

IN MEMORIAM

Gregory W. Bredbeck
Associate Professor of English
UC Riverside
1962 - 2007

Gregory W. Bredbeck was born in Akron, Ohio, in 1962. He was an undergraduate at The Ohio State University in Columbus, graduating in 1984, and he pursued graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania. He completed his Ph.D. there in 1989.

Greg was an astonishing scholar. In his first years at UCR, he published a book with Cornell University Press and two scholarly articles in the *PMLA*, the premier journal in the field of literary studies. All this work challenged conventions as well. Greg's book *Sodomy and Interpretation from Marlowe to Milton* (Cornell University Press, 1991) took Renaissance studies by surprise, and it immediately earned Greg a national, even an international reputation. His book was both brilliant and courageous. When he started the dissertation that later turned into that book, it was, as he wrote in his preface, "an isolated and risky endeavor. Nobody would outright deny the interest of the project, but neither would anybody outright endorse it. . . . I was treading a fine line between an expansion of gender studies and a lapse into the unconscionable." His book educated us in the language of Renaissance sodomy, the *crimem sodomiticum* of legal discourse, and we learned about the buggerer, the catamite, the ingle, the 'masculine whore,' the Ganymede. He gave us a fresh look at old texts and made us see the homoeroticism in, of all places, Milton. He invited us to think again about the "master-mistress" of Shakespeare's Sonnet 20 and he made newly visible forgotten writers such as the Elizabethan poet Richard Barnfield, who openly celebrated same-sex desire. His ground-breaking chapters about Marlowe's *Edward II*, *Hero and Leander*, and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, along with subsequent essays are shaping the critical conversation about these works even today.

Greg provoked people, and he offended people, and most especially he inspired people with his bravery, his wit, his love of words, his fast-moving intelligence. He expanded our minds. He expanded our sense of academic community. Greg's early influences included Barthes, Foucault, Deleuze & Guattari, Alan Bray and Eve Sedgwick, and he brought a sense of play to his work along with a sharp fierce sense of political engagement. He relished the multivalences and the indeterminacies and the double, even multiple, voicings of literary texts. He was skilled in the art of using shock tactics to start new conversations. He brought national attention to our department and initiated new directions in Renaissance studies.

His essay "Milton's Ganymede: Negotiations of Homoerotic Tradition in *Paradise Lost*" (*PMLA*, 1991) appeared in *PMLA* the next year and he had tenure in year three. (Another *PMLA* article, "B/O: Barthes's Text/O'Hara's Trick,"

made his rise officially meteoric, and we all were awe of this brilliant young scholar.) It is hard to convey just how electrifying a presence Greg was back then -- and how quickly he seemed to know -- and be known by -- just about everybody in the field of Renaissance Studies. His mentors from Penn and elsewhere included Stuart Curran, Joseph Wittreich, Peter Stallybrass, Jean Howard, and especially Phyllis Rackin, to whom he dedicated his book. At the Shakespeare Association of America conferences he was invited to give a paper in one of the major opening day sessions (1991) -- rare for such a young scholar -- and he gave papers and led seminars in subsequent years. He led a seminar again at the huge Sixth World Shakespeare Congress held in LA in 1996.

Here at UCR he was a lively force, shaking up our department meetings, helping to revamp our curriculum, and organizing conferences. For our Riverside Shakespeare Conference in 1990, he got Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin to come out here and present papers, and gave his own ground-breaking talk "Tradition and the Individual Sodomite," a title with a characteristically Greg-like clever spin on a famous essay by T.S. Eliot. In 1991, he helped to organize the highly successful conference, "Unauthorized Sexual Behaviors," contributing also the unnerving, provocative illustration used for its poster. He even got his day in the sun in the local press, provoking columnist Dan Bernstein with his graduate seminar on "Renaissance Bodily Fluids." Greg's productivity and his contributions to the department were little less than astonishing and he and his work seemed to be everywhere.

Greg put an enormous amount into his teaching. Websites for his classes were legendary among the undergraduates, and even colleagues would go to his sites from time to time in order to challenge themselves to do more for their students. Greg had some bizarre pedagogical techniques, which often included showing off his knowledge in an almost arrogant way. This would spell classroom suicide for most university professors, but Greg's students, for the most part, enjoyed this. Especially early in his career, when he was such a productive scholar, Greg had a firm foundation from which to pontificate, and students came from far and wide to share in that experience. Graduate students and undergraduates alike were devoted to him. Greg's commitment to teaching is also evidenced in an essay he wrote for an MLA collection on teaching Lesbian and Gay Studies. "The Impossibility of a Queer Pedagogy" is one of those essays that we return to again and again. For only Greg can ask: "do we not all want our students to leave class with something that is entirely their own, some viewpoint, perspective or mode of thinking that they have internalized from our courses? . . . This puts in the position of . . . diddling with the capitalist anus and engaging in the 'contradiction' of heterosexual, hommo-sexual pederasty, even if what we ask our students to internalize is entirely queer and different."

At his loss, the department heard from scores of students, those who knew him in the last year or two as well as those who knew him fifteen years ago. The outpouring of grief from students is truly moving.

As his *PMLA* publications suggest, Greg shifted his scholarly focus as he found how very much he had to say. Moving from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century British literature, to twentieth-century British and American literature and even contemporary American literature, he wrote on topics as wide-ranging

as E.M. Forster's *Maurice*, Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, and even Disco. In the *Angels in America* piece, which appeared in an essay in a collection published by the University of Michigan Press, Greg pointed out that the apparent liberalism of the play is misleading and that it requires, for full understanding, a context dating from the liberationist rhetoric of the 1970s. He points to Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theater Company as a necessary predecessor of Kushner's play and published an article on Ludlam in *Modern Drama*, the chief journal in its field. In that article, the comic, "camp" and parodic theater of Ludlam is convincingly placed in the context of the militant rhetoric of early gay liberation.

Greg was one of the founding members of the Interdisciplinary Minor in LGBT Studies at UCR, and at the Academic Senate meeting in which the proposal was discussed he spoke eloquently about its value to the undergraduates at UCR.

At this time, Greg threw himself into campus service in various ways. He served on the Committee on Educational Policy; on the Reg Fee Committee; and on the Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Lesbians and Gays. And he was nominated and elected secretary of the Gay and Lesbian Caucus of the Modern Language Association in 1995, a nationally--and not just in academia--visible post and succeeded to vice-president and president over the next two years.

In the mid-nineties, however, Greg moved out of Riverside, and he began to distance himself from campus activity. In Palm Springs, his new home, he devoted himself to activist activities in that community. He was involved with People-with-AIDS, and especially with PAWS, a program that helped care for the pets of people who were suffering that disease. At the same time, he became interested in Buddhism, and he exchanged his disco shoes for a prayer mat. Those of us who visited him in Palm Springs witnessed a lively and energized home that radiated a very special calm.

Some of us remember one of Greg's own parties at his mid-century modern house in Palm Springs with his eclectic friends: fellow Buddhists, fellow dog lovers, old rock and rollers and Hollywood exiles, ACTUP activists, real estate agents and professors. We were not allowed to bring our pets, because he felt this was unfair to his own pack of dogs. Given his unsentimental take on dog training, which paralleled his unsentimental take on treating people, we thought they would be very well behaved, but in fact they were suspiciously spoiled and Greg's was the only refrigerator we had ever seen filled entirely with home-made dog treats.

Often at his parties, he asked us to throw our deepest worries, which we had written on small slips of paper, into the fire he had going in the back yard. Those of us who did so felt an enormous relief. All of Greg's new beliefs seemed to sweep us up in its hopefulness. That feeling, and the rhetoric of Buddhist disburdening, gave Greg's friends a false security about his life in Palm Springs. Things for Greg in that desert world were not as positive as they seemed.

Still, at that time he began to offer classes on the topic that now fascinated him: dogs. Students were intrigued, and courses like this one became the talk of the undergraduate majors:

ENGLISH 142M: THE CULTURE OF THE DOG.

This course examines the cultures that arise around dogs, and the cultures that arise between dogs, and the cultural neuroses of dissolution masked and displaced through images of dogs in numerous discourses. Readings are typically selected from Eastern traditions of practice and mythology (the Zen koan; The Rig Veda); formative mythologies of Western culture such as natural science (Darwin), psychology (Pavlov; Thorndike) and classical epistemology (Aristotle); and more materially efficacious discourses of the West such as popular culture (Cujo), folklore (black dogs and hell hounds) , and urban legends. While there are readings in the course, the majority of the material for the course is delivered through lecture, and coursework often involves group projects that happen over the span of a few sessions. Thus students who cannot assure themselves that they will attend class should find a course other than this one to take. Students with an antipathy or allergy to dogs also should not take this course, as the dogs we study are both material and textual, and some dog-human interaction is necessary in the course. All others, however, are more than welcome to come, sit and stay.

Greg also began to write in this vein, contributing to the UCR/California Museum of Photography show on “Dog Days of Summer” an essay called “Walking With Cerberus: Anthropomorphism in the Void.” Although others were able to make dog-obsession a scholarly field, Greg turned instead to journalism, publishing engaging essays on dog culture, in the form of Buddhist canine reveries, as well as other feature articles, for a local gay paper in Palm Springs, the *Desert Post Weekly*. He also wrote a column called “The Desert Rat” that addressed local elections, public events, and other topics both interesting and provocative.

In the last few years, however, even this seemed to slip away. In one last show of commitment to his students and to UCR, Greg took over the Chair of the LGBT Minor at UCR in 2004, and he put a lot of energy into getting some energy back into that minor. He taught the introductory course more or less on his own, and developed a following among these students as well. In his last years, and indeed up until his very last quarter of teaching, he found that he had an increasingly devoted cadre of undergraduates whom he inspired.

But in other ways, he pulled back. Greg was nursing illness in his last several months. He stuck it out alone, and did not seem to have a strong circle of friends around him when things went from bad to worse. Still, we like to imagine that he maintained that inner strength that his Buddhism so clearly offered.

Among his websites and guides to his classes, to queer scholarship, and so on, we found this little site that features, in a lively graphic setting that suggested a postcard from far way, this short poem:

THINKNOT2

TO CLEAR THE WAY
WHEN DOUBT ARISES,
THINK 'NOT TWO'
IN THIS 'NOT TWO'
NOTHING ABIDES:
NOTHING REMAINS.
LIVE IN SUCH THUSNESS

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We like to remember this Greg: the one who could challenge us to be our better selves; the one who could remind us why we are doing what we do; and that one that could assure us that it was all right to “think not two.”

Deborah Willis
John Ganim
George Haggerty, Chair