

Henry J Leir Chair Annual Report 2020

Robert Deam Tobin

Highlights

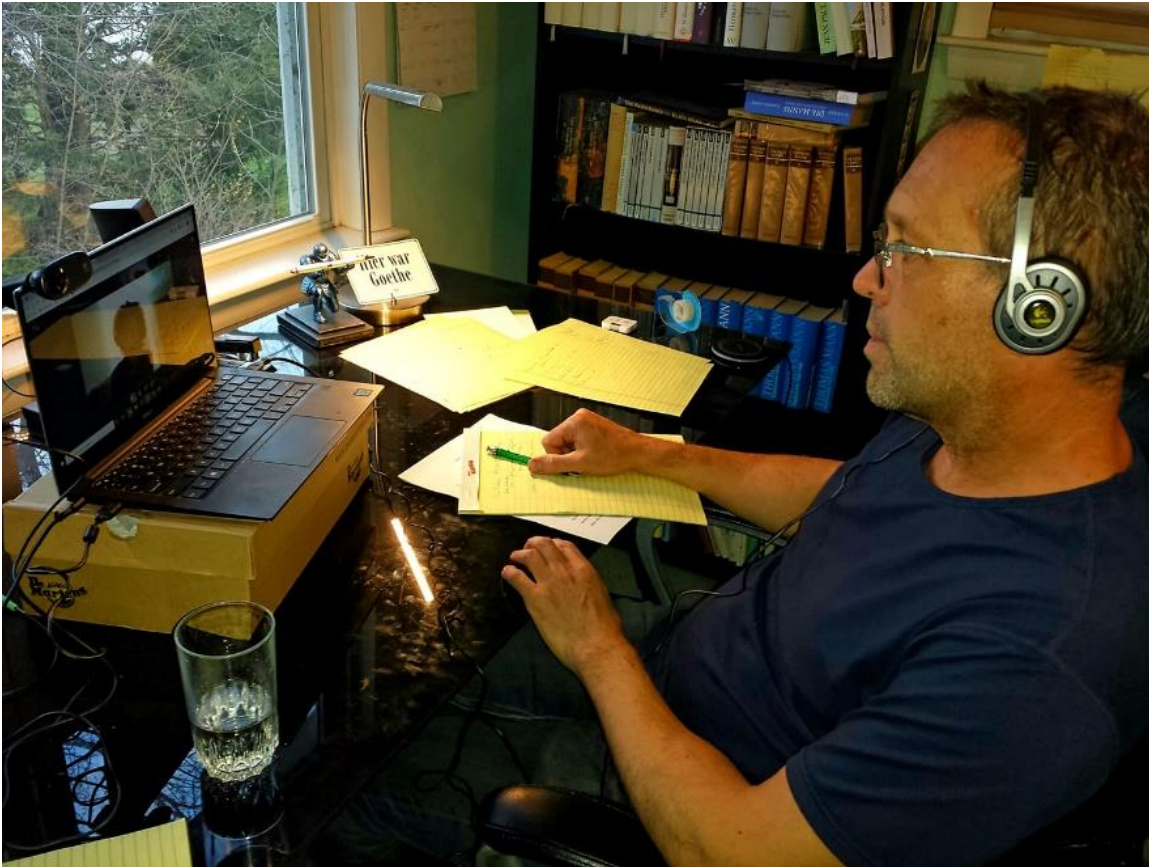


Figure 1: Virtually attending "The Pasts and Futures of Queer German Studies," a conference hosted by the University of British Columbia

1: Illiberal Thought and Male-Male Desire: Julius Evola

I begin with this picture because it seems like an apt image for academic life in 2020! In it, I'm virtually attending "The Pasts and Presents of Queer German Studies," a conference hosted by the University of British Columbia, in late April. My talk at the conference, "Queer Roots of the Alt Right," was on Julius Evola, an Italian fascist philosopher who went on to become a touchstone of the new and far right, admired by thinkers such as Alain de Benoist in France and Aleksandr Dugin in Russia, promoted by political movements such as CasaPound in Italy, the Golden Dawn in Greece, Jobbik in Hungary, and cited admiringly by figures on the alt-right such as Richard Spencer Milo Yiannopoulos, and Steven Bannon. While Evola's resurgence has

attracted some attention in the media, virtually nobody knows that he himself relied on two reactionary authors from the early days of the German homosexual emancipation movement, Otto Weininger and Hans Blüher, about whom I happen to know a lot. The organizers of this conference recorded our online talks, which [you can actually still see and/or hear here](#). I will be submitting an article on this to a forthcoming collection of essays called *Queer Temporalities*.

In June of 2019, I also spoke on this subject at the inaugural conference of the Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right, hosted by Richmond, the American International University in London, which incidentally has a distant relationship to Henry J. Leir—it is the alma mater of Prince Louis of Luxembourg.



Figure 2: Main building of Richmond, the American International University in London, host of the inaugural conference of the Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right

I was also able to contribute my knowledge of Evola to a three-day seminar called “The Nazi Legacy in the United States” at the German Studies Association in Portland, Oregon, in October, 2019. As a result of this presentation, I will be submitting an article on Evola’s ongoing influence in right-wing intellectual circles to a special issue of the *Journal of Holocaust Studies*.



Figure 3: Seminar on Nazi Legacies in America Today, at the German Studies Association

2: Mishima and Genet at the International Comparative Literature Association

Connected to my work on writers with illiberal tendencies, I spoke on the Japanese author Yukio Mishima and the French author Jean Genet, both of whom reject liberal ideals while celebrating eroticized masculinity, at the International Comparative Literature Association at the University of Macau.



Figure 4: Talking literature and politics with Qilin Cao, from the University of Macau

3: Keynote Speaker in Berlin

My talk, “Jews, Human Rights, and the Right” at Berlin’s Schwules Museum, the oldest and most significant gay museum in the world, was the keynote speech at the conference, “Jews and Queers in German-Speaking Europe and Mandatory Palestine/Israel,” where I got to interact with a substantial number of Israeli scholars.



Figure 5: At Humboldt University in Berlin

4: Publication of *LGBTQ+ Worcester for the Record* and the Key to the City

As the culmination of at least two years of work, Stephanie Yuhl (College of the Holy Cross) Joe Cullon and I were able to publish a scholarly history of Worcester gay and lesbian history to follow up on their successful exhibit on the subject at the Worcester Historical Museum. This was in fact probably the most significant achievement of the year for me. While there have been studies of LGBTQ+ history of larger municipalities like New York City, Boston, or San Francisco, there have been very few accounts of LGBTQ+ history in midsize cities such as Worcester. I was able to bring my expertise in LGBTQ Studies and queer theory to the team. It was a wonderful opportunity to work across disciplines with historians, to collaborate with colleagues at local peer institutions, and to make connections with cultural institutions in the city.



Figure 6: Worcester Councilman Khrystian King Presents Key to the City at Launch Party for *LGBTQ+ Worcester for the Record* (seated: Stephanie Yuhl, Robert Tobin, Joseph Cullon and his daughter)

At the book launch, the City of Worcester awarded me and my co-authors the Key to the City of Worcester for our work on local LGBTQ+ history. The award letter declared, “the history of our community’s most marginalized and unrecognized communities are the most vital and need to be shared and celebrated.” *Clark Now* wrote up [a full account of the award](#).



Figure 7: The Key to the City of Worcester

5: The Steinbrecher Senior Faculty Award

In addition to the Key to the City, I was honored to receive the Steinbrecher Senior Faculty Award in the Fall of 2019. This kind of recognition is so important for faculty morale! [Clark Now wrote up the awards here.](#)



Figure 8: Recipients of faculty awards

6: Mann-Family Workshop at Dartmouth College

I served as one of six senior scholars at a workshop at Dartmouth College for young academics studying Thomas Mann and members of his family. I mention it primarily because, partly at my instigation, **Aviv Hilbig-Bokaer** (Clark class of '17) was one of the nine junior scholars, indeed the most junior. After completing majors in comparative literature and IDCE, Aviv spent two years in Austria as an English teaching assistant. This year he was one of the top candidates for PhD programs in German Studies throughout the United States, actively and aggressively courted by Stanford, Cornell, University of Pennsylvania, and New York University, among other institutions. He will be attending NYU next year. You can read [his essay on Franz Kafka and Yoko Tawada in SURJ here.](#)

7: Eurovision Song Contest



Figure 9: At the San Diego International Jewish Film Festival

Because the Eurovision Song Contest is heavily associated with both gay culture and European ideals, it remains very important for liberal secular Israelis, especially gays. I have prepared a paper on four Israeli films that touch upon the importance of the Song Contest for gay Israelis. In order to see the fourth film, Daniel Syrkin's *Douze Points*, which was just released this year, I had to go to the San Diego International Jewish Film Festival. I intended to give this talk at a conference on Eurovision at the University of Sydney, but it was cancelled. I will give a version of the talk at the Modern Language Association next year.

8: Student Wins National German Studies Competition



Figure 10: Samantha Whittle (Comparative Literature, '21) Wins National German Studies Award

Samantha Whittle (Comparative Literature, '21) combined insights from classes she took from me on Faust, German Film, and the National Imagination to write a brilliant essay on women in the far-right in Germany (notably the lesbian leader of the Alternative for Germany, Alice Weidel) in the context of images of women in canonical German literature and film, from Margarethe in Goethe's *Faust* to Maria Brau in Fassbinder's *Marriage of Maria Braun*. It's not just my opinion that her work is brilliant—she won Ohio State University's national undergraduate competition for the best essay in German Studies!

Clark Now wrote up [an account of her award here](#).

9: Leir Chair Programming

In the fall of 2019, I was able to bring in a number of distinguished speakers on topics that enhanced the diversity and richness of campus conversations:



Figure 11: Angela Bowen at Clark University

With the Screen Studies program, I hosted independent filmmaker Jennifer Abod, who showed her documentary on Angela Bowen, the Black lesbian activist who was the first graduate of Clark University's doctoral program in Women's Studies.

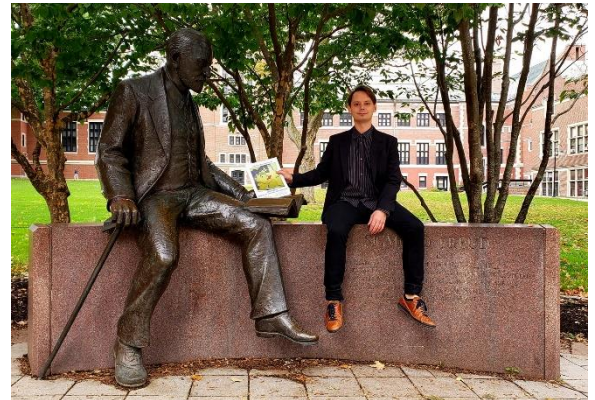


Figure 12: Professor Fleishman showing Freud his talk

The Screen Studies program was also interested in another speaker I invited to speak, Assistant Professor Ian Fleishman from the University of Pennsylvania, who spoke on Fassbinder's film *Querelle*.



Figure 13: Professor Al-Ariss goes toe-to-toe with Freud!

Tarek Al-Ariss, Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at Dartmouth College, came to speak on Arabic literature.

Nadine Knight, Associate Professor of English from the College of the Holy Cross, spoke on *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison who had died the year before.



Figure 14: Professor Knight shares a laugh with Freud!

Overview of Activities of Robert Tobin, Henry J. Leir Chair

Teaching:

Fall 2019: Human Rights and Literature
 Fall 2019: German Film and the Frankfurt School
 Spring 2020: on sabbatical
 Ongoing oversight of German and Comparative Literature Programs

Research:

Monograph:

LGBTQ+ Worcester For the Record, by Robert Tobin, Joseph F. Cullon and Stephanie E. Yuhl.
 Worcester: Worcester Historical Museum, 2019. 115 pages.

Published Review:

Richard O. Block, *Echoes of a Queer Messianic: From "Frankenstein" to "Brokeback Mountain."*
Modern Language Quarterly 80.3 (September 2019): 347-49.

Internal reviews:

Book manuscript of University of Wisconsin Press
 Article submitted to the *Journal of the History of Sexuality*

Forthcoming:

"Eine Geschichte, die Geschichte verändert," introduction to Niki Trauthwein, *Peter Pan in Hamburg. Gert Christian Südel: Transpioneer, Aktivist und Überlebenskünstler*.
 "Winckelmann und die Menschenrechte," in *Winckelmann and His Passionate Followers*, ed. Wolfgang Cortjaens and Christian Loeb.

In process:

Booklength project on sexuality and human rights in European culture, tentatively titled,
Friendship and Freedom: Sexuality, Human Rights, and the Right. Brief outline:

1. Friends
2. The Rights of Man
3. Limits of Liberalism
4. The Homosexual Emancipation Movement
5. Sex Law
6. Psychoanalysis
7. Sexual Freedom and the Left
8. Queer Roots of the Alt Right

More information available on request!

Scholarly Presentations:

"Early Twentieth-Century Masculinism and the Roots of the New Right," at the inaugural conference of the Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right, "A Century of the Radical Right: New Approaches," Richmond University, London, United Kingdom, May 2019.

"Bad Boys and their Politics: Genet and Mishima," Conference of the International Comparative Literature Association, Macau, August 2019.

Participant in three-day seminar on "The Nazi Legacy for Today's America," German Studies Association, Portland, OR, October 2019.

Senior scholar at two-day seminar on the Mann Family, Dartmouth College, October 2019.

"Jews, Human Rights and the Right," at the Schwules Museum, keynote talk at the conference, "Jewish and Queer Interactions in Central Europe and Mandatory Palestine / Israel," Humboldt University, Berlin, November 2019.

"Male-Male Desire and the Far Right," at the conference on "The Pasts and Futures of Queer German Studies," University of British Columbia, Canada, April, 2020. Conducted online.

"LGBTQ+ Germany since the Unification," American Institute of Contemporary Germany Studies, Washington, DC, originally scheduled March 2020. Conducted online in June 2020.

The following were all cancelled or postponed:

"Camp in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility: Walter Benjamin, Susan Sontag, and Rosa von Praunheim," American Comparative Literature Association, March, 2020. Conference Cancelled.

"Friendship and Freedom: From Johann Joachim Winckelmann to Alexander von Humboldt," Colloquium on "Männerfreundschaften/Frauenfreundschaften," University of Illinois at Chicago, March 2020. Cancelled/Postponed.

"Queer Roots of the Alt-Right," invited lecture, Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA, April 2020. Cancelled/Postponed.

"Framing Homonationalism: Queer Eurovision in Israeli Cinema," at the conference on "Eurovision Down Under," University of Sydney, Australia, April, 2020. Cancelled/Postponed.

Public Scholarship:

Cited extensively by Benjamin Pierret, "L'Eurovision, vitrine progressiste d'une Europa (qui se veut) ouverte," BFMTV, May 17, 2019.

Cited extensively by Candice Jalili, "Experts Explain the Significance of Every LGBTQ+ Flag," *Cosmopolitan*, March 18, 2020.

Service to the University:

Research Board, 2018-present (Chair, fall 2019)
 Diversity and Inclusion Taskforce of the Alumni Council, 2018-present
 Board of Trustees Advancement Committee, 2017-present

Service to the Community:

Cultural Commission Oversight Committee, Worcester, 2019.

Leir Chair Programming:

Jennifer Abod (independent filmmaker), "The Passionate Pursuits of Angela Bowen." September 2019.

Tarek El-Ariss (Dartmouth College), "Monsters and Exiles: Queer Arab Trauma." September 2019.

Ian Fleishman (University of Pennsylvania), "Camp/Abject: Queer Self-Erasure in Fassbinder's *Querelle*," (October 2019)

Nadine M. Knight (College of the Holy Cross), "'The Chaos of the Needy Dead': *Beloved* and the Struggle for Order," November, 2019.

Angie Cruz (University of Pittsburgh), Reading, April, 2020. Cancelled/Postponed due to Coronavirus.

Awards:

Steinbrecher Senior Faculty Award, Clark University, 2019
 Recipient of a Key to the City of Worcester, the city's highest honor, January, 2020.