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The EAAS Transatlantic Grant Report

The Transatlantic Travel Grant awarded by the European Association for American Studies made it possible for me to spend four weeks in the fall of 2013 in University Park, Pennsylvania, where I conducted library research at the libraries of The Pennsylvania State University. This monthly access to Penn State's impressive library resources (including, among others, over 7.3 million books and 662 databases) has contributed greatly to the advancement of my doctoral research, allowing me to become familiar with valuable and immensely informative texts in African American literature, literary criticism, philosophy and history I could not have accessed from my home institution.

As the general area of interest for my doctoral research is contemporary African American poetry or, more specifically, the relationship between the works of Kevin Young, Natasha Trethewey and Thomas Sayers Ellis and the wider cultural phenomenon of the so-called "post-soul aesthetic," I conducted most of my research in the Pattee and Patterno library buildings, home to Penn State's Arts and Humanities, Special Collections, and Social Sciences Libraries, among others. Among the libraries' vast resources I have found exactly the materials I had been looking for: an array of primary and secondary sources including poetry collections by the poets I work on and other authors, anthologies of contemporary African American poetry, edited volumes on feminist, African American, ecological, postcolonial, psychoanalytical and Marxist literary criticism; works from the field of jazz and blues studies, and even rare documents (such as letters and other unpublished materials) closely related to my field of research. Access to digital humanities resources through databases such as Project MUSE, Oxford African-American Studies Center, Twentieth-Century American Poetry, or Literature Online has also proven to be of much value for my academic work.

Apart from the wonderfully productive time spent in the libraries, my stay in University Park offered another experience of great significance for my research project. On the days of October 25th – 26th, I had the pleasure to participate in the *Celebrating African American Literature 2013* Conference held at Penn State, which I could not have afforded to

travel to (nor would have had the opportunity to access and collect the materials much needed for the writing of my conference presentation) if it were not for the grant awarded by the



Me with Professor Lovalerie King, Director of the Africana Research Center at Penn State and co-planner of the CAAL 2013 Conference (photograph by Professor Howard Ramsby II)

EAAS. As the focus of this year's conference was primarily on contemporary African American and Afro-Caribbean poetry, it was an extraordinary opportunity for me not only to present my own paper titled "Women in process and the labor of becoming in Natasha Trethewey's *Domestic Work*" but, perhaps more importantly, to listen to presentations delivered by some of the leading scholars working in the same field as I do, as well as to have some exciting, informative and inspiring conversations with many of them. Being able to meet in person the people whose writings had been of so much use and encouragement for my own academic work (including Aldon Lynn Nielsen, Annette Debo, Keith D. Leonard, or Meta DuEwa Jones, just to name a few) and hear poetry readings by wonderful poets such as Nikky Finney or Evie Shockley was perhaps the most incredible and motivational academic experience I have had so far.

I would like to take this opportunity to give my thanks to everyone who have contributed to making my stay and research at the Penn State Libraries the most marvelous academic adventure. I would like to thank Sandra Stelts, the Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts at the Special Collections Library, who took her time to show me around the libraries, help me with the very few administrative and technical issues I have had, ordered

books for me from other Penn State campuses and made sure I felt very much welcome and at home both at Penn State and in University Park. I also want to express my gratitude to Shirley Moody-Turner, Professor of English, and Aldon Lynn Nielsen, the George and Barbara Kelly Professor of American Literature at Penn State, who both took their time to read my research project and provide me with priceless professional feedback, guidance and advice which I am absolutely certain will improve the quality of my research and writing work. Most of all, I would of course like to thank the European Association for American Studies, as neither the valuable research I had conducted at Penn State University Libraries nor my participation in the CAAL 2013 Conference would have been possible without the financial support I had received from the EAAS. I am extremely grateful to the EAAS for selecting me as one of the recipients of the transatlantic travel grant this year and thus providing me with the unique opportunity to spend as long as four weeks in a much stimulating and encouraging academic environment, in a wonderfully creative atmosphere, and among exactly the books and materials I needed so much to further the work on my dissertation.