

SUMMER 2022

# GIVE ME GOOD NEWS

The Department of English Newsletter

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

## What's up with you?

Our English faculty share their latest updates and adventures!

### Lance Svehla

Lance Svehla recently had a book chapter published. The chapter is titled: "A Lighthouse and a Crossroads: The Rhetorical Strategy of President Barack Obama."

### Jon Miller

Jon Miller's Spring 2022 Writers on Writing class created a literary magazine, *Sequence: A Mixtape of Writings*, which will be printed this summer.

### David Giffels

David Giffels is proud to be one of three English Department faculty members to receive a Faculty Research Committee Summer Fellowship, along with Patrick Chura and Grace Zhang. Only 14 fellowships were granted university-wide this year, so that's a great showing for English! David will spend the summer working on a historical novel called "Take the Guitar Player for a Ride," set in Cleveland in the 1970s and 80s. It involves the city's early punk scene, Phil Collins, cheap beer, Anita Baker, and the ghost of Langston Hughes, among other things.

### Julie Drew

Dr. Julie Drew will attend an intensive writers' workshop at Dalnaglar Castle, Scotland in July, where she'll work closely with New York Times bestselling YA author Maggie Stiefvater. Drew's project for the workshop is the second volume of her new YA fantasy series, *The Deeping Chronicles*.

### Bill Thelin

Bill Thelin will be bowling in the USBC Nationals in Las Vegas this June. After that, his time will be spent writing a novel on which he has been working for two years. He's hoping for a successful and productive summer.

# Mary Biddinger

Mary Biddinger's latest poetry collection *Department of Elegy* was published by Black Lawrence Press in early 2022. New poems have appeared in *Allium*, *Bennington Review*, *Couplet Poetry*, *Crazyhorse*, *The Laurel Review*, *Pithead Chapel*, and *Thrush Poetry Journal*, among others. Stories have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Always Crashing*, *DIAGRAM*, *Gone Lawn*, *On the Seawall*, and *West Trestle Review*. She received Pushcart Prize nominations in poetry and fiction this year.

Mary attended the Association of Writers and Writing Programs conference in March, where she and colleague Jon Miller sold University of Akron Press books to poetry fans gathered in Philadelphia. She participated in two poetry readings at the conference, including the annual "Rock and Roll Reading," which took place offsite at Tattooed Mom. In October, Mary traveled to Indianapolis to be featured in the Rufus & Louise Reiberg Reading Series at IUPUI.

This summer she is finishing her current writing project, which is a flash fiction novella that chronicles the adventures of two graduate school roommates living in Chicago in the late 1990s, and spending time with her new tortoiseshell kitten, Blanche.



# Patrick Chura

Patrick Chura recently received a Faculty Research Committee Summer Fellowship for archival research into the life and career of leftist novelist and screenwriter Albert Maltz. Professor Chura's work will take him to library manuscript collections in Boston, New York, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

In April 2022, Chura contracted with the London-based publisher Alma Books to re-issue Albert Maltz's 1966 novel *A Tale of One January* in both the UK and USA. This novel, based on Maltz's extensive interviews with an Auschwitz survivor, was acclaimed in Great Britain but denied publication in the United States because Maltz was blacklisted. Chura will write the introduction to the new edition (scheduled for release in 2023) and include an appendix consisting of previously unpublished Holocaust testimony.

During the 2021-22 academic year, Professor Chura published three reference articles in *The Literary Encyclopedia*, including a critical biography of bell hooks (co-authored with UA student Cadence Dangerfield) and essays on Louisa May Alcott and Walter Mosley. He also reviewed Darko Suvin's recent book, *Communism, Poetry: Communicating Vessels* for the scholarly journal *Socialism and Democracy* and published several pieces of journalism in *The People's World* magazine.

# Heather Braun



Dr. Heather Braun recently returned to her alma mater, Lafayette College in Easton, PA, to lead human-centered design workshops for current engineering students and the first cohort of [Dyer Center Fellows](#).

In February, Braun gave the talk, "Moms and Other Monsters: The Angel in the House in Lockdown" for the *Rethinking Gender Series* sponsored by UA's Women's Studies Department.

In March 2022, she offered a four-hour design thinking workshop to 50 project managers from Brazil enrolled in the [LAI OB Executive Leadership Program](#). This workshop focused on how the process and mindsets of design thinking can deepen one's understanding of customers, teams, and products.

In April 2022, Braun facilitated a session on "Empathy and Creative Problem-Solving" for the 2022 Diamond Women's Leadership Speaker Series through the College of Business Administration.

Her book chapter, "Literary Activism and Norman Mailer," was published in *The Cambridge Companion to Norman Mailer* (2021).

# Tales from the Classroom

featuring

## Hillary Nunn



In Hillary Nunn's Spring 2022 Digital Projects in the Archives class (Menus and Manuscripts at the Hower House), students conducted hands-on research at the Hower House Museum and University Archives. The class centered on a trove of handwritten recipes and dinner menus recently found in the Museum, where Blanche Hower scribbled down directions for making family favorites, as well as recorded what she served at the many parties she hosted. The students' mission was twofold: to make these hundred-year-old materials publicly accessible in a digital format, and to create group projects to illustrate how cooking and dining helped shape the Akron's social world in the early twentieth century.

Working in teams, students investigated subjects ranging from the ins and outs of cooking on a wood stove, the role of servants in the household, and what it meant to dress for dinner in turn-of-the-century Akron. They prepared recipes ranging from sugar cookies to beet salad, blogging and videotaping as they went, as well as writing more traditional academic papers about their efforts.

The course was listed as an [Un]Class through the EXL Center, which means that it was interdisciplinary in focus and concentrated on student-led, experiential learning. NEOMFA student Mixby Dickon says of the class, "We became aware of the many twists and turns of conducting archival research. There were both successes and failures, and plenty of times when we simply didn't know where to go next. With the help of a research community, we were able to combine our efforts and support each other through the often-arduous research process."

The students are currently working with The University of Akron Press to publish a book of the Hower Family's recipes. To read accounts of their works in progress, [check out their blogs](#). You can also access the [searchable recipe archive they created](#).



[Un]Class students filming as they prepare Blanche Hower's recipes. From left, Sean Miller, Megan Delaney, and Mixby Dickon.

*And Now a Word from*  
**THE AC\***

**\*Assistant Chair Lisa Rhoades**

*Hello friends,*

Congratulations on wrapping up what I know most would agree was a challenging yet rewarding semester. Being back in the classroom with our students, and eventually seeing their full, shining faces, made the challenges worth the ongoing struggles presented by the pandemic.

Transitioning into this new role as AC and Undergrad Advisor has been a wonderful journey. Under the amazing guidance of new chair, Mary Biddinger, I am learning more with each passing day. Soon enough, I suspect she will tire of my endless queries, but until then, I am taking full advantage of her wisdom.

One thing we should be seeing more of is student traffic in our main office. I have been working to meet with our students and encouraging them to be as present as they are comfortable being in the halls of Olin (and on campus in general). We have welcomed several new majors this semester and said goodbye to many others as they write the next chapter in their lives. We are welcoming our first BA/MA student in the fall and look for others to follow.

Our outreach to students has yielded at least one internship thus far, with more possibilities as summer nears. Kathie Oden will be interning with IGV content development this summer. New graduate Cadence Dangerfield accepted a graduate assistantship position at Case Western where she will work toward her Master's Degree.

Please keep sending students my way; I love meeting with them, and I love hearing the positive stories that come from their experiences in the classroom. In addition, I continue to work with Mary and Kate to expand our reach on social media, and I appreciate all materials you can send my way.

*Have a fabulous summer,  
Lisa*



# Read any good books lately?

Check out our faculty's recommended summer reads!

## Mary Biddinger

- *The Butterfly Lampshade* by Aimee Bender
- *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett
- *Instructions Between Takeoff and Landing* by Charles Jensen
- *The Incendiaries* by R.O. Kwon
- *Whereabouts* by Jhumpa Lahiri
- *The Glass Hotel* by Emily St. John Mandel
- *What Are You Going Through* by Sigrid Nunez
- *Velvet Hounds* by Aimee Seu
- *Our Country Friends* by Gary Shteyngart

## David Giffels

- *Cuyahoga: A Novel* by Pete Beatty
- *Booth* by Karen Joy Fowler
- *Devil House* by John Darnielle

## Tom Dukes

- *The 6:41 to Paris* by Jean-Philippe Blondel, a novel
- *Death of a Red Heroine* by Qiu Xiaolong, a long but very good post-Mao Chinese mystery
- *The Wild Iris* by Nobel Prize winner Louise Glück, poetry
- *The Beauty of Dusk* by Frank Bruni, about his losing sight in one eye due to a stroke: the book is an excellent exploration of disability, writing, and how others handle sight loss in remarkable ways

## Heather Braun

- *Such a Fun Age* by Kiley Reid
- *Oh, William* by Elizabeth Strout
- *Book of Delights* by Ross Gay
- *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo* by Taylor Jenkins Reid
- *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel
- *Kindred* by Octavia Butler
- *Mary Jane* by Jessica Anya Blau

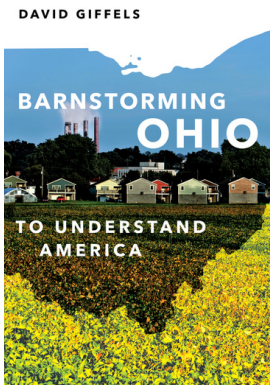
## Lance Svehla

- *It's Not Free Speech: Race, Democracy, and the Future of Academic Freedom* by Michael Bérubé and Jennifer Ruth. I should warn you: I do not like this book. I disagree with the authors' conception and definition of Academic Freedom, their conception and definition of Free Speech, and their ideas on how the two interact. Nevertheless, I do think the topic is important, and I do like some of their ideas on protecting the academic freedom of adjunct faculty, who often suffer the brunt of censorship. Anyway, it's not a fun summer read, and I think it's an incredibly flawed book, but it is also an incredibly vital subject.
- *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi. On a different note, if you want to read one of the best graphic novels ever written (or are interested in seeing what graphic novels "can do"), check out this book. It's a fantastic, moving, tragic yet funny story of a young girl living through the Iranian revolution. If you love graphic novels but have never read this one, or if you are new to or skeptical about graphic novels, this is a must read. In some ways, it's the pinnacle of the art form. I loved it.



# Faculty IN PRINT

OUR FACULTY'S  
NEWEST BOOK  
PUBLICATIONS

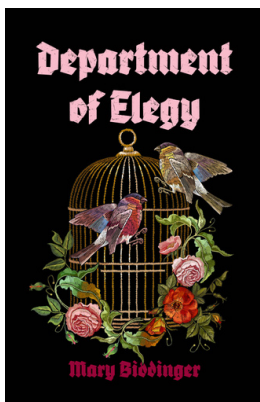
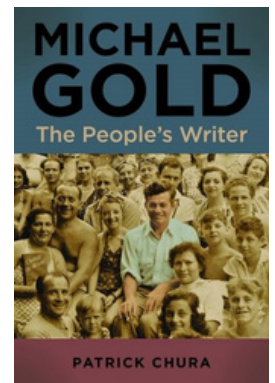


## *Barnstorming Ohio* by David Giffels

*Barnstorming Ohio: To Understand America* (Hachette Books 2020) is David Giffels' account of a year spent traveling his home state at a time of deep political and cultural tension. Driven by the belief that "Ohio isn't any more American than any other place, but it is completely so," he sought voices of reason in small towns and factories, farm fields and city streets. Praised by *Publisher's Weekly* as a "nuanced and often lyrical mix of memoir, reportage, and political analysis," *Barnstorming Ohio* was one of *Library Journal's* "Best Books of 2020."

## *Michael Gold: The People's Writer* by Patrick Chura

Michael Gold was one of the most prolific writers of the American communist movement of the mid-20th century, but if you ask the general public—or even some English teachers—if they know his name, you may get blank stares in return. To remedy this, Dr. Patrick Chura of the UA Department of English has written the first full-length biography of Gold, *Michael Gold: The People's Writer* (SUNY Press). Gold was a key figure in the movement for proletarian literature and believed deeply in political art for the everyman. He penned a famous long-running column titled "Change the World" in the popular leftist paper *The Daily Worker*. His autobiographical novel *Jews Without Money* was even a bestseller in 1930. Chura hopes that his book will revitalize Gold's readership and remind contemporary readers of a "strong, proud heritage" of marginalized works that have been forgotten through the decades.



## *Department of Elegy* by Mary Biddinger

Part post-punk ghost story, part Gen-X pastoral, Mary Biddinger's seventh poetry collection, *Department of Elegy*, is "a wonderfully nostalgic/anti-nostalgic, goth reminiscence on a Gen-X childhood and young adulthood punctuated by midwestern vacant lot landscapes and marvelously bad decisions," in the words of Jeannine Hall Gailey. This collection follows a consistent speaker through various perils, moving from adolescence into a present day contemplation of popular culture and counterculture, friendships and loss, and the ways we mythologize our own weird and wayward crew.



# Letters

FROM THE INTERIM CHAIR

*Dear Colleagues,*

I hope you are all unwinding in some way, and thinking back on the spring 2022 semester with the same exhausted amazement that I am. Before I go any further, I must acknowledge the English department team members who made my transition into the chair role as smooth as it could be. I am sending tremendous gratitude to Kate Tasseff, Carol Szabat, and Katie Stoyhoff for making it possible for me to hit the ground running and accomplish the goals that I had for the spring semester, including the creation of this newsletter, which showcases the excellence of Kate's design and editorial skills. Extreme thanks, as well, to Lisa Rhoades for not only taking on the Assistant Chair role, but expanding it to include work with various social media platforms to boost recruitment and acknowledgment of the good things going on in our department. Especially now that my time is split between two units, I appreciate having Lisa's institutional knowledge and welcoming presence in the front office.

The past academic year brought more faculty and students back to campus, and it was a joy seeing the halls busy again. I commend the English department faculty—full time, part time, and graduate assistants—for their creativity and perseverance as we addressed the challenges of the pandemic. While we have accomplished major strides toward restoring our presence on campus, I also wanted to implement some small measures to bring warmth and positivity to our workspace. In the spring semester I was happy to provide a coffee station for our department, and will continue the new tradition of giving all faculty and GAs a free cup at the beginning of the semester, and at the end of the semester, when we could all use a boost. Some of my fondest recent English department moments were conversations around the Keurig, reconnecting with colleagues.

Additionally, after noticing that my undergraduates were hungry in class, I made the decision to create and stock an Olin Hall cupboard where UA community members can help themselves to food as well as health/convenience items. It was also a priority for me to bring back the course flyers (electronic and print) with Kate's help, to raise awareness regarding the wide range of interesting courses that we offer.

And finally, when you return to campus in the fall, you will find our beloved 362 Olin conference room/classroom has been ushered into the 21st century, with numerous upgrades. Many thanks to BCAS for helping us make this space one that we will be proud to share with our visitors, colleagues, and students, including NEOMFA students who will benefit from gathering around our big table again.

If my office door in English is not open, I can be found down in Olin 304-D, in my second home in the Department of Modern Languages. I invite you to stop by and say hello in either location, and to share your ideas with me. Thanks so much for your effort and support, and I look forward to continuing in this leadership role in the fall.

All the best,

*Mary B.*



If you're a former English major (or minor, or certificate holder, or MA or MFA--or all of the above!), we'd love to hear what you've been up to! Reach out to Lisa Rhoades at [rhoades@uakron.edu](mailto:rhoades@uakron.edu) with your fabulous updates.



Submit your updates for the next edition to Kate Tasseff at [kit4@uakron.edu](mailto:kit4@uakron.edu)!



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