

Robert A. Chodat

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Boston University
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Education

Ph.D., English and American literature, Stanford University, 2003
M.A., English literature, McGill University, 1995
B.A. with First-class Honors, English literature, McGill University, 1993

Professional Positions

Professor, Department of English, Boston University, 2018-
Chair, Department of English, Boston University, 2017-18, 2019-21
Associate Professor of English, Boston University, 2010-18
Assistant Professor of English, Boston University, 2004-10

Honors, Grants, and Awards

National and International

National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, 2013-14
Humboldt Research Fellowship (at Technische Universität Berlin), 2006-7 (renewed spring 2012)
Postdoctoral Visiting Scholar fellowship, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2003-4
Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) fellowship, 1999

At Boston University and Stanford University

Boston University Center for the Humanities, Henderson Senior Research Fellowship, 2024-25
Boston University Center for the Humanities Enhancement Project Award (for BU Colloquium on
Literature, Philosophy, and Aesthetics, 2018-)
Boston University Center for the Humanities Enhancement Project Award (for “Particular,
Possible, Universal: Reflections on Literature, Philosophy, and History”), 2016
Boston University Center for Humanities Enhancement Project Award (for “No Quarrels:
Literature and Philosophy Today”), 2011
Boston University Humanities Foundation, Junior Research Fellowship, 2008-9
Mabel McLeod Lewis Fellowship, 2002-3
Tom Killefer Dissertation Fellowship, 2001-2
Mellon Foundation Fellowship, 2000-1
Stanford University Doctoral Fellowship, 1996-2000

Primary Research and Teaching Interests

Post-WWII American fiction; history of aesthetics, criticism, and interpretation; Modernism;
relations of literature and philosophy; Pragmatism; Wittgenstein

Monographs

The Matter of High Words: Naturalism, Norms, and the Postwar Sage (Oxford University Press, 2017).

Worldly Acts and Sentient Things: The Persistence of Agency from Stein to DeLillo (Cornell University Press, 2008).

Edited

Wittgenstein and Literary Studies. Essay collection co-edited with John Gibson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). Contributors: Sarah Beckwith, Toril Moi, Michael LeMahieu, Hannah Vandegrift Eldridge, Henry Pickford, Espen Hammer, Ben Ware, Magdalena Ostas, Robert Chodat, John Gibson.

“No Quarrels: Literature and Philosophy Today.” Special issue of *nonsite* 3-4 (2011), co-edited with Oren Izenberg. Contributors: Charles Altieri, Jennifer Ashton, Jami Bartlett, Elisabeth Camp, John Gibson, Kristin Gjesdal, Paul Grimstad, Garry Hagberg, James Harold, Oren Izenberg, Jonathan Kramnick, Magdalena Ostas, Robert Pippin, Bernard Rhie.

Articles and Book Chapters

“A Horrifyingly Deprived World?: Stories, Novels, and Alasdair MacIntyre.” *ELH* (forthcoming).

“Truth By Other Means?” *Syndicate* symposium on Robert Pippin’s *Philosophy By Other Means* (2023); 3500 words.

“Appreciating Materials: Literature, Science, and the Very Idea of Method.” *Wittgenstein and Literary Studies*, ed. Robert Chodat and John Gibson (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 62-81.

“Experts and Encounters.” *PMLA* 135 (2020): 989-94.

“Doing Art and Doing Other Things: On Michaels on Photography.” *nonsite* 32 (2020); 4400 words.

Response to *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies After Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell*, by Toril Moi. *nonsite* 27 (2019); 4000 words

“Agency.” *Bloomsbury Handbook to Literary and Cultural Theory*, ed. Jeffrey R. Di Leo (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 364-65.

“Is a Narrative a Something or a Nothing?” *Wittgenstein on Aesthetic Understanding*, ed. Garry Hagberg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 99-130.

“That Horeb, That Kansas: Evolution and the Modernity of Marilynne Robinson.” *American Literary History* 28 (2016): 328-61.

“The Novel.” *Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Noël Carroll and John Gibson (New York: Routledge, 2015).

“Bumps on the Head, Touchstones of Intimacy, and the Vulnerability of Criticism.” *Criticism After Critique: Aesthetics, Literature, and the Political*, ed. Jeffrey Di Leo (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 67-96.

“Is Style Information?” *Partial Answers* 11 (2013): 133-62.

“The American Evasion of Pragmatism: Minds, Souls, and the Case of Walker Percy.” *nonsite* 3.1 (2011). Special issue devoted to “No Quarrels: Philosophy and Literature Today.” 12,000 words.

“Empiricism, Exhaustion, and Meaning What We Say: Cavell and Contemporary Fiction.” *Stanley Cavell and Literary Studies: Consequences of Skepticism*, ed. Richard Eldridge and Bernard Rhie (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 208-23.

“Philosophy and the American Novel.” *Cambridge History of the American Novel*, ed. Leonard Cassuto et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 653-70.

“Evolution and Explanation: Biology, Aesthetics, Pragmatism.” *Contemporary Pragmatism* 7.2 (December 2010): 155-92.

“Naturalism and Narrative, or What Computers and Human Beings Can’t Do.” *New Literary History* 37 (2007): 685-706.

“Jokes, Fiction, and Lorrie Moore.” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 52 (2006): 42-61.

“Fictions Public and Private: On Philip Roth.” *Contemporary Literature* 46 (2005): 688-719.

“Sense, Science, and the Interpretations of Gertrude Stein.” *Modernism/Modernity* 12 (2005): 581-605.

“The Many Uses of Dialogue: Eliot, Stevens, and the Foreign Word.” *English Language Notes* 41.4 (Winter 2004): 50-63.

“Beyond Scientism and Supermen: Bellow and Mind at Mid-Century.” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 45 (2003): 291-325.

“Real Toads and Imaginary Gardens: Freud and Davidson on Meaning and Metaphor.” *Representing Realities: Essays on American Literature, Art, and Culture* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2003). 23-35.

“History, Ethics, and the Fragility of a Person: Two Rival Versions.” *Ethics and Subjectivity in Literary and Cultural Studies* (London: Peter Lang, 2001). 75-86.

Reviews

Review of Richard Rorty, *Pragmatism as Anti-Authoritarianism*. *American Literary History* 34 (2022): 1652-55.

Review of *Futurity: Contemporary Literature and the Quest for the Past*, by Amir Eshel. *Partial*

Answers 12 (2014): 400-404.

Review of *Why Literary Studies? Raisons D'être of a Discipline*, ed. Stein Haugom Olsen and Anders Pettersson. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71 (2013): 219-222.

“A Commitment to the Meaningful” (Review of Princeton’s University Press’s 20/20 series), *Twentieth-Century Literature* 54 (2008): 514-25.

Invited Lectures and Seminars

“Experts and Encounters.” Invited online seminar for the Templeton Foundation’s project on “Knowledge, Perception, and the Prospects of Criticism”; September 2022.

“Comments on Pippin.” Invited talk at Symposium on Robert Pippin’s *Philosophy By Other Means*. Harvard Mahindra Center, Harvard University; February 2022.

“Appreciating Materials: Literature, Science, and the Very Idea of Method.” Invited paper presented at the BU Colloquium on Literature, Philosophy, and Aesthetics; Boston University, November 2019.

“Response to Peppino Ortoleva on the Law.” Remarks presented at “Individual Freedom Versus the Hidden Manipulators,” symposium at Boston University, September 2019.

“Comments on *The Claim of Reason*.” Remarks presented at “Why Does *The Claim of Reason* Matter?” Duke Center for Philosophy, Literature, and the Arts. Duke University, September 2019.

“Responses to commentators on *The Matter of High Words*.” BU Book Celebration, Boston University; February 2019.

“Response to James Haille.” BU Workshop on Literature, Philosophy, and Aesthetics, Boston University, October 2018.

“Show and Tell.” Invited lecture presented to “The Contemporary” workshop group and the “Philosophy and Literature” workshop group; Stanford University, March 2018.

“What Are Human Situations? On Noses, Brains, Knowledge, and Narrative.” Invited lecture to the Department of Comparative Thought at Literature; Johns Hopkins University, February 2018.

“Do Brains and Artworks Behave Like Human Beings?” Invited seminar presented to the Dutch Art Institute Roaming Academy; Boston, March 2017.

“Prophecy and Ordinary Language.” Invited paper presented at workshop on “Prophetic Imaginings: Aesthetics, Ethics, Hermeneutics.” Stanford University, May 2016.

“Fictions of the Sixties.” Boston University Discoveries Lecture, April 2015.

“Literature, Philosophy, and Literature and Philosophy.” Class of 1960 Scholars seminar presented at Williams College, October 2014.

“Inward, Concentrated, Closed: Cavell, Wallace, and the Conditions of Absorption.” Plenary

presented at the Brandeis English Graduate Student Conference on “Privacy.” Brandeis University, April 2014.

“Awkward Interdisciplinarity: Researching, Publishing, Presenting, Networking, and Working Across Mutually Suspicious Fields.” Seminar presented at the US Literatures and Cultures Consortium; University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, March 2013.

“Jigsaw Puzzles, Pawnshops, and Cavell’s Improvisations.” Invited lecture presented at the US Literatures and Cultures Consortium, University of Michigan. Ann Arbor, March 2013.

“That Horeb, That Kansas: *Gilead*, Evolution, and Why I Act.” Invited paper presented at the American Literature and Culture Seminar, Mahindra Humanities Center. Harvard University, November 2012.

“Bumps on the Head, Touchstones of Intimacy, and the Vulnerability of Criticism.” Invited paper presented at the Society for Critical Exchange’s Winter Theory Institute, on the topic “Criticism After Critique.” University of Houston-Victoria, February 2012.

“The American Evasion of Pragmatism: Minds, Souls, and the Case of Walker Percy.” Invited paper presented at “No Quarrels: Literature and Philosophy Today,” conference sponsored by the Boston University Humanities Foundation, April 2011. Also presented as a seminar at the BU Humanities Foundation. Boston University, February 2009.

“Empiricism, Exhaustion, and Meaning What We Say: Cavell and Contemporary Fiction.” Invited paper presented at Stanley Cavell and Literary Studies Conference. Harvard University, October 2010.

“No Things But in Ideas: Philosophy and Twentieth-Century American Fiction.” Seminar presented as part of BU’s American Studies’ “American Conversations” series. Boston University, February 2009.

“Response to Motoyuki Shibata.” Remarks presented to the Department of English and Department of Modern Literature and Comparative Literature, Boston University, March 2009.

“The Stories and Sciences of Modern Literature.” Invited lecture at Université de Neuchâtel (Switzerland), May 2007.

“Naturalism and Narrative, or What Computers and Human Beings Can’t Do.” Paper presented to Tertulia Junior Faculty Reading Group, Boston University, February 2006.

“Some Stories About Intention.” Seminar presentation at American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, MA, April 2004.

“Ants, Cultures, Human Beings, and Other Persons.” Paper presented at American Academy of Arts and Sciences, January 2004; Boston University, February 2004.

Conference Papers

“Trust, Reliance, and Confidence in the Academy.” Dis/Trusting the Institution(s) of Literature; University College Dublin (Ireland), June 2025.

“Resonant Quarrels: Remarks On Literature and Philosophy.” American Comparative Literature Association annual conference; Montreal, March 2024.

“‘Persons Grouped Around a Common Object’: Philosophy, Criticism, and Aesthetic Societies”; Prometheus Trust Annual Conference; Atherstone, Warwickshire (UK), June 2023.

“Chariot-People, Tailoring-People, Novel-People.” American Comparative Literature Association annual conference; Washington, D.C., March 2019.

“Art and Unfashionable Stuff: Dostoevsky in Post-WWII American Writing.” Russia and American Literature conference; British Library, London (UK), July 2017.

“The Fraternity of Ralph Ellison.” Prometheus Trust Annual Conference; Atherstone, Warwickshire (UK), June 2016.

“The Best Lack All (or At Least Some) Conviction.” American Comparative Literature Association annual conference; New York, March 2014.

“The Setting of Cavell’s Modernism.” Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900; University of Louisville, February 2014.

“Philosophy and the Aesthetics of the Novel.” American Philosophical Association Central Division Conference; New Orleans, February 2013.

“Are Narratives a Something or a Nothing?” Modern Language Association Conference; Seattle, January 2012.

“Seeing Style As.” International Wittgenstein Symposium; Kirchberg am Wechsel (Austria), August 2010.

“Rorty Astride the Two Cultures.” Modern Language Association Conference; Philadelphia, December 2009.

“The Perfection of Middle-Sized Dry Goods: Cavell, Science, and Modernism.” Modernist Studies Association annual conference; Montreal, November 2009.

“‘Where the Hell is the Two Cultures Split When You Need It?’: Some Remarks on Literature and Science.” American Comparative Literature Association annual conference; Harvard University, March 2009.

“What Revival? Pragmatism and American Fiction.” Louisville Conference on Twentieth-Century Literature and Culture; University of Louisville, February 2009.

“The American Evasion of Apocalypse: Burke, Percy, and Pragmatism.” Modern Language Association Conference; San Francisco, December 2008.

“The Romance of the Hand and its Apposable Thumb.” Stanley Cavell and Literary Criticism Conference; University of Edinburgh (UK), May 2008.

“Is Style Information?” Modern Language Association Conference; Chicago, December 2007.

“Hermeneutics in a Cognitivist Age.” Humboldt Stiftung Network Meeting; Bonn (Germany), April, 2007.

“Missing Persons.” Modern Language Association Conference; Philadelphia, December 2006.

“Pragmatism and Aesthetics.” Swiss Association of North American Studies Conference; Université de Genève (Switzerland), November 2006.

“Are Hopes in the Head?: Kenneth Burke and Cognitive Science.” Modern Language Association Conference; Washington D.C., December 2005.

“The Background of Persons.” Modernist Studies Association Conference; Chicago, November 2005.

“Matter that Moves, Matter that Matters.” Agency and/in/via Literature Conference; Berkeley, CA, October 2005.

“Imaginary Gardens or Real Toads? Freud and Davidson, Mind and Metaphor.” Swiss Association of North American Studies Conference; Université de Lausanne (Switzerland), November 2002.

“A House, a Canal, a Statue, a Picture: Kant, Emerson, and the Interests of Art.” Midwest Modern Language Association Conference; Kansas City, November 2000.

“Modernism Without Prophets: Nietzsche and the Birth of American Tragicomedy.” Midwest Modern Language Association Conference; Kansas City, Nov. 2000.

“Persons and the Problem of Editing Jonathan Edwards.” East-Central American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies Conference; Norfolk, VA, October 2000.

“History, Ethics, and the Fragility of a Person: Two Rival Versions,” Ethics and Subjectivity Conference; Eastern Mediterranean University (Northern Cyprus), May 2000.

“Carlyle the Novelist: *Sartor Resartus* and the Genre of Genres.” Victorian Genres Conference; Liverpool University (UK), January 1998.

Conferences and Panels Organized

“BU Workshop on Literature, Philosophy, and Aesthetics.” Annual philosophy and literature colloquium founded in 2018, typically comprising seven speakers and seven respondents. Topics have included: “Knowledge, Perception, and Judgment in the Arts” (2024); “The Body and Embodiment” (2023); “Autonomy” (2022); “Art, Democracy, and Public Life” (2021); “Wittgenstein and Literature” (2019); “New Directions in Literature & Philosophy” (2018)

“Particular, Possible, Universal: Reflections on Literature, Philosophy, and History.” Two-day conference with twelve invited speakers; Boston University, April 2017.

“Modernism and Rationality.” Modernist Studies Association roundtable; Boston, November 2015.

“Modernism and Analytic Philosophy.” Modernist Studies Association roundtable; Pittsburgh, November 2014.

“Wittgenstein and Narrative.” Modern Language Association Conference special session; Seattle, January 2012.

“No Quarrels: Philosophy and Literature Today.” Two-day conference with eleven invited speakers; Boston University, April 2011.

“Rorty, Pragmatism, Criticism.” Modern Language Association Conference special session; Philadelphia, December 2009.

“Pragmatism and Fiction.” Modern Language Association Conference special session; San Francisco, December 2008.

“Style and/as Knowledge.” Modern Language Association Conference special session; Chicago, December 2007.

“The Fate of the Person in Literary Studies.” Modern Language Association Conference special session; Philadelphia, December 2006.

“The Ethics of Inner and Outer.” Modernist Studies Association Conference special session; Chicago, November 2005.

Courses Taught

Undergraduate

The Ethics of Art

Critical Studies in Literature and Philosophy

The Ancient Quarrel in our Time: Fiction and Philosophy Since 1945

Postwar Truth, Postwar Fiction (Percy, Ellison, DeLillo, Robinson, Wallace)

Fictions of the Fifties

The Sixties in Theory and Fiction

Contemporary American Fiction

Seminar on Literature: Aesthetic Ideas

Literary Criticism I

The Mind in Literature and Theory

Contemporary Fiction and Moral Philosophy

The Postwar Epic Novel

Graduate

After Wittgenstein

Knowing, Feeling, Judging (Kant and Postwar Aesthetics)

Contemporary Literature and Ordinary Language (co-taught with Bernie Rhie)

Irony and Postwar Fiction

Philosophical Fictions

Academic Service

National and International

External reader for Harvard University Press, Oxford University Press, Cornell University Press,
 Cambridge University Press, Bloomsbury Publishing
 External reader for *Twentieth-Century Literature, Contemporary Literature*
 Reader for National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend competition, 2017
 Reader for National University of Ireland post-doctoral competition, 2016

College/University

General Education Implementation Committee, 2016
 Lecturer Promotion Committee, 2010-11
 Academic Conduct Committee, College of Arts and Sciences, 2007-8, fall 2008
 Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) Committee, 2008-2010

Departmental

Director of Graduate Studies, 2022-
 Department Chair, 2017-18, 2019-21
 Chair, Curriculum Review Committee, 2018-19
 Associate Chair, 2010-11, 2012-13, 2015-17
 Merit Review Committee, 2011, 2016
 English Department Job Search Committee, 2007-8
 English Department Graduate Admissions Committee, 2005-6, 2007-8
 English Department MLA Interview Committee, 2005, 2008
 Director of Writing Seminars, 2007-10

Dissertation and thesis advisees:

Maggie Boyd, “Narrating Trauma in the Age of PTSD” (Ph.D., English, expected 2024); first reader
 McKay Sheftall, “‘Genius in the Particular Idiom’: Transmedial Modernist Poetics and Relational Lyric Meaning (Ph.D., English, expected 2024); first reader
 Christopher Bartlett, “The Book and the Box: Post-War American Fiction, Soap Operas, and the Middle-Class Home” (Ph.D., English, 2021); second reader
 Jonathan Najarian, “Images of Modernist Fiction: Literary and Pictorial Narrative from Joyce to Spiegelman” (Ph.D., English, 2019); first reader
 Greg Chase, “‘The Silent Soliloquy of Others’: Language and Acknowledgment in Modernist Fiction, 1910-52” (Ph.D., English, 2018); second reader
 Patrick Whitmarsh, “Anxieties of the Inanimate: Cybernetics and Science-Fictional Modernism” (Ph.D., English, 2019); second reader
 Claire Kervin, “Our Human Boundaries Were Overrun”: Coextensive Bodies and Environments in Contemporary American Fiction” (Ph.D., English 2017); first reader
 Iain L. Bernhoft, “Novel Deceptions: Historical Illusionism in Contemporary American Fiction” (Ph.D., English 2015); second reader
 Jared Champion, “Realizing Hegemonic Masculinity: Gender Fictions and Cultural Trauma” (Ph.D., New England and American Studies 2013); first reader
 Sara Jaye Hart, “Sacramental Materialism: Don DeLillo, Catholicism, and Community” (Ph.D., Religion & Literature 2010); first reader
 Steven Wandler: “Moral Luck and American Fiction: Identity, Aesthetics, History” (Ph.D., English 2009); second reader
 Dennis Praeter, “The Utopian Function in Postmodern Fiction” (M.A. Religion and Literature 2005); first reader

Languages

German: proficient reading and speaking
French: fluent reading, proficient speaking
Dutch: fair reading, good comprehension