

FALL/WINTER 2024

GIVE ME GOOD NEWS

The Department of English Newsletter

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 2

What's up with you?

Our English faculty share their latest updates and adventures!

Thomas Dukes

Thomas Dukes, Professor Emeritus of the English Department, had another poetry collection published, *Gospels From the Lower Shelf*. He is retiring from the university for the third and final time at the end of the fall semester, 2024.

Bill Thelin

Bill Thelin presented his paper, "Abuse Disguised as Love in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*" at the Michigan College English Association Conference in October. He is currently working on an as yet untitled paper concerning religious iconography in the film *Unforgiven*.

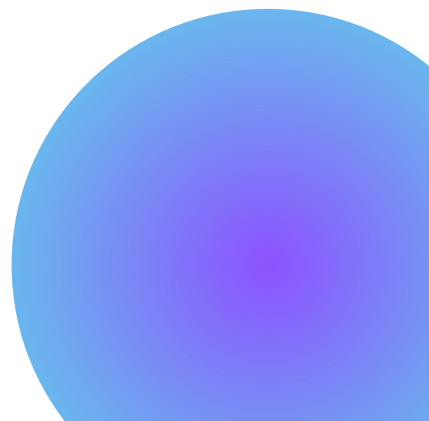


Lance Svehla

In October, Lance had the article "The Audacity of Trump: The Rhetorical Strategy of President Donald J. Trump" published in the edited collection: *The Legacy of the Trump Administration: A Disruptive Presidency*.

David Giffels

Professor David Giffels is eagerly counting down the days to Akron's 2025 bicentennial celebration. He was recently named to the Summit County Historical Society Board of Directors and has a chapter on Akron's music history forthcoming in *Akron at 200: A Bicentennial History*, to be published next year by the University of Akron Press. Fun fact: Alan Freed, the legendary deejay credited with coining the term "rock 'n' roll," started his career as the WAKR play-by-play announcer for University of Akron sports.



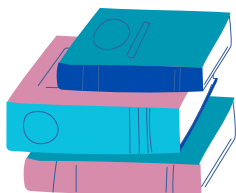
Philathia Bolton

Dr. Bolton has had a busy fall semester since returning from her sabbatical break! In addition to continuing her research on Toni Morrison for an article and book-length project, she also has reviewed grant applications for a national organization in the humanities, delivered a photographic presentation on her time abroad for middle school-aged students in an arts photography program, and is scheduled to deliver a virtual talk on storytelling and activism in the Black American literary tradition for the International Conference on Conflict (Cairo, Egypt). Highlights for Dr. Bolton also have included witnessing her students advance with interpretive analyses in the Black American Literature and Harlem Renaissance courses that she teaches. Dr. Bolton is looking forward to additional moments to share with students, colleagues, and the community what she experienced while traveling abroad at upcoming UAkron events this month and in February.



Mary Biddinger

Mary Biddinger would like to share a snippet from the first blurb for her new book, which is forthcoming from Black Lawrence Press in July 2025. “Mary Biddinger’s *The Girl with the Black Lipstick* isn’t simply a blast from the past—it is the past—the year 1999 brought back to life in all its Twitter-less, text-less glory, courtesy of the narrator Mary Van Pelt, who blends nostalgia and cynicism in appropriate doses. This is a story that feels perfectly suited to the novella-in-flash, a reach back to grab the fragments of who we were in the final year of the twentieth century, to hold them to the light in an attempt to understand what peculiar threads connected us.” –Sarah Freligh, author of *Hereafter* and *Sad Math*



Read any good books lately?

Check out our faculty's recommended reads!

Bill Thelin

- *How Elites Ate the Social Justice Movement* by Fredrik DeBoer
- *Monsters: A Fan's Dilemma* by Claire Dederer

Lance Svehla

- *The Extinction of Experience: Being Human in a Disembodied World* by Christine Rosen
- *The Gang of Three: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle* by Neel Burton
- *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata

Mary Biddinger

- *The Hunter* by Tana French
- *Piglet* by Lottie Hazell
- *God of the Woods* by Liz Moore
- *Bear* by Julia Phillips

Thomas Dukes

- *The Kitchen Madonna* by Rumer Godden

David Giffels

I recommend these books, all released in 2024 by recent NEOMFA visiting writers:

- *Heartbreak Is the National Anthem: How Taylor Swift Reinvented Pop Music* by Rob Sheffield
- *There's Always This Year: On Basketball and Ascension* by Hanif Abdurraqib
- *Grief Is for People* by Sloan Crosley

Alumni Spotlight

Cadence Dangerfield, B.A., 2022



Raised in Akron and a graduate of St. Vincent-St. Mary High School, Cadence Dangerfield knew for a long time she wanted to be a teacher. When in Fall 2019 she began taking classes in English at The University of Akron, she did so as a scholar in the Williams Honors College. Then COVID-19 hit. There's no question Cadence was driven, so much so that she graduated in only three years when many of her peers were taking gap years or otherwise struggling due to the pandemic.

For Cadence, though, taking a full load of online courses in Fall 2020 was an opportunity to learn more about teaching and about how important it can be to the lives of students. She watched her teachers pivot to online learning with commitment and enthusiastic encouragement, and she also eagerly met the challenges of the time head on. When she graduated in May of 2022, it was with a B.A. in English and minors in both Spanish and Women's Studies.

Cadence excelled in her time at UA, but she didn't just appreciate the knowledge she acquired in her programs or the guidance in meeting graduation requirements she received from advisors. She raves in fact most enthusiastically about the vocational advice she received from UA faculty who helped guide her professional steps as she debated career possibilities. Meeting with faculty for their frank advice and assistance, she claims, made a large school like UA feel smaller, and she loved how she was able to craft her experience at UA to help profit personally and professionally from her time in our classrooms.

For her senior honors project, Cadence tackled a tough but rewarding subject. Literary theory has long discussed "the male gaze" in film and literature, and Cadence decided to investigate the possibility of a corresponding "female gaze" at work genre fiction. She later even pursued the possibility of a female gaze in a separate essay on Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, and when she finished sought an opportunity to share her work with other honors scholars. Since no venue existed, she organized one, putting together what she describes as a "mini-conference" with four

other honors students, each of whom presented their work and handled questions from an engaged audience. This experience is among her most rewarding and memorable at UA.

When Cadence left UA, she enrolled in a two-year English M.A. program at another local institution, Case Western Reserve University, furthering her studies and readying herself to run her own classroom. She found that classroom at the Hathaway Brown School in Shaker Heights this fall, when she joined the faculty of the Upper School English Department. When asked what drew her most to Hathaway Brown, Cadence cites their embracing feminist pedagogy and their emphasis on student agency.

At Hathaway Brown, Cadence teaches two sections each of American Literature and a sophomore-level honors English course. Her American Literature course includes such diverse and recent titles as Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You*, Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine*, and a graphic memoir, *Belonging*, by Nora Krug. In her sophomore honors course, her students explore domestic spaces and what haunts them, literally and figuratively. Among other readings this fall, her students have studied Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, and Le Thi Diem Thuy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*. Cadence relishes the opportunity to teach such works and to share with her students the enthusiasm for literature that she first shared with us for three years.

Currently engaged to her high school sweetheart, Cadence is planning a marriage in July, after which she and her spouse will both move to Shaker Heights. When she's not prepping for classes or planning the wedding, Cadence relaxes by playing video games and completing adult coloring books. Oh, and she reads. And reads. And reads. She tries to read 100 books a year. She's currently at 93, but there's still time left in 2024. We wish Cadence all the best with her career, her marriage, and her book list.



**CALLING ALL ALUMNI
& GRADUATING SENIORS!**

The UA English Department is establishing a new alumni database to stay more engaged with our graduates, new and old. We'd love it if you provided updated contact information, including a (non-UA) email and a phone number. That way we can send you digital editions of future newsletters so you can hear what's happening with us and your fellow alumni. You'll also get invitations to readings and other special events on campus and in the community. You can update your info on the English Department's homepage (<https://www.uakron.edu/english/>) or simply use the QR code. We look forward to hearing from you!



Student Success

by Dr. Hillary Nunn



English 4+1 student Olivia Kurylo appeared twice on the program for the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference this October, presenting a paper in the undergraduate seminar and delivering second presentation with Prof. Hillary Nunn. Since Olivia is taking both undergraduate and graduate courses to complete her BA and MA in 5 years, she could engage in the conference under both classifications.

Olivia took part in the undergraduate seminar in the morning, offering and giving feedback to other undergraduate participants on their work. The roundtable discussion offered a chance for everyone's work to get focused attention, and Olivia's "Judges being Judged: How Shakespeare's Patriarchies Punish Female Characters in *The Winter's Tale* and *Othello*" contributed to a shared interest in reimagining women's roles among panel members.

Later that afternoon, Olivia presented a paper entitled "Institutionalizing Shakespeare: Nineteenth Century Popular Images of Asylum Thespians." Olivia's contributions incorporated research from the Cummings Center for the History of Psychology's archives, specifically accounts of how Shakespearean works appeared in nineteenth century accounts of American asylums. While some administrators encouraged patients to read Shakespeare, Olivia found, others treated patients with acting ambitions as spectacle. An account she presented from an 1859 report in *Harper's Weekly* for example, recounted one doctor's encouragement of a patient to recite for the benefit of visitors: When the doctor asked "Will you gratify them by giving us 'King Lear?'" The patient – who the reporter identified as a black man – "began to declaim" but the words he spoke were not from the play, even though they sounded as first like Shakespearean verse. "He was uttering gibberish," the reporter concluded before quickly moving on (*Harpers Weekly*, March 10 1859, p 186).

For Olivia, the conference allowed her to bring together two strands of her academic interests. She explains, "Both English and Psychology have interested me throughout my undergraduate studies, so finding this connection between the two was incredible and catalyzed my Honors Research Project, which will focus on analyzing the usage of Shakespearean literature in asylums by patients and doctors." She adds, "Shakespeare, and literature in general, have always been a conduit for connection among people in the general public, and I'm excited to dive further into this project and to continue examining Shakespearean literature in asylums."

Alumni Spotlight

Casey Shevlin, M.A., 2013




Since graduating with an M.A. in English from The University of Akron in May 2013, Casey Shevlin has pursued a path leading from further academic study and non-profit work to the private sector and public sectors. She now works as the first Director of Sustainability and Resiliency for the City of Akron. She credits her training in our program with helping her develop translatable skills that stood her well in these various positions.


When Casey left Akron in the summer of 2013, she began Ph.D. coursework at the University of Texas, San Antonio. While she enjoyed and felt well-prepared for Ph.D. work, Casey missed Akron and felt drawn to pursue a position more directly engaged with real-world problems in the community. Moving back to Akron, she took a position in the non-profit sector working for Women's Network, where she designed and executed a countywide gender equity study. While proud of her work for the Women's Network, she wanted more structure and resources, and she subsequently spent five years working for FirstEnergy in corporate sustainability and communications. This last year Casey made the jump to the public sector, where she's the new (and first) Director of Sustainability and Resiliency for the City of Akron.

It's a tough job, but Casey is up to the task, and she credits her M.A. training in part for her preparation and success. As she says, "many of the skills I developed at UA have also translated well for me to the non-profit, private, and public sectors. Knowing how to research any topic, how to document and organize your research, how to assess diligently for patterns, how to communicate effectively and tell a compelling story — these are all valued, translatable skills that have been necessary in every job I've ever had since my time at UA." Casey also credits the course planning she undertook as a Graduate Assistant at UA teaching her own Composition courses with helping her hone her skills in project design, management, and program development. Treading new ground for the City of Akron, Casey acknowledges the novelty of her position and the opportunities for progress it affords. As she puts it, "I'm very much building the plane as I fly it." We're glad Casey's found a home and a calling in Akron, and we trust this life-long Zip will continue to make us proud. Fly high, Casey!

IN LOVING MEMORY OF



BEV RICKS



by Jim Wallace

Bev Ricks was a UA alum (BA, MA, TESL); a teaching assistant when we first met in the spring of '82; a part-timer, teaching composition for many years; and one of the most conscientious teachers and biggest clowns I have ever met. I can tell you that she was a good teacher, and her students seemed to enjoy the way she presented composition, always with a sense of humanity and a touch of humor. But, it may be more cathartic for me to tell you two quick stories about her as a teacher.

Once, when she was working for a parochial school, which had a “no-touching the students” policy, that Bev said was strictly enforced, she stepped out of her classroom at the end of a long day, and a student, whom she’d spent hours with crafting college applications, came racing down the hall with an acceptance letter in her hand, screaming “Ms. Ricks, Ms. Ricks! I got in! I got in!” And, then leaped into Bev’s arms, tears flowing, happy as she could be. Bev said she knew the policy, but there was no way she wasn’t going to hug that kid. That moment took place in front of the principal, and Bev was duly informed of her breach of policy the next day. After which, she said, “I just said ‘F that’ and started looking elsewhere for work.”

Then, and this is my favorite teaching story, she was working a contract that Berlitz had in Columbus with a private education company that was running several charter schools in the state, back when charter schools were something relatively new. It was a Friday afternoon, and I was on the roof of my garage when she called (my wife handed the phone out the window and said “She says she has to talk to you”). Her first words were “Jim, can we get out of this contract? Like Now!” For thirty minutes, she ran through a litany of the lies, misinformation, and double-dealing that the school was putting on students and the state. I told her I’d let the boss know and she’d probably contact HQ about it, but that we were on it. Then, I reminded her that if we ended the contract, she’d lose the work down there, which was a significant portion of her income with the company. She said she didn’t care, that the charter school was cheating everyone, and she just wanted the kids to get the help they needed to get their GED’s. Berlitz nullified the contract the following Tuesday, and the state began an investigation of the charter schools two weeks later.

Those are the basics of Bev as a teacher; students came first, regardless. The reality of Bev? Well, that was different, and I wish you all could have spent some time with her, even just a couple of hours because you’d have remembered those hours as some of the funniest, laughiest moments of your life. She was just fun to be around, always a quip, barb, or sarcastic comment at the ready. Since she’s gone and you probably won’t get to meet her now, I thought I’d share a few moments of my time with her.

The semester we first met we had the rather dubious honor of being in practicum together with Dr. Robert Holland, the Director of Composition back in the old days. He was demanding and fairly strict in practicum, so every week Bev and I would trudge into that 8'x8' room, with its one table, four chairs, no windows, and definitely no place to hide, because there were only two of us, and we'd learn how to be better at our craft. On one occasion, Bev and I got to class at the same time, and she asked if I'd done the reading for the week, which I hadn't, so she said "Don't worry, I've got you covered. But you owe me a joke; it's been a bad week." For the next fifty minutes, she handled that class like Perry Mason handled Hamilton Burger in the courtroom, and at one point, there was even a little scowl from Dr. Holland because he knew she was protecting me.

When class was over, I told her one of the funniest dirty jokes I knew at the time (which I won't repeat here because it's not 1982 anymore), but the punchline was "Lady, that's my son-in-law!" That cheered her up, and she'd chuckle almost every time we saw each other for the rest of the semester, shaking her head and repeating "that's my son-in-law." That remained a joke between us for the next ten years, at least. Every time we saw each other, regardless of where we were, what we were doing, or who was around us, "Lady, that's my son-in-law" was bound to come up.

On another day, about ten years after we had first met, when we were both working for Berlitz Languages, we had just finished up lessons at the students' home, and I asked her how she was doing because she seemed a little less vibrant than usual. She said there were some things with one of her kids at school, some disruptive behavior, and she was concerned. So, to cheer her up and because I'd been the king of disruptive behavior as a kid, I told her the story of my Conduct-Clown:

In the third grade at Sts. Cyril and Methodious Elementary School, Sister Anne, fresh out of convent school, had each of us color a picture of a clown, cut it out, and string a piece of yarn through a hole in the top. She said for each time she had to correct our behavior, she would use a hole punch on the clown, and we'd keep these tied to our desks for the upcoming Parent-Teacher night so that our parents could see how well we were behaving in class. That P-T night couldn't have been two weeks off, but by the time it arrived, my "Conduct Clown" was the piece of yarn and the original hole.

Bev started laughing, got in her car laughing, drove off laughing, and, according to her, laughed through the rest of the evening, to the bemusement of her family.

Two days later, I went to my UA office, and above my desk, hung by a piece of yarn, was a gaudily colored paper-clown, or what was left of him, for holes had been punched literally everywhere, and a note "Lady, that's my son-in-law; thank you so much." Thirty years later, I still smile at that memory although the clown, sadly, has disappeared.

This was Bev, throughout the years, maybe a little more serious in later years, but still the joker. and, for me, that really was what it was like to know Bev; yes, she was a good teacher, both at UA and Berlitz, and she seemed to always be helping her students succeed; but, more than that, she loved to laugh and to make others laugh, and that's the person I wish you'd known, and just once heard her say "Lady, that's my son-in-law."



And Now a Word from
THE AC*

***Assistant Chair Lisa Rhoades**

Hello friends,

Happy Holidays! As we close the chapter on fall semester, we can take a moment to celebrate some of the great accomplishments of the term. Congratulations to recent graduates Ben Roscoe (BA), CJ Jacobs (Eng. Minor), and Cheyenne Kitchel (Eng. Minor). We wish them well as they begin the next leg of their journey.

We have successfully navigated our way through the term with Workday and Stellar; students and faculty alike are adjusting to the changes and I am sure we will soon all be experts! Please see me if you are still struggling to negotiate the process.

This fall, Olivia Kurylo (Accelerated BA/MA) presented at the OVSC (Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference). We are so proud of her accomplishments and continue to encourage undergrads to get those brilliant papers out there.

Spring semester promises to be a busy one. We have a lot of graduates lined up to walk in May and we can't wait to see all the wonderful things they will accomplish. Mark your calendars for **Wednesday, April 16th for the English Department Awards Ceremony**. This year, we also plan to honor our graduating seniors in addition to the award recipients. We look forward to celebrating.

Have a wonderful break. Rest, rejuvenate, and read!

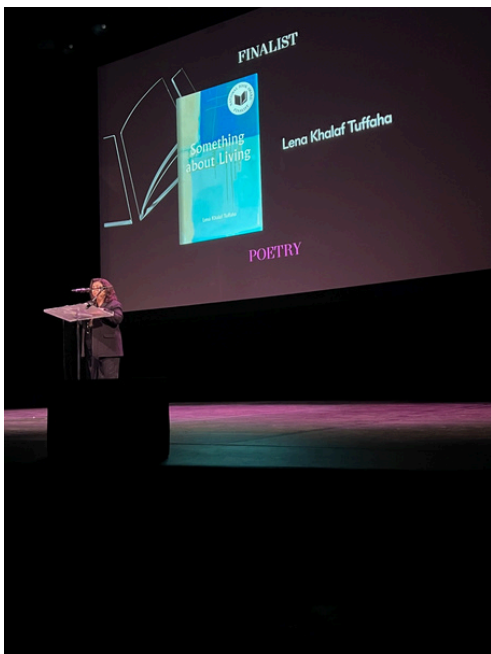
Kindly,

Lisa

Letters

FROM THE CHAIR

Dear English Department Colleagues, Students, and Friends,



Lena Khalaf Tuffaha reads from *Something About Living* at the NYU Skirball Center for the Performing Arts (Photo credit Mary Biddinger)

All semesters are memorable in their own way, but Fall 2024 will go down as the semester when the University of Akron Press had its first National Book Award winning book: the poetry collection *Something About Living* by Lena Khalaf Tuffaha. Not only was it an honor to celebrate all the finalists and to cheer for our author at the ceremony, but it was especially poignant to represent university presses, as the University of Akron Press was the sole university press on the short list. Of course we hyped this up beforehand and asked friends and colleagues and students to watch the livestream from home, and amazingly, they did. It was a joy receiving all the kind messages (beginning with the moment of the announcement itself) and seeing the University of Akron Press applauded near and far.

This literary victory means so much to our campus community, especially our creative writers. One of my favorite parts of the National Book Awards experience was getting to celebrate with my students—apologies for all of the “now you need to listen to all of my editorial advice forever” jokes—and bring home items such as the event program for everyone to check out.

Best wishes for the end of the semester, and happy new year to all!



Mary Biddinger with Brittany LaPointe, University of Akron Press Marketing & Sales Manager (Photo credit Brittany LaPointe)

Sincerely,

Mary B.



**NEO
MFA**

**Northeast Ohio
Master of Fine Arts**
The nation's only consortial
MFA creative writing program

Genres: Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry, Playwriting
Funding: Assistantships, Ambassadorships, Scholarships, Conference Support

 neomfa.org



**DON'T
FORGET**

The semester kicks off **Monday, January 13th!**



**thanks for
reading**

SEE YOU NEXT TIME!

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



Follow us on Facebook!

Like us on Instagram!

Connect with us on LinkedIn!