

FALL/WINTER 2022

# GIVE ME GOOD NEWS

The Department of English Newsletter

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2

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**UA ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AND  
NEOMFA REPRESENTED AT**

## **THE LITERARY YOUNGSTOWN FALL FESTIVAL**

The University of Akron English Department was well-represented at this year's Literary Youngstown Fall Festival, themed "The Places That Make Us." The conference took place October 20-22, 2022, and was held on the campus of Youngstown State University and offsite in the surrounding community.

NEOMFA alum Mary Ozbolt and third year NEOMFA poetry student Mixby Dickon both read from their creative work at the conference.

Professor Mary Biddinger served in a panel titled "Moving Past Influence" with NEOMFA student poets Ali Black and Dylan Morris, both from CSU. Biddinger's advice for moving past influence was to not only read your contemporaries in American poetry, but also works of literature in translation, and she shared thoughts on being inspired by writers such as Charles Baudelaire and Vasko Popa.

Third year NEOMFA poet Samantha Imperi served this year on the Lit Youngstown Fall Festival planning committee and emceed the Open Mic Gathering In on Thursday evening. She also worked multiple volunteer shifts at the festival and attended many panels and readings.

Second year NEOMFA creative nonfiction student Susan McKenzie did her first public reading at the Lit Youngstown Fall Festival. The short prose pieces and poems she shared reflected enduring moments with her uniquely fierce and loving mother, whom she writes about in her continuing effort to understand the complex truth of her own middle-age identity. Susan mentioned that she found the other panels she attended immensely informative.

Kudos to these UA NEOMFA writers for their participation in the conference, and to all who took part in the festival. To learn about next year's Lit Youngstown festival, including information on call for proposals, [see this link](#).

# ✦ SAGES ✦

Society of Akron Graduate English Scholars

The Society of Akron Graduate English Scholars invites students and independent scholars of all disciplines to submit their work for consideration for our Spring Hybrid Conference on April 21, 2023. Our theme this year is Technological Revolutions: Creating in the Digital Age. We are looking for papers that explore the ways in which technology has affected our lives, studies, and art, for better or worse. All papers and presentation proposals will be considered. Please submit an abstract of no more than 400 words to [sagessubmission@gmail.com](mailto:sagessubmission@gmail.com) by February 1, 2023.

## What's up with you?

Our English faculty share their latest updates and adventures!

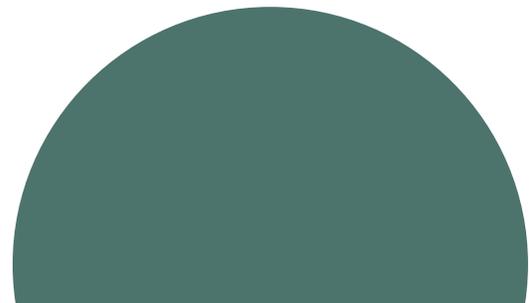
### Jim Wallace

Over the summer, Jim completed the three-week Quality Matters training to be certified as a QM Peer Reviewer. Also, he learned a lot about the difficulties involved in actually taking a fully online, asynchronous course (and he thought *teaching* that platform was difficult--live and learn).



### Jon Miller

Jon's students in ENGL 457/557, Writers on Writing, wrote and published their own magazine, *Sequence: A Mixtape of Writings*, which is free and now available in the English department front office.



# Mary Biddinger

Mary Biddinger is wrapping up her first year as Interim Chair of the departments of English and Modern Languages. This past semester she had four flash fiction stories published in a print issue of *Always Crashing*, and has three more stories appearing in the fall 2022 issue of *Southern Indiana Review*. On the poetry side, Biddinger was thrilled to have her poem "Your Damage" read by U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limón for *The Slowdown*. In January, one of her poems will appear on *Poetry Daily*. Biddinger was recently interviewed by *Exclamations Gauntlet* for "And Could They Hear Me I Would Tell Them: Small Press Conversations and Contexts," where she had a chance to talk about the process of writing her poetry collection *Department of Elegy* (Black Lawrence Press, 2022).

This past semester Biddinger presented on a panel at the Lit Youngstown conference, visited Baldwin Wallace university for an in-person reading, and spoke via Zoom to a literary publishing class at the American University of Rome. She continues to work on her flash fiction novella, as well as a new prose poem series, and is almost finished compiling the essay collection *A Mollusk Without a Shell: Essays on Self-Care for Writers*, co-edited with Julie Brooks Barbour of Lake Superior State University and under contract with the University of Akron Press.

This holiday season, Biddinger is bracing herself to see what kitten Blanche does to the Christmas tree.



## A Note to Students from Heather Braun

*To my students,*

As you may know, this is my last semester at UA as I begin a new position at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. I will miss each and every one of you and all you have brought of yourself to our classes. The hardest part of my decision was knowing I won't get to teach you again. So please know how much you mean to me and how joyful you have made my years at the University of Akron.

*Warmly,  
Dr. Braun*

# Words, Words, Words!

update from

## The Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference

by Hillary Nunn

Three students from the Department of English presented their papers at the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference this year.

Two UA graduate students were on the program: Bethany Decker examined the kitchen as a domestic space in "A Mouth Too Full: Domination, Consumption, Kitchens, and Witches in *Macbeth*," while Grace Maier offered a reading of motherhood's importance in "The Power of Early Modern Maternity: The Patriarchy's Greatest Fear."

Undergraduate Andra Benninghoff, meanwhile, traced dual meanings in the Sonnets and *The Winter's Tale* in "Interpretation: The Deceiving Word and Telling Tone."

The regional conference, sponsored in part by BCAS Innovation Grant, took place at the Cummings Center and hosted Shakespeare scholars from eight states.



## *upstart crows!*

Upstart Crows president Sam Grom and Chloe DiMario tabled for the student writers' group in the UA Student Union on November 16, 2022.

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

**\*Assistant Chair Lisa Rhoades**

*Hello friends,*

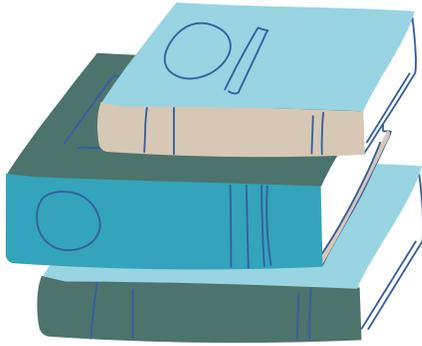
It has been a fantastic fall semester. We have seen increased foot traffic in the office and the climate of the department has certainly made a positive change. Students and faculty once again move freely through the halls and the energy is welcome.

We have seven students graduating this semester. We send best wishes to Marcus Anderson, Justin Boca, Chynna Brown, Kendra Ivery, Christopher Moore, Madelynne Smith, and Sydney Stroll. We are excited to see all the wonderful things they will do. We will also be awarding three minors and three certificates in December.

As we say goodbye to these fine students, we also welcome new students to the major. We continue to conduct outreach at UA recruitment events and look forward to growing our program. We hope to see more students check out our Accelerated Degree Program, and as always, we invite all majors to add a minor or certificate.

As the weather changes, and we brace for a brisk winter break, I hope everyone finds time to rest and recharge. Please stop and see me—to review a DPR, discuss potential classes, or simply chat over some coffee.

*Have a fabulous break,  
Lisa*



# Cozy up with a good book!

Check out our alumni and faculty's recommended winter reads!

## Nina Barnes (alum)

- *Maybe in Another Life* by Taylor Jenkins Reid
- *Darling Girl* by Liz Michalski
- *Leave the World Behind* by Rumaan Alam
- *One Italian Summer* by Rebecca Serle
- *Saving Red* or *The Opposite of Innocent*, both by Sonya Sones

## Heather Braun

- *Inciting Joy* by Ross Gay
- *Lucy by the Sea* by Elizabeth Strout
- *These Precious Days* by Ann Patchett

## Lisa Rhoades

- *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson
- *The House in the Cerulean Sea* by TJ Klune

## Mary Biddinger

- *The School for Good Mothers* by Jessamine Chan
- *The Candy House* by Jennifer Egan
- *Demon Copperhead* by Barbara Kingsolver
- *Hole Studies* by Hilary Plum
- *Lucy by the Sea* by Elizabeth Strout

## Chelsey Moore (alum)

- *One Day in December* by Josie Silver
- *The Lost Apothecary* by Sarah Penner
- *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig
- *The Paris Apartment* by Lucy Foley

## Jim Wallace

- I'm currently working through Leonard Maltin's book, *Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons*, and it is absolutely fascinating, especially if you're interested in the evolution of animated shorts and movies. Highly recommend this.

# Letters

FROM THE INTERIM CHAIR

*Dear English Department Colleagues, Students, and Friends,*

Thank you for your support over the past twelve months as I have taken on the duties of interim chair, with the assistance of a remarkable new assistant chair, Lisa Rhoades. When I say that I work with a dream team here on the third floor of Olin, that isn't hyperbole. A few weeks back, a freshman composition student visiting the English department remarked, "This place has the best vibes. I had no idea this office was here." I am glad that the English department is projecting warmth to all visitors, thanks in big part to the dedication of our faculty and staff.

This semester we welcomed singer/storyteller Tom Kastle to UA, and hosted the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference. Both of these events were supported by BCAS Dean Mitchell McKinney's Innovation Fund, and we are tremendously grateful for that support. It was wonderful not only to gather with our students and faculty for these in-person events, but also to welcome community members and visitors from outside Akron to take part in programming. Additionally, a number of our UA NEOMFA students presented at the Literary Youngstown Fall Festival, which was a lively gathering of writers from the region and beyond.

Finally, I want to offer a bittersweet adieu to English department faculty member Dr. Heather Braun, who is moving on to a new opportunity at Johns Hopkins University, where she will be Assistant Director of Life Design for graduate students. I am thankful for all of Dr. Braun's contributions to our department over the years, particularly her outstanding mentorship of our students. I wish her the very best for this exciting next step.

Happy holidays to those who celebrate, and see you in the new year!

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 with your fabulous updates.

## Nina Barnes

Since graduating from The University of Akron, Nina returned to her alma mater! She now serves as Assistant Director of Admissions in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions at UA, and loves getting to interact with her favorite faculty and staff in a new position. She finds helping prospective students find their fit at Akron is the most rewarding job!

## Chelsea Moore

Chelsey Moore is currently a Young Adult Case Manager at OhioMeansJobs Stark and Tuscarawas Counties where she helps at-risk youth individuals aged 14-24 overcome barriers and provides assistance for employment. Studying English has helped Chelsey understand the human condition and emotion to better advocate for her clients and make sure they receive the coaching and resources they need for success.



# thanks for reading

SEE YOU NEXT TIME!

Submit your updates for the next edition to Kate Tasseff at kit4@uakron.edu!



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