

# DR. COTTERILL'S FIFTEEN YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

Written by Taylor Schubert

On September 1, 2020, Dr. Anne Cotterill retired from full-time teaching at Missouri S&T. Her retirement marks the end of a 15-year faculty appointment in our department, and what a pleasure it has been to have her exceptional instruction and dedication to her students. Although she is taking a one-year hiatus from teaching to concentrate on research, she will have the option to continue to teach on a part-time basis beginning in the fall 2021.

The focus of Cotterill's teaching is literature, with an emphasis on British and world literature. While it can be challenging to introduce STEM students to poetry, Cotterill does so with gusto. She is adamant about reading poetry aloud to her students and having them read out loud, so they can hear the tones, inflections, and passion inherent in the words. "I often get from students the sense that poetry is like a threatening puzzle or code of black marks on a page, to which they must apply some violent mental effort, comparable to a hammer, to crack open. But instead of a hammer you need your speaking voice and your ear to listen and hear the words' rich music of sound and rhythm as they're spoken. The recitation—



Dr. Cotterill (right) with her friend Jóna Siggeirsdóttir (left) in Iceland. Cotterill lived for many years in Iceland.

the physical involvement of blood and heart and muscles in speaking powerful language—is almost like a drama. You act the drama of sound and hear its meaning—sound and sense continually interact. You physically experience the poem from beginning to end as a physical process of exact feeling becoming exact thought." These performances have certainly impacted her students, and Cotterill has had multiple former students reach out and thank her for opening their minds and hearts to the beauty of poetry.

"I think when you read poetry that speaks to you, you learn to distinguish between language used to the highest power and language that is incomplete, falls short. The best poetry and prose are really brilliant thinking that opens things up to you, opens your mind to see more, think harder, instead of poor language and thinking that open nothing, that shut your mind down. You want to look for voices or language that opens. Always opens." Opening hearts and minds is an integral part of literature, and Cotterill embodies those same ideals in her teaching.

In 2005, one of Cotterill's first tasks was to revive *Southwinds*, the literary and arts magazine of Missouri S&T, which had fallen into "hibernation." Cotterill wanted to enhance the

magazine with more textual content as well as with original drawings and photos, plus color, which would make for a stark contrast to the text-heavy, black-and-white layouts of previous issues. “We started getting photographs and artwork and holding open mic readings and creativity contests to encourage submissions. To find the funds necessary to expand the magazine, we began applying to the Student Activity Finance Board. We also received some generous assistance from the College of Arts, Sciences, and Business. We could then feature color covers--outer and inner, front and back—plus a color centerfold and thicker issues of the magazine, all without charging students for a copy. That was a big breakthrough, and we could start distributing Southwinds free all over campus and to alumni. That made [the magazine] more visible. We’ve discovered amazing artistic talent among S&T students, faculty, staff, and alumni.”

Cotterill had some closing advice to give, not just to students but to everyone in our society, particularly lovers of literature. “Don’t give up on literature when many in the world say that it’s impractical. Besides being intensely pleasurable because of its beauty, its high level of craft, great literature is always new, intelligent, an ongoing, ever fresh experience of powerful insight into human nature, including one’s own, and into human society. It has been invaluable to me as a touchstone for distin-

guishing sense from nonsense, falseness from what is not false.

“To keep ourselves informed, we have to be able to understand other people. We have to be able to understand ourselves. To be able to think clearly, we must use language with respect—with care and integrity—and demand such care of language from others. The study of literature is essential for absorbing the experience of great language in action. And speaking of action, I promise that your ability to communicate well will give you great versatility on the job market: for example, jobs in fund-raising, law, or public relations that require speaking sensitively and persuasively, jobs requiring writing and editing of all kinds, or teaching, interpreting, or translating. My advice is to keep reading, and keep reading widely.”

Despite having retired, Cotterill can still teach literature at Missouri S&T, and she intends to do so. She will also continue reading, writing, and publishing, and she plans to submit her next book for publishing by June 2021. She will miss working with her peers at the English and technical communication department, whom she holds in the highest regards. On behalf of us here at Panoply, we thank you Cotterill for your contributions, your passion, and the inspiration that you have awakened within your students for so many semesters.

## THE LAND OF FOLK & MYTH

Dr. Eric Bryan’s monograph, *Icelandic Folklore and the Cultural Memory of Religious Change*, is scheduled for publication in February 2021. As described on the publisher’s website, “This volume unlocks [a] secret story by placing Icelandic folktales in a context of religious doctrine, social history, and Old Norse sagas and poetry.”

