



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



MSU DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

2018 RHYMES & REASONS NEWSLETTER

For many years Professor Rich Raymond provided leadership and expertise in composition theory among the English department's tenure-line faculty. In the summer of 2016 he retired, and Writing Center Director Professor Stacey Kastner departed for a position elsewhere, leaving the English department without research expertise on writing theory among the tenure-track faculty.

The department was fortunate to be able to hire two new Assistant Professors last year with expertise in writing theory, and they bring a range of expertise that the department hasn't had before.



DRS. KATHERINE FLOWERS

Katherine Flowers received her PhD from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her dissertation, "Local Language Policy: Shifting Scales in the English-Only Movement," examined how policies making English the only official language have locally emerged, changed, and waned in four communities in the U.S. Although we often think about the "English-only" movement as a national one, Professor Flowers shows that this debate is actually quite local, and reflects the practices and history of individual communities in very specific ways. This powerful argument about the way that policy is developed and debated has already garnered national attention. Last month the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the preeminent organization on the study of language theory and the teaching of writing, awarded Professor Flowers the James Berlin Memorial Outstanding Dissertation Award.

A native of Jackson whose father and brothers attended Mississippi State, Elizabeth Miller received her PhD from The University of Maryland, and wrote her dissertation on civil rights rhetoric. Entitled, "Faithful Genres: Rhetorics of the Civil Rights Mass Meeting," this project investigated how mass meetings functioned rhetorically in the civil rights movement as a way to create a collective identity and make claims about citizenship. In particular, Professor Miller examines how these meetings repurposed religious genres like hymns. This research can help to interpret Mississippi's particular role in the civil rights movement. Miller notes, in particular, that mass meetings in the Mississippi Delta made much heavier use of personal testimony than the mass meetings in Birmingham and Selma, which tended to be dominated by high-profile civil rights speakers.

Professors Flowers and Miller will be developing a range of new courses at Mississippi State that will significantly expand the role of writing theory. This semester, Professor Flowers is teaching a course on Grant Writing, in which students partner with community groups to seek funding for local initiatives. Working with the university's Center for Community Engaged Learning, students in this class are working with teachers at Sudduth Elementary school and Ms. Smith's Educational Services on developing grants. This fall, Professor Miller will be offering a class on Literature and Social Change, which will examine a variety of social movements and how they were reflected in literary works—including revolution and the suffrage movement. Both Professors Flowers and Miller are also taking on a central role in the teaching of writing for the department. This semester Professor Flowers is training several of the department instructors on the teaching of Writing for the Workplace, and in the spring of next year, Professor Miller will offer Introduction to Composition Theory for our next graduate teaching assistants.

We're excited by how these two new faculty members will help the department to develop its expertise in writing theory, which adds a new dimension to the English major and our Masters program.



ELIZABETH MILLER

FACULTY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

TOMMY ANDERSON became the interim Assistant Dean for the College of Arts and Sciences.

SHIRLEY HANSHAW, HOLLY JOHNSON, and KELLY MARSH were all promoted to Full Professor.

WENDY HERD and ANDREA SPAIN were given tenure and promoted to Associate Professor.

TED ATKINSON published "Literary Mississippi and the New Southern Studies" in *A Literary History of Mississippi*.

GREG BENTLEY delivered an essay "The Name-of-the-Father, Alternative Masculinities, and Female Agency in Beth Henley's *Crimes of the Heart*" at the Mississippi Philological Association Conference.

SHALYN CLAGGETT published *Strange Science: Investigating the Limits of Knowledge in the Victorian Age* with Lara Karpenko (University of Michigan Press).

PETER DEGABRIELE gave a pair of invited talks: "Translating Property: Occupation and Sovereignty in Enlightenment Natural Law" at the University at Buffalo—SUNY, and the keynote address, "Sovereign (Ir)responsibility: *Leviathan* Among the Drones" at the English Graduate Organization/ Sigma Tau Delta conference at Western Illinois University.

LARA DODDS published "Dark Looks and Red Smiles: Homeric Gesture and the Problem of Milton's Angels" in *One First Matter All: New Essays on Milton, Materialism, and Embodiment* as well as "Sidney, Cary, Cavendish: Playwrights of the Printed Page and a Future Stage" (with Margaret Ferguson) in *A New Companion to Renaissance Drama*.

KATHERINE FLOWERS won the CCCC James Berlin Memorial Outstanding Dissertation Award for her dissertation "Local Language Policy: Shifting Scales in the English-Only Movement"

BECKY HAGENSTON published four short stories this year in literary journals: "In the Museum of Tense Moments," "The Spectrum of Wonders," "Atlantis," Basic Commands, and Hematite, Apatite."

WENDY HERD won the Mississippi Humanities Council's Humanities Teacher of the Year Award, as well as receiving a \$97,000 grant from the US Department of Education.

HOLLY JOHNSON continued her work on the second volume of *The Selected Sermons of Robert Rypon*, which will be published in the Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations series this year (Peeter Press) and gave a paper on Rypon, "Preaching the *Imago Dei* in the Sermons of Robert Rypon" at the Medieval Studies conference in Kalamazoo.

MICHAEL KARDOS completed work on his next novel, *Bluff*, which will be published in April by Grove Atlantic. His earlier novel, *Before He Finds Her*, saw publication in the Czech Republic (Pregue: Mystery Press s.r.o.), France (Gallimard), and Germany (Bastei Lübbe).

MATT LITTLE published the monograph *Origin of Kibosh* (Routledge) as the inaugural volume in the Routledge Studies in Etymology series.

RICH LYONS published "Sun's Daughter, Moon's Son" and "What I could use" in the *Cimarron Review*, and was interviewed in *Straylight*.

KELLY MARSH was invited to participate in Ohio State's Project Narrative program, and presented a talk there entitled "Plotting the Unnarrated in Austen, Wharton, and McEwan."

ELIZABETH MILLER gave a talk entitled "'Freedom in the Air': The Activist Revisions of Frances Beal and the Third World Women's Alliance" at Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s).

BONNIE O'NEILL published *Literary Celebrity and Public Life in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Georgia).

CATHERINE PIERCE published ten poems, and had three others included in anthologies, including *Literature: The Human Experience*.

DAN PUNDAY published a chapter "Narrativity" in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Electronic Literature* and is serving this year as the President of the International Society for the Study of Narrative.

RICH RAYMOND has had his essay "Toby, Tristram, and the Reader: The Triumph and the Defeat of 'True Shandeism,'" accepted for publication this summer in *South Atlantic Review*.

DONALD SHAFFER published a special issue of *The South Atlantic Review* on "Black Transnationalism."

ANDREA SPAIN edited a special issue of *Safundi: The Journal of South African And American Studies* on "Circulating Sense: Writing in and Between South Africa & The U.S."

MEGAN SMITH has received a contract for a textbook, *Key Questions in Second Language Acquisition*.

ERIC VIVIER published "Judging Jonson: Ben Jonson's Satirical Self-Defense in Poetaster" in the Ben Jonson Journal.

ROBERT WEST published the two-volume *The Complete Poems of A.R. Ammons* (Norton).

DEPARTMENT LAUNCHES CAREER MENTOR PROGRAM

Today, students are under increasing pressure to choose “practical” majors, and often feel pushed into programs like nursing or engineering that are designed around professional preparation. We know that humanities majors help students get good jobs, and when English alumni are surveyed a few years after graduation, they’re overwhelmingly happy with their choice of major. For example a few years ago, the Association of Departments of English reported on an extensive survey of English alumni at Cal State Fullerton. Given the chance to do it all again, an overwhelming majority of respondents in that survey (96.8%) said they would recommend the English major to others, and less than one percent (0.65%) said they would recommend instead a “more practical” major, like business.

Although English can lead to great careers, sometimes it’s hard for them to imagine their future careers and to explain their decision to major in English to their families. It’s easy to imagine where a degree in Nursing can take you, but what does your future look like as an English major? We developed the Career Mentor program to help answer that questions for students and their families.

We are assembling a group of nine professionals with an undergraduate degree in English whose careers can serve as an inspiration for our students, including publishing, law, public relations, business, technical writing. Our Career Mentors will visit our Introduction to English Studies class (EN 1111) to talk about their field and to offer advice to current majors. And they’ll remain in contact with students during their four years in the majors to answer occasional questions and mentor our majors as their interests develop and their plans sharpen.

We are excited to have our first group of Career Mentors joining the department this summer, and we look forward to the way that they will inspire our students to think about their future.

THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT LAUNCHES INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Starting in the fall of 2018, our English department will be launching an internship program where students can earn credit for internships towards their major and where students can gain valuable work experience towards their future career paths. We will promote the program throughout the fall semester, and then we will offer an internship course in the spring of 2019 where students can earn course credit during their internship period. The internship course will provide professional development along with guidance during their internship period.

There are many scholarly articles that discuss how the English major is a viable major for careers in addition to education and research, and internships can add a tangible path for future careers. 80% of internships in general later turn into jobs, and our program will help our English majors gain experiences in both

exploring potential careers and working toward career goals. Our majors are already cultivating skills and knowledge, such as effective communication skills, research and analysis skills, and independent and creative-complex thinking skills, in our department courses that can help them excel at their careers, and these internships can help to enhance these skills. In general, interning shows potential employers that students are committed to their futures and are actively learning more about their career paths, and this gives students more weight in their employment considerations.

If you have information about an internship opportunity that our majors can apply for or if you have gone through an internship and would like to share your experience with our majors, please contact us – we would love to hear from you! internship@english.msstate.edu.

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Internships will allow our majors to gain valuable work experience and apply their knowledge and skills and to make professional connections with others in that industry.”

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

NICK WHITE

When I arrived at Mississippi State, I was twenty-two years old, naïve, and hopelessly in love with the sound of my own voice. So of course I entertained vague notions of becoming a poet. The words of Marianne Moore and Elizabeth Bishop spoke to me. I cottoned to their poems about animals—the fish and armadillos and moose. I thought often about how I could spend the rest of my life describing wild hogs, slain deer, pregnant skunks, the fauna of my childhood. It didn’t seem like such a bad row to hoe, all things considered.

I grew up about an hour and half from Starkville. The town was called Possumneck—but “town” might be an embellishment. Let’s call it a network of paved roads in the hill country, just outside the Delta. There were fields in front of my home and piney woods behind it. There was the Big, Black River, and there was my family, a host of aunts and uncles on my mother’s side, all of us living next door to each other, our own familial neighborhood in the middle of nowhere—but “nowhere” might be a slight. Because to me, it was the beginning and end of everything I knew of the world.

My childhood will not sound unique to those who, like me, grew up in rural parts of the country. My folks were just shy of poor. Oh, there were some in our family who had a little more than we did, but we didn’t like them very much, and always found cause to avoid them. Anyway, both of my parents worked, but “worked” might not fully convey the amount of toiling it took—week after week after week—to keep the lights on and enough food in the freezer. My father slogged away for many

years at the Attala County Co-op, driving these big trucks that spread seed in the fields. Then, he sold four-wheelers and tinkered on the small engines of lawn mowers and weed-eaters before finally earning his commercial driver’s license to drive semis. I cannot pass a NAPA Auto Parts and not think of him and of how his hands always smelled like grease and rubber. My mother worked, too: first, in a lamp factory for many years, then she became a salesclerk at a local office supply store a mile or so away in the town of Kosciusko—and by “town,” I mean an honest-to-god one, as they had a courthouse and a post office and a Wal-Mart Supercenter. I learned my parents had two modes of being: at work, and at rest. All this to say, they didn’t teach me to read, or instill in me a love of reading—this is not that kind of essay and we are not those kinds of people. But they labored away their lives, so I didn’t have to, so I could have the time and opportunity to find books on my own. They created a space for me, their son, to value my own education.

I showed up in Starkville, ready to begin my master’s degree, well-read and eager, but not really understanding what it meant to become a writer—not yet, anyway. The professors in the English Department challenged, terrified, worried, and inspired me—sometimes all at the same time. I spent my two years in the program in a state of wonder. It felt like a great luxury, to be able to talk books all day with such great thinkers and artists, who never patronized or belittled me for my ignorance. Learning to write was hard, and what’s more, it should have been. Michael Kardos,

in one of the first workshops I took at MSU, said that writing fiction requires more from us than time. Working closely with him, Becky Hagenston, and poets Rich Lyons and Catherine Pierce, I learned that creating art with words should require everything we have to give, and if we are lucky, it will push us beyond the limits of our own intellectual and emotional capabilities.

But maybe that is too highfalutin, so let me say it another way.

At Mississippi State, I learned that lying was an art. “We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that tells the truth,” Picasso said, or maybe he didn’t. Point is, it sounds like something Picasso would say. The quote strikes at the very paradox of fiction, this knot we storytellers must learn (and continually relearn) to untie.

How do we get these truths? Where do they come from?”

Well, I am not sure. If I knew the answer to this, I would either be much richer than I am now, or dead. Universities and colleges don’t provide us with easy answers—nor should they. Places like Mississippi State have another, perhaps more important goal: they help us find the questions. The great and good professors in the English Department did this for me. And in gratitude, I try to do the same for my own students.



A 2009 graduate of MSU’s M.A. program in English, Nick White is the author of the novel How to Survive a Summer (Blue Rider/Penguin, 2017). He is an Assistant Professor of English at The Ohio State University’s M.F.A. Program in Creative Writing. His short stories, poems, and essays have appeared in a variety of places, including The Kenyon Review, Guernica, The Hopkins Review, Indiana Review, The Literary Review, Lit Hub, and elsewhere. His short story collection, Sweet & Low, will be published on June 5, 2018 (Blue Rider/Penguin).

STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Kudos for our Students, Alumni, and Supporters

We inducted 13 majors into our Xi Chapter of the English Honorary Society, Sigma Tau Delta: Anna Bills, Rebekah Bisson, Joy Cariño, Frances Crawford, Haley Herndon, Bianca McKinnis, Emma Moffet, Joseph Black Pryor, Shaquarius J. Rayford, Mia Rodriguez, and Dajana Ware.

Howell and Elizabeth Gwin Scholarship Winners: Caroline Brandon

Eugene Butler Creative Writing Award: Mark Burr and Jared Lemus

Roger LaMoyné Dabbs Memorial Scholarship: Georgeann Kenney

Helen W. Skelton Endowed Scholarship: Kelsey Horn

Ann Pittman Andrews Memorial Endowed Scholarship: Jasmine Avery-McGuire

Peyton Ward Williams, Jr. Distinguished Writing Award: Meredith Hilliard

Brasher-Dazey Paper Award: Jessica Dulaney

Krista Barrett won the 2017 Gender Studies paper contest for her paper on Gaskell's *North and South*.

Morgan Hydrick, Meredith Hilliard, & Megan Pirkle were inducted into MSU's Society of Scholars.

Jared Lemus has had his story, "A Sort of True but Mainly Not Origin and Love Story" accepted for publication in *Kenyon Review Online*.

Francesca Wadlington (TESOL Certificate 2017) was awarded 1st place in the Arts and Humanities division of the MSU Undergraduate Research Symposium poster session and 3rd place in the three-minute Thesis Research Talk for her linguistics work on geminate consonants in Italian.

Meredith Hilliard won first place in the Arts and Humanities division of the MSU Undergraduate Research Symposium for her paper on Dante.

Nicole Poole (BA 2017) is in her first year at the University of Tennessee Law School, fully funded by a Dean's Scholarship.

Kristin Sheppard (BA 2017) accepted a TA position and entered the graduate program in English at Western Illinois University.

Krista Barrett (BA 2017) was accepted into LSU's Ph.D. program in English, to study Victorian literature.

Kelsey Marx (BA 2012), will earn her Masters of Public Health at George Washington University in 2018. She now works as a senior analyst Senior Analyst at Prometheus Federal Services in Washington D.C. She provides ongoing support for activities for the VA's Women's Health Service's Evidence-Based Quality Initiative and assists with research, drafting, editing, and piloting of OPA's clinical decision-making guide for implementing services for HIV prevention in Title X clinics.

Kelsey Norris (BA 2012) is a Research Fellow at the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, where she's working on The Fort Negley Descendants Project. She earned an MFA from Vanderbilt University in 2017 where she was the editor of Nashville Review, and she was an editorial intern at the Oxford American magazine. Her nonfiction was a finalist in Narrative's Fall Story Contest. Find her work at Kenyon Review online, Nashville Review, and Oxford American online.

Caroline Baker Smith (BA in English 2011, MA in English 2013) graduated from Mississippi College Law School in May of 2017 (where she was Managing Editor of the Law Review) and now holds a clerkship with the Honorable Leslie H. Southwick in the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit.

Nick White, (MA 2009, MFA OSU, PHD U Nebraska), has his first novel, *How to Survive a Summer*, published by Blue Rider Press (an imprint of Penguin/Random House) and has been widely reviewed, including by the *Washington Post*.

Lauren Shook (BA 2008, MA 2010, PhD UNC-Greensboro), accepted a position as Assistant Professor of English at Texas Lutheran University and will begin teaching there in Fall 2018.

Leigh Ann Sallis (BA 2006) is Company Manager for the Tennessee Williams Theatre Company of New Orleans (the only company in the country that only performs Williams's work).

Nancy Hargrove won the 2017 Robert E. Wolverton Arts and Sciences College Legacy Award.

JESS WALTER VISITS AS THE 2017 WRITER IN RESIDENCE



“Walter is the author of six novels and a book of short stories, whose work has been translated into over 30 languages.”

In February, the College of Arts & Science's Institute for the Humanities brought acclaimed fiction writer Jess Walter to campus as the university's 2018 Writer-in-Residence. A National Book Award finalist and winner of the Edgar Allan Poe Award, Jess Walter spent four days on campus. He attended the Craft of Fiction class for a special Q&A session, held office hours during which he met individually with students about their work and the writing life, and gave a public reading/Q&A for the university and Starkville community.

Walter is the author of six novels and a book of short stories, whose work has been translated into over 30 languages. His most recent novel, *Beautiful Ruins*, was a #1 *New York Times* bestseller and selected as a best book of the year by *Esquire*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *Publishers Weekly*. *Kirkus Reviews* writes, "Walter's Prose is a joy—funny, brash, witty, and rich, with ironic twists. He's taken all of the tricks of the postmodern novel and scoured out the cynicism, making for a novel that's life-affirming but never saccharine."

Walter's essays, short fiction, criticism and journalism have been published in *Best American Short Stories*, *Best American Nonrequired Reading*, *Harper's*, *Esquire*, *McSweeney's*, and elsewhere.

He grew up in Spokane, Washington, a city where he still lives and frequently incorporates into his fiction.

THANK YOU

TO OUR ALUMNI & FRIENDS

Over the past 13 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. Patten 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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