspired a few related research projects. I’m currently working on an article tracing volcanic depictions of racial violence in Melville’s *Battle-Pieces*; seeing racial inequality as the very geological core of the nation, rather than something storm-like that can pass, offers a framework for understanding not only the “eruptions” of the 19th century, but also our own era of tremors and instability. I’ve recently begun exploratory research into

memoirs of unmarried female homesteaders of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in response to a CFP for a special issue of *Legacy* on “American Women’s Writing and Genealogies of Queer Thought,” and will present a paper in February on animal encounters and posthuman ethics in Melville’s “Encantadas” and the world of *Blade Runner*. I also hope to continue an ongoing collaborative project on roadside “museums” of the American West, which interrogates westerners’ self-depictions of material history. In addition to these American Studies projects, my research also draws upon my background in German Studies and my strengths in transatlantic and comparative literature; one of my current articles-in-progress uses my prior MA thesis research into a little-known antisemitic folktale of the Brothers Grimm to uncover Charles Dickens’s allusions to this tale in *Our Mutual Friend*.

I have eleven years of experience teaching at the college level, including upper-division literature courses, first-year composition, and introductory German language courses; I’ve designed and taught fully-online courses as well as in intensive summer and winter short-sessions, with class sizes ranging from four to 80 students, and assisted in large lectures of 150+ students. I’ve taught six sections of our department’s required upper-division literature survey course, British & American Literature 1660-1865, and TAed for an additional two sections of this course. I’ve also taught courses on Major American Authors and an Introduction to Close Reading. My first-year composition courses are organized around social justice—reading and writing the diversity of human experience—and encourage students to use their research and writing to make a difference outside the classroom. Curricula and materials I developed for first-year writing courses have been published in multiple editions of our methods textbook and shared as recommended instructor resources since 2012; I’ve also been invited to speak to new instructors in the Writing Program to share my innovative rhetoric and research assignment sequence.

Working at a large state university, I’m experienced engaging with a diverse student body; my course evaluations reflect how I treat every student with respect, and make time to get to know them personally, even in large classes. I’ve greatly enjoyed being an informal second advisor for a student working on her senior honors thesis, and look forward to more of this very fulfilling one-on-one mentorship. In recent years I’ve brought more technologies from the online classroom into my face-to-face teaching, including asynchronous online discussions and collaborative cloud documents, making coursework accessible for students of diverse abilities, income levels, learning styles, and backgrounds. By demonstrating the joy of academic inquiry and making assignments not just pedagogically sound but also *fun*, my students come to realize that academic inquiry isn’t drudgery, but a delight worth pursuing. When students begin to pursue learning from a place of curiosity and delight, they become both better scholars and more likely to pursue their passion for learning beyond my classroom. I love the exchange of ideas across disciplines I’ve experienced at the Dartmouth Futures of American Studies Institute, which I’ve attended three times. Striving for this kind of interdisciplinary synthesis, I’ve collaborated with colleagues in the Center for English as a Second Language to pair my composition classes with international students for exchange days, and I’ve set up a partnership with a local high school English class to be the “rhetorical audience” for my spring composition students’ public writing assignment.

One of my department’s own graduates (from before my time, however), Jason Lagapa, has recently published a book and received an impressive NEH grant thanks to the supportive environment of UTPB, and I’m excited for a post-doctoral opportunity that would similarly cultivate scholarly production—not only expanding my pedagogical experience but also sustaining my research and publication pursuits. I would be delighted to interview for this position.

Sincerely,



Carie Schneider