

Rhymes & Reasons

A NEWSLETTER OF THE MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™ DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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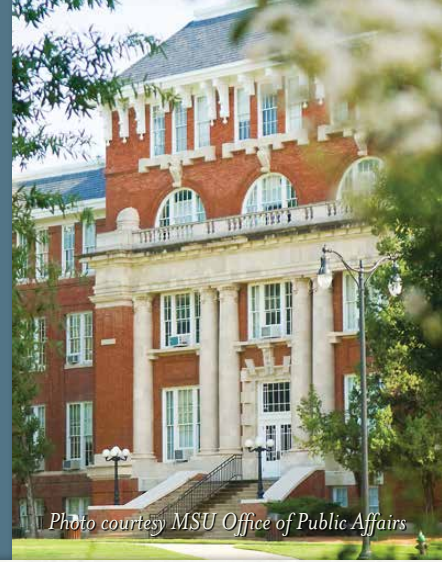


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A NOTE FROM RICH RAYMOND



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Greetings from Wyoming! Judy and I moved here last June, when Dr. Dan Punday took over as the Head of English. We have since settled into our cabin in Story, a town of 850 residents on the eastern slope of the Big Horn Mountains, near Sheridan.

Judy rolls her eyes when I speak of my retirement, as these last six months have included my teaching two sections of Comp I at Sheridan College as well as two online courses for MSU, American Lit survey and Writing for the Workplace. I may soon start another online gig at my alma mater, the University of Wyoming.

I continue writing, too, having just published my swan-song on English Studies in the Lamar Journal of the Humanities. I've also begun projects on Laurence Sterne and Samuel Johnson, and may try my hand at a poem or two!

But I don't spend all my time working. Judy and I often visit

my 96-year-old mom, who lives in Sheridan. We have also planned a trip to NYC this spring to see Hamilton. Of course, we will also visit kids and grandkids: Heather, who now works at Virginia Tech, and grandsons Josh and Nate; Anna and grandson Roy in Houston; and Matt and Kristen and granddaughter Ellie, who live near LA.

We also plan to hike these beautiful mountains and to camp when weather allows. Right now, we have a foot of snow on the ground, and the thermometer dipped to -17 F a few nights ago!

So I'll close this note with best wishes to Friends of the Department of English and to my dear colleagues at MSU. I miss you all sorely and will certainly drop by Starkville on our way to visit kids.



SPOTLIGHT ON: DR. MEGAN SMITH

By: Dan Punday, Department Head

We are excited to welcome Dr. Megan Smith to the department with the start of the 2016-2017 academic year. Professor Smith did her PhD work in Second Language Studies at Michigan State University, and joins Professors Pizer and Herd to form a strong group within our growing linguistics program.

Professor Smith's work focuses on second language acquisition. In particular, she strives to develop a more granular understanding of how language systems are acquired and stored in the mind. A great deal of the work on second language acquisition has taken as its subject western languages, such as Spanish. Professor Smith's work questions the assumptions of this research by turning to non-Western languages—particularly Japanese—whose morphology is quite different. For example, it is commonly assumed that second language learners simply have an inherently hard time learning word endings—from conjugating verbs to choosing the right case for pronouns.

Japanese offers an interesting subject for this inquiry because the morpheme that marks case (the word's role in the sentence, such as subject or direct object) only marks case and is not conflated with the gender or number of the object marked—as it is in many European languages. Professor Smith's work shows that English speakers learning Japanese as a second language acquire case marking relatively easily. It may be that the difficulty of managing case in a second language has more to do with the languages commonly studied.

Professor Smith is interested in the whole range of conditions that affects how adults learn second languages. She notes that, while a five-year old child learning her first language has spent 14,000 hours in training, even a four-year language major will only have dedicated 600 hours. Nonetheless, we tend to expect a lot—maybe too much—out of adult learners. Again Japanese provides a useful example: learning the Japanese writing system is quite difficult, and depends on a whole set of literacy skills that those of us who grew up writing in English simply don't have. But because we expect adults to be able to write as well as to speak—something that we don't really expect from a five-year-old—language classes often insist on teaching writing alongside of oral skills, even if doing so compounds the complexity of the task.

In addition to her research background, Professor Smith has experience teaching ESL in Japan and at the college-level in the United States. Together with

Professor Wendy Herd's work in second language acquisition, this expertise provides a foundation for the department's growing TESOL program.

Asked about the transition from Michigan to Mississippi, Professor Smith describes our students as surprisingly open and easy to build rapport with. They are, as she remarks, “engaging, curious, and friendly, and ask good questions.”



FACULTY PUBLICATIONS & AWARDS

Tommy Anderson and **Lara Dodds** were promoted last year to the rank of Professor.

Kelly Marsh won the John Grisham Master Teacher Award. On September 12, she delivered her lecture, "Reading Students and Teaching the Language of the Academy."

Shirley Hanshaw was named the IHL Diversity Educator of 2016.

Tommy Anderson published *Shakespeare's Fugitive Politics* (Edinburgh UP).

Ted Atkinson published "Long Faulkner: Charting Legacy on a Civil Rights Continuum" in *Fifty Years After Faulkner*, and "Natasha Trethewey's Joe Christmas and the Reconstruction of Mississippi Nativity" in *Faulkner and the Black Literatures of the Americas*.

Shalyn Claggett edited *Strange Science: Investigating the Limits of Knowledge in the Victorian Age* with Lara Karpenko (University of Michigan Press).

Peter De Gabriele presented "The Foot or the Spear: Natural Law Property Theory and the Problem of Prosthetic Touch" at the Annual Meeting of the South East American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies.

Lara Dodds presented "Language and the Fall in Paradise Lost and China Miéville's Embassytown" at the MLA Annual Convention in Austin.

Becky Hagenston published *Scavengers: Stories* (University of Alaska Press), which won the Permafrost Book Prize in Fiction.

Wendy Herd published "The Southern Vowel Shift in Women from Mississippi" with W. Knight in the *Proceedings of Meetings on Acoustics*. She is also co-PI on a funding \$100,000 grant "Writing: Accessing the Past and the Future Institute," funded by the Mississippi Board of Trustees Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL).

Holly Johnson completed volume 1 of *The Selected Sermons of Robert Rypon*, which will be published in the Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations series next year (Peeter Press).

Michael Kardos published the second edition of *The Art and Craft of Fiction* (Bedford St. Martin's). His novel *Before He Finds Her* was translated in Portuguese this year, and is forthcoming in the Czech Republic, France, Germany, and Spain.

Matt Little is a co-author of the monograph *Origin of Kibosh*, scheduled for publication in September by Routledge. The press intends this to be the inaugural volume in the projected series Routledge Studies in Etymology.

Rich Lyons published *Un Poco Loco*, his fourth collection of poems.

Amy Mallory-Kani received a contract from Routledge for her book, *Literature, Biopolitics, and Medicine in England: Romantic Immunities*.

Kelly Marsh's *The Submerged Plot and the Mother's Pleasure from Jane Austen to Arundhati Roy* was published in the Theory and Interpretation of Narrative Series by the Ohio State University Press. She also had her essay on *Jane Eyre* (part of this book) chosen for the prestigious Norton Critical Edition of the novel.

Bonnie O'Neill's *Literary Celebrity and Public Life in the Nineteenth-Century United States* is in production with the University of Georgia Press for publication this year.

Catherine Pierce published *The Tornado Is the World* (Saturnalia Books).

Dan Punday published "Space Across Narrative Media: Towards an Archeology of Narratology" in *Narrative*.

Rich Raymond published "Overcoming Crises in English Studies: A Case for Hope" in *The Lamar Journal of the Humanities*.

Donald Shaffer published *The Construction of Whiteness* with co-editors Stephen Middleton and David Roediger.

Megan Smith published "L2 Learners and the Apparent Problem of Morphology: Evidence from L2 Japanese" published in *Theory, Research, and Pedagogy in Learning and Teaching Japanese* (Palgrave), and "Testing Aptitude for Second Language Acquisition" in *Language Testing and Assessment* (Springer).

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: KELSEY MARX

"I Think We Need More Alligators"



If someone had told me when I was graduating from Mississippi State in 2012 that I would be a registered lobbyist at age 26, I would have asked with a dropped jaw and raised eyebrows, "Like that guy in *Thank You for Smoking*?" But in all seriousness, to say that I could imagine what life would look like four years after graduating would not only be a gross overstatement but a flat-out lie. During the last semester of my glorious English major days, I dreamt about teaching English abroad. By April of that semester, I even had a job lined up to teach at a school in Peru. And at some point during those last few months, I also considered becoming a librarian. I don't know, I guess the idea of hanging out with books all day didn't seem so bad. Instead, I did neither of those things and joined AmeriCorps where I worked alongside individuals with visual disabilities and witnessed how impactful labor and transportation policies were on my coworkers' economic well being, which helped me cultivate an interest in public policy and advocacy. So here I am, four years later, doing something completely different with my life than I had ever thought was possible before.

So, before you start chanting, "Drain the swamp!" let me just say that the government affairs profession is born out of the idea that individuals have a right to petition their government. No, I don't think corporations are individuals, I take your point there; but there are many for-profit entities, think tanks, and other interest groups who care about issues affecting the

public, issues such as expanding the types of benefits offered to SNAP recipients or making hearing devices more accessible and affordable to consumers, which are two examples of projects on which I am currently working. In fact, when I first moved to D.C. in 2013, I was interning for Terpstra Associates (run by a Mississippi State graduate, no less!) and advocating for increased gun reforms -- such as making it more difficult for convicted domestic abusers to keep or purchase firearms -- during the months leading up to the 20th anniversary of the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, which mandated background checks for gun purchasers. I will never forget walking the corridors of the U.S. House of Representatives with the parents of victims from the Aurora and Sandy Hook shootings imploring House and Senate Members and their staffs to see

the need for additional, sensible legislation to protect families and communities from gun violence.

While many of our requests went unmet in late 2013, the ability to speak directly with our elected legislators about these issues was incredibly important and helped shape the conversation about gun reform going forward. So, to that point, not only do I think that the swamp should be preserved, but I also think it needs more alligators. *Good* alligators. Because, no, not all special interests have the public in mind when pushing for legislation. However, to say that the entire swamp needs a 'drainin' is to say that we don't need people who can argue against nefarious agendas, both internal and external. On the contrary, we need people who can understand, explain, and analyze government and social systems amidst ever-shifting cultural and economic contexts. We need people who are able to deconstruct legislative and regulatory language and anticipate actual results and subsequent reforms. We need people who can refute opposing claims by imploring logos, ethos, and pathos.

And who is poised to petition their government best? To be these good alligators? Why, English majors, of course! English majors are taught how to deconstruct and analyze written text and spoken word, to expose truth through nuance, and to prove these uncovered truths through rigorous research. By extension, English majors are also students of nearly every subject:

economics, history, human rights, philosophy, politics, religion, and sociology, to name a few. Moreover, there's a clear historical precedent of using prose to garner support for changes to governments and societies, either through blatant advocacy, such as in Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, or through cultural observations, such as in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. With those attributes in mind, one may even argue that what a lobbyist does on a day-to-day basis is not so different than what you do when you write an analysis of a literary work. (And when you attended office hours because you thought that paper on the *Miller's Tale* deserved an A instead of a B... yeah, that was lobbying).

So will I still be a lobbyist in five years? If the last five years should inform my answer here, then all I could tell you now is that I see the next five years as wonderfully mysterious and full of possibilities. However, I will say

that since moving to D.C., I have further uncovered my love for advocacy, especially within the healthcare field, and I will be working toward refining that interest over the next few years. To this end, I recently decided to supplement my professional experience by pursuing a Master's of Public Health at George Washington University in D.C. in hopes of sharpening my understanding of healthcare policy issues, program metrics, and effective legislative solutions. While, no, Chaucer did not exactly prepare me for Biostatistics, I do view my educational background as a critical precursor to my graduate studies and, more specifically, my research and analytical skills (although, sidenote, being able to recite the *Canterbury Tales* in Old English is a *really cool* grad school party trick). It's with full thanks to my studies as an English major at Mississippi State that I see myself with many different kinds of opportunities over the next five years and beyond, alligator or not.

KUDOS FOR OUR STUDENTS & ALUMNI

We take great pride in our students, past and present. We list a few recent achievements:

We inducted 13 majors into our Xi Chapter of the English Honorary Society, **Sigma Tau Delta**: Victoria Bruno, Kristin Sheppard, Kayla Mattox, Taylor Greer, Lindsay Pace, Joely Pugh, Michael Spears, Kelsey Horn, Lily Hebert, Jennifer Dominguez, Sydney Austin, Jessica Ingram, and Jessica Collins.

Howell and Elizabeth Gwin Scholarship Winners: Krista Barrett, Allison Wiltshire

Eugene Butler Creative Writing Award: Jessica Flowers, Ciera Higginbotham, Isabelle Lang, Sarah Sones

Roger LaMoyné Dabbs Memorial Scholarship: Georgeann Kenney, Patrick Sistrunk

William H. Magruder Memorial Scholarship: Kristin Sheppard

Helen W. Skelton Endowed Scholarship: Jessica Collins

Ann Pittman Andrews Memorial Endowed Scholarship: Krista Barrett

Peyton Ward Williams, Jr. Distinguished Writing Award: Kylie Dennis

Brasher-Dazey Paper Award: Nathan Rester

Undergraduate Research Symposium: Lily Hebert presented a paper titled, "Multifaceted Objectification in The Duchess of Malfi"

Gentry Burkes, sophomore English major, spent the summer in Los Angeles, California as a student in the Music Innovation Summer Institute at UCLA. Gentry is the founder and president of StarkVegas Productions, an independent record label and MSU startup company, which plans to sign and record artists with ties to MSU. Her company was recently awarded a prototype development and key capital expenditure grant through the MSU Entrepreneurship Center.

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A high school student from The Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science **Joy Cariño**, who is now a freshman in the English program, served as a co-author on research with Professor **Wendy Herd** presented at the Acoustical Society of America in May.

Morgan Hydrick, junior English major, studied Demography and Modern European History in Italy during the summer with Cornell-in-Turin.

Natalie Jones became the university's 18th Truman Scholar, earning the nation's most prestigious scholarship for students dedicated to public service. She was also a finalist for a Rhodes Scholarship, won for the first time since 1911 just three years ago by the department's own Field Brown.

Karleigh Kimbrell, senior English major, studied creative writing and art history at Oxford University during the Trinity Term

Meghan Barlow entered law school at the University of Memphis.

Carley Robertson began her MA at Clemson University.

Nathan Rester started law school at the University of Mississippi in the fall.

Lien Van Geel, an English and classics major, began her PhD in classics at Columbia University in the fall.

Alex Ward started the MA program in divinity at Vanderbilt with the goal of pursuing a PhD.

Mannah Warren started the MFA program at the University of Kansas with an emphasis on poetry.

Ashleah Wimberly started the MA program in English at the University of North Dakota.

Laura Allen, who was featured in the 2015 "In Their Own Words" section of *Rhymes and Reasons*, accepted a tenure track assistant professor position in our Department of Psychology

Sarah Bush joined Trident Media as a literary agent.

Former English major and Rhodes Scholar nominee (2016), **Kylie Dennis** is at Rutgers University in her first year of graduate school.

Katy Walters Brink, BA 2004, after three years in Madrid, Spain, has just been re-located with her family to Brussels, Belgium, where she and her husband are missionaries with Mission to the World. "Her reflections on her experience in Spain can be read in her book *Clotheslines and Callings: Home Is Where My Laundry Is*, available electronically through Amazon.com.

Sloan Chesney BA 2013, graduated from Mississippi College's School of Law last spring, passed Mississippi's bar exam in June, and is now clerking for Presiding Judge Tyree Irving at the Mississippi Court of Appeals.

Matthew Clark, BA 2009 (Mississippi College Law), is a lawyer with the Department of Human Services in Vicksburg, and he and his wife are helping to plant a multi-ethnic church in downtown Vicksburg.

Caroline Eaton, BA 2003 (MA Humanities, U. Chicago), has just received her PhD in English at King's College London, where she worked through their Centre for Life-Writing Research. Her critical/creative dissertation about Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis is called "Solving the Jackie Mystery: Celebrity, emotion and everyday life in critical and creative practice."

Kelsey Norris, BA 2013, Peace Corps volunteer and Rhodes Scholar nominee (2015), is now the editor of Vanderbilt's *Nashville Review*. She is currently a graduate student in Vanderbilt's Department of English MFA program.

Eric Smith, MA 2000 (PhD U Florida), was promoted this year to full professor at the University of Alabama at Huntsville, and he won his college's outstanding faculty award.

Nick White, MA 2009 (MFA OSU, PhD U Nebraska), is a new assistant professor of English at the Ohio State University, and his novel is forthcoming in June 2017 with Blue Rider Press (an imprint of Penguin/Random House).

RITA DOVE: SPRING 2017 WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE

By: Ciera Higginbotham

Mississippi State University will be hosting Rita Dove as the Spring 2017 Writer-in-Residence. Dove was born in Akron, Ohio and attended Miami University in Ohio as a National Merit Scholar. Dove then went on to receive a Fulbright scholarship to study at the University of Tübingen in Germany. Following this, she later earned her MFA at the renowned Iowa Writers' Workshop.

Rita Dove has an extensive list of accolades and awards, most notably for her work in poetry. She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1986 for *Thomas and Beulah*, and *On the Bus with Rosa Parks* was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1999. In 1993, Dove became the first African American and youngest poet ever to receive the title of US

Poet Laureate, and she received the 1996 National Humanities Medal. More recently, Dove was the editor for *The Best American Poetry 2000* edition, and, in 2011, she received the National Medal of the Arts. Additionally, just last year, her *Collected Poems: 1974-2004* was a finalist for the National Book Award. Presently, Rita Dove is Commonwealth Professor of English at the University of Virginia. Though perhaps most well-known for her poetry, Dove is successful in a variety of mediums and has also published fiction, essays, and a verse drama. In her work, Dove often layers her writing with attention to historical and political events and calls for awareness of social issues. In a recent review in the *L.A. Times*, Craig Morgan Teicher wrote, "The lyric beauty of Dove's poems makes them unforgettable; their deep knowledge of history and its ongoing consequences makes them permanent."

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-Craig Morgan Teicher



As Writer-in-Residence, Rita Dove will be available for a variety of opportunities during her week-long visit at MSU. Dove will be giving a public reading that will be open and free to the student body and members of the surrounding communities. She will also be visiting one of MSU's creative writing workshop classes and discussing her craft and writing experience with aspiring writers. Additionally, she will be holding office hours for one-on-one meetings with students who are interested in learning more about her work and her insights on the writing life.

THANK YOU TO OUR ALUMNI & FRIENDS

Over the past 12 years, our generous alumni and friends have donated over \$370,000 to support our scholarships and awards as well as the English Advancement Fund, which helps to fund travel and equipment needs for faculty and students. In the last year, we have received more than \$21,000 in gifts and pledges to department scholarships and other funds, including large gifts to the Richard F. Patteson Endowed Scholarship, the Price Caldwell Memorial Endowment, and the Cecil Hunter and Ann Pittman Andrews Memorial Endowed Scholarships. Most of the donations that we receive are much smaller, however: \$250, \$100, \$50, and even \$25. They all add up, though, and help to support programs and scholarships for our students.

If you're interested in making a tax-deductible donation to help us meet our needs, please contact **Sara Frederick**, Director of Development for the College of Arts & Sciences at MSU. You can reach her at her office number, **662-325-3240**, or by email, **sfrederic@foundation.msstate.edu**.



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