



Musings

2024-26 Newsletter
Volume XXIX

Northwestern

Department of
English

WEINBERG COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

FROM THE CHAIR

I'm delighted to send warm greetings from University Hall, which this summer received a desperately-needed new heating system and updates to some of the lecture hall classrooms. As I begin my three-year term as department chair, I'm grateful to Katy Breen for her steady leadership over the last five years, a period of much change in higher education and also, for the Department of English, a period of new hires, newly tenured colleagues, prizes and awards recognizing faculty and student scholarship, and other accomplishments. On the note of accomplishments, I'm delighted that last year, Michelle Huang (also appointed in Asian American Studies, and a specialist in contemporary Asian American literature, posthumanism, feminist science studies, the environmental humanities, and the medical humanities) and Justin Mann (affiliated with Black Studies, and a specialist in Black feminist theory and queer of color studies, 20th and 21st century African American literatures, American Studies, and speculative fiction studies) were tenured and promoted to associate professor.

I'm looking forward to the year ahead, which I'm certain will include some surprises. I'm just as certain that the year will involve stimulating conversations with student and faculty colleagues about their stellar research and teaching and collaborations with our department's fabulous officers and staff to steer the ship in University Hall.

Kelly Wisecup

Arthur E. Andersen Teaching and Research Professor
Chair, Department of English



Justin Mann



Michelle Huang

A WORD FROM EGSO

As summer leaves just begin to turn and fall, the English Graduate Student Organization (EGSO) celebrates the start of a new school year by reflecting on the many successful events that our community has organized since this time last year. This autumn we mark yet another return to stimulating intellectual dialogue and lively social gatherings at University Hall and beyond.

The department's 2025 Fall Collation held in Harris Hall offered a warm welcome to the 2025 academic year. Presentations by Kayla Boyden, Charif Shanahan, Sof Sears, and Viv Soni provided rich and generous insights into the English department's current writing and scholarship, and students and faculty celebrated numerous graduate student accomplishments while meeting new colleagues in the PhD, MA, and Litowitz MFA+MA cohorts. Not long after, EGSO welcomed the new first-year graduate cohort, and introduced them to their peer mentors over coffee, bagels, and conversation in the Hagstrum room.

Since last fall, doctoral students Samuel Aftel and Alaia Snell, alongside faculty advisers Justin L. Mann and Michelle N. Huang, have organized numerous successful events for the American Cultures Colloquium (ACC). In October, ACC organized a talk with Jodi Byrd, Professor of Race, Diaspora, and Indigeneity at the University of Chicago. The talk, entitled "Indigenomicon: Indigenous Relationality in the Grind of the Shitty Future," previewed Prof. Byrd's new book, *Indigenomicon: American Indians, Video Games, and the Structures of Dispossession* (2025), a study of

video-game culture's complex relationship to Indigeneity, Indigenous feminism, settler colonialism, interraciality, and anticolonial politics. In the spring, ACC brought Chris A. Eng, Assistant Professor of English at University of Maryland, College Park, for a talk entitled, "Getting to the Bottom of Camp: The Queer Taint of Japanese American Incarceration." This talk elaborated a reparative reading of literatures around Japanese internment during World War II to posit queer experiences as "encoded secrets about the desirability of organizing around the charge of suspect loyalty." Following the talk, Professor Eng also led a workshop on academic conference preparation and abstract-writing for graduate students.

Temperance Aghamohammadi and S. Yarberry, alongside faculty advisor Susannah Gottlieb, organized a year of events for the Poetry and Poetics Colloquium. The events centered on the theme of "Unsettling Sound," to explore sonic experimentation in contemporary poetry. Interdisciplinary collaboration among guest speakers and other departments at Northwestern oriented this thematic aspiration. Temperance Aghamohammadi and Kai Ihns kicked off the reading series with readings in September. October brought the Chicago-based experimental music group, A*pe*re*od*ic to campus, along with poet, critic, and translator, Kevin Holden. February brought Craig Dworkin, poet and Professor at University of Utah, to host a poetry reading and workshop for students and faculty across disciplines. In March, NYC-based poet and NYU faculty, Urayoan Noel, performed recent work in the Hagstrum room, and April saw the close of a highly successful year of Poetry and Poetics events with resounding performances by experimental poets, Noa Fields and Jjijjerome Ellis.

In May, the flagship journal of Northwestern's Environment, Culture, and Society cluster, *Lime* hosted a symposium entitled *Over/Flows: Convergence and Confluence in the Environmental Humanities* on the productive multivalence of the shore as both a metaphoric image and a material site. A collision point between formlessness and form, known and unknown, sanctioned and unruly, the shore offers a practical paradigm for thinking about the symposium's guiding question: "What can emerge from meeting points, sites of convergence, and hybrid or indeterminate zones?" This full day of panels and discussion featured an original short film by Michal Krawczyk and a keynote with Michael McColly, author of *Walking Chicago's Coast*, who joined Sarah Dimick in conversation about the experience of walking the entire Chicagoland shoreline.

The EGSO board also organized a year of events for English graduate students, including our quarterly colloquiums where students read and present their works in progress of original theory, literary analysis, fiction, and creative nonfiction. EGSO's Fall Colloquium featured Eric Aston ("The Science of Names, The Names of Science"), Michaela Corning-Myers ("The Nocturnal Beast: DogBeing in Nightwood and Nightbitch"), Annie Howard (Selections from 'The City Made Me Trans'), and Samantha Stewart (Excerpt from the short story "Pairing"). Winter colloquium in February featured William An ("Delta: An American Story"), Hayon Cho ("A 'Cold' yet 'Green' House: Black Girlhood as Remedial Worldmaking in *The Bluest Eye*"), and Avi Waldman ("Off Our Backs' Unfinished Business: Crisis and Transformation in Jewish Feminism"). In March, EGSO organized a welcome dinner for prospective PhD students, sharing experiences and expectations over delicious food at Tapas Barcelona. Spring Colloquium in June featured Wenshu Qiao ("Dark Energy in Berssenbrugge's Poetry; or, Toward a Theory of Racial Fields"), Robin Seiler ("So Wide Shall Be The Garden Walk": Overlooked Queerness in Edna St. Vincent Millay"), and McKenzie Clarke ("Bodacious Black Eves: Thinking Through the Originary Black Feminines of Morrison and Milton"). We were also thrilled to celebrate the creative work and accomplishments of graduating Litowitz MFA+MA students Emely Taveras, Sof Sears, JK Anowe, and Dawn Angelicca Barcelona in May.

Lastly, graduate denizens of the fourth floor are thrilled to have received infrastructural updates to our beloved graduate commons. New chairs, desks, and (most importantly) heating systems have helped to transform the commons into a space better fit for student work and collaboration. Many thanks to the department administrative staff and outgoing Chair, Katy Breen, for organizing the purchase and installation of this new equipment.

2026-2027 will undoubtedly be another terrific academic year shaped by graduate students, faculty, and the broader Chicagoland community. It is with immense gratitude that we also wish to recognize English Department staff members Nathan Mead, Lesley Lundeen, David Kuzel, Colin Pope, and Ashley Woods. These events and conversations would not have been possible without their communication, organization, and commitment to the academic and professional development of students and faculty in the English Department.

PhD Co-Chairs - Alaia Snell, Callum Goetz, Aliyah Symes, Marvellous Taiwo, Afnan Hussain Kottathodika
MFA Representative - Ronnie Rose
GPPC Co-Reps - Rui Zhu, Wenshu Qiao
Students-in-Coursework Representative - McKenzie Clarke
Archivist - William An

NEW GRADUATE STUDENTS

TJ Calhoun (PhD) earned an interdisciplinary degree with honors in Narrative and Media Studies from Grinnell College in 2020. They have spent the last several years at HarperCollins Publishers as a poetry and fiction editor working with authors such as Franny Choi, Hala Alyan, and Imani Perry amongst others. Their research interests include Black Aesthetics and Performance, Literary Criticism, Psychoanalysis, and Queer Theory.

Halle Gordon (PhD) is a graduate of Emory University, where she received highest honors in English with a concentration in Writing, Rhetoric, and Information Design. Before coming to Northwestern, she served as Managing Editor for *American Periodicals*, where she worked closely with archival scholarship and the histories of print culture. Her recent research examines how Black feminist writers from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, such as Audre Lorde, Lucille Clifton, and June Jordan, theorize illness and care within racialized medical systems. In her free time, she enjoys listening to music, reading fiction, and attending concerts.

Eunsoo Gye (PhD) earned her BA and MA in English Literature from Sogang University in Seoul. Her research explores Asian American and Indigenous literatures, examining how fiction engages histories of empire, displacement, and gendered violence. She is especially interested in how literature creates alternative archives of memory and imagines solidarities across communities marked by different colonial histories. In her free time, she enjoys taking long walks and seeking out cozy cafés.

James Kennedy (MFA+MA - Fiction) is the author of the horror thriller *Bride Of The Tornado*, which the Chicago Tribune named as one of their Best Books of 2023. James's previous books include the sci-fi novel *Dare To Know*, dubbed by the Times Saturday Review as their "Best Sci-Fi Book of 2021," and the young adult fantasy *The Order Of Odd-Fish*. James is also the founder of the 90-Second Newbery Film Festival, an annual video contest where kid filmmakers create short movies telling the entire stories of Newbery-winning books in just a few minutes, screening in many cities around the country for the past 15 years. James regularly reviews books for *The Wall Street Journal* and co-hosts the "Secrets of Story" podcast.

Cassidy Pawul (PhD) is a graduate of Williams College with degrees in English and French, and served as Assistant Director of Admission at Amherst College before leaving for Northwestern. She wrote her honors thesis on how language is used and ab-used in keystone texts by Shakespeare and Spenser, and loves grappling with questions at the intersection(s) of linguistics/etymology, history, ethics, and epistemology in Early Modern lit. When not nerding out over language and literature, she can most often be found on stage: acting, singing, and/or dancing (sometimes all at once!)

Mirian Torres (PhD) earned her MA in late nineteenth-century American fiction from Howard University and holds a BA in English Language and Literacies from California State University, East Bay. Her research examines the literary, cultural, and spatial mechanisms through which Black life is represented, contested, and often constrained in late nineteenth-century American fiction. She

is particularly interested in how racialized geographies, narrative voice, and sentimental reform logics shape portrayals of African American subjects; and how white-authored texts borrow from and reconfigure African American narrative forms—using plot structures, focalization, and genre conventions to reinforce racial hierarchies even in works that claim moral or political progress. Her scholarship spans a range of authors, including Harriet Beecher Stowe and Mark Twain, but extends across a broader archive of texts, tracing the continuities and disjunctures in postbellum representations of race, labor, childhood, and community. Her work is informed by Black literary traditions, critical race theory, and feminist approaches to narratology, emphasizing how literature both shapes and reflects broader social and political ideologies. Outside of her scholarly work, she loves diving into queer media and binge-watching the latest popular shows with her mom.

Tiffany Wang (PhD) earned her BA in English from National Chengchi University and her MA from National Taiwan University. Her research focuses on the intersection of long 18th-century British literature and Romanticism, with a particular interest in migrant issues under climate change. Outside of research, she is a culinary enthusiast and an avid anime lover.

Ebru Esma Yağız (PhD CLS/English) is a Turkish PhD student in Comparative Literary Studies with a home department in English, and a Mellon Cluster Fellow in Middle Eastern and North African Studies. She holds an MA in Comparative Literature from Koç University, İstanbul, Turkey (2025) and a double BA in Psychology and Western Languages and Literatures from Boğaziçi University, İstanbul, Turkey (2023). Ebru's research interests include the global nineteenth-century, science studies, Bildungsroman and lyrical poetry in English and Turkish literatures, with a methodological focus on psychoanalysis, affect studies, and phenomenology. Drawing from her interdisciplinary formation, the core of her research interests position psychology and science both as interpretive tools and also as objects of critical inquiry in their own right. In her doctoral work, she plans to specialise in the long nineteenth-century Ottoman Turkish and Anglophone literatures, examining how scientific and literary discourses mutually constitute one another across imperial and cultural boundaries and generate distinct accounts of embodiment, selfhood, and modernity. Alongside her scholarly work, Ebru co-founded

Dantel, a virtual poetry reading community focused mainly on modern Turkish poetry, and she volunteers as a copy editor for *Nesir: Journal of Literary Studies*.

QQ Yang (MFA+MA - Poetry) is a poet and essayist. Her poems are published or forthcoming in *Black Warrior Review*, *Mississippi Review*, and elsewhere, and her nonfiction has been recognized by *The New York Times*. She holds a BA in History of Art & Architecture from Harvard University, where she won the Hoopes Prize and Claire Fairman prize for her writing and research on photomontage and popular visual culture in post-WWII Japan.

Zhao Zhang (PhD) holds a BA in Chinese philology from Sichuan International Studies University, an MA in Translation Studies from

Beijing Foreign Studies University, and an MA from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in English literature with a focus on the early modern period. His research interests include form and new formalism, genre, philology, poetry and poetics, temporality, method, and the long history of literary theory and criticism.

Isabella Zou (MFA+MA - Creative Nonfiction) is a writer and performer who works on issues of race, faith, and justice. She holds a BA in Ethnicity, Race & Migration from Yale University, where she was editor-in-chief of the *Yale Daily News*. A former fellow at *The Texas Tribune*, her work has appeared in outlets such as *Slate* and *Teen Vogue*.

THE 2025 GRADUATE COHORT

William An (MFA+MA - Poetry) is a graduate of Yale University and the University of Cambridge, recognized by the J. Edward Meeker Prize, the John Hubbard Curtis Prize, and The Poetry Society.

Lucy Butsch (MA) earned her Master's degree here at Northwestern in 2026 for her thesis "Sublimity and Knowledge in Milton and Byron," and came to us as writer and educator from St. Louis, Missouri, with a BA in English Literature from Loyola University Chicago. Before joining the program she was an editorial intern with *RHINO Poetry* and the recipient of the John Gerriets Award for Excellence in Creative Writing.

McKenzie Clarke (PhD) is a graduate of Spelman College, and works at the intersection of black feminist theory, film studies, early modern and African American literature, postcolonial studies, and feminist psychoanalysis. Her work also engages sound studies to think through cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare's *Othello* and the reproduction of black women's erasure that his work perpetuates.

Zeina Elhanbaly (MFA+MA - Fiction) is an Egyptian-American writer from Southern California. She received her BA from Northwestern University, where her novella *Not That Kind of Woman* earned the Edwin L. Shuman Award for Best Thesis. Her work explores diasporic themes, patriarchy, class, and feminine rage.

Cassandra Gillig (MFA+MA - Creative Nonfiction) is a writer and curator, and spent the decade prior to joining the Litowitz program working as a Kansas public librarian, co-running Stray Cat Film Center, and organizing for the end of police and prisons in Kansas City.

Alex Jennings (MFA+MA - Fiction) is a lifelong fan and creator of SFF. His fiction, nonfiction, and verse have appeared in dozens of venues, including *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Africa Rising*, and *New Suns 2*. He is a graduate of the University of New Orleans. He was born in Wiesbaden (Germany) and raised in Gaborone (Botswana), Paramaribo (Suriname), and Tunis (Tunisia) as well as Columbia, MD. He was also an instructor of popular fiction at the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast MFA program. In 2021, he was selected as the recipient of the inaugural Imagination Unbound Fellowship at Under The Volcano. His writing has been short-listed for numerous awards, including the Ray Bradbury Prize for Speculative Fiction, the Mythopoeic Award for Adult Fantasy Novel, The Locus Award for Best First Novel. He received the BSFA's Compton Crook Award in 2023. And his debut novel, *The Ballad of Perilous Graves*, was published that same year.

Afnan Hussain Kottathodika (PhD) earned his BA and MA in English Literature from Delhi University and the University of Hyderabad respectively. For his M.Phil thesis in Comparative Literature at University of Hyderabad, he attempted a comparative analysis of case files, counter-narrative documents and literary adaptations related to a police encounter in Delhi, India. Afnan's research interests include Life Writing, Prison Narratives, Critical Theory, South Asian Literature and the interstices between literature and other fields, such as law, religion, and political discourses.

Sam Savitz (MA) received her 2026 Master's from Northwestern for her thesis "I Choose Option C: Reading the Grotesque in Dark Romance." She has a prior BA from the University of Miami, where she majored in English Literature and minored in Creative Writing, Art History, and – to learn for learning's sake – Microbiology/Immunology. During her undergraduate career, she completed an extensive and provocative thesis on the presentation and presence of gender and sexual fluidity in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and other related European works.

Samantha Stewart (MFA+MA - Fiction) is an erstwhile cultural companion, English teacher, and Francophone interpreter for immigrants and refugees as well as a recently retired solo practitioner mobile massage therapist. She has six children and is a former and future foster mother. Her indie debut novel, *The Revenge of Bridget Cleary* was a finalist in the 2022 Whitney Awards. Her short fiction has appeared in *Mermaids Monthly*, *Cosmic Horror Monthly*, *Irreantum*, and the bestselling *Never Whistle at Night* anthology.

Aliyah Symes (PhD) has completed degree programs at New York University (BA in Global Public Health and Anthropology), the University of California, Los Angeles (MA in African American Studies), and the University of Pittsburgh (Master of Library and Information Science). Her research interests include African American speculative fiction and its relationship to political economy, labor, worldmaking, and technology.

Marvellous Taiwo (PhD) received a BA in English from Obafemi Awolowo University and an MA in English from West Virginia University. His interests lie at the intersection of literature, culture, and the environment, influencing his research in environmental humanities, global anglophone literature, diaspora, postcolonial studies, trauma studies, and interdisciplinary pedagogy. He enjoys listening to music and exploring the outdoors in his spare time.

DEGREES COMPLETED

Elisa Ady (MFA+MA 2025)

MFA Thesis: “Pink Noise”

MA Thesis: “(Dis)Embodied Bodies: Cleaving Open Alternate Articulations of the Cyborg”

JK Anowe (MFA+MA 2026)

MFA Thesis: “Late Rite: poems”

MA Thesis: “Revisiting the Palmwine Drinkard, Or the Postcolonial Monstrosity in and around Amos Tutuola’s Artistic Expression”

Dawn Angelicca Barcelona (MFA+MA 2026)

MFA Thesis: “Unbelieving”

MA Thesis: “Structural Interventions on the History of the Transcontinental Railroad in Paisley Rekdal’s *West: A Translation*”

Elena Bellaart (PhD 2025)

Dissertation: “Home Made: The Uses of Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Writing”

Rio Bergh (PhD 2025)

Dissertation: “‘Convulsively Written Reminiscences’: The Language of Environmental Catastrophe in Nineteenth-Century American Literature”

Raina Bhagat (PhD - CLS/English 2026)

Dissertation: “Nucleopoesis: Racializing Atomic Energy in Global Science Fictions”

Andrea Bianchi (MFA+MA 2025)

MFA Thesis: “Still Life with Body: Essays”

MA Thesis: “The Fragmented Form: Reclaiming Agency over the Illness Narrative via Embodied Memory in Sarah Manguso’s *The Two Kinds of Decay*”

Lucy Butsch (MA 2026)

MA Thesis: “Sublimity and Knowledge in Milton and Byron”

Jennifer Comerford (PhD 2025)

Dissertation: “Touching Stories: Hands, Orientation, and Responsibility in Eighteenth-Century British Literature”

Mariana Gutiérrez-Lowe (PhD 2026)

Dissertation: “Maternal Ruptures: Motherwork and Embodiment at the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands”

Nat Happe (MFA+MA 2025)

MFA Thesis: “How to Skin a Fish”

MA Thesis: “The Disidentificatory Performances of Queer and Trans Boxers: Examining McBee’s Amateur through the work of José Muñoz”

Mariam Hirsi (MFA+MA 2025)

MFA Thesis: “EGO”

MA Thesis: “<An Ego the Size of Minnesota>”

Allie Ibarra (PhD 2026)

Dissertation: “Narratives of Belonging: Chicanx Foodways 1965-2021”

Mitchell Johnson (MFA+MA 2025)

MFA Thesis: “Inner Country”

MA Thesis: “Callahan”

Paulina Jones-Torregrosa (PhD 2025)

Dissertation: “Global Intimacies: Transnational Writings by U.S. Women of Color”

Irene Kim (PhD 2025)

Dissertation: "Racial Pneumatics: Air, Atmospherics, and Militarism in Asian American Art and Literature"

Rafael Reza (MA 2025)

MA Thesis: "The Urban Indian as a Disruption of the Native American Literary Figure"

Samantha Savitz (MA 2026)

MA Thesis: "I Choose Option C: Reading the Grotesque in Dark Romance"

Sof Sears (MFA+MA 2026)

MFA Thesis: "Fawns: A Novella"

MA Thesis: "Crossing the Pink Opaque: Haunted Time and Sideways Girlhoods in Jane Schoenbrun's *I Saw the TV Glow*"

Emely Taveras (MFA+MA 2026)

MFA Thesis: "Push Me Away"

MA Thesis: "The intersection of horror, wonder and humanity in colonial depiction: Indigenous studies of De Bry's Engravings"

Elizabeth Winter (PhD 2026)

Dissertation: "Legal and Literary Liberties: Figuring Racial Difference in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic"

Olivia Xu (PhD 2025)

Dissertation: "Multilingualism of the Other: Writing the Novel in Translation East and West, 1818-1910"

S. Yarberry (PhD 2026)

Dissertation: "Trans Impossibilities and the 1790s: The Imaginative Bodies of William Blake"

JOB PLACEMENT

Elena Bellaart (PhD) - Editorial Coordinator for *CriticalProductive* at MIT Press, Editorial Assistant at the University Press of Kentucky

Rio Bergh (PhD) – Assistant Professor at Southwestern Oklahoma State University

Raina Bhagat (English/CLS PhD) – Assistant Professor of English at CUNY Hunter College

Johana Godfrey (PhD) – Assistant Professor of English at Carleton College

Paulina Jones-Torregrosa (PhD) – Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Program in Gender and Sexuality Studies at Princeton University

Adam Syvertsen (PhD) – Kaplan Institute Postdoctoral Fellow in Humanities Program Administration at Northwestern University,
Instructor in the Honors Program at DePaul University

Olivia Xu (PhD) – Assistant Professor of English at Yale University

DEPARTMENT TEACHING AWARDS

BEST GRADUATE STUDENT INSTRUCTOR

2024-25

Dawn Angelicca Barcelona (MFA+MA 2026)

Emma Cohen (PhD)

2025-26

Samantha English (PhD)

Isabel Griffith-Gorgati (PhD)

Robin Seiler (MFA+MA)

BEST TEACHING ASSISTANT

2024-25

Lauren Johnson (PhD)

2025-26

Alaia Snell (PhD)

Ruiyi Zhu (PhD)

On the retirement of **KATHY DANIELS**

Kath's retirement is such a bittersweet occasion -- and a historic marker for the English department.

I start by putting one particular element of *our* Kath's comprehensive human excellence front and center. Kathy Daniels ranks among the greatest mentors I have ever known. She has mentored every department chair and associate chair, every DUS and DGS, and every staff member who has passed through these offices, across her brilliant and benevolent tenure. And our department has also had the honor of "loaning out" Kath's mentorship to a lucky host of faculty and staff in other units as well. The constellation of virtues that must come together for someone to be a successful mentor (let alone one justly renowned, for *decades*, in our community) are worth pausing over as we celebrate Kath today. I don't think I've ever met anyone who combines more of them than she does: insight, judgment, equity, kindness, patience, honesty, discretion, optimism ... and Kath's signature *sin qua non* in this list, laughter.

But let's get a little more granular about these abstractions! Kath is a perfectly astute observer of all our individual foibles and hobby-horses. But she treats everyone in the same way; she is the same, welcoming person to each one of us, regardless of anyone's relative power or (*it has to be said*) relative politeness. Indeed, the democracy of her care and her commitment to the success of each and every member of this department infuses ALL of our successes. When it comes to community values, she sets an ambitious standard for us all. I admire the deep springs of Kathy's *magnanimity* with all my heart.

All teachers in the department will have had direct contact with her work assembling the curriculum. Who among us has not interrupted a huddle between Kath and our various associate chairs across the scheduling season? And who among us has not added our own special, annoying, or very untimely wrinkle to this already turbulent process? Sometimes, as chair, I would pass through this huddle entering the office, and they would still be working, in hushed and studious tones, hours later as I passed them, tiptoeing so as not to interrupt. Without her exemplary patience and attention to unnumbered moving parts: no curriculum. Thank you, Kath, for -- *always* -- keeping calm and carrying on!

An equally demanding but necessarily invisible part of Kathy's caretaking: her care and expertise assembling hiring, tenure, and promotion files. We chairs and letter-writing-field-experts come and go, and every single one of the procession of us has benefitted from her long and expert view of the evolving gears of these processes, as close to neurosurgery as I ever hope to get. And everyone here who has gone through hiring, getting an office, periodic reviews, tenure, or promotion has done so in part because she did her part.

"University Hall" is the name of a community. But it also names a very very very demanding material landmark. So, some episodes in the storied relationship of Kath and University Hall -- whether we imagine her role as the building's governor, mayor, queen, or (alas) "emergency officer"! This last title was bestowed on the heels of our first "active shooter" scenario on campus, itself one of the difficult chapters of recent years. Kath has gotten University Hall through pandemics and protests. Particularly vivid crisis for me is the year of the indoor tsunami, when we all first learned to say, "polar vortex." Flooding in an entire vertical quadrant of UHall (see volume XVIII of Musings, from Fall 2014!) delivered scenes of total chaos, as we rescued books from offices where it was raining. But this incredible drama had at its heels literally months of heroic work (both physical work, oversight of contractors' work, and paper-work) with faculty, facilities, book



salvage companies, and insurers. It's unclear to me how Kath survived this ordeal with her wits intact -- but: she persisted. (If you have built-in shelving in your office, it was Kath who scored most of these during this recovery process. Just one of countless accumulating gifts from Kath).

Can we talk about the BOILER? A characteristic recurring visual trope: Kath saying to various and sundry of freezing department members: "I've put a ticket in ... " From "do you need a space heater?" to "have you unplugged that thing?" Kath has tirelessly sought to protect us from "the injuries of the weather" that keep finding their way indoors. And so I hereby invite her to return, in glory, and smash a magnum champagne bottle on the new one when it's (finally) in. Thanks to her durable advocacy, our future will have heat in the winter.

It would take more time than I have to fully inventory our thanks or my admiration. So I'll mention one thing I envy about Kath's extraordinary working life. Few of us will know what it's like to be able to dedicate a career to the holistic thriving of an evolving community -- to assessing and addressing the needs of one client, all the time. Kath, you have presided over this place so brilliantly and so generously and for so long, serving as its glue and its memory, and it staggers the imagination to think of University Hall without your daily great goodwill at the center. You have made "the office" a term of optimism instead of a mere place of "work."

A last thing may really be the first thing: Kath's sense of humor. From the silent eye-roll to the ironic chuckle to the dramatic look of faux surprise to the way she dissolves bureaucratic skullduggery with peals of laughter ... May we all absorb the lesson of your salubrious attitude to the bumps in the road that always clutter our paths.

No one person has given more to the ongoing life of this department than Kathy Daniels. Thank you, dear Kath, for the best collaboration I've ever had the good fortune to experience "at work" -- and for the most fun I've had "at work" in my life. We, all of us, your colleagues, are in awe at all you've given -- to each of us and to the ongoing mission of this Department. BRAVA!

-----Laurie Shannon

FACULTY NEWS

In May 2025, **Nick Davis** gave the keynote address at the first-ever conference organized by the Film Studies PhD students at UCLA. During his 2025-26 leave, Davis worked on his contracted book about Mike Mills's movie *20th Century Women* (2016), highlighting feminism, film form, and contemporary political resonance. In March 2026 he gave an invited talk at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, on catastrophes and Afrotopias in Mati Diop's *Atlantics*, and in June gave a paper about Óliver Laxe's *Sirāt* at the Screen conference on emergency cinema in Glasgow. Closer to home, he continues to offer his free lecture series "Digging Deeper into Movies" in downtown Chicago, each month singling out a different film, filmmaker, genre, or national cinema tradition for an hour-long talk and a robust Q&A with local movie fans of all ages and backgrounds. In May 2026, he was invited to Cannes for the second time to help program the movies that will show at this October's Chicago International Film Festival.

Sarah Dimick gave several talks this past year based on her first book, *Unseasonable: Climate Change in Global Literatures*. She spoke at the University of Oregon; the University of Delaware; the annual meeting of the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts in Dallas; and the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association in New Orleans. She also traveled to Johannesburg, South Africa, to begin research on a new book project, portions of which she presented at the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment in College Park, Maryland and the Society for Novel Studies in Durham.

Michelle N. Huang has been promoted to the rank of Associate Professor, and her first book, *Racial Beings: Experiments in Asian American New Materialisms*, was published in March 2026 with the ANIMA series at Duke University Press. A forum on environmental humanities and ethnic studies she edited with Carlos Alonso Nugent (Columbia) appeared in the March 2025 issue of *American Quarterly*. She also gave or will give talks on her new work on beauty horror and cosmeceuticals at NYU, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign.

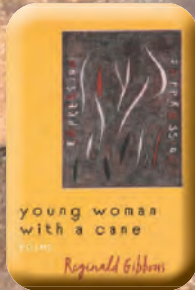
In 2024, **Lauren M. Jackson** was awarded the Nona Balakian Citation for Excellence in Reviewing for pieces in *The New Yorker*. She has continued contributing to the magazine and *newyorker.com*, including essays on Mark Twain, humorless laughter, P.O.V. videos, the cultural and juridical history of gay marriage and immigration, and DHS propaganda; recently, she spoke with Brandon Taylor (author of Booker prize finalist, *Real Life*) on occasion of his new novel, *Minor Black Figures*, in a published interview. Elsewhere: in the Winter 2025 issue of *The Point* magazine, a post-party report on the 2024 Democratic National Convention (and the Democratic Party); in *New Literary History*, an essay on the critical problem of understanding novels after theory (in this case, *Glyph* by Percival Everett). The past year has also brought the honor of sharing unpublished work as a part of the distinguished First Mondays series (organized by our Sarah Schulman) at Performance Space New York; as well as public conversations with Vinson Cunningham and Angela Flournoy on their respective book tours. Last, but

continued on page 11

FACULTY PUBLICATIONS



Brian Bouldrey
The Good Pornographer



Reginald Gibbons
Young Woman with a Cane



Daisy Hernández
Citizenship: Notes on an American Myth



Michelle Huang
Racial Beings: Experiments in Asian American New Materialisms



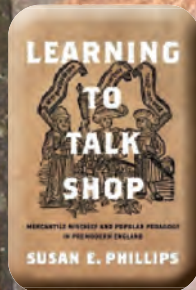
Justin Mann
Breaking the World: Black Insecurity and the Horizons of Speculative Fiction



Jeffrey Masten, ed.
Edward II, a critical edition of the 1594 play by Christopher Marlowe



Barbara Newman
The Fathers of the Church, Medieval Continuities: The Key to Natural Philosophy



Susie Phillips
Learning to Talk Shop: Mercantile Mischief and Popular Pedagogy in Premodern England



Sarah Schulman
The Fantasy and Necessity of Solidarity

On the retirement of SUSAN MANNING

Susan Manning, Bergen Evans Professor in the Humanities, an expert on German, American, and Global Modern Dance, and a former Chair of the English Department, is retiring after 38 years at Northwestern. Susan has taught and served across English, Theater, the Interdisciplinary PhD Program in Theater and Drama (IPTD), and Performance Studies. Scholarly collaboration and leadership have guided her distinguished career for four decades. As a leading light of Dance Studies' second scholarly generation, Susan has contributed transformative research, teaching, and service to her students, her departments, and her profession. She was among the first scholars to import Raymond Williams's cultural analysis and contemporary theories of bodily practice into the history of dance across time, place, and nation. Her numerous graduate students (more than 35 dissertations directed alone) now constitute the third wave of leading dance scholars working today.

Susan has written three monographs, an exhibit catalogue on African-American theatre dance for a Francophone audience, and four co-edited collections, most recently *Dancing on the Third Coast: Chicago Dance Histories* (2027), a two-volume anthology co-edited with her former student, Lizzie Leopold (IPTD 2017). Her monographs include *Ecstasy and the Demon: the Dances of Mary Wigman* (California, 1993; 2nd ed Minnesota 2006), which received the de la Torre Bueno Prize for the best book in Dance Studies; *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minnesota, 2004), which received a book award from the Congress on Research in Dance; and *Dancing on the Fault Lines of History. Selected Essays* (Michigan: 2025). She has won three national fellowships and six awards in Dance Studies, most importantly a \$2,000,000 grant from the Mellon Foundation to fund "Dance Studies in/and the Humanities," an initiative that ran from 2012 to 2019. This program placed and mentored dance studies post-docs at Northwestern, Stanford, and Brown and held immersive summer seminars for early-career scholars. And she has served as dramaturge for Reggie Wilson's *Moses(es)* and for Neja Yarkin's *The Other Witch*.

Leadership is a recurring theme for Susan, who chaired English on three separate occasions, for a total of six years. Her first term from 2008 to 2011 furthered our drive to diversify faculty, particularly at the junior level, and during the years from 2019 to 2021 she steered the department during the Covid 19 pandemic, when anti-racist protests and white supremacist backlash shook the nation after the murder of George Floyd. She also worked with the donors and helped enable the vision for the Litowitz MA/MFA Program in Creative Writing.

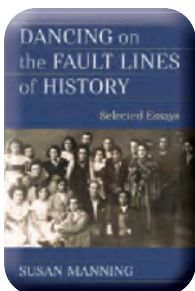


Susan was born in Jackson, Michigan, the second of four children. Her Jewish father escaped the Nazis as a young teen in Breslau, aided by his mother, who arranged transport for such Jewish children out of Germany. Her grandmother, Susanne Mannenberg, for whom Susan is named, died in Theresienstadt, and Susan's great aunt, Lizzie, died in Auschwitz. Susan's questions to her "German" father helped excavate this once clandestine family history and inspired Susan's passion to recover dimensions of cultural and performance history that standard narratives had buried.

From her mother, she learned about Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and devoured the book, which ignited an intellectual penchant for feminism at age 12. Susan left Jackson for Simon's Rock, an experimental pre-college program, and then Harvard, where she created her own major in dance history and criticism, working with a music professor. She then completed an interdisciplinary Ph.D. at Columbia in Dramatic Literature and Theater History, writing a dissertation on German Modern dancer Mary Wigman, also the subject of her first book. During her assistant professorship, Susan gave birth to two sons, Rueben and Elijah, now both in their 30s. She and her husband, international lawyer Douglas Doetsch, have created Seminary Hill, an organic orchard and cidery for cider in the Catskills on Doug's family homestead. Susan plans to divide her time between new scholarly projects in Evanston and managing the orchard. Thank you, dear Susan, for all you have made possible:

"Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new"
John Milton, *Lycidas* (line 193).

-----Julia Stern



Dancing on the Fault Lines of History: selected essays
2025



Futures of Dance Studies,
co-ed
2020



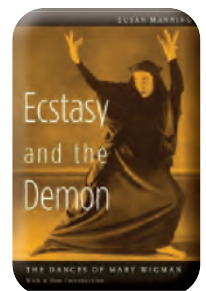
New German Dance Studies, co-ed
2012



Danse Noires, Blanches Ameriques
2009



Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion
2004



Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman
1993

FACULTY NEWS CONTINUED

principally, her second book, *Back* (Amistad Press/HarperCollins), is slated to release in October 2026.

Christine Froula contributed “Late Bloomsbury’s Dialectic of Enlightenment” to *A History of the Bloomsbury Group* (Cambridge University Press, 2025). In April 2025 she delivered an online lecture, “Leslie Stephen among the Women,” for the Virginia Woolf Society of Turkey.

Justin Mann has been promoted to the rank of Associate Professor. His first book, *Breaking the World: Black Insecurity and the Horizons of Speculative Fiction*, was published in March 2026 by Duke University Press.

Susan Manning enjoyed her last year teaching at Northwestern, which culminated with retirement events on May 21-22, 2026, timed to coincide with her 70th birthday. A new book, *Dancing on the Faultlines of History: Selected Essays*, appeared in 2025 and was highlighted on a panel at the annual conference of the Dance Studies Association. A two-volume coedited anthology, *Dancing on the Third Coast*, is now in press. In retirement Susan plans to continue writing and to engage in the public humanities. She also will help her husband manage the organic orchard and cidery founded on his family’s homestead in the Catskills. Her Northwestern email will remain her primary contact.

The cover of **Juan Martinez’s** novel *Extended Stay* was featured in December 2025 on the *taylorswift_as_books* Instagram account.

Jeffrey Masten’s edition of Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II* was published in April 2026 (Arden/Bloomsbury), and his essay “Lost in Transliteration: Editing the Frenchman in Marlowe’s *Edward II*” is forthcoming in *Shakespeare and Textual Failure*, ed. Claire M.L. Bourne (Arden/Bloomsbury). His essay “Frolic” appeared earlier this year in *Logomotives: Words that Change the Premodern World, 1400-1700*, ed. Marjorie Rubright and Stephen Spiess (Edinburgh University Press). Two of his undergraduate advisees were recognized for research distinction this past year: Ella Waffner was named a 2025-26 Franke Undergraduate Fellow at the Kaplan Humanities Institute for a thesis project he is advising, and Faith Magiera was named a Finalist for the Fletcher Undergraduate Research Grant Prize for her summer research project under his direction. Faith was also awarded Honorable Mention in the Library’s Undergraduate Archival Research Prize competition for a paper on Hamlet, Nero, and an early modern translation of Seneca in Northwestern’s Special Collections.

Barbara Newman has begun her work as editor of *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* and, to her surprise, rather likes it. It’s a wonderful way to keep up with what’s going on in the discipline, and she has been able to provide jobs for two of our best medieval studies PhDs as full-time editorial staff. Now she can also pursue her passion for the Oxford comma and her vendetta against “As such.” Her translation of Honorius Augustodunensis’s work, *The Key to Natural Philosophy*, was published in November (haven’t heard of it? Never mind, neither have most medievalists.) In her spare time she is starting a new project on saints’ lives and the history of emotions.

Susie Phillips celebrated the 2025 publication of her most recent book, *Learning to Talk Shop: Mercantile Mischief and Popular Pedagogy in Premodern England* (University of Pennsylvania Press). Revealing what happens when language learning itself undergoes a translation out of the classroom into the marketplace and further down the social ladder, *Learning to Talk Shop* offers a new account of premodern education that tells the tales of resourceful chambermaids, savvy black stableboys, and arithmetically adept barmaids as well as the story of a schoolgirl who compiled a textbook of her own and a black schoolmaster teaching in Shakespeare’s London.

Sarah Schulman’s book *The Fantasy and Necessity of Solidarity* was published in April 2026 by Thesis/Penguin Random House. It is a finalist for The Chicago Review of Books Book Awards.

Regina Schwartz’s essay “Loving Justice,” and Rowan Williams’ response to it, appeared in *Crossings: Migrant Knowledges, Migrant Forms*, published in 2025 by punctum books.

As a Kaplan Faculty Fellow in 2024-25, **Charif Shanahan** completed his translation of *Corpo presente* (Besa; Premio Internazionale Montale) by Gëzim Hajdari; advanced his third collection of poetry; and began editing a critical anthology on creative writing pedagogy and mentorship. He presented work from his book-in-progress and his second collection, *Trace Evidence: poems*, at the Dodge Poetry Festival, Poets House, Cornell University, and elsewhere. He served as a judge for the Raiziss/de Palchi Book Prize for an outstanding translation of Italian poetry into English and began his work as both a judge for the T.S. Eliot Foundation/Poetry Society of America’s Four Quartets Prize and one of twelve editors for the Academy of American Poets’ 2026 monthly Poem-A-Day program.

Wendy Wall’s book, *Cosmic Matter: Hester Pulter and the Early Modern World*, was accepted by University of Pennsylvania Press for the “Alembics: Studies in Literature and Science” series. *Cosmic Matter*—the first monograph devoted to this author—explores the recently found manuscript of a 17th-century female writer who used poetic form to obsess about faith, space travel, atomic dissolution, and nonhuman states of being. “Devotional Astronomy: Hester Pulter’s Posthuman Poetics,” drawn from this research, will appear this spring in *ELR (English Literary Renaissance)*. Wendy is now editing *The Cambridge Companion to Hester Pulter*, and continues to co-edit the digital edition, *The Pulter Project: Poet in the Making*, which includes over forty collaborators from across the Anglophone world. She spent last year working on these projects (in joyous New Orleans) and writing an essay on the poet Amelia Lanyer. Most recently, she was appointed as Associate Dean for Academic Initiatives and Graduate Studies in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, a post that began January, 2026.

Kelly Wisecup spent the 2025-26 academic year as the Beatrice Shepherd Blane Fellow at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute. The fellowship supported research on her book project in progress, “Sovereignty on the Page,” which analyzes Indigenous birchbark books made during experiences of deforestation in the Great Lakes and the contemporary Indigenous artists engaging these birchbark literary histories. She was selected as the 2025 A.S.W. Rosenbach Fellow in Bibliography at the University of Pennsylvania and gave three lectures in March 2025 as part of the fellowship. Wisecup joined the editorial board of the journal *Early American Studies* and began a two-year term as president of the Society of Early Americanists.

Rachel Jamison Webster’s book, *Benjamin Banneker & Us*, was released in paperback in 2024 and she has continued to share her ancestral research and writing as a way to examine racial construction in the early U.S., continued racism, and relational literary ethics. More recently she has given talks at several conferences and universities including Tufts, William & Mary, the Library of Virginia, and the American Inspiration Series. Her consulting on an exhibition and short film about Banneker for the Smithsonian Museum was halted due to the current administration’s rewriting of history and their excising of African American presence and genius from our cultural foundation. Rachel’s 2020 book, *The Sea Came Up and Drowned*, has been adapted by Nicholas Cline into a choral opera which has been performed by Donald Nally’s renowned ensemble “The Crossing” in six U.S. cities and internationally.

On the retirement of

TRACY C. DAVIS

Tracy C. Davis, Ethel M. Barber Professor of Performing Arts, retired in 2026 after thirty-five years at Northwestern University in the Departments of English, Theater, and Performance Studies. In addition to numerous publications in theater history, historiography, theory, and criticism spanning multiple disciplines, as well as recognition with many awards and visiting professorships, Tracy's career at Northwestern includes her leadership as Director of the Interdisciplinary PhD in Theatre and Drama (IPTD), Chair of Northwestern University Press's Board, and the inaugural Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the Graduate School. But her greatest legacies at Northwestern may well be her generosity and guidance to her students, her tireless work to build bridges among disciplines along many fronts, and her insistence on articulating grounds for sound, convincing historical inquiry in the most fleeting of fields, the study of performance.

Tracy received her BFA in Drama from the U of Calgary and her PhD in Theatre Studies from the University of Warwick. She served on the faculty at Queen's University, Kingston (ON) and the University of Calgary before accepting a Mellon Faculty Fellowship at Harvard. She came to Northwestern as an Assistant Professor with appointments in English and Theatre, later joining Performance Studies, where she published the first of her five monographs, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (1991). Others quickly and regularly followed, most recently *Liberal Lives and Activist Repertoires: Political Performance and Victorian Social Reform* (2023). Between she wrote award-winning monographs on topics from nineteenth-century economics and politics to Cold War civil defense strategies to George Bernard Shaw, all through the perspective of performance and enactment, onstage and off. Tracy has edited eight collected volumes on theater history, historiography, methods, and methodologies, showing the impressive range of her scholarship, including the field-defining *The Cambridge Guide to Mixed Methods Research for Theatre and Performance Studies* (2024, with Paul Rae); *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance Historiography* (2021, with Peter W. Marx); *Uncle Tom's Cabins: The Transnational Histories of America's Most Mutable Book* (2018, with former PhD student Stefka Mihaylova); and *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies* (2008). She has also edited a major anthology of British theater and performance presenting an increasingly influential methodology of attending to nineteenth-century performance, *The Broadview Anthology of Nineteenth-Century British Performance* (2012), was general editor of the six-volume *Cultural History of Theatre* (Bloomsbury, 2022), and authored a play, *The Great Sea Serpent*, which premiered at Northwestern in 2024. She is currently general editor for three book series, on critical media histories, theater and performance theory, and transnational theater histories. Her scholarship has been recognized with major awards from the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung, the National Science Foundation, the Mellon Sawyer Seminars, Northwestern's Kaplan Institute, and a host of others. She has held visiting Professorships and Lectureships at De LaSalle University, Manila; New College, Oxford; the John Rylands Institute,



Manchester; Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi; Queen Mary University of London; Washington University in St. Louis; the University of Iowa, and elsewhere.

In this daunting CV, though, Tracy's dedication to her students in their full academic lives stands out, as does theirs to her. Tracy exercised a shaping role in the innovative IPTD program as its Director for fourteen years. Seeing the need for more careful mentoring, she founded the Excellence in Doctoral Mentoring Initiative in TGS. With her colleague Peter Marx, Tracy founded [sic!], the Summer Institute in Cologne, which brought dozens of Northwestern and other students to Germany for intensive work in theater and performance studies, and just as crucially, to work with colleagues from around the world. She also made time to lead yoga sessions to refresh the bodies of students immersed in the life of the mind. Tracy has supervised thirty-six dissertations in English, IPTD, Performance Studies, and Comparative Literary Studies, and served as committee member for thirty-three more including programs in History, Music, and Rhetoric. Former students have imitated Tracy in following their own branching and varied intellectual paths: they hold appointments at Dalhousie, McGill, MIT, MSU, Stanford, London, and Exeter; but also at international arts consulting and research firm WolfBrown; the Pennsylvania Youth Theater; and as Theatrical Operations Manager for Norwegian Cruise Lines.

Tracy leaves the stage at Northwestern for an open-ended run in British Columbia. She currently has four more book-length projects in the wings, ranging from late medieval and early modern representations of St. George and the dragon to nationalism and decolonization in performance repertoires worldwide to an introduction to researching critical media history. Advance booking advised.

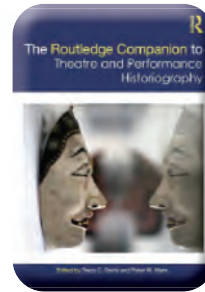
-----Will West



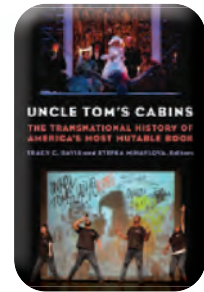
The Cambridge Guide to Mixed Methods Research for Theatre and Performance Studies, co-ed
2024



Liberal Lives and Activist Repertoires: Political Performance and Victorian Social Reform
2023



Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance Historiography, co-ed
2021



Uncle Tom's Cabins: The Transnational History of America's Most Mutable Book, co-ed
2018



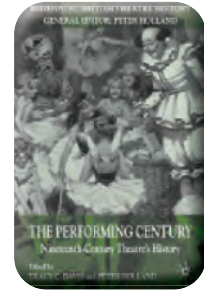
A Cultural History of Theatre, co-ed
2017



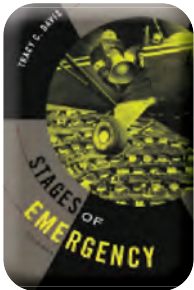
The Broadview Anthology of Nineteenth-Century British Performance
2011



The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies
2008



The Performing Century: Nineteenth-Century Theatres History, co-ed
2007



Stages of Emergency: Cold War Nuclear Civil Defense
2007



Considering Calamity: Methods for Performance Research
2007



The Economics of the British Stage, 1800-1914
2007



Theatricality, co-ed
2004



Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain, co-ed
1999



George Bernard Shaw and the Socialist Theatre
1994



Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture
1991

GRADUATE STUDENT NEWS

Temperance Aghamohammadi (PhD)

Temperance's debut book, *Battalion Shaped Girl*, was published by *Discount Guillotine* in September 2025. Her chapbook, *Behnt*, was also selected as the winner of the 2025 New Delta Review Chapbook Prize by judge Dorothea Lasky.



William An (MFA+MA)

Supported by a TGS Graduate Research Grant, William conducted archival and field research in Mississippi for his poetry manuscript, *Delta: An American Story*. He has also attended the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and the Kenyon Review Writers Workshop in 2026.

Eliza Feero (PhD)

Eliza received a Graduate Research Grant to help support work on her dissertation project, "Re-Forming the Body: Muslim Dismemberment and Identity Change in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Literature."

Allison Gibeily (PhD)

With support from the MLA's Edward Guiliano Global Fellowship and the Buffett Institute's International Dissertation Research Travel Award, Allison relocated to Lebanon where she worked as an affiliated researcher at the American University of Beirut. She is studying the rise of Lebanese Christian nationalism as articulated in recently discovered letters exchanged between Arab literary scholars at the turn of the twentieth century.

Cassandra Gillig (MFA+MA)

Cass is the 2026 Bibliographical Society of America Blahnk New Scholar and a 2026-2027 fellow with the University of Missouri's Era of Rights Kansas City public history initiative. This year, Gillig received a Charles S. Longscope Jr. Writers and Artists Grant from *The Gay & Lesbian Review* and the Harry H. Harkens Jr. Travel Grant from Duke University's Rubenstein Library. Her writing is forthcoming in *Post45*, *Chicago Review*, the *Poetry Project Newsletter*, and the *Journal of Gender and Sexuality*. With Mara Mills, she is co-editing a reissue and revisitation of *The Basketball Article* by Bernadette Mayer and Anne Waldman and she was an editor on the exhibition catalog for *Images on Which to Build, 1970s-1990s*, forthcoming from Inventory Press.

Mariana Gutiérrez Lowe (PhD 2026) received the International Dissertation Travel Grant and The Newberry Consortium in American Indian and Indigenous Studies (NCAIS) Graduate Student Research Grant to conduct research on Indigenous women's literatures in Mexico City for the final chapter of her dissertation. She was also awarded the Buffett Dissertation Fellowship by the Roberta Buffett Institute for Global Affairs.

Annie Howard (MFA+MA)

Annie participated in the Lighthouse Literary Festival in 2025, and the StoryBoard Workshop in 2026. She moderated a sold-out screening of the Wachowski sisters' film *Bound* as part of the Music Box's Sapphopalooza film series. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Chicago Reader*, *Liber: A Feminist Review*, *Defector*, and a Chicago-themed issue of *New York Review of Architecture*.

Jon Lee (MFA+MA)

The *Bellevue Literary Review* chose Jon as the winner of the 2026 Felice Buckvar Prize for Nonfiction. His essay, "Running Deep: essays on dialysis" was published in *BLR's* Spring 2026 issue.

Angad Singh (PhD)

Angad's article, "Partitioned Desires: Female Agency and Interfaith Relationships around the Partition of India," has been accepted for publication in an upcoming volume of the journal *Gender & History*.

Samantha Stewart (MFA+MA)

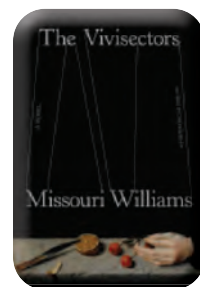
Samantha completed two weeks of archival work and historical/ cultural preservation work in Kotzebue, Alaska in collaboration with Dr. Cana Itchuaqiyak of Virginia Tech University, the Rematriation Project, The Center for Sustainable Engagement in the Arctic, Northwestern's Center for Native American and Indigenous Research, and Aqqaluk Trust. She accepted an artist's residency on Norton Island, Maine from the Eastern Frontier Society. She served as a keynote speaker at the Great Lakes Independent Booksellers' Association and the Midwest Independent Booksellers' association, a presenter at ALA, and a panelist at NecronomiCon-Providence.

Alaia Snell (PhD)

In 2025, Alaia was admitted into Northwestern's JD/PhD combined degree and is the first student in the English department to be enrolled in the joint program. She received The Graduate School's 2025 Beiling Wu Prize in Writing, and her work has been republished in Aja Y. Martinez's 2nd edition book, *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory* (2026). In 2026, Alaia was selected to participate in the Newberry Consortium of American Indian Studies Graduate Workshop in Research Methods at the University of Minnesota.

Heather Williams (PhD)

Heather's novel, *The Vivisectors*, was published in late May, 2026 by Macmillan Publishers under her pen name, Missouri Williams.



Elizabeth Winter (PhD)

Elizabeth was awarded the 2025-2026 Lawrence Lipking Fellowship through the Newberry Library, which she used to conduct research on legal constructions of racial categories in the 19th century British West Indies. She was also awarded the Midwest Victorian Studies Association's Arnstein Prize for Dissertation Research, a Graduate Research Grant from Northwestern's Graduate School, and an International Research Travel Grant from the Buffett Center, which she used to conduct archival research in England and Jamaica to advance work on her recently-defended project, "Legal and Literary Liberties: Figuring (Bi) Racial Difference in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic."

GRADUATE STUDENT & ALUM PROFILES

Agam Balooni (PhD candidate)

I am a scholar of canonical and postcolonial gothics, a poet, and an Indian Classical vocalist. When I teach, I am at home close reading artifacts of the nineteenth century with my students, but I also love conversing with audiences of all disciplinary backgrounds. Now entering my sixth year in the English PhD program, I am completing my dissertation, *India Gothic*, which illuminates the neglected but foundational role that the idea of India plays in the long nineteenth century, not only in making the gothic genre a global literary phenomenon, but also in reifying the discourse of imperial otherness formative to the literary gothic tradition into a global technology of nation-making. Showing that colonial gothic imbrications of racial and caste logics amalgamate distinct genealogies of social difference into a capacious and powerful epistemology of terror, I uncover how independent India weaponizes colonial gothic epistemology against its own Muslim and Adivasi (indigenous South Asian) citizens, while arguing that postcolonial fictions purposely make “incoherent” use of literary gothic conventions to address such catastrophic upheavals as the 1947 Partition of India, one of the largest forced migrations in history, or the US-backed Indian “Green Revolution,” which began in the 1960s with promises of revolutionary agricultural growth but spelled disaster for India’s indigenous communities.



As a “teacher-scholar” at Northwestern’s Searle Center for Advancing Learning and Teaching, I am well on my way to fulfilling my vision of building a practice of reflective and effective pedagogy that benefits *all* learners engaged in higher education, and not just those who have made the choice to pursue an English major. I put this intensive training into action in designing undergraduate-level “Literary Histories” seminar in Winter 2026. Called “Demon Twinks,” this course engaged a cultural phenomenon of immediate and wide appeal as a springboard for exploring literary configurations of non-normative sexuality to invite students to unearth the historical continuities between older and contemporary discourses on gender and sexuality.

In leveraging the unique value of literary study for thinking across disciplines in a politically useful way, I uphold the priority of community above all. I’ve dedicated my efforts in this direction over the last year as a graduate leader with the Kaplan Scholars Humanities Program at the Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities. Mobilizing my training in Indian Classical Music, I designed an interdisciplinary workshop on deep listening, with the goal of igniting a systematic practice of strategic empathy and focused interpretation. My hope is that it helped first-year Kaplan Scholars just embarking on their intellectual journey at Northwestern to develop and strengthen critical thinking skills that they can apply in whichever field they choose to pursue.

Dawn Angelicca Barcelona (MFA+MA 2026)

My poetry largely explores themes of family history, identity, (im)migration, labor, and the evolving definitions of home. Since entering the Litowitz program in 2023, I’ve had poetry published in several journals including *Modern Language Studies*, *Tyger Quarterly*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Brink*, and *Atlanta Review*. My poem, “Human Resources,” was awarded second place in Singapore Unbound’s 10th Annual Poetry Contest. I’ve also published a nonfiction essay, “The Educator,” in *Tampa Review* and a short story, “Out of Service,” in *Reed Magazine*. My debut chapbook, *Roundtrip* (Finishing Line Press), was published in March 2025.



Teaching creative writing was the highlight of my second year. I wanted to pay homage to the teachers who supported my early writing endeavors, whether by recreating one of their writing exercises or crafting my lesson plans based on their pedagogical best practices. Witnessing my students take risks in their writing and build a community with each other was a true joy.

In my third and final year, I focused on completing my MFA thesis: poems centered on devotion and faith, exploring the erosion of inherited belief systems and the search for meaning when the foundational structures and rituals fall away. This book expands on work that I began in my first year and continued to develop while attending the Kenyon Review Writers’ Workshop and Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference in the summer of 2025.

Beyond my thesis, I am dedicated to engaging with literary communities in the Chicagoland area, volunteering at StoryBall and Pub Crawl as a member of the StoryStudio Chicago Associate Board. I had the exciting opportunity to serve as the poetry judge for the 2026 Dukane Literary Festival in Wheaton, IL, supporting the work of high school writers. I was also part of a poet/artist collaboration for Issue Two of *Off the Page: Poetry Reimagined*.

GRADUATE STUDENT & ALUM PROFILES CONTINUED

Mitchell Johnson (MFA+MA 2025)

I spent most of my time in the Litowitz Program for Creative Writing working on my first novel, titled “*Inner Country*,” co-recipient of the department’s inaugural Jo Minow Prize in Creative Writing. Since graduating from the program in Spring 2025, the book has been picked up by a literary agent at CAA and is soon to be sent out to publishers. It’s a picaresque, comic novel, following a young man fumbling through attempts at connection in a world that seems always on the brink of collapse. The book is informed by a lot of gay literature from the late-20th century, a tradition that produced many really great, socially expansive novels that explored intimacy in moments of political and historical crisis. Another big influence is Whitman, whose central provocation — that the heart of democratic society lies in a kind of communal eroticism — was a big jumping-off point for the book. As I work on finishing the novel, I also continue to write nonfiction essays, one of which was recently featured in the “notable” section of 2025’s *Best American Essays*.

Nathan Leahy (PhD 2015)

After receiving my PhD, I pursued my interests in narrative and economics by joining the international tax practice at Ernst & Young. At EY, I specialized in transfer pricing and supply chain optimization while working on a wide range of international tax projects for multinational companies, from IP valuation, tax controversy, and financial modeling, to writing innumerable transfer pricing reports for local tax compliance around the globe. In 2020, I joined the tax department at Abbott Laboratories, where I am currently a transfer pricing manager. My time at Northwestern sharpened my skills in close reading, concise writing, public speaking, and project management that I have drawn upon continually in my career in international tax. In particular, close reading and project management skills are getting tested daily since the arrival of twin daughters, Valerie and Ava, in 2023.



S. Yarberry (PhD 2026)

Since starting my PhD in 2020, I have been working to bring trans studies into conversation with eighteenth-century literature, with a particular focus on the poet and artist William Blake. My dissertation, “Trans Impossibilities and the 1790s: The Imaginative Bodies of William Blake” argues that eighteenth-century literature constitutes a surprising, pivotal ground for understanding trans literature today. To make this case, I focus on Blake, arguing that this eccentric, self-proclaimed prophet is also an indicatory thinker in an age that saw categories of gender undergo profound regulation, scrutiny, and experimentation. I have received a two month fellowship at the Huntington Library to study Blake’s manuscripts, which I was delighted to complete over the summer of 2025. The Huntington Library, too, generously provided me with a one month travel grant to study Blake’s manuscripts at The British Library and the Albertina Museum, allowing me to spend the first month of summer 2026 in both London and Vienna (with Blake by my side). My research has led me to write and publish two articles, “Rage, Embodiment, and Withdrawal: Trans Impossibilities in William Blake’s The [First] Book of Urizen” and “Writing Robert Blake,” appearing in *Studies in Romanticism* and *European Romantic Review*, respectively. The trans studies focus of my project led me to collaborate with professors Sarah Schulman and Marquis Bey to start a Workshop in Trans Studies (WITS) with funding support through Kaplan’s Research Workshop program.

As a poet, I received good news in the summer of 2025 as my publisher, Deep Vellum, offered me a two book contract—and I gladly accepted. My next book, scheduled for Fall/Winter 2026, is called *The Robert Poems*: a speculative history project that reanimates Robert Blake, the late brother of poet William Blake, as a trans man in the eighteenth century. Drawing from my scholarly background in Romanticism and Blakean studies as well as details from my own life as a trans person, I have attempted to create a world that flickers in and out of recognition—playing with historical boundaries and expectations around gender and transformation. The second project is titled *Urgent, Stars* and is expected in Fall 2028. This book-length poem is written using a “prosody of needles,” a prosody I invented that functions via duration, improvisation, and collage. The arm of the star, as an early poem indicates, reflects the silver arm of the needle used in testosterone injections; hence, the unit of measurement throughout the poem is the silver length of needles used to either pull the medication or inject it. Through writing *Urgent, Stars*, I hope to illustrate connections between celestial bodies, textual bodies, and the formed bodies of the trans subject. I read with Deep Vellum at their annual off-site event for the 2026 AWP conference, as well as presenting my new research in poetry, entitled “Poetics of the Event,” on a panel with NU alumn Toby Altman during the 2026 New Orleans Poetry Festival and Small Press Fair.

ALUMNI NEWS

George Abraham (MFA+MA 2024) co-edited two volumes: *HEAVEN LOOKS LIKE US: Palestinian Poetry* with Haymarket books which was long-listed for the Palestine Book Award, and the recent indy best-seller *Homosexual Intifada* with Interlink Books. They are currently an artist-in-residence at the Arab American National Museum producing their play, *Eve*, co-written with Fargo Tbakhi, which premiered in August 2026.

Elisa Ady (MFA+MA 2025) was selected as a 2025 Anthony Veasna So Scholar in Fiction by *The Adroit Journal*. They published her short story “¡Suéltame!” in issue 53. Elisa also received the 2025 Award for Best MFA+MA Thesis for “Pink Noise.”

In 2025, **JK Anowe** (MFA+MA 2026) was the recipient of a 2025 Paul & Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans, a program now in its 27th year. The Fellowship’s recipients represent remarkable contributions across fields like medicine, law, engineering, the arts, public service, and science. JK was also awarded the English Department’s 2026 Award for Best MFA+MA Thesis for “Last Rites: poems.”

Carla Arnell (PhD 1999) is serving as the Associate Dean of the Faculty and Director of the Office of Faculty Development at Lake Forest College, where she is a full professor of English. She had a new article “A.E. Waite, George MacDonald, and the Golden Stair from Victorian Fantasy to Edwardian Mystical Fiction” published in the journal *Renaissance* in 2025.

Rio Bergh’s (PhD 2025) essay “‘The Cyclone of Civilization’: Environmental Catastrophe and Social Evolutionism in *The Red Man’s Greeting*” will be published in an upcoming issue of *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists*.

Andrea Bianchi (MFA+MA 2025) was named runner-up in *Puerto del Sol*’s 2025 Prose Contest, and her fiction is available in *Puerto del Sol* and *Passages North*. She also recently published poetry in *The Pinch*, and her nonfiction is forthcoming in *Arts & Letters* and *Third Coast Magazine*.

Sarah Blackwood (PhD 2009) edited and wrote the introduction to Louisa May Alcott’s classic novel *Little Women* for The Norton Library—W.W. Norton’s new student-friendly series—that was released in February 2025. She was interviewed by The Norton Library podcast about the book and its remarkable author in a two-part episode that ran last summer.

Casey Caldwell (PhD 2019) is currently an Adjunct Assistant Professor of English at Carthage College, where he’s creating a creative writing summer camp for high school students, as well as directing the English Players, a student and faculty acting troupe run through the English department. He will be serving as dramaturg for Carthage’s spring 2027 production of *Twelfth Night*. His book, *Urban Citizenship in Early Modern Drama: Politics, Commerce, and the City*, will be published as part of the Arden Studies in Early Modern series with Bloomsbury press in December 2026, and he has an article on James Loehlin and learning-through-performance forthcoming with the journal, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, as part of a special *in memoriam* issue.

Vanessa Corredera (PhD 2012) recently made a professional move and as of August 2025, is a Full Professor of English at Baylor University. In spring of 2025, she began her tenure as General Editor of *Shakespeare Quarterly*. Spring of 2026 saw the publication of two edited collections, *Shakespeare, Race and Anglophone Popular Culture* (Bloomsbury) and “*What Country, Friends, Is This?*: *Shakespeare and the Staging of Exile* (ACMRS Press).

In the summer of 2025, **Maria Dikcis** (PhD 2021) co-organized the Public AI Summit with metaLAB (at) Harvard and the Data Nutrition Project. This free, virtual gathering featured keynote lectures and hands-on workshops by leading experts in the fields of AI ethics, education, and technology policy. The event attracted more than 1,400 participants from around the world across two days of programming and helped the general public and industry professionals develop critical approaches to understanding and shaping the role of AI in society.

Richard Gabri’s (PhD 2018) new article, “All White in the End: From the Passage of James Wait to the Passing of James Gatz; Intertextuality and the Riddle of Race in *The Great Gatsby*,” was published in the Summer 2026 issue of *ELH*. The article grew out of classroom research with Richard’s high school students, and was recently featured in a Johns Hopkins University Press podcast conversation. The work was previously covered by KQED.

Aaron Greenberg (PhD 2017) recently ghostwrote and published Mickey Norton’s *Game Changer*. Several articles of his have also been published; “Writing Life in the Age of Generative AI and Surveillance Capitalism” in *Life Writing*, “Still life with sovereignty: new materialist biopolitics” in *Culture, Theory and Critique*, and “Postcolonial Biopower and Auto|Biography” in *Life & Times of Michael K*’ in *Auto|Biography Studies*.

Nat Happe (MFA+MA 2025) was a 2025 Luminarts Cultural Foundation fellow, and a co-recipient in 2025 of the English Department’s inaugural Jo Minow Prize in Creative Writing for “On Beauty and Violence.”

Christie Harner’s (PhD 2010) position at Dartmouth College was endowed this past year, and she is now the Thomas A. and Georgina T. Russo Associate Dean for Fellowships and Scholars Programs, as well as a Senior Lecturer in English.

Jackie Hendricks (PhD 2013), in collaboration with Amy Lueck, Lauring Pfeiffer, and Maura Tarnoff, published their OER *Your Voice Matters*, a free, open-access resource for teaching first-year writing. It was created with funding from the OER for Social Justice grant, which supported eleven teams across four Jesuit Universities to develop OERs as part of a Department of Education effort to reduce textbook costs.

Peter Jaros (PhD 2009) has been promoted to the rank of Full Professor at Franklin & Marshall College.

Paulina Jones-Torregrosa (PhD 2025) was awarded the 2026 Hagstrum Prize for Best Dissertation for “Global Intimacies: Transnational Writings by U.S. Women of Color.

ALUMNI NEWS CONTINUED

Jeff Knight (PhD 2009) has been promoted to Full Professor at the University of Washington in Seattle. His next book, *Shakespeare's Books and Readers*, is forthcoming in late 2026 from Bloomsbury.

Joe Kraus (PhD 2000) spent four weeks in between March and April 2026 at Stefan cel Mare University in Suceava, Romania as a Fulbright specialist where he taught a seminar on American literature and culture.

Christian Kriticos (MA 2014) is working as a journalist, and his first book, *Musique Concrète*, is being published by Bloomsbury in October 2026.

Janaka Lewis (PhD 2009) has coedited a collection, *Culinaria: Women of Color Rewriting Our Food Stories*, which will be coming out in October from SUNY Press.

Chris Lombardo (MFA+MA 2023) has been appointed as an Adjunct Assistant Professor in Northwestern's Department of Radio/Television/Film, and taught a course titled "Future Tense: Rhetoric and Speculative Media" in Spring of 2026.

Jenny Mann's (PhD 2006) new book, titled *The Forms of Utopia: Paradox, Labyrinth, and Recursion in the Renaissance*, will be published in October by Princeton University Press.

John Edward Martin (PhD, 2003) is about to begin his tenth year at the University of North Texas Libraries, where he serves as Director of Scholarly Communication and Comics Studies Librarian. For the last two years, he has served as faculty advisor to the UNT Comic Book Club student organization, which has successfully created and published two compendiums of original comics by UNT undergraduate artists. For his own part, John has continued to work on his own book-length study of comics adaptations of the work of Edgar Allan Poe and has two forthcoming articles: Martin, J.; McIntosh, M. C.; & Ekberg, S., "Poe in Print & Pixels: Recovering Early Newspaper Comic Strips Through Digital Technologies." in S. D. Keralis & C. Coker (Eds.), *DH + BH: Digital Humanities and Book History*, Windsor and Downs Press, 2025, and Martin, J.E., "Climbing the Walls: How I Got Bit and Turned Spider-Man Into Me," in M. Kobre and P. Nagy, *Origin Stories: Fans, Scholars, and the Superhero Comics that Shaped Their Identities*, University Press of Mississippi, 2026. He has also been a regular attendee at conferences hosted by the Comics Studies Society, the Poe Studies Association, and the Festival of Monsters. In the Spring of 2027, he will be stepping back into the classroom for the first time in a decade to teach a graduate seminar on the American Renaissance at UNT.

Liz McCabe (PhD 2013) joined the Office of the Provost at Northwestern in January as Director of Academic Initiatives in the Office of Undergraduate Education. She continues to serve Weinberg College as an Associate Professor of Instruction in the Chicago Field Studies Program, with occasional teaching in the English Department.

Sarah Mesle (PhD 2009) was promoted to Professor (Teaching) of Writing at the University of Southern California, and her guide, *Reasons and Feelings: Writing for the Humanities Now*, was released by the University

of Chicago Press in October 2025. In ways both direct and indirect, this book grew out of her PhD research on 19th-c American sentimental literature. Completing it made her grateful all over again for the many kinds of mentorship she received at Northwestern.

In 2025, the Modern Language Association of America awarded the third annual Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for African Studies to **Susanna Sacks** (PhD 2019) for her book *Networked Poetics: The Digital Turn in Southern African Poetry*. The prize is awarded annually for an outstanding scholarly work in African or African diaspora literary or linguistic studies.

In July just passed, **Serena Simpson** (MFA+MA 2021) published her essay "Through Plastic Windows" in issue 61 of the *Notre Dame Review*.

Kira Tucker's (MFA+MA 2023) debut book, *Wildest*, won the 2025 National Poetry Series. Originating from Kira's work in the Litowitz MFA+MA program, this poetry collection asks how we can make meaning in our lives during a time of ecological crisis and rampant social injustice. *Wildest* will be published on December 1, 2026 by Akashic Books.

Abram Van Engen (PhD 2010) is now the Director of the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis, and was installed in 2024 as the Stanley Elkin Professor in the Humanities.

This past year, **Jade Werner** (PhD 2014) served as an invited Visiting Professor at the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, allowing her to continue research for her book on how colonial nineteenth-century missionary presses (primarily in SE Asia) helped consolidate nineteenth-century ideas of "world literature." In 2024, she had two articles published; "The Hikayat Abdullah, the Missionary Press, and the Making of Nineteenth-Century 'World Literature'" in *Comparative Literature*, and "Spatial Contingency: Digital Networks, James Hogg, and the Religious Politics of Space" in a special issue of *Romantic Circles*. Jade has also joined the Editorial Board of the journal *Victorians*, and was appointed to the Executive Committee for the Literature and Anthropology Forum of the MLA, and is now the Associate Editor of the journal *Literature and Theology*.

Olivia Xu (PhD 2025) received the 2025 Hagstrum Prize for Best Dissertation for "Multilingualism of the Other: Writing the Novel in Translation East and West, 1818-1910."

Two new books co-edited by **John Young** (PhD 1998) will be published in the fall of 2026: *Approaches to Teaching Post-1945 Short Fiction from the United States* by Parnassus Books, and *Toni Morrison in Context* by Cambridge University Press.

ALUMNI PUBLICATIONS



George Abraham, co-ed
Heaven Looks Like Us: Palestinian Poetry



George Abraham, co-ed
Homosexual Intifada: A Queer Palestinian Anthology



Toby Altman
Jewel Box



Carla Arnell
Divine Representations: The Rise of the Mystical Novel in Twentieth-Century England



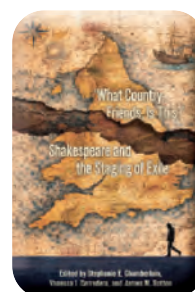
Dawn Angelicca Barcelona
Roundtrip



Sarah Blackwood, ed
Louisa May Alcott, Little Women



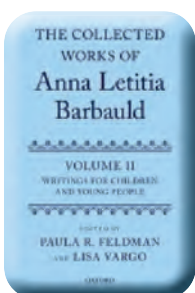
Vanessa Corredera, co-ed
Shakespeare, Race and Anglophone Popular Culture



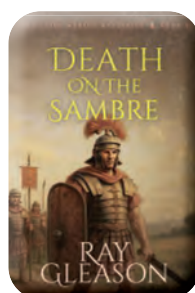
Vanessa Corredera, co-ed
"What Country, Friends, Is This?": Shakespeare and the Staging of Exile



Joanne Diaz
Electric Dress



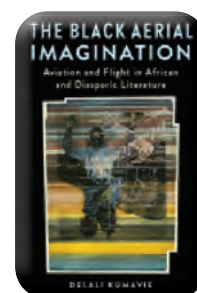
Paula Feldman, co-ed
The Collected Works of Anna Letitia Barbauld, Volume II: Writing for Children and Young People



Ray Gleason
The Belgian Affair II: Death on the Sambre



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The Corporate Forms of Antebellum US Literature



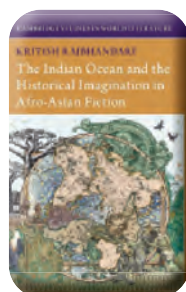
Delali Kumavie
The Black Aerial Imagination: Aviation and Flight in African and Diasporic Literature



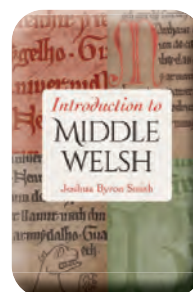
Sarah Mesle
Reasons and Feelings: Writing for the Humanities Now



Laura Passin
We the Destroyers



Kritish Rajbhandari
The Indian Ocean and the Historical Imagination in Afro-Asian Fiction



Joshua Smith
Introduction to Middle Welsh



Abram Van Engen, co-ed
Anne Bradstreet Today: Modern Poets Respond

WHALE TALES

The Elephant in the Room and the Whale on the Ceiling

We've all heard the story about the whale that used to hang from the ceiling of University Hall—and that some would say still haunts the poor graduate students in the TA office. Indeed, records of the whale's suspected hauntings date all the way back to November 1879 when, in Northwestern's paper *The Vidette*, one joking account explains: "Dreadful noises over Prof. Baird's room on certain days, are caused by the sophomore elocution class, and not by the ghost of the whale, as some had supposed." As fascinating as the whale is, it raises some interesting questions: where did the whale go? And what's the deal with the Civil War lore, so universally accepted that it was even emblazoned on a formal plaque accompanying the whale for decades?

While much of Northwestern's defunct natural history museum collections were dispersed to local Chicago area museums, our whale met a somewhat different fate. It turns out, the whale lives just an hour west of us at Benedictine University's Jurica-Suchy Museum. The museum's history page, penned by Fr. Theodore D. Suchy, includes the following account of how the whale was acquired:

The whale (a rorqual whale BALAENOPTERA from the family BALAENOPTERIDAE) was from NW University. It hung in their old library building and when the university moved to a new library building, [t]he University did not want the whale skeleton. Somehow Father found out about it, and with the help of some of the brothers from the Abbey disassembled and took down the skeleton, bone by bone, brought it to Procopius, reassembled and hung it up in Father's classroom. Father Hilary told me that it was killed by a cannon ball during the [C]ivil War! And that is all I know of its history.

And thus, the whale was carried off. No paper trail appears to exist in our own archives to corroborate this (highly anecdotal) story, but one must appreciate the happy chance of "somehow" hearing about a free whale skeleton.

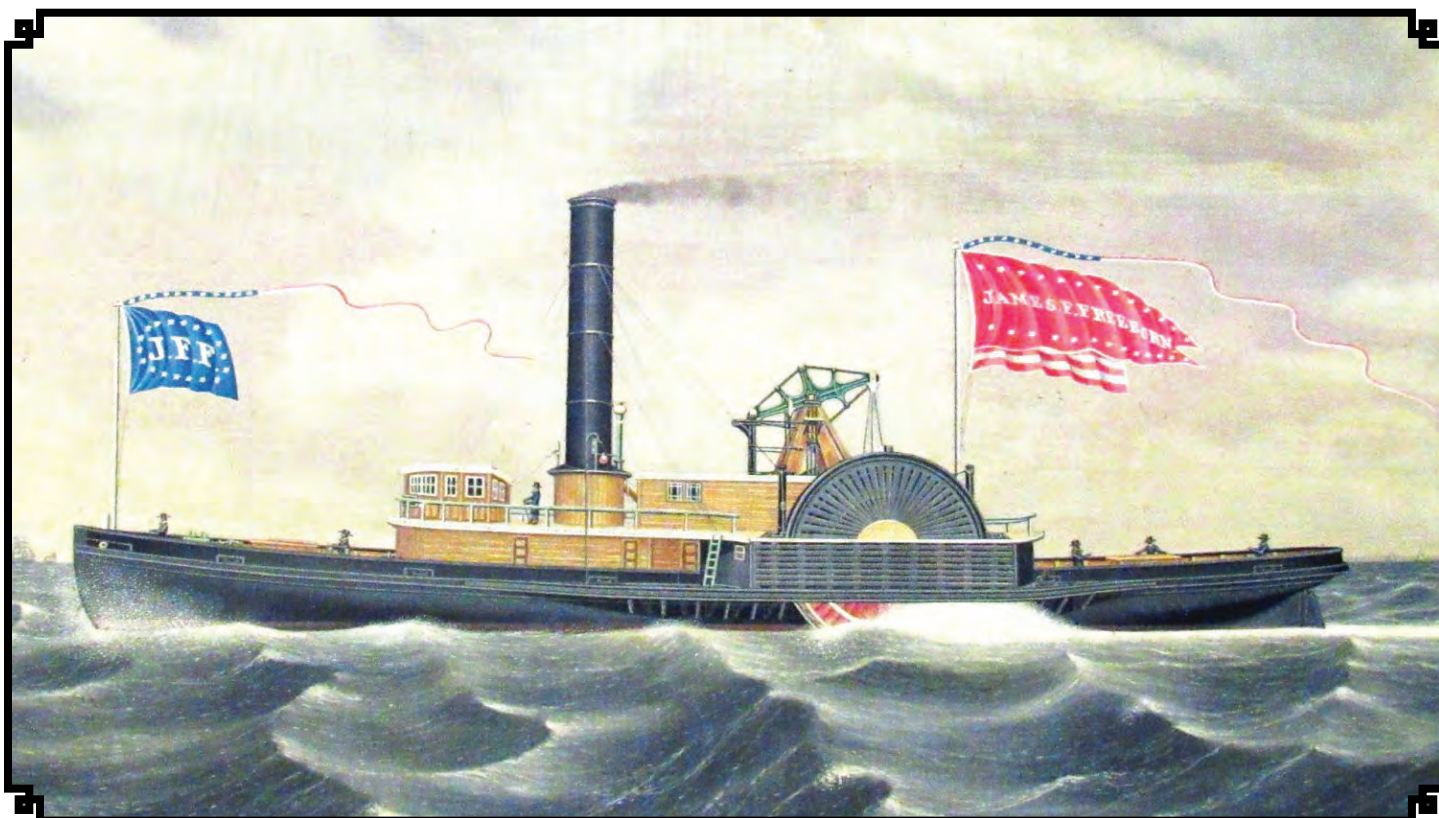
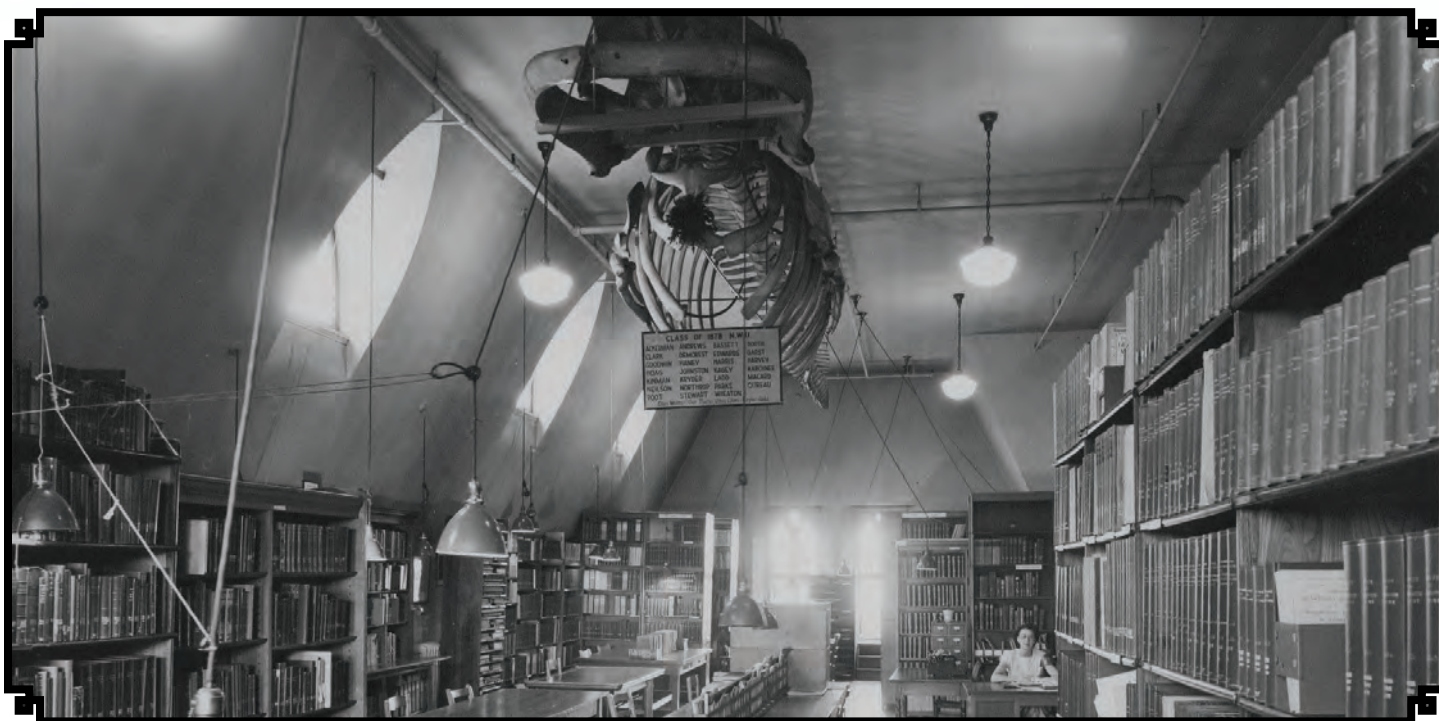
Now to the more curious story of how the whale was acquired, both by the class of 1878, as a gift for the University, and by Henry Augustus Ward, who sold it to them. It all began when Dr. Marcy, founder of Northwestern's Natural History Museum, took his biology class to a downtown exposition in 1875 (part of the Great Chicago Fire revitalization efforts). Henry Augustus Ward had a vast natural history exhibit which, among other things, featured a 42-foot whale skeleton. According to an account Joseph T. Ladd delivered during the class of 1878's 50th anniversary reunion, the class of 1878 decided to purchase the whale as a class gift late one night. Early the following morning, Ladd and another student, George Everett Ackerman, raced to Dr. Marcy's house to obtain a letter of introduction (so early, in fact, that they apparently had to slam the door knocker for quite a while to get Dr. Marcy to answer).

Letter in hand, they caught the first train into the city, only to find the exposition building locked. Hurrying on, they found some members of the maintenance staff and were told it was the time of day when Ward got his shave at one of the barbershops in the area. Every barbershop seemed to be closed, but on they searched until they came across an open one. In Ladd's words: "Here they discovered an aged man in a chair his face smothered in lather. Without delay they announced their request. To the surprise of the artist of the razor and [to] the delight of the boys the lathered face turned, the head lifted, eyes twinkled with interest and a cheerful voice announced, 'my name is Ward.'" A hasty agreement followed—\$1,000, a third to be paid in cash and the rest to be paid over the next two years, with interest.

But really, the story goes back further, because the whale had to come from somewhere, and however fascinating to imagine its purported involvement in the Civil War, it did not come into Northwestern's possession after being shot by a Confederate cannon ball in the Gulf of Mexico during the Civil War, nor was it then carried by the current all the way around Florida to wash up in Georgia, as the description accompanying the whale would have us believe. And that's where we journey out of Northwestern's archives and over to the University of Rochester's collection of Henry Augustus Ward's papers. In an 1874 letter from one G.W. Stockwell to Ward, we find some answers. In a lost piece of correspondence, Ward must have inquired about the origin story of a whale he purchased from Stockwell. Stockwell writes that "a shoal consisting of some 4 or 5 whales" appeared near Brunswick, Georgia where the revenue cutter Nansemond, a decommissioned Civil War ship, fired at them and wounded one.

The wounded whale ran ashore just south of Brunswick on Cumberland Island in September 1872. According to Stockwell, it was "then and there cut up by myself and some hired help and brought to Brunswick...I afterwards cleaned it to the best of my ability and exhibited it in Brunswick, Savannah, and at the Macon Fair" (I have added punctuation since Stockwell does not seem to have cared for it). This whale measured 42 feet. While this story is clearly not a dramatic Civil War-era story, the details of Stockwell's account bear enough striking similarities to confirm that this is the Northwestern whale's real tale. The measurements of the whale match up, the state where it washed ashore is the same, and the decommissioned ship that purportedly shot it was indeed an old Civil War vessel,

continued on page 22



The USS Nansemond - originally the James F. Freeborn - the boat that started this whole mess in 1871

WHALE TALES CONTINUED

even if it happened years after the Civil War ended. 1874, the date of Stockwell's letter, is the very year when Ward began exhibiting his wares in Chicago—a time when he may have wanted to regale prospective buyers with grand stories of how the whale came to be there.

The answers, alas, raise more questions than they resolve. One wonders when the lore of the Civil War cannon ball first came to be engraved on the official plaque about the whale. Was Ward the originator? The students? Or was it a story that, over time and miscommunication, developed into this dramatic tale?

And now, added to this, we must wonder more about this G.W. Stockwell, who, in the postscript of his aforementioned letter to Ward, brings up an additional matter of business: “a pair of Hogs, they are half Hog and half Goat, male and female, everything perfect” and he adds only that, “if they would be of any advantage to your museum, it would afford me pleasure to forward them if you will please inform me to whom I can send them an[d] how, as they are alive and hearty, I will trust to your honour as a gentleman to pay me anything you may think them worth.” I shall leave it to you to determine whether or not Ward purchased these (highly plausible and certainly not hoax) specimens.

-----Jennifer Comerford (PhD 2025)



Scalawags from University of Benedict show true colours! Steal noble Northwestern whale in dead of night. English Department graduate students traumatized and whale-less.

We are grateful to everyone who has donated to the department over the years. It is with your continued support that we are able to offer our graduate students the many opportunities for research and professionalization funding available to them.

We list here, with our most sincere thanks, our valued donors from this past year.

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Musings

2024-26 Newsletter
Volume XXIX

Please send thoughts and news to

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