FEBRUARY 7: VICTORIA LANTZ

Dr. Victoria Lantz will present a paper titled “Black Fridays: Popular Culture, Race, and Postcoloniality Surrounding Robinson Crusoe’s Friday.” In the 1860 Victorian pantomime *Robinson Crusoe, or Harlequin Friday and the King of Caribbee Islands!*, Friday’s first words on stage are in response to Crusoe’s question, “Wilt be my servant?” Friday replies, “Oh iss, massa: me you did delibar from de massa-cree. I’ll be your slave.” Then, as the stage directions have it, Friday “kneels and places CRUSOE’s foot upon his head.” This one small moment reflects a clear colonial representation of race and power. Crusoe asks for a servant, and Friday promises him (natural) slavery and fealty.

In Defoe’s narrative, the islands are not the Caribbean and Friday appears distinctly “non-Negro,” yet since the book was first adapted into a staged pantomime in 1781, Crusoe’s companion has been a stereotypical Africanized native (often in a Caribbean setting). By the late 1800s, the narrative was one of the most popular texts for children, and the stage shows presented comical versions of the beloved story.

In her talk, Dr. Lantz will trace the colonial and racist staging of Friday in popular arts: Victorian pantomime, blackface minstrelsy, and animated cartoons. These theatrical and cinematic representations played on racial stereotypes, and Friday became a clown figure in the Western collective imagination. In considering these representations and Derek Walcott’s postcolonial play *Pantomime* (1978), Dr. Lantz explores racial constructions of Friday, the colonial power dynamics inherent in the original narrative, and the transatlantic movement of popular culture.

MARCH 7: RALPH NORRIS

Dr. Norris will present a talk on recent developments in the textual study of Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur*: P. J. C. Field’s new edition of *Morte Darthur* is a landmark in Malory studies. Using a less narrow editorial theory than his great predecessor, Eugène Vinaver, Field is able to make much greater use of both medieval witnesses to the text, the Winchester Manuscript and the first printed edition by William Caxton, to create what is certainly the most accurate edition of Malory’s work in over five hundred years. Field is able to achieve his results in large part because of his skillful use of an editorial tool Vinaver developed that is fitted for the exact nature of Malory’s work and which has since been called the Vinaver Principle. Malory based his version of the Arthurian story on earlier works, most of which survive and can be compared to the use Malory made of them. The Vinaver Principle states, therefore, that whenever a reading in either Winchester or the Caxton edition is supported by the sources against a reading in the other, the reading supported by the sources is likely to represent Malory’s authorial text, except in special cases in which an editor has reason to suspect contamination or coincidence. However, Vinaver was an exponent of the very conservative theory of editing medieval literature associated with his mentor, Joseph Bédier, which calls for an editor to choose a single manuscript, the best manuscript so far as it can be determined, and to emend only those readings
that could not possibly be correct. Fidelity to this theory prevented Vinaver from using the principle developed from his own discoveries to the full advantage of the text, a situation that Field has now corrected.

From the perspective of textual studies, the most interesting part of the *Morte Darthur* is the second section, “King Arthur and Emperor Lucius.” This tale is based upon Malory’s most important English source, the alliterative *Morte Arthure*; the archaic vocabulary and heavy alliteration that Malory took from this poem give “Arthur and Lucius” a distinctive flavor that is unlike the rest of the *Morte Darthur*. This different style seems to have disquieted the producers of the early copies, for both traditions show signs of active interference. Since the publication of the first edition of Vinaver’s *Works* Malory scholars have known that the version in Caxton is abbreviated to about half the size of the fuller Winchester version and that the vocabulary has been significantly modernized and much of the alliteration removed. Much more recently has it been discovered that the Winchester version has also been subject to scribal abbreviation and revision. Much of the anticipation for the new edition has been caused by an eagerness to see how Field would reconstruct the text of this section in the light of this discovery. In one instance, however, Field seems to have missed the opportunity to completely undo the alterations of the Winchester scribe. The reading as it stands in Field is, naturally, perfectly lucid and the further emendation that Dr. Norris’ paper will propose will not substantially alter the text, but the very philosophical underpinning of Field’s new edition is the premise that it is important to try to recover Malory’s authorial text in every possible detail.

**APRIL 4: AMANDA NOWLIN-O’BANION**

Dr. Nowlin-O’Banion will read an excerpt from her new book-length work of creative nonfiction titled provisionally *Forty-nine to Fifty*. Set in Alaska in the summer of 2001 and in New York City the following fall, this book takes readers into two distinct communities to look at ways people voluntarily drop out of society. It chronicles work in a wilderness lodge deep within Denali National Park, presenting the oddities of ultra-secluded populations, and considers Dr. Nowlin-O’Banion’s own seclusion inside America’s biggest city after 9/11.