

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 20th anniversary of the RWU English Department's **Senior Thesis Colloquium**. This Colloquium represents the sparkling tip of the iceberg of TWO semesters worth of reading, discussion, research, and revision.

Each paper focuses in some way on this year's Colloquium theme -- **Cultural Studies**, a theory that may or may not be familiar to everyone in our audience. So a brief word of introduction might be helpful.

Cultural Studies is in many senses our modern day Romantic movement. For one thing it represents a tremendously powerful – if initially upsetting -- paradigm **shift** in not only the way we study literature, but in the way we define it in the first place.

That might explain why Kristen Wajsglas's father was so confused when she told him that she was working on her senior thesis and then he came downstairs to find her watching *Weeds* on t.v.

"I thought you were working on TFSO1043ffitkvasbogat literature."

Matthew Arnold, the great Victorian educator and poet, summed up our culture's distrust of popular culture in a work entitled "**Civilization and Anarchy**." Arnold believed that Civilization can be achieved only by the study of high culture. Anarchy, he thought, is what results when we spend too much time with **popular culture**.

Arnold believed in the cultivation of an appreciation for high culture:

William Shakespeare's plays

Philosophers such as Immanuel Kant

Poetry, especially the epic

He felt that spending time engaged with high culture would open up the human mind to perfection – by encouraging the capacity to "tremble with awe" at aesthetic beauty.

In my opinion he's right about that. However, what Matthew Arnold overlooked is the fact that human beings are storytelling animals. Constantly dreaming up new genres -- new ways of telling stories -- and encoding values. But when these new genres emerge, they are almost always heralded as the end of culture as we know it.

For example, when the novel emerged as a form of popular culture in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century