



2020

  
**MISSISSIPPI STATE**  
UNIVERSITY™  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

# RHYMES & REASONS NEWSLETTER

# THREE QUESTIONS

## FOR PROFESSOR DHANASHREE THORAT

The Department was thrilled to welcome Dr. Dhanashree Thorat as a new assistant professor in the fall of 2019. Dhanashree Thorat situates her research at the intersection of Asian American Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and Digital Humanities. Broadly, she examines how colonial and racial ideologies shape the technological imagination, specifically in technical infrastructures, platforms, and policies. Her current work focuses on how Muslims use hashtag activism to intervene in public conversations about their racialized bodies. She completed her PhD at the University of Florida (2017) and was a postdoctoral researcher in digital humanities at the Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities, University of Kansas from 2017-2019. Dhanashree is a founding Executive Council member of the Center for Digital Humanities, Pune in India. She serves as the lead organizer for a winter school on Digital Humanities, and advises the center on digital archival projects and DH curriculum development.

### For people unfamiliar with the term, what is digital humanities?

There are probably as many definitions of digital humanities as there are digital humanities practitioners! In the context of my own work in postcolonial digital humanities, I am especially interested in examining the entanglement of digital technology, colonial histories, and the lived realities of postcolonial people in the Global South. Broadly, I see digital humanities as a field offering three possibilities: 1) a set of digital methods that we can use to pursue humanistic inquiry, 2) applying and extending humanistic inquiry to digital spaces and computational practices, and 3) a toolkit or a mode of knowledge creation that enables publicly engaged scholarship.

### You've already done some really interesting projects in your classes since arriving at Mississippi State. Can you describe a couple?

Yes! I have to first say that it has been such a pleasure to teach in the department! In Fall 2019, my Multi-Ethnic U.S. Literature class set up an end-of-term event called the Mississippi Civil Rights Zine Fest. During the event, students showcased their zine projects which highlighted the rich tradition of Civil Rights activism and Black writing in Mississippi. The zines were multi-modal projects and students combined archival texts, photographs, speeches, poetry, and newspaper articles to write about important

figures such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Unita Blackwell, Richard Wright, James Meredith, and Richard Holmes. The zines will eventually be digitized and posted on a dedicated website so they are accessible to a broader public audience. I encourage my students to think through public and community-oriented humanities projects that connect classroom conversations to the social and political life of the communities we are embedded in. I'd like to give a quick shout-out to MSState Libraries here because some of my students worked with archival texts from our collections!

In Spring 2020, two English students (Neveah A.M. Payne and Charlotte McBride) co-facilitated an event to celebrate Frederick Douglass' birthday on February 14 called the Douglass Day transcribe-a-thon. This is a national event spearheaded by the Colored Conventions Project and this year they had set up a transcription of the papers of Dr. Anna Julia Cooper. Transcription ensures that digitized papers are machine readable and easily searchable. We got a good group of MSState colleagues to drop by and work on Dr. Cooper's letters, manuscripts, and other documents. We joined the 500+ volunteers who participated in the transcribe-a-thon and ensured that 100% of the project collection was transcribed.

Given the emphasis on community engaged learning at Mississippi State, I hope to continue these projects.

### What do you think these kinds of projects and the field of digital humanities offers more broadly?

Speaking specifically in the context of my class, these projects have raised important conversations in class about local histories, how we can be accountable to our communities, and the role of the Humanities in community advocacy. My students also share and reflect on their school education and learn to identify the absences and gaps in the histories and literature that they encountered. In just my first year here, for example, I've heard students sharing that they hadn't heard about several important Black Mississippi writers and activists or heard about Asian American migration in the Mississippi Delta. What do we do once we identify such gaps? How can students share the knowledge and ideas that they have learned? What role do we play in local memory-making? Community oriented projects ask students to think through and in their local contexts, and digital humanities offers us platforms and methods that can be turned towards that end. I have been fortunate to have had excellent students in my undergrad and grad courses who have taken up these lines of thinking and run with them.



# FACULTY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**DON SHAFFER** was appointed the Director of African American Studies.

**TOMMY ANDERSON** was appointed Associate Dean for the College of Arts & Sciences.

**MICHAEL KARDOS** and **KATIE PIERCE** were promoted to Full Professor.

**TED ATKINSON** published "Too Small to Fail: Jason Compson's Precarious Self-Worth" in *Faulkner and Money* (University Press of Mississippi).

**KATE BARBER** published three stories in 2019 and was a finalist and honorable mention for the James Hurst Prize for Fiction.

**SHALYN CLAGGETT** presented "Through the Looking Glass: Literary Adaptation in Victorian Magic Lantern Shows" at the Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies Conference, as well as papers at the North American Victorian Studies Association Conference and the SEC Colloquium on Nineteenth-Century Studies.

**PETER DEGABRIELE** presented "The Deconstruction of the Eighteenth Century: Derrida in the 1960s" at the Annual Meeting of the American Society for Eighteen Century Studies.

**LARA DODDS** published "Affected and Disaffected Alike: Women, Print, and the Problem of Literary History" in *Political Turmoil: Early Modern British Literature in Transition, 1623-1660* (Cambridge) and presented papers at four conferences, including the Modern Language Association Conference.

**KAYLEIGH FEW** presented "Our Rhetorical Creation of Space" at the International Writing Center Association Conference.

**JESSICA FLOWERS**, and graduate students Emma Moffett and Juliana Jones presented "Social Media Wizards and the Golden Tweet" at the Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference.

**KATHERINE FLOWERS** published "Writing Studies' Concessions to the English-Only Movement: Revisiting CCCC's National Language Policy and its Reception" in *College Composition and Communication* and Resisting and Rewriting English-Only Policies: Navigating

Multilingual, Raciolinguistic, and Translingual Approaches to Language Advocacy" in *Literacy in Composition Studies*.

**BECKY HAGENSTON'S** short story "Hi Ho Cherry-O" has been selected for a 2020 Pushcart Prize. She published six short stories this year as well.

**WENDY HERD** presented "Variation, Vowels, and Vocal Fold Vibration in Mississippi" at ACCESS: Cognitive Science Research Forum.

**HOLLY JOHNSON** published volume 1 of *Robert Rypon: Selected Sermons* (Peeters), and gave two conference papers.

**MICHAEL KARDOS** won the 2019 Grisham Master Teacher Award, the university's highest honor in teaching.

**MATT LITTLE** published three articles in *Comments on Etymology*, and presented "Origin of 'Put the Kibosh on': Solving a Long-Standing Etymological Mystery" at the Biennial Meeting of the Dictionary Society of North America.

**RICH LYONS** published *Heart House* (Emrys Press). He also published eight poems.

**KELLY MARSH** published "Suspended Seriality and the Recovery of Bridget Jones" in *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory*. She also gave the Branton Lecture at Washington and Jefferson College.

**PETER B. OLSON** presented "Robert Pirsig, Romantic Science and Post-War Culture: A Chautauqua on Axiological and Aesthetic Theory" at the Rocky Mountain MLA conference (Oct. 2019), El Paso TX. He taught a summer course (2019), *Nature Writing in Big Sky Country: Journaling in the Last Best Place* at Montana State University.

**BONNIE O'NEILL** presented "Lecturers to Young Men: Henry Ward Beecher's Manly Virtue" at the American Literature Association Conference.

**CATHERINE PIERCE** also won an extremely competitive \$25,000 National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship. She also published 14 poems and two creative non-fiction essays.

**DAN PUNDAY** published *Playing at Narratology: Digital Media as Narrative Theory* (Ohio State University Press).

**RICH RAYMOND** published "Teaching English Literature Survey as a Writing Course—Online" in *College English Association Forum*.

**MEGAN SMITH** published *Key questions in Second Language Acquisition* (Cambridge University Press).

**ANDREA SPAIN** presented her lecture, "Index," for the Judith E. Wilson writers series at the University of Cambridge, UK. At Mississippi State, she launched our new Minor in Film Studies housed in the English Department.

**ANN SPURLOCK, ABIGAIL VOLLER, KATIE DOUGHTY,** and **AARON GRIMES** presented "Speak Up! Helping Students Find Their Voices" at the National Organization for Student Success Conference.

**DHANASHREE THORAT** published "Colonial Topographies of Internet Infrastructure" in *South Asian Review*. She also gave presentations at six conferences, including the Modern Language Association Conference.

**ERIC VIVIER** published "Gabriel Harvey Against Satire" in *English Literary Renaissance*. He also won the College of Arts & Sciences Outstanding Teacher Award.

**JERVETTE WARD** presented "Do Black Women Have a Seat at the Table of Great Debates?" at the Modern Language Association Conference, as well as presenting at the SAMLA and the College Language Association.

**ROBERT WEST** published two interviews in *Conversations with Robert Morgan* (University of Mississippi Press), a poem, and gave presentations at two conferences. He also won the College of Arts & Sciences Outstanding Research Award.

**KELLY MARSH** and **DAN PUNDAY** organized the 2020 International Society for the Study of Narrative conference in New Orleans, with Mississippi State as the host.



As a young English major at Mississippi State, I had dreams of graduating and working in the publishing industry to learn the business and eventually publish my first novel. This dream is not unique among English majors, I know, but I believe the roots of this shared vision are telling. Books were my religion growing up, and I found solace and escape in stories that taught me the world was bigger than my rural slice of it, that art was seductive, and that language was powerful.

These stories became my companions. I leaned on them and learned from them and framed my dreams around them. I think many of us English majors fell in love with stories and the art of storytelling when we were young, which shapes our goals of becoming like the novelists and poets we've admired for so long. I found comfort in knowing that my like-minded classmates and professors understood where that yearning stemmed from and that we could share our passion through analytical discussions and uncensored excitement about our favorite texts and poems.

While it's valid (and inspirational) to work toward those name-in-print dreams following graduation, it's simply not the path many of us find ourselves on after all. I eventually landed at the Sun Herald newspaper in Biloxi, and it was a different type of publishing experience than I had envisioned. During my time there, I had to cultivate a certain type of restraint in my writing style as this was my first real-world experience in writing for the general public. I couldn't write the way I did for my English professors or even in standard business writing styles, so if there was ever a time when I needed to articulate my ideas with careful nuance in order to be understood, it was there. Effective communication is certainly more than just crafting well-researched analysis papers. It's also being able to drill down to an idea and

express it clearly, presenting evidence of support along the way. In 2015, I had the opportunity to co-create an interactive application for the tenth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina with the Sun Herald. It had video, photo stories, articles, and personal testimonies, but the design spaces to feature this content were smartphone and tablet screens. Editing down text and interviews featuring first-hand accounts of surviving the historic storm took care and an appreciation for the necessary emotional impact of the survivors' words. In this instance, brevity was paramount, but in distilling these stories, we also had to maintain their integrity. It was a rewarding challenge and one that illustrated the importance of versatility in our study of stories. I found my experience exercising this practice of mindful editing vital, but that growth would not have been possible without the foundational skills I earned through my study as an English major.

It was my time at the paper that led me to seek a new position using writing in a way I hadn't considered before, one that effects change for those victimized by violence. I sought the position of Resource Development Director with the Gulf Coast Center for Nonviolence, a nonprofit organization that serves adults and children affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, and homicide. I'm often asked about my background and how I came into a position like this one, which is responsible for bringing in funding to sustain the agency's programs. It's unusual in my field to have someone on staff who studied literature. It's more common to see social workers, therapists, advocates, and financial professionals. I've met other development directors from diverse backgrounds, but I've never met another one who studied English. But that still seems odd to me because much of my job is detailed grant writing, composing formal requests and communications packages for local government entities, public speaking, and writing for the local media. In my experience, a background in English is crucial to succeeding at these tasks. I'm responsible for ensuring the agency can sustain funding, so careful, persuasive writing clearly detailing the organization's mission, goals, and strategies to use allocated funds under strict guidelines is what sets a grant application apart. If an argument I'm crafting in support of the agency's mission fails to convey the need behind its request, programs are not funded. Lost funding means lost counseling

services, lost legal services, and lost emergency shelter services for those in need.

Thanks to my degree in English, appreciating the ways language can be harnessed to persuade, educate, and inform is my first thought when I start researching a new project that will help expand and preserve these lifesaving social services.

It makes me proud to know that my skills are derived from bringing ideas together and then seeing the results of that effort demonstrated through the direct services provided by my colleagues. I worked with Blue Magnolia Films a couple of years ago to produce a photo story project on the Center to show the importance of these services in our community. I had the honor of writing the agency's story, narrating it, and photographing the programs. I had no idea what direction it would take in the beginning, but the result ended up being a story about the significance of treating each other with dignity and empathy. Whether a viewer had experienced violence did not matter. What mattered in the end was that they could relate to the universal experience of human suffering and that how we tell each other's stories matters. The skills I've learned as an English major help me communicate with readers in a way that activates them, whether that's through an approved funding application or a converted supporter for the cause. Perhaps I'm biased, but I do believe language is an essential tool to induce change in a world that often neglects the importance of our words.

Language is an art. All the readers, writers, and students of literature can agree, I think. We analyze its depth, its beauty, and its ability to unify our experiences. We wield it to show capability and compassion. And we turn to its stories for comfort and inspiration. Without my time in the English Department, I would still love books and language, but I would not have the training, the experience, or the confidence to take risks and teach others why they need an English major on their team. It's about what we can do, not what we're expected to do.

# FOOD AND IDENTITY IN LITERATURE

DE'ARIS RHYMES, M.A. 2020

Whether food is being used as a setting, as in the awkward feasting scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, or as a character, such as everyone's guilty pleasure, Teacake, from Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*, or even as a source of contention, as in Dr. Seuss's famous *Green Eggs and Ham*, there is no doubt that food plays a vital role in literature. While food makes literature a worthy indulgence, the larger question becomes, what role does this seemingly subtle image tell us about these texts? What is at stake if these food scenes are not included in literature? Dr. Jervette R. Ward's *Food and Identity in Literature* course explores both these questions, and others, while examining food as it relates to power, and studying the ways in which food shapes the way we view the world today. Starting as a graduate course in the Spring of 2019, this course has created a scholarly conversation transcending the classroom and becoming a public engagement project which addresses the immediate need of discourse surrounding food accessibility and insecurity across the nation. Focusing on the identities of characters in literature along with our own experiences with food, *Food and Identity in Literature* teaches students that food is a universal right that is often used for power and pleasure.

Over the course of one semester, students start reading Lizzie Collingham's *The Hungry Empire*, a historical revisionist text which argues that it was Britain's quest for food that led to the British Empire's imperial history. The class also reads Frederick Douglass Opie's *Zora Neale Hurston on Florida Food: Recipes, Remedies & Simple Pleasures and Southern Food and Civil Rights: Feeding the Revolution*. These texts prompt students to think about the American South, a place that is often considered the epicenter of both slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. We also study food and historical events, such as study the murder of Thomas Moss. Moss, the owner of People's Grocery in Memphis, Tennessee, provided groceries for African American shoppers in the segregated South. In 1892, He was lynched by a white mob while in police custody. This unfortunate event illustrates that food is a prominent, powerful tool that was tragically taken away from African American shoppers in Memphis by the murder

of the grocery store's owner. We then read Anne Moody's memoir, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. Moody, a graduate of the historically Black institution, Tougaloo College, also participated in the well-known Woolworth Sit-In, where students walked into Woolworth's five and dime restaurant in Jackson, Mississippi and were refused service because they sat at the lunch counter reserved for white customers only. This sit-in was another demonstration of food being used as power to uphold whiteness and segregation in the American South. By the middle of the semester, the connection between food, literature, and historical events in the American South caused students to notice that food within our own communities has been at the center of injustices in America for decades and even centuries. While we often think about food in excess, food in literature allows us to shift our focus and think about food scarcity, a prominent issue right here in Starkville, Mississippi. With unwavering support from Mississippi State University's English department and members of Starkville and Oktibbeha county, Dr. Ward and graduate students De'Arís Rhymes, Katherine Brown, Charlotte McBride, Theophilus Okunlola, Taylor Greer, Sam Kealhofer, Ross Rogers, and Kat Bowman created The Starkville Table of Culinary Justice to publicly engage with Mississippians across the state on the importance of food justice while giving back to Mississippi, a state that has historically been at the center of food injustice dating back to the enslavement of Africans. This event was widely successful, selling 48 of our 50 tickets and raising hundreds of dollars, all of which was graciously donated to the Mississippi Food Network, a charity focused on feeding families in Mississippi. We raised funds to feed the hungry while simultaneously raising awareness on the immediate need for culinary justice in our own communities.

The success of this service project inspired Dr. Ward and her research assistant, De'Arís Rhymes, to ensure The Starkville Table of Culinary Justice became an annual event, and to expand this project by critically examining food and cultural sites across the world. Together, the two created the 2020 Food and Identity in Literature Spring Break Field Trip. They planned to visit Washington, D.C. and New York City, two cities that are considered melting pots of multicultural foods and

ethnicities as well as two of the epicenters that housed the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s. Dr. Ward and De'Arís planned for students to visit several restaurants and cultural sites, including The Hamilton, The National Museum of African American History and Culture, Sweet Home Cafe, Busboys and Poets, The National Museum of the American Indian, and the Mitsam Cafe in Washington, D.C. They also planned to visit Juniors Cheesecake, The Schomburg Center for Research and Black Culture, The African Center and Seasoned Vegan, a soul food vegan restaurant in New York City. The purpose of this energetic and refreshing trip was to allow students at Mississippi State University the opportunity to travel and explore culinary cultures unlike their own. We anticipated students coupling their mostly Southern background and experiences with those of the Northeastern United States. Unfortunately, after traveling to D.C. and enjoying just one meal, our trip was quickly halted as D.C. was placed under a state of emergency due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Although this was not the experience that was planned, this trip taught us that public health should always be our top priority. Now, more than ever, we understand that access to food is a right and a resource that we must share and provide for people across the world.

On April 29, 2020, with even more ammunition to give back to students who were devastatingly affected by the coronavirus at Mississippi State University, Dr. Ward and undergraduate students Toria Folsom, Joseph MacGown, Tysah Owens, Nevaeh Payne, and Mia Rodriguez hosted a virtual chat on Twitter to discuss the origin and the relevance of Southern cuisine in literature. They noticed that the idea of Southern cooking often leaves out other cultures and ethnicities that have contributed to Southern cuisine, including, but not limited to, Mexican, Jewish, African, Native American, and Southern French cultures. From the confines of their homes, these students were able to raise funds to support Mississippi State University's

Bully's Closet and Pantry, a campus resource that provides food and other personal necessities for students in need. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, many of the campus's food services closed, and students relied

on Bully's Pantry for food. Even during this unprecedented pandemic, The Starkville Table of Culinary Justice continued its original purpose of engaging with the public while initiating a much-needed discourse centered on food and accessibility in the American South.

The Starkville Table of Culinary Justice is just getting started! With the support of students, faculty, and the public, we plan to expand this project by collaborating with local restaurants, food agencies, and charities across the state, including the Mississippi Humanities Council. We also plan to travel and critically examine food internationally by studying the culinary and cultural experiences of people all across the world. As this course grows, *Food and Identity in Literature* will continue highlighting the importance of questioning the role of food in literary texts while also addressing the need for food justice within all of our shared communities.

Join us and share this culinary experience  
by following MSU's Food and Literature  
project on Instagram and Twitter @  
**MSUFoodLit**  
<https://www.instagram.com/msufoodlit/>  
<https://twitter.com/MSUFoodLit>

# 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: Toria Folsom, Sabrina Guichard, Mazie Pizzolato, Ella Schalski, Reagan Sumrall, Riley Stephens, Cameron Temple, Anna Claire Tucker, Rebecca Woods.

Howell and Elizabeth Gwin Scholarship Winners:

**Madison Brown, Avery Ferguson, Rebekah Grisham, Katelyn Poe, Reagan Poston, Emma Moffett-Taylor, Hollie Tucker**

Eugene Butler Creative Writing Award: **Madison Brown, Lindsey Fisher, Reagan Poston, Ross Rodgers**

Dr. Richard F. Patteson Endowed Scholarship: **Sandra Currier**

Mildred Freeman Shurlds English Annual Scholarship: **Toria Folsom**

Roger LaMoyne Dabbs Memorial Scholarship: **Dorothy Higgs, Deshalia Murray, Dustin Smith**

Helen W. Skelton Endowed Scholarship: **Macie Stone**

Ann Pittman Andrews Memorial Endowed Scholarship: **Kameron Keel**

Peyton Ward Williams, Jr. Distinguished Writing Award: **Frances Crawford**

Brasher-Dazey Paper Award: **Rebekah Grisham**

Stacey Goff Endowed Scholarship: **Taylor Anderson**

William H. Magruder Memorial Scholarship: **Anna Kirksey Sheffield**

**Rebekah Bisson, Gentry Burkes, Joy Carino, Frances Crawford, Avery Ferguson, Lily Hebert, Juliana Jones, Emma Moffett, Katelyn Poe, Rebecca Poyner, Juliette Reid, Helen Schwartz, Kathryn Stringer,**

**William Textor** were the inaugural inductees into Mississippi State's Phi Beta Kappa chapter.

**Joy Cariño** was chosen to participate this summer in the U.S. Department of State-sponsored Critical Language Scholarship Program in Indonesia.

**Reagan Poston** won 2nd place in the poetry category for this year's Southern Literary Festival for her poem "Reform," and represented Mississippi State at the Festival held at Christian Brothers University in Memphis.

**Sam Dean** and **Toria Folsom** presented a paper "Maintaining Writer Identity of ESL Students in the Writing Center" at the Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference.

**Rebecca Poyner** has been accepted to Virginia Commonwealth University's MFA program in poetry.

**Carolyn Angelo** (MA 2020) published "Critical Sociolinguistic Research Methods" with Dr. Katherine Flowers in *Language Policy*. This fall, she will be joining MSU's English Department as a Lecturer teaching both Composition and Descriptive English Grammar. She plans to pursue at PhD in a few years, possibly in linguistics or TESOL.

**Taylor Greer** (MA 2020) will be joining the faculty at Germantown High School in Madison, Mississippi, where she will be teaching 12th-grade English in a dual enrollment program with Holmes Community College. She will also have the opportunity of teaching online courses with Holmes.

**Sam Kealhofer** (MA 2020) successfully defended his creative thesis "Inheritance" this Spring, which passed with distinction. The thesis was chaired by Dr. Catherine Pierce. In addition, he has published the following poems in literary journals: "Life Among the Magnolias" in the *Peregrine Journal*, "Business Model" in *The Dunes Review*, "Spring Sonnet" in *From Whispers to Roars Literary Magazine*. The poems "Aubade" and "Self Portrait" are forthcoming in the next issue of *The Roanoke Review*.

**Charlotte McBride** (MA 2020) has been invited to teach Language Arts to junior high school students in Kosciusko. This was Charlotte's school district when she was growing up.

**Amber Morgan** (MA 2020) will be joining the MSU English Department as a Lecturer this fall where she will be teaching Composition.

**Theophilus Okunlola** (MA 2020) successfully defended his MA thesis "The Rwandan Genocide in Writing and Visuality: Memory, Representations of Violence, and the Anthropocene" in April, and passed with distinction. The thesis was chaired by Dr. Andrea Spain. In the fall, he will enter the Ph.D. program in English at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where he will continue his research on

genocide, representations of violence, and memory. He has already been awarded a university fellowship, and awaits a final decision on another university-wide fellowship for which he was nominated by the department.

**De'Aris Rhymes** (MA 2020) will be pursuing his Ph.D. in English at Arizona State University, where he will be studying constructions of race in early modern literature. He has also received two University fellowships: the Interdisciplinary Enrichment Fellowship and the University Graduate Fellowship.

**Ella Schalski** (BA 2020) was accepted into the MA program at George Washington University.

**Mia Rodriguez** (BA 2020) has been accepted into the Teach for America program.

**Laura Purl Koleva** (BA 2013, MA 2015) has been accepted to a PhD program in English at Texas Tech University.

**Susan Martin Bailey** (BA 1998, MA 2000) was offered a high school teaching position in Corinth, MS.

**Sara Creel** (MA 2019) was accepted into PhD programs at the University of Nebraska and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville to study early modern literature and film adaptation.

**Ginny Leonard** (MA 2007) gave a public lecture for her Humanities Teaching award at East Mississippi Community College, titled, "Literature in Relief: Healing the Human Spirit,"

**Chris (Elliot) Sudduth** (BA 2020) was admitted to Mississippi State's Masters of Arts in Teaching program.

**Michelle Aucoin Wait** (BA 2015, MA 2017) published "Medusa Rewritten" in *The Meadow*.

**Annie Watson** published the children's book *Is 2 a Lot: An Adventure With Numbers* (Tilbury House Publishers).

# CRITICAL LANGUAGE SCHOLARSHIP

JOY CARIÑO

“ *I was raised by the Indonesian language that is clever and witty. / Though sometimes complicated and confusing, / it nevertheless teaches me how to compose knowledge / so I know / that the source of every story is love...*”

(translated from “Kamus Kecil”  
(*Little Dictionary*) by Joko Pinurbo)

On a chilly, windy midnight in August, on a stage in an abandoned movie theater, I found myself reading Indonesian poetry at an open mic in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. I had never thought I would be in such a place, yet I was there, supported by new friends, teachers, and fellow book-lovers and poetry-enthusiasts in a country across the globe.

From June to August 2019, I had the privilege of studying Bahasa Indonesia on the U.S. Department of State’s Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) Program. The CLS Program is part of the U.S. government’s initiative to help more American students learn critical languages—languages less commonly taught in the U.S. and spoken in regions of the world important for national security. For me, I not only learned about Indonesia’s position on the global stage or the effects of globalization in Indonesia, but I also learned the ins and outs of a whole Indonesian poem.

The week before the open mic, I was working on my final class project to top off the last eight weeks of Indonesian language classes at the Universitas Negeri Malang (Malang State University). I chose to do my final project on styles of Indonesian poetry reading. For data collection, I interviewed other Indonesian students who wrote and performed poetry. One of my interviewees told me there was a Malam Puisi (*Poetry Night*) happening that weekend at Patjar Merah, a traveling literacy festival and book market that held events across Indonesia. He was going to read his favorite poem “Kamus Kecil” (*Little Dictionary*) by Joko Pinurbo, and he invited me to read the poem with him as a collaborative poetry performance! I was elated and immediately agreed, but soon I felt anxious, a feeling I often felt while communicating with others in this language I felt I only knew precariously.

Yet, over the next few days, my language tutors (other Indonesian students chosen by the CLS Program to help us American students study Indonesian and navigate the city) supported me patiently as I read the poem repeatedly, translated it into English, then practiced reading it with purpose and oomph. My two amazing tutors helped and cheered me on, as they graciously did throughout the two months we shared trying to understand one another. Finally, Poetry Night came along, and as I took turns with my friend reading each line scribbled into my notebook, I was amazed I could even read and understand this clever, beautiful poem that celebrated how language—like a mother’s love—never leaves our memory.

Before traveling to Indonesia, I tried to read all the statistics, news, travel blogs I could find to ease my fears about navigating a country I knew little about. Perhaps all the reading helped ease my mind beforehand, but what truly helped me learn the most was allowing myself to be taken in by a community. From Mississippi State University to Malang, Indonesia, I had the privilege of being taken in by several communities. Such connections certainly prepared me for the misunderstandings and anxieties of study abroad but also the joys of immersing oneself in a new language, one that is clever and witty, complicated and confusing.

# SPRING 2020 WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE

BENJAMIN PERCY

“ The *New York Times* called his latest story collection, *Suicide Woods*, “twisted and thorny and beautiful. A small masterpiece.”



In February, the College of Arts and Sciences brought acclaimed fiction writer Benjamin Percy to campus as the 2020 Institute for the Humanities Writer-in-Residence. Percy is the author of four novels, three story collections, and a book of essays on craft. His sci-fi trilogy, *The Comet Cycle*, will be published in 2021 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and has been optioned by the Russo brothers. He is part of the new *Dawn of X-Men* at Marvel and writes both *Wolverine* and *X-Force*; he has also written for DC Comics and Dynamite Entertainment. His honors include a Whiting Award, an NEA fellowship, the Plimpton Prize, two Pushcart Prizes, and inclusion in *Best American Short Stories*, *100 Years of the Best American Short Stories*, and *Best American Comics*.

The *New York Times* called his latest story collection, *Suicide Woods*, “twisted and thorny and beautiful. A small masterpiece,” and the writer Karen Russell says, “Benjamin Percy’s genre-busting, electrifying fiction is opening doors for a new generation of writers.”

During his four days on campus, Benjamin Percy visited the Craft of Fiction class, participated in meals with students and faculty, and held office hours with creative writing students. He visited the Last Page Comic Book Store to sign copies of his just-launched *Wolverine No. 1* comic.

The main event of his visit was his lecture, a free event for students and the public. Percy talked about craft, read from his work, and answered questions from an enthusiastic audience of students, faculty and members of the Starkville community.

# THANK YOU

## TO OUR ALUMNI & FRIENDS

Over the past 15 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](mailto:sfrederic@foundation.msstate.edu).



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