

THE MIRROR & THE LAMP

The Department of English at Western Illinois University Issue 11 Spring 2024



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

BY MAJORIE ALLISON



Looking back on my notes of English department accomplishments for the 2023-2024 academic year, I understand why we are all beginning to feel a bit tired! It has been a very full year of events. In fact, a colleague from another department just said to me, “I see your events posted and I wonder, how on earth do you all do so much?!” We “do so much” because we have very dedicated faculty and enthusiastic students! Simpkins is a happening place throughout the year. Below are just some of our successes (you will certainly read more about many of them within this publication).

This year we kicked off the Fall Semester with a new (but very popular event) we called “Poetry, Pizza, Pop, and Prose.” It served as our welcome back gathering for faculty, returning, and new students. All attendees were invited to bring in a favorite poem or piece of prose to share as we gathered in the reading room for conversation and pizza.

We continued the spirit of gathering with Monthly Mindfulness Sessions led by our own Barb Lawhorn. Barb spent her sabbatical earning a certificate of “Mindfulness for Educators” from Antioch University and now she gives back to the department by leading students and staff in a mindfulness (and muffins!) event each month. Throughout the year, Barb also continued to host a fantastic and well-attended Reading Room series, both in person and on zoom.

In October the Sigma Tau Delta students hosted the second “Haunted Simpkins” event much to the delight of ghost-interested students and those who enjoy costumes! This spring the Sigma students, with the help of Rebekah Buchanan, took on the task of cleaning up (and out!) the Sigma Tau Delta meeting room. After removing decades of collected “stuff,” and donating a variety of 30-50-year-old materials to the WIU Archives, they have reimagined the space for use by themselves as well as a room for the production of the creative writing publication, *Elements*, and this very publication, *The Mirror & the Lamp*. For perhaps the first time ever, the students working on publications have easy access to a computer and space in which to work. We hope to expand opportunities by dedicating another computer in that room for English student organization use.

The Fred Case and Lola Austin Case Writer-in Residence events remain highlights in our year and remind us of the generosity and forethought of the Cases. Very few English Departments have endowments which allow this kind of sustained interaction with outstanding professional writers. In September, we hosted one of our own alumna, Juliana Goodman, whose first novel, *The Black Girls Left Standing*, came out in 2022. Emily St. John Mandel visited us in October and engaged with students and the community about her many novels. And Javier Zamora, the acclaimed author of *Solito*, visited in early April and spoke of his memoir and his poetry, and about being an immigrant in the US. All three visits were outstanding events, and we are in the planning stages of next year’s line up!

The Department decided to move The Maurine Magliocco Lecture to the fall in order to increase attendance (spring is so very busy). This year, the speaker was Ryan Poll who spoke on Aquaman and the environment. His event became a very lively discussion of comics, the environment, race, class, and other relevant topics. The best part of the day was that Dr. Magliocco was able to join us for a meal and the lecture—it was great to have her “back in the house!”

The Department hosted two events which serve as outreach to surrounding communities and as a way to recruit and

attract area students to Western. The annual High School Writing Festival was led by Rebekah Buchanan and Alisha White and over 150 students from area schools attended, many with their WIU English Education major alumni teachers! Our Get Lit festival was organized by Everett Hamner and over 150 students attended that event on the Quad Cities Campus for a lively day of celebrating writing and writers. We are proud to offer these opportunities to high school students in our region!

Lastly, I will leave you with a new and unusual honor the English Department at Western earned this year. We got a shout out from *Girl Talk*, a podcast that, after reviewing syllabi from across the nation, stated that our Department “had the highest proportion . . . of female to male writers included on its syllabus making it the most gender diverse English program in the US.” We will take the compliment!

As this brief letter shows, there is a lot(!) happening in Simpkins Hall these days. Read on in this issue to get more great details. And if you are ever in the area, do stop by! We would be happy to chat about all things English!

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WIU WRITING FESTIVAL 2024

BY TAYLOR HOLAN

On Monday, February 5th, Western Illinois University (WIU) hosted the 9th annual Writing Festival. The event took place from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Attendees included almost 160 students and their teachers from eight different high schools. This year, the festival offered 22 workshops from 15 WIU professors and four high school teachers.

The interactive workshops encouraged students to write on

various topics throughout their time at the event. Examples of some workshops at this year's festival were:

- "Dear Poet" with Professor Barbara Lawhorn.

Students listened to three poems read aloud by their writers. Students were asked to think about tone and voice within these poems. They were then encouraged to write letters to the poets about their poems.

- "Dream Notebook" with Dr. Jacquie Wilson.

Students were asked to write a poem about one of their dreams. Afterward, they shared their work and tried to interpret their dreams using the Internet and Dream Dictionary.

- "Unexpected Events" with Mr. Daniel Kopping.

Students were given note cards depicting a random event and asked to write about it. After a few minutes,

Kopping gave them another note card containing another event. They were asked to tie this into their story. The process was repeated one more time,



then students were encouraged to share. • "The Secret of Creative Writing" with Dr. Merrill Cole.

Students were taught about poetry techniques and then asked to write haikus. They were encouraged to write their haikus on a whiteboard which allowed other students to read their work.

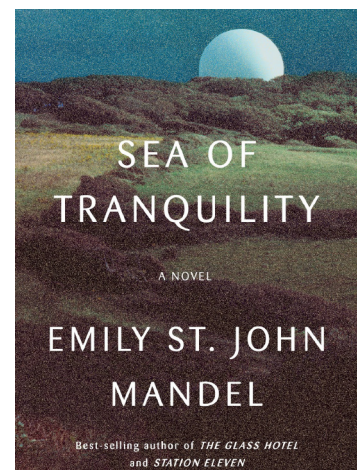
Throughout the years, the festival has progressed in many ways. According to Dr. Alisha White, the Writing Festival began in 2013 at the Multicultural Center. Since then, the number of students attending has been growing and the event has been moved to the University Union. This year was especially unique because the event expanded its location to the Malpass Library and the Art Gallery. Additionally, several WIU students volunteered to take the high schoolers on campus tours. The

number of workshops offered has also increased, originally having roughly nine, to now over twenty. Finally, this year, the 2024 Writing Festival did not have a writing contest, which differs from past years.

I spoke with students who expressed interest in returning to the event next year and even attending WIU for college. Overall, it was a success for WIU's English Department. Special thanks go to Dr. Rebekah

Buchanan and Dr. Alisha White for organizing the event, the professors and teachers who held workshops, and the WIU students who volunteered to

HOLAN'S BOOK OF THE YEAR



Taylor Holan – The way the story unfolds is so unique, and I admire the way it all comes together at the end.

JULIANA GOODMAN'S WRITING JOURNEY: FROM PASSION TO PUBLISHED BY CARTER MYERS



Juliana Goodman reads at the campus art gallery.

How does someone achieve their dream job? What on Earth does that process look like?

Juliana Goodman is a professional author, having published one Y.A. novel *The Black Girls Left Standing* (TBGLS) and one short story, "One on One" in a sports anthology, *Out of Our League*. Goodman studied English Literature at WIU, obtaining her B.A. in 2014. She continued her education at Purdue University, earning an M.F.A. in fiction in 2017. She was also a Tulsa Artist Fellow from 2019-2022; she honed her craft and worked full-time writing novels. She published TBGLS, her first novel, shortly following this, but what did this journey look like? In an interview with published author Juliana Goodman, I spoke with her about how she turned her passion for writing into being published and more:

I began the interview by questioning how she discovered her passion – how she knew what she wanted to do with her life:

Carter Myers: *What is writing to you? What does it mean? Is it a passion? Is it a hobby? (. . .) Where did you see writing going in your life?*

Juliana Goodman: *So, for me, writing has always been a passion. I knew eventually, as I got older that I wanted to turn it into a job. But as I was growing up I was writing when I was really young and didn't even have a concept of knowing I'd need to get a job and have money, and I was still doing it and loving it, and it was the only thing that really kind of made life worth living sometimes . . . it really saved me in a way, from the things I was running from in life.*

Goodman also said that knowing that she wanted to turn writing into a career, she studied literature at university. During her schooling and time within the Tulsa Artist Fellowship, Goodman wrote and wrote; writing was what she spent most of her time doing. She wrote multiple novel manuscripts during her time as a fellow and sought out agents to begin publishing them. But how did her debut novel, TBGLS, begin? How did her journey to professional writing start post-education?

Carter Myers: *What was that process of submitting your manuscript like? What helped you to land an agent?*

Juliana Goodman: *So the first time I was sending out my manuscript, I was trying to find an agent. So I would send it out to maybe thirty or forty agents at a time, and I did that maybe like three rounds. Then, once I got my agent . . . we worked on it together.*

Goodman worked for a while with her new agent, Patricia, on the manuscript for TBGLS. She dived into a cycle of revision, send to agent, revision, send to agent, revision, over and over. Eventually, her manuscript got to a point where she and Patricia began looking for a publisher.

Juliana Goodman: *We went on submission again, but this time to editors and publishers. This time, it wasn't as big. It wasn't like 30 or 40 publishers. It was maybe like eight or nine . . . at that point*

we had a polished version, at least what we both considered to be the most polished version of the draft that we were sending out.

Carter Myers: *What helped you end up deciding on this publisher?*

Juliana Goodman: *What helped me sign with Feiwel and Friends? Well, at the time, they were the only ones who made an offer on the book, so my agent had also worked with this editor, . . . so she was able to tell me like, this is what [my editor] Kats like. This is what she's interested in. It's really easy to get feedback from her. She's prompt. She's on time. So that was our main focus.*

Once her book had been edited, it was only a matter of time until TBGLS was officially published for profit. After post-education, Goodman brought forth her dream of becoming a paid and published author in only three years. Since then, she has been traveling, giving presentations on TBGLS, talking about her writing process, and teaching others about the art of literature. Goodman currently teaches at the University of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and travels nationwide, teaching and presenting to students. She recently visited and spoke at WIU as a Lola Austin Case writer, the occasion for this interview. I thoroughly enjoyed speaking with Juliana Goodman. She enlightened me about the writer's process. It was sparkling, and I eagerly await her future publications.

Follow the QR code below to read the complete interview on themirrorandthelamp.org



GOODMAN GETS CRAFTY

BY NICK RUSH

Juliana Goodman, author of *The Black Girls Left Standing*, visited WIU's Art Gallery on September 26th, 2023, to give a talk on craft and young adult fiction. Dr. Erika Wurth introduced her and detailed her academic and professional accomplishments. With this, Goodman took the podium.

Goodman began her talk by defining what young adult fiction is. Young adult fiction, or YA, is a genre written for an audience of primarily 12–18-year-old readers, the protagonists on average age between 14 and 19. Goodman specified further that most narrators of YA novels are either 16, 17, or 18 years of age. With this explained, Goodman transitioned into speaking about the process of actually writing a YA novel. She advised us to start with what you, as the writer, want to convey to your audience. For example, Goodman gave a brief summary of her book, *The Black Girls Left Standing*, and then told us what her message was to her audience. She said, “I wanted to tell young black girls that they aren’t responsible for how the world sees and interacts with them. I also wanted to let them know that they are not alone.”

Goodman then explained how she uses plots, both internal and external, to accomplish this. External plots, as Goodman explained, are what we read on the surface. The external plot of Goodman’s novel is the struggle for justice by the protagonist, Beau; the internal plot is the grief she’s processing over having lost her sister. These plots work in tandem to produce the desired effect, according to Goodman.

Goodman also warned us that it is our responsibility to ensure the writings within these plots are not dangerous to our audience, such as the glorification of dangerous acts that are portrayed in media, like excessive partying, alcohol and drug abuse, sensationalized sexual acts, etc. Goodman said, “We don’t

wanna glorify dangerous acts.” To avoid this, there must be a founded rationalization in the text that justifies the portrayed act. This act must further the plot in some way, rather than be left as an inconsequential point. Goodman gave the necessity of consent as an example. It is extremely common, especially in older forms of media, for an anticipated kiss or erotic/sensual moment to be given without any consent. She gave the amusing example of Edward from *Twilight*, climbing through his love interest, Bella’s window to watch her sleep. Goodman said, “Edward [was] watching Bella sleep like a creep.” Although amusing, this is not something we usually notice, as it is portrayed as romantic or “swoon-worthy,” according to Goodman. She reiterated the impact our words have on our readers and suggested that the inclusion of consent is both safer and more modern.

Goodman then mentioned the importance of “staying current” as a YA writer. With an audience of largely teenagers, Goodman stressed that it was important for her to do some research on what kids of her character’s age were interested in. She advised designating birth years for characters rather than just their ages. With this, you can work backward, figuring out what kids from those eras liked, what they were obsessed with, what music they listened to, etc. Doing this groundwork helps your characters come across as more authentically young and not so easily nailed as written by an adult, according to Goodman.

Goodman then focused on adult characters in YA. She claimed that in a YA novel, “there are three things you can do with adults.” First, you can kill them. Many YA novels portray characters with either one or both parents deceased. This often benefits the narrative of the story as it removes parental supervision while

also giving trauma to the protagonist, which can be worked out through the plot. The second option for adults is to make them an obstacle for the protagonist. Goodman said that often, adults in YA fiction hold different values than the protagonist, which can spark conflict between the two. She gives the example of rigidly strict parents who won’t permit their children to have a social life. The third option for adults is to make them a “trusted mentor.” The trusted mentor is usually not the parent of the child, but is instead a close adult like a teacher, coach, or a family relative/friend. The trusted mentor often provides advice and comfort for the protagonist who feels that they can’t be as open with their immediate family.

Finishing her craft talk, Goodman opened the discussion to questions. I asked two questions, first, wondering how she dealt with the anxieties of approaching a career that does not guarantee professional or financial success. Goodman responded that she still feels those anxieties often, but you must push through, working hard and trusting in yourself, almost delusionally. I asked my second question, wondering if she, as a published author, has the resources to branch out into other forms of writing, like script writing, game campaign writing, etc. Goodman acknowledged that she hasn’t truly thought about it yet but did say you would need to look for different agents, as each agent only specializes in a specific form of media. Both answers to my questions were very informative.

Goodman’s craft talk was engaging and beneficial for anyone hoping to write YA novels professionally. It was inspiring to see an alumna successfully traverse the journey that many of us, as English majors, are mapping now.

MANDEL CAPTIVATES AUDIENCES OF EAGER READERS

BY NICK RUSH

On October 16th, 2023, award-winning author Emily St. John Mandel visited WIU's campus to lead a talk on her craft, and a separate reading/book signing. Although the earlier craft talk was very engaging, the reading and book signing was the better attended event, with the Grand Ballroom of the University Union as full as I've seen it. Mandel was interviewed by Dr. Rebekah Buchanan, read two excerpts from her bestselling novel, *Station Eleven*, and took more questions from the audience. At the beginning of this hour-long session, the Chair of English, Marjorie Allison, gave a brief introduction. She thanked Mandel for visiting, thanked the donors of the scholarship fund that allowed for the event, and then, turned the stage over to Buchanan and Mandel.

The reading session was informal and sustained a Q&A throughout. Buchanan began by asking Mandel questions about her novels, from her earliest to her most popular. Mandel's most recent book, *Sea of Tranquility*, was discussed first. *Sea of Tranquility* follows a time traveler who visits three time periods significant to the author's life. The first is loosely based on Mandel's great-grandfather, who was a young adult in 1912. The second is based on the lives of New Yorkers a month before the COVID-19 virus ravaged the city in March of 2020. The third is based on Mandel's personal experiences while touring her newly released books, focusing on absurd encounters she's had with readers. It was fascinating to hear Mandel break down these experiences, as well as answer questions about her funny anecdotes gained from being on tour. Next, Mandel was prompted to speak

about her most popular novel, *Station Eleven*, which was picked up by HBO for a television adaptation, tells the story of a postapocalyptic world crippled by a flu pandemic. The narrative follows a ragtag troupe of entertainers, made up of actors, artists, and musicians, as they traverse the Great Lakes. According to Mandel, before the final concept of *Station Eleven* came to her, she was inspired to write about the lives of traveling actors in a Shakespeare troupe, heading through Canada. She discussed how she often imagined the caravans that these actors would have traveled in. Although the Canadian trek did not make it to the final plot, the caravans did. Mandel mentioned how incredible it was to see these vehicles that she had dreamt of for so long translated onto the big screen by HBO's adaptation. Before and after discussing the contents of *Station Eleven*, she read an excerpt from her chapters. First, from chapter eleven, which felt fitting, and secondly, from chapter six.

Many questions were asked by Buchanan and members of the audience throughout the hour. They ranged from curiosities over her opinion of HBO's adaptation of *Station Eleven* to questions about her early book tours. Notably, Mandel answered a question concerning the Museum of Humanity written about in *Station Eleven*. More specifically, she was asked what she would display in the museum given the chance. Mandel replied, "A globe. I would enter a globe into the museum." Mandel's reasons for this inclusion were based on how small the world would become without outside knowledge of happenings beyond the horizon. She also spoke about the alienation of electricity and how odd the concept would be for those whom it is not normalized. She said, "Flip a switch, and the room is flooded with light." Something so insignificant to us would seem like magic to children of a postapocalyptic world.

Mandel also gave an entertaining response about her early book tours. She told the story of how she met Patrick Somerville, who took her to a gun show in the suburbs of Chicago. Somerville was a novelist whom Mandel contacted through a mutual friend.

She was hoping he would accompany her on a book tour so that they could share and expand their audiences. Mandel joked that although that was the first time they had met, they bonded quickly over the awkward experience. She then revealed that, years later, it was Somerville who offered her a spot in the writing room for HBO's adaptation of her bestselling novel. It was a funny anecdote that shows networking truly does lead to success.

In response to another question—one about the impact of her most popular novel—Mandel said, "*Station Eleven* was like this juggernaut that rolled over my life." She was referring to the massive success that *Station Eleven* received and how it subsequently impacted her life. Prior to the novel, she was still working as an executive assistant, writing on the side. After the novel's release, she was able to write to support herself and her family, making her dreams a reality.

Mandel's visit to WIU was well received by all who attended, and for good reason. She is a fascinating and inspiring author, one who offers a unique insight into what it means to live a life of writing. As I look back and romanticize the event, I am reminded of a powerful metaphor Mandel constructed in comparison to the work of writing. She said, "The novel is like a tiny little world where you have absolute control." There was a time in Mandel's life when this control was strictly limited to the page, but through insistent grit, it has expanded to fully captivate audiences of eager readers. Consider my belief in the power of literature, renewed.



JAVIER ZAMORA WRITES HIS IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

BY TAYLOR HOLAN

On April 2, 2024, Javier Zamora, native Salvadoran and author of *Unaccompanied* and *Solito*, blessed the students and faculty of WIU with his visit. Starting at 3 p.m., Zamora sat down with Professor Barbara Lawhorn

to engage in an inspiring interview. Here's what we learned:

During his interview, Zamora told students and faculty that his parents started working around age five—his dad picking cotton and sugarcane, and his mom selling mussels on the beach. They pushed him to do well in school since neither they nor their parents ever finished school. He said this wasn't uncommon, though, as 60% of Salvadorans were illiterate in the 1980s.

Zamora explained that his mother had left El Salvador when he was in first grade. So, to fill the void, he turned towards his teachers, looking for love, and learned to please them accordingly. He said that this dynamic was also reflected in their relationship once he met up with his mother again.

Zamora made it to the USA as an undocumented immigrant when he was nine years old—a story that is told in *Solito*. He claimed that he was pressured to be the perfect student in the USA, to keep his scholarships in school, the same as when he was in El Salvador. He explained that if he didn't do well in school, the money his parents sent him from the USA, used for Kellogg's Frosted Flakes and other 'luxuries', would have to go towards uniforms instead. By the time Zamora reached college, he had figured out "the formula." He said that he knew how to manipulate the systems in his favor. This was particularly important because, as an undocumented immigrant, he wasn't

able to apply for student loans. He was living in the USA on what he called, an "extraordinary visa", which allowed him to live in the country while he was working on his books.

"The average American can empathize with a child's story, but the average American cannot empathize with an adult's story."

- Javier Zamora

Zamora stated that writing *Solito* came from a place of anger. The book is a memoir written from the first-person perspective of Zamora, who was nine years old when he made his way to the USA. Zamora said that one of the biggest forces leading him to write this story was American-born, white journalists writing and publishing stories about immigration, writing his story for him. He decided to write his memoir but quickly became bored with the story he was writing.

In therapy, his therapist encouraged him to step back into the shoes of his nine-year-old self, which is how *Solito* is written. Zamora informed the students and faculty of the importance of therapy in his life. When he was working on *Unaccompanied*, Zamora didn't have any money, so he turned to poetry as therapy. Now, Zamora said that he doesn't even understand some of his poems anymore. He told us that

poetry isn't therapy, despite what we're all told. Zamora hasn't "written a poem in three years." Zamora told students and faculty that he struggles with his trauma and that "You need money to heal." It wasn't until later in life that he

realized how impactful visiting a therapist was. Zamora openly admitted that he'd been through thirteen different therapists and that his current therapist is also a child immigrant, so he identifies with her on a deeper level.

Zamora gave us a sneak peek into his new project. The book is supposed to be about an undocumented immigrant in middle school. Zamora told us that he wants to push boundaries by using various points of view throughout the novel. But he also told us that he hasn't started writing it yet.



EGO COLLOQUIUM COMES BACK

BY NICK RUSH

On March 23rd, the English Graduate Program held its second colloquium since the COVID-19 pandemic, and it came back with a bang! Meeting in person rather than virtually made this a very special event, as once again, graduate students, undergraduate students, prospective students, and family and friends gathered in Simpkins Hall to present academic papers, ask questions, and share food and conversation together.

The event was organized by the English Graduate Organization (EGO) and the Director of Graduate Studies in English, Dr. Roberta Di Carmine, who welcomed everyone to Simpkins at 9:30 a.m. in the Reading Room and kicked off the colloquium with coffee and breakfast. Dr. Di Carmine said, "I'd like to thank everyone for supporting this event, particularly our department chair, Marjorie Allison, the EGO co-presidents, Isabella Perez and Chris Perez, and the English Graduate Committee."

Nine students presented their work in a series of academic papers. Their topics reflected the wide and unique spectrum of potential English research. Some students worked on traditional literary topics, like Sara Murphy with her paper on Nigerian novelist Ben Okri's Booker prize-winning book *The Famished Road*. Others took the broader approach of rhetorical and cultural criticism: these included Mark Brown's deep analysis of masculine vulnerability in contemporary heavy-metal music, Chris Perez's work on the musical and the value of art, Joshua Stinson's deep analysis of the television show *Stranger Things*, Isabella Perez's analysis of domesticity and the horror film, and Kristen Lippold's analysis of

fan-fiction subcultures.

Some of the most lively and engaged conversations occurred in the



question-and-answer periods that followed each panel. Marie Watson thoroughly engaged the audience with her presentation on Pier Paul Read's bestselling non-fiction account of cannibalism and survival, *Alive* (1974). Her work raised questions about the taboos of civilization, the religious imagination, and the reading experience of these survival stories. Dr. David Banash, a Professor of English, asked, "What is this book [*Alive*] doing for the reader? Why do readers connect with this horrific event?" Watson laughed at the question and answered, "Morbid fascination?" She argues that a combination of morbid fascination, admiration of the human-spirit's will to survive, and plain curiosity, hooks readers. "It's not like I want to commit cannibalism!" Watson joked.

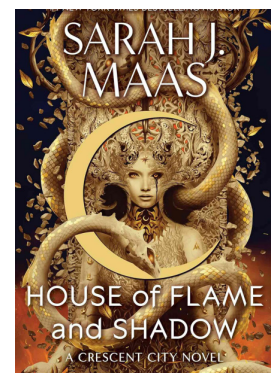
Both Joshua Stinson's paper on *Stranger Things* and the 1980s and Collin Burns's paper on Frank Herbert's *Dune* with its celebration of feudalism raised questions about nostalgia, for the authors of these texts and for their readers.

Abigail Heinecke's paper on adaptations of the classic "Little Red

Riding Hood" fairy tales had the audience asking about the function of fairy tales in older eras versus today's film, television, and graphic novel adaptations. Dr. Merrill Cole, a Professor of English and Poetry, asked, "How are the wolves gendered in these adaptations of the fairy tale?" Heinecke responded that the overwhelming majority of "big bad wolves" are male, even amongst recent adaptations. She continued to speak about the power dynamic this illustrates between men and women.

In addition to listening and responding to papers, the panelists, faculty, and guests gathered together for lunch in the reading room, continuing the conversation and swapping book recommendations, questions, and insights. Presenters were excited to talk about how the work they were presenting is part of their exit options for the program in the shape of both the traditional thesis and the applied project.

WHITE'S BOOK OF THE YEAR



Alisha White – It is the third in the Crescent City series, an epic urban fantasy series with faeries, werewolves, dragons, and angels.

MALPASS' GLORIOUS GREENERY

BY NICK RUSH

As any WIU attendee will surely know, our campus library is home to more than books. Since its opening nearly 50 years ago, Malpass Library (often referred to as Malpass) has been a safe haven for all things green and leafy. The building, opened on September 5th, 1978, was designed to be a blooming organism with symbiosis between its plant life and texts. According to an article published by the *Western Courier* in 1979, the idea was that plants would regulate moisture levels at a perfectly serendipitous percentage, which would keep book spines from drying out while also preventing stagnant moisture and mold growth. Of course, this is an oversimplification that excludes the work provided by the library's dedicated plant keepers. As an avid library goer myself, my curiosities craved to know what went into this maintenance.

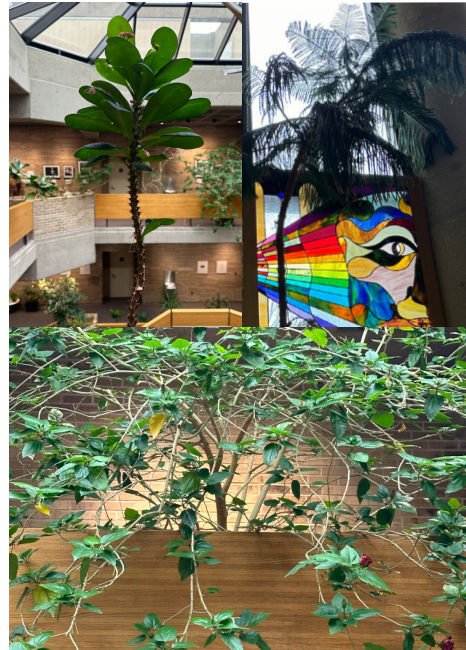
After stopping to smell the roses, I reached out to Adrea Craft, who I had bumped into during her watering routine. Craft is the primary plant keeper, also overseeing WIU's greenhouse. Her responsibilities are extensive; her knowledge even more so.

While communicating with Craft, she recommended that I also contact Andrea Francis, a reference librarian and plant enthusiast. Francis helps out with the plant collection if Craft is unavailable. With their combined expertise, the plant collection is thriving and steadily growing in size.

Speaking of size, this was one of my prime curiosities concerning the collection. As I toured Malpass with Craft and Francis, I was faced with a new plant at every turn. And these were just the plants that are visible to students. Later, I was taken on a behind-the-scenes tour of the library's Green Room, where they nurse and propagate dozens more. So, this begs the question. How many plants call Malpass home? According to Craft and Francis there are 660 to 700 individual plants throughout the library. Although this estimate may sound staggering, it is nothing compared to the population's peak prior to 2016. It was so extensive that the space in the library grew quickly limited. A publicized plant sale was held, which reduced the collection's population from nearly 2,000 individual plants to the approximate number maintained today.

While the collection may no longer be in

the thousands, I still needed to know how they water nearly 700 plants on a regular basis. According to Craft, "it is a project." An estimated ten-twelve hours every week are dedicated to watering. She packs up her watering cart with the works (buckets, pitchers, clippers, etc.) and goes floor to



floor, checking the soil of each plant before determining if they need a drink. She follows a pre-coordinated route a previous student employee helped pave. Hours were spent mapping, cataloging, and noting needs. This map helps Craft when it comes time to water, and provides her with the approximate population.

As we followed an abbreviated routine, Craft and Francis had shocking stories to share. On the third floor, Craft pointed out an impressively tall pine growing against a south-facing window. As is common in Malpass, these windows display a hanging piece of stained glass, recycled from a local church. Apparently, these two tenants posed a serious historical issue. Craft explained that one of the pine's crowns (the growing point located at the top of the tree) had managed to grow between the stained glass and the window, threatening the artwork. Craft reasoned that because the pines lean towards light and had not been rotated, the tree weaseled its way against the window. To prevent any further growth from lifting the stained glass from its anchors, Craft had to carefully rotate the pot, while someone else secured the scene from a ladder. With the

crown successfully removed from underneath the stained glass, the entire pine promptly fell over! I imagine some deep voice in the background yelling, "TIMBER!" Luckily, no one was injured, including the pine. After this dramatic event, Craft has maintained more regular pot rotations.

After hearing this story, the height of the pines sparked new interest. A tree this tall surely has been growing for many years. Craft's answer? Roughly forty years old. That particular pine has been thriving in Malpass since the 80s. Sensing my admiration, Craft walked me down to the Garden Lounge of the second floor. In one of the plant-filled glass alcoves, a Christmas Cactus grows, as it has done for the past one-hundred years. That's right. We have, in our library, a cactus over a century old! Apparently, it was donated to Western in 1919 by a newly married couple, who had received the plant as a wedding gift, or so the story goes. I like to think that their regifted wedding present symbolizes the union between Malpass and thriving plant life.

Among these thriving plants, Craft and Francis have their favorites and each led me to various spots. First, Francis led me to a potted Dutchman's Pipe Cactus (*Epiphyllum oxypetalum*). This impressive plant blooms intricate white flowers, but only for a night. If you have seen the 2018 film, *Crazy Rich Asians*, you will be familiar with these flowers. Francis expressed admiration for the plant's fleeting but regal beauty. Craft, on the other hand, had a harder time narrowing down to a single specimen. She first led me to a Clivia (*Clivia nobilis*) or Forest Lily. This plant grows bright orange flowers, downturned, and bell shaped. Her second choice was a Bird of Paradise (*Strelitzia reginae*). A more commonly known plant, it is named for its bird-like blooms, complete with a look-a-like beak and orange crest feathers.

I know I am not alone in claiming comfort in this blooming haven. Francis put it best; "I think that when people see healthy plants in an environment, they might subconsciously translate that into how their own experience in that environment might be; that they might be nurtured to experience growth at WIU." I feel grateful to have such a welcoming space to retreat to on the Macomb campus. Now, I am even more grateful for the dedicated team behind Malpass Library's glorious greenery.

DI CARMINE TAKES FILM STUDIES STUDENTS TO ITALY

This year, Professor Roberta Di Carmine, the director of the film studies minor in the English department, offered a remarkable class, ENG 379, Exploring Italy through Film. Professor Di Carmine grew up in Pescara, in central Italy, and emigrated to the U.S. in 1994, ultimately earning her doctorate in film studies. She directs the film minor program in the department of English. Di Carmine explained, "I always wanted to bring students to Italy and show how Italian landscapes have been used in classic as well as contemporary Italian and American films. I always wanted to bring film students to Cinecittà, the famous studio in Rome! And, I always wanted to share Italian culture (passion for the arts, food, language, for instance) with film students." That dream became a reality on March 8th, as Professor Di Carmine and nine students traveled to Rome to begin their exploration of Italian film in Italy, visiting the studios and sets, meeting with guides and directors, and immersing themselves in the experience of Italy for ten days.

To prepare for the trip, Di Carmine took

the class through the history of Italian film, beginning with Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, and including classics like Rossellini's *Open City* and De Sica's *Today and Tomorrow*. The class also looked at Hollywood clas-

from the 90s before looking at contemporary Hollywood's representations of Italy in Scott's *Hannibal* and Howard's *Angel's and Demons* among many other films. Di Carmine contextualizes all films with extensive



lecture and discussion, and the class read Carlo Celli's *A New Guide to Italian Cinema*. As graduate student Andrew Cripe put it, "Dr. Di Carmine didn't simply play the hits and let it rest; she went to great lengths to ensure we had ample opportunity to learn more about filmmakers whose contributions to Italian cinema remain unsung in U.S. film studies."

Having immersed themselves in Italian film, history, and criticism, the class left from Chicago's O'Hare airport to fly to Rome on March 7th. They stayed at the Hostel Palladini on the Via Cattaneo, toured the city, and then spent time in the heart of the Italian film industry, the Cinecittà studios. Here, they walked the soundstag-

es, sets, and back lots of some of the most famous films in cinema history. As junior Matthew Gedraitis put it, "Seeing the Italian film industry up close was oddly transformative for me. I have looked up to many filmmakers, but being able to be in the same

es, sets, and back lots of some of the most famous films in cinema history. As junior Matthew Gedraitis put it, "Seeing the Italian film industry up close was oddly transformative for me. I have looked up to many filmmakers, but being able to be in the same

place where the creatives I look up to toiled away for hours on end when developing one film struck me.” Graduate student Andrew Cripe felt the power of being at the famed studio, too. “There were areas that were cordoned off from photography, such as a large expanse of a ghostly set that bore productions like HBO’s *Rome* and Martin Scorsese’s *Gangs of New York*. So much of this territory inspires film lovers, like myself, to return to the past when such grand, operatic designs for film backgrounds were attempted. I felt a certain eeriness during the tour, as this was a location that both celebrates and mourns a generation of filmmakers that no longer exists on the grand, hypnotic scale it once did in the era of Fellini, Visconti, and as we explored in great depth, Ettore Scola, whose workshop we got to spend time in.” Elizabeth Morales was also deeply impressed, “It was an amazing eye-opening experience. Seeing all the details that take place to have a film come to life made me more appreciative of film.”

After four days in Rome, the class traveled to Florence, where they toured famous film locations and spent time in famed film



The class also had an opportunity for lunch and an extended conversation with film director Lucia Mauro, and to spend time exploring Rome on their own outside the limits of the guided tours. Matthew Gedraitis made the most of these opportunities, “being able to walk or take the train to these ancient sites that had been standing for hundreds or thousands of years. While I didn’t particularly enjoy visiting them during the day, visiting them at night al-

lowed me to sit and reflect on these places—not as tourist sites, but as a window into a time long past. These quiet, contemplative moments are what really made an impact for me.” Andrew Cripe affirmed the value of independent exploration, “Dr. Di Carmine provided us a great deal of independence and flexibility in appreciating and soaking in the gorgeous environments we had the chance to visit.”

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writing down idea after idea for days until he was satisfied with what he had come up with.” In Florence, the class also took in the Uffizi museum, and the Palace Vecchio. Florence was an especial favorite with Andrew Cripe, noting his love for “Florence, in total, but especially the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Flower and Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise.”

Then it was back to Rome for the final days of the trip, with class sessions at University Sapienza and a visit to the Dario Argento museum. Di Carmine was so delighted with

the success of the trip, “Seeing expressions of wonder and excitement in the students when we were in Cinecittà in Rome and then in Florence at the Franco Zeffirelli Foundation, both full of costumes, art decor, sets, and original works by famous Italian directors (Fellini, Scola, Bertolucci) and American direc-



tors (Scorsese). They absolutely loved Cinecittà.” Elizabeth Morales explained what an amazing opportunity the trip was. “I would recommend this program to students. This was my last semester and I never thought that I would be able to study abroad. I think studying abroad in general gives you a new perspective of life, and helps you see that there is a whole world out there. People know that there is a whole world out there, but just being able to go and see it for yourself can be very eye-opening.” Di Carmine hopes to offer another section of this class in the future and spend even more time in Italy with her students.

2023 · 2024 ANNOUNCEMENTS



Students wait to hear their names called at the English Department Awards Night on Thursday, April 18th in the Lincoln Room of the Union.

Each spring, the English Department awards \$20,000 in scholarships and fellowships for our graduate and undergraduate students. We are pleased to announce the following students were awarded English scholarships this spring for the 2023–2024 academic year.

College of Arts and Sciences Awards

Emma Gilliland won the College of Arts and Sciences Scholar of the Year Award

Claire Koechle was selected as the College of Arts and Sciences Lincoln Laureate nominee

Jack Sellers won the College of Arts and Sciences Honorary Award in Humanities

Undergraduate Scholarship and Award Winners

John and Barbara Blackburn Scholarship – **Payton Brodie**

Dr. Paul Blackford British Literature Scholarship – **Nicholas Rush**

Dr. John Castle Memorial Scholarship – **Roberto Jaramillo**

Dr. Olive Fite American Literature Scholarship – **Natoya Raymond**

Dr. Irving Garwood Shakespearean Scholarship – **Taylor Holan**

Robert L. Hodges English Education Scholarships – **Elijah Adams, Keagen Beckner, Grace McGill, & Brett Metternich.**

The Sig, Jeanette and Dean Johnson Scholarship in English – **Jamariah White**

Lila S Linder English I – **Sam Adcock**

Lila S Linder English II – **Elijah Adams**

The Karen B. Mann Essay Award – **Claire Koechle**

Nai-Tung Ting and Lee Hsia Ting English Scholarship – **Claire Koechle**

Beth M. Stiffler Memorial Scholarship – **Maya Steinke**

English Department Scholar of the Year – **Taylor Holan**



The Creative Writing Program's Barbara Lawhorn celebrates Khloe Wiegers first place win in the Cordell Larner Award for poetry.

Writing Awards

Bruce H. Leland Essay Contest Winners

English 100, Introduction to Writing – 1st Place, **Destinee Harris**; 2nd Place, **Giselle Diaz**; 3rd Place, **Jordan Draughan**; Honorable Mention, **Laurence Williams.**

English 180, College Writing I – 1st Place, **Avery Weaver**; 2nd Place, **Finley Westover**; 3rd Place, **Jerreia James**; Honorable Mention, **Anne Chalker**.

English 280, College Writing II – 1st Place, **Evelyn Fetzer**; 2nd Place, **Hannah Stevenson**; 3rd Place, **Marlon Moses**; Honorable Mention, **Tionne Hanley**.

GH 101 General Honors – 1st Place, **Julietta Marini**; 2nd Place, **Rishabh Arya**; 3rd Place, **Natalie Gibson**.

Creative Writing Awards

Lois C. Bruner Creative Nonfiction Awards – 1st Place, **Karol Sheese**; 2nd Place, **Gerry Garcia Campos**; 3rd Place, **Grace McGill**.

Cordell Larner Award in Fiction – 1st Place, **Abigail Jones**; 2nd Place, **Cole Miller**; 3rd Place, **Karissa Geisinger**.

Cordell Larner Award in Poetry – 1st Place, **Khloe Wieggers**; 2nd Place, **Ajayla Ries-Ennells**; 3rd Place, **Sophia Best**.

Graduate Scholarship, Fellowship, and Award Winners

Ron & Leslie Walker Graduate Fellowship – **Maram Alsufyan**

Syndy M. Conger Essay Award – **Abigail Heinecke & Connor Sullivan**

Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award – **Abigail Heinecke**

Alfred J Lindsey Memorial Scholarship – **Chris Perez**

C. John Mahoney English Graduate Fellowship – **Maram Alsufyan & Marie Watson**.



The new Sigma Tau Delta executive officers for 2024-2025 are Grace McGill, Natoya Raymond, Ajayla Ries-Ennells, Taylor Holan, Maya Steinke, Carter Myers, and Jael Henning.

Announcements

Current Students

Grace McGill was re-elected President of Sigma Tau Delta and presented on “The Future is Now” Roundtable at the NCTE conference in Columbus, Ohio.

Jael Henning was elected co-vice president of Sigma Tau Delta.

Taylor Holan was elected Social Media Manager of Sigma Tau Delta.

Carter Myers was elected Treasurer of Sigma Tau Delta.

Hannah Puccini attended the NCTE Annual Convention in Columbus, Ohio.

Natoya Raymond was elected Public Relations manager for Sigma Tau Delta.

Ajayla Ries-Ennells was elected co-vice president of Sigma Tau Delta.

Kaitlyn Rockwell was elected Secretary of Sigma Tau Delta.

Maya Steinke attended the NCTE Annual Convention in Columbus, Ohio.

Alumni

Nick Apke (B.A. 2011) accepted a position as an Instructional Designer at Brilljent.

Ayana Contreras (B.A. 2006) accepted the position of Assistant General Manager of Radio, at Rocky Mountain Public Media, running daily operations and strategy for KUVU Jazz and 104.7 The Drop in Denver.

Rebecca Gonner (B.A. 2017) accepted a position as a technical writer with CACI International.

Cass Litle (M.A. 2011) accepted a position as a Writing Specialist at East Central College in Union Missouri.

Emily Litle (M.A. 2014) accepted a position at the University of Missouri at Saint Louis as a Learning Analytics Coordinator for their Center for Teaching and Learning.

Raymond Norris (M.A. 2018) was accepted to the doctoral program in English at Texas A&M where he will be fully funded with a fellowship.

Meghan O’Toole (M.A. 2021) accepted a position as the Assistant Director of Content and Storytelling at Lake Forest College.

Darrin Ross (B.A. 2022) attended the NCTE Annual Convention in Columbus, Ohio.

Zack Short (M.A. 2006) accepted a full-time faculty position as an Instructor of English at Southeastern Community College in Iowa.

Samantha Smith (B.A. 2023) accepted a position teaching English at Rochester High School in Illinois.

Anne Vantieghe (M.A. 2023) presented her paper “How to Use Classics with a Modern Lens for the Twenty-First Century Student” at the NCTE Annual Convention in Columbus, Ohio.

Faculty

David Banash published “The Long History of Collage: From Early Modern Commonplace Books to Twenty-First-Century Experimental Writing” in *Subversion and Conformity in Literary Collage* (Routledge 2024).

Ashley Beardsley presented “Open Work, Open Play: Stories of Resisting Exclusive Digital Media” and “Amplifying Student Voices in Our Stories about Generative Artificial Intelligence” at the 7C Ad Hoc Committee on AI at the Computers & Writing conference in Fort Worth, TX. June 2024. She is moving from Associate Editor to the Disputation Section Co-Editor for *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*. She took on a new role as an Associate Editor for the *Best of the Journals in Rhetoric and Composition 2023*. She published “You Have Time and You Should Cook, Tonight’: Erasing Feminized Labor on 30-Minute Meals.” *Peitho*, vol. 26, no. 2, Winter 2024. Her chapter “Calling All Bakers, Chefs, Home Bakers & Cooks’: Digital Food Activism and Bake Sales as Social Activist Rhetoric” is forthcoming in the book *Practicing Digital Activisms*.

Rebekah Buchanan was chair and presenter at “Making Rural Connections: Building Rural Literacies, Creating Communities, and Cultivating Dialogue,” a Roundtable at the NCTE Annual Convention in Columbus, Ohio. Nov. 2023. She was also the advisor for student Grace McGill’s presentation on the “The Future is Now” Roundtable at NCTE, and she brought six undergraduate and graduate students to present and attend this year’s NCTE conference. She presented “Young Adult Reads and Cannabis Culture: Smoke and Prince of Pot” at the PCA Annual Conference in Chicago, in Mar. 2024, and she founded the Cannabis and Culture Area, a first of its kind for a national academic association, and she is now serving as the area Chair for Cannabis and Popular Culture Area of PCA. She also presented “Women in Punk” at the Punk Scholars Network Conference in Chicago, Aug. 2023. She co-founded The Rural Assembly on English Literacy and Language Education (TRAELE) and currently serves as its vice president. She won a competitive grant to become a member of the 2024 Cohort of This Story Matters Teacher Corps. She continues to write book reviews for *Library Journal* and *School Library Journal* and she hosts the *New Books Network: Popular Culture* podcast.

Merrill Cole was elected WIU Chapter President of the UPI faculty union. His poem “Meditation with Medieval Plague Paintings” was published in *New York Quarterly* in June.

Roberta Di Carmine led a study-abroad course in film studies, “Exploring Italy Through Film” for undergraduate and graduate students, spending ten days in Italy exploring the culture of Italian cinema. She was also invited to speak at both the Multicultural Center and Veterans Resource Center, leading a discussion of the documentary film *Lioness*, on March 26, 2024.

Everett Hamner presented “Making End-Times New: Climate Lit & Film as Contemporary Mythology,” for the Sacred Texts, Theory, and Theological Construction Unit at the American Academy of Religion, San Antonio, 2023. He was appointed to the Executive Committee of the Science and Literature Forum and the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment for the

Modern Language Association. He also organized the 6th Annual Get Lit event at Western’s Quad Cities Campus.

David Johnson co-authored “Embodying Antiracist Pedagogy: Why Is It So Difficult?” for the *Journal of Teaching Writing*, Volume 37, Issue 1, (2023).

Yekaterina Kozhukhova published “How Coyote Borrowed the Devil’s Wings” in *Dreamforge: A Magazine of Science & Fantasy Fiction*. She also designed and taught an honors course on horror fiction and the role of horror in contemporary culture.

Barbara Lawhorn published “Recompense” in *Zaum Magazine* (Issue 28); “Ember” in *The Bangalore Review* (March 2024); “Field Corn,” in *Miracle Monocle* (Spring 2023); “God Send,” in the Belmont Story Review (Fall 2023); “Switchback,” in *BigCityLit* (Summer 2023); “Kitchen Song” in *Inkwell* (Summer 2023); and “Using My Hands” in the *Santa Clara Review*. (Vol. 110, Issue 02). Her short story collection, *Born Again*, was a semifinalist for the Eulidia Award. She earned a graduate certificate in Mindfulness for Educators from Antioch University, and she now organizes Midweek Mindfulness & Muffins (Fall) & Monthly Mindfulness & Muffins (spring) for the department. She hosted a pack-a-lunch/poetry for dessert “Garden Party” with librarian, Michelle Holschuh Simmons and also hosted an open mic at the Western Illinois Museum with Sue Scott and Jan Welch in April.

Dan Malachuk published his new book *Literature for a Society of Equals* (Routledge, 2024). He also published “Sympathy and Pride in George Eliot’s Fiction” in *Nineteenth-Century Literature* vol. 79.1 (June 2024).

Amy Mossman spent three weeks as a visiting professor at Le Mans University in Le Mans, France where she gave research talks, sat in on classes, met with students and faculty, and spoke to a group of students about the new student exchange partnership Western has with Le Mans University. In January 2024, Amy Mossman was selected to participate in the MLA’s competitive Reimagining Humanities Coursework for Career Readiness professional development workshop series for spring 2024. The goal of the seminar, which is funded by a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, is to support faculty members and program leaders in languages and literatures at small and mid-size institutions that are developing initiatives in undergraduate career preparation.

Mark Mossman was promoted to the position of Interim Provost. He presented “Revamping the Onboarding Process: Preparing Students for Higher Learning” at the Higher Learning Commission Annual Convention, on April 16, 2024, in Chicago.

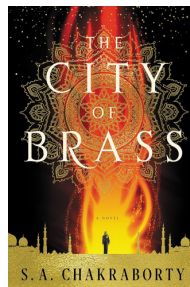
Richard Ness published “Projectile Dysfunctions: Influences on and of Bergman’s Persona” in *A Companion to Ingmar Bergman* (Wiley-Blackwell) and “Music for Crime Films, Film Noir, and Thrillers,” in the *Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World* (Bloomsbury). He contributed program notes for this year’s Columbus Moving Picture Show festival, in Columbus, Ohio.

A.J. Rocca presented “The Horde Enters Ukraine: Rhetorical Use of ‘Orcs’ in the Russo-Ukrainian War” at The Virtual International

Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts, Nov. 2023. He published several short stories, including: “The Devil Went Down to the Subway” in *Playlist of the Damned*; “Adventure Capital” in *99 Fleeting Fantasies*; “And One Day Soon Your Many Worlds” in *Short Edition*; “To Catch the Light Off Other Stars” in *Sci Phi Journal*. His article “Samuel R. Delany as Genre Flaneur: Encountering Science Fiction in *Dhalgren*” was published in *Science Fiction Studies*. His feature Article: “John Milton the Space Poet: Early Traces of Science Fiction in *Paradise Lost*” was published in *Reactor*. His feature story, “‘Not in our Name’: Chicago’s Jewish Left Demands a Ceasefire in Gaza” was published in *The Chicago Reader*.

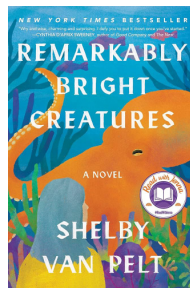
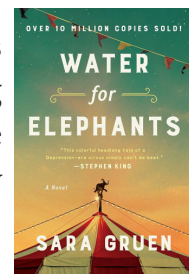
Alisha White brought three current undergraduates, one current graduate student, and two alumni to the NCTE conference, where she also gave two presentations: “I Talk Like a River’: Connecting Place and Identity in Picturebooks and YA” for the Making Rural Connections Roundtable and “Visual Eco-literacies: Pivoting from Climate Doom to Inspiring Climate Possibilities” for the roundtable session for ELATE Commission on Climate Justice at the annual conference of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Columbus, Ohio. She presented “Let’s Wear It Tomorrow: Concert Tee Shirts as Representations of Affinity Spaces” at the National Popular Culture Association in Chicago. As a co-author, she published “Walking the In-Between: Convening Time and Space for our Entangled Selves” in *Pedagogical Propositions: Playful Walking with A/R/Tography* [Book 2] (InSEA) and “Do Not Enter: Walking and Rolling the Wrong Way up the Down Ramp” in *Pedagogical Propositions: Playful Walking with A/R/Tography* [Book 1].

BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR!

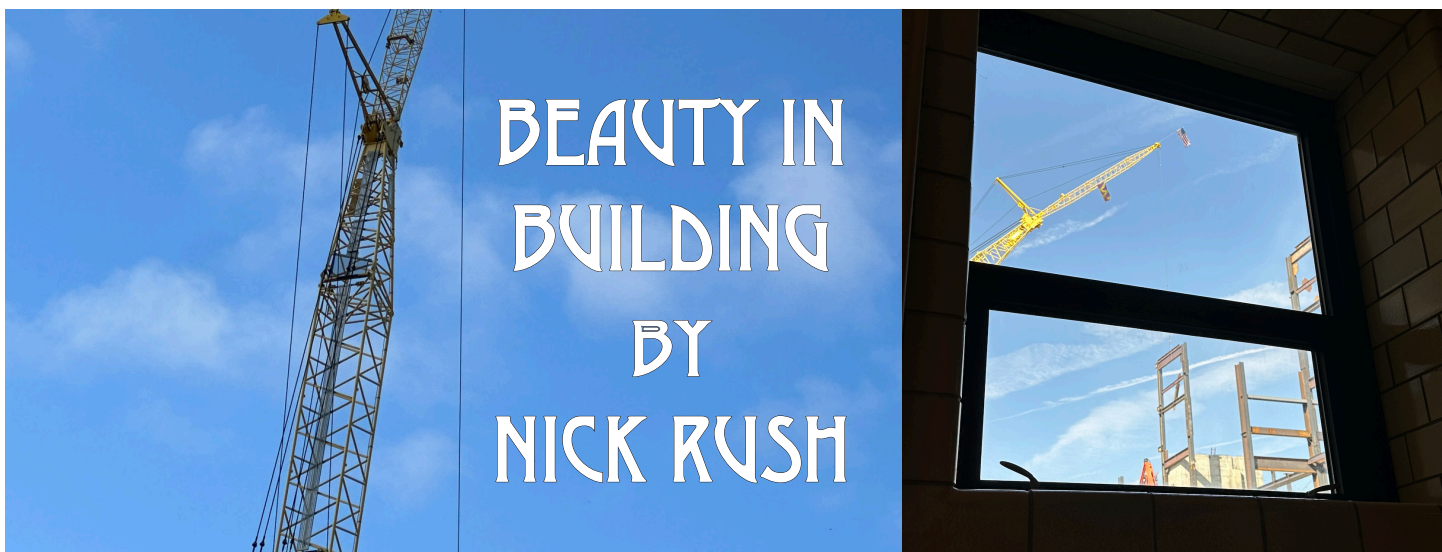


Nick Rush – It allows me to enjoy all of the adventure and myths of Rick Riordan’s novels, but in a more mature way!

Ajayla Ries - *Water for Elephants* is a beautiful book with an intriguing plot and an incredible narrative voice that makes the story flow effortlessly.



Carter Myers - A sentient, deeply human octopus, an old woman gripping with grief, and a setup for one of the best love stories of the century. *Remarkably Bright Creatures* truly is remarkable.



Over the 2023-2024 academic year, Simpkins, the departmental building of English, has been a faithful neighbor to the emerging Center for Performing Arts building. The building’s construction, which began in late 2022, has been a constant

over the year, with passing students able to gauge the site’s progress by the constant shifting of large machinery. From the WIU webpage, this progress can be monitored by a live video feed, often featuring the resident lattice crane at work, with its

symbolic yellow color and proud waving of a WIU flag. As the year progressed, English students and faculty alike have grown accustomed to the cacophony of construction, learning to hear its racket as ambiance and to see its structures as art.

SIX TIPS FOR PLEASURE READING

BY TAYLOR HOLAN

As a literature major, one of my favorite pastimes is reading. Diving into a good book is such a reward after hours of homework, household chores, working a part-time job, and juggling my extracurriculars and social life. Reading was my first love, and we will be together for the rest of my life. As a college student, I understand how difficult it is to find time to read. Classes take up hours of our week, the homework is neverending, and some of us have jobs, clubs, sports, family, and friends. Still, it is important to find time to settle in, with a cup of tea, maybe a candle, and a good book (and not one you have to read for class).

Sure, it seems stressful, another thing to add to our already full schedules, but think about it. We make time daily for socializing, working out, watching television, and scrolling endlessly through social media. So why can't we make time to read? Not to say that those things aren't as important, they're a crucial part of our identities, but reading can easily become part of our identities too.

I'm not perfect. I went years without reading for pleasure, simply because I didn't have time. I rediscovered my love in the past year, and I feel so much more complete now that I have.

College student to college student, I have some tips for those of you who need help finding the time for books.

1. Set aside a specific time of day for just pleasure reading.

I tend to read before bed—after finishing my homework, showering, and eating dinner. I typically give myself about an hour to really get into the book (and sometimes I accidentally stay up late because it's so good). I used to spend this time watching television and doom scrolling through social media, and I still do those things, but I've made it a point to progress in my books almost every night. Pick a time of day, and dedicate some time to reading. It doesn't have to be an hour, it doesn't

recommendations. Setting a reading goal and watching my progress keeps me motivated.

3. Pick the right book for you.

I like to read fantasy books, you might like science fiction. I like to read books in a series, but you might prefer stand-alone. It doesn't matter the genre, the length, the author, or the intended age group. Read what makes you happy. It'll keep you interested and make reading feel like less of a chore.

4. Do your homework on time.

It's hard to think about reading when you have a bunch of assignments hanging over your head. I know this, and when I have homework, I can't relax because I'm stressed about getting it done. One thing I've realized is that getting my homework done early allows me more time for myself, and as I've



even have to have to be half an hour. You could just read a chapter. It's up to you as the reader. It doesn't even have to be at the same time every day. Sometimes I'll read between classes, or during my breaks at work.

2. Make a GoodReads account

I'm telling you, this is one of the greatest things I've ever done. It helps me track my reading progress, keeps me updated with my favorite authors, and even gives me book

established, this is more time to read.

5. Find friends who also like to read.

Or encourage the ones you have to read too. I've found that being able to talk to my friends about the books I'm reading gets me excited about reading more. Join a book club, or read a book with a friend.

6. Lastly, have fun!

This one is self-explanatory.



"AQUAMAN SUCKS!" MAGLIOCCO LECTURER RYAN POLL DIVES INTO THE CONTROVERSY BY NICK RUSH

At the beginning of the November 8th Magliocco lecture entitled "Aquaman Sucks!" Department Chair Marjorie Allison welcomed all in attendance while giving special recognition to Maurine Magliocco. Magliocco, who studied at Western beginning in 1967, went on to teach in the English Department for 37 years and, upon retiring, created the Magliocco Lecture Series. The lecture series, which hosted its first annual lecture in 2006, would finance the visit of a guest lecturer to provide academic enrichment for both Western students and faculty. Magliocco has not visited Western in some time, so it was a real treat to have her, with many professors in attendance greeting her with well wishes and warm embraces.

Once Allison had welcomed the attendants, she turned the podium over to Dr. Rebekah Buchanan, who gave an introduction to the guest lecturer, Ryan Poll. Poll is an associate professor of English at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago, IL. Outside of teaching, Poll researches the overlapping of politics, aesthetics, and ecology. In his second book, *Aquaman and the War Against Oceans*, Poll uses Aquaman, both as the figure and as a stand-in for the aesthetic of comics, as an allegory for the global mistreatment of our precious oceans. According to Buchanan, this unique perspective drew her to his teachings and led her to invite Poll to give his lecture. The lecture was a long time coming, as Buchanan said she first virtually met and began corresponding with Poll a year ago. Following this kind and flattering introduction, Poll stood to begin his lecture.

"The best projects start with a paradox," according to Poll. He went on to explain what he defines as the disappearance

of oceans from popular literature. Beginning in the 20th century, oceans became a forgotten space in stories, appearing less and less, if included at all. Before this disappearance, oceans were often written about as expanses of natural beauty, connections between humans and spirituality, or alien-like worlds filled with mysterious wonder. According to Poll, this disappearance also refers to the change in the connotation of oceans in writing. Following this disappearance, oceans were no longer seen as wondrous or positive environments but were seen as dangerous, untamable, and the home of villainous monsters or beings. With this outlined, Poll began discussing the realistic use and histories of our oceans.

Poll asked the audience what they thought were the two most important ships. With a few ideas shouted out that were well reasoned but not what Poll had in mind, he revealed his answer. According to Poll, "slave ships and container ships enabled modernity." These two classes of ships, different in their purposes and positions in our history, initiated the usage of oceans as a means of transport. "Oceans have become highways for our hot commodities," Poll explained. After providing plenty of background information, Poll began speaking about comics as a form of media and, more significantly, Aquaman as an allegory for oceanic ecology.

While talking about comics, Poll covered a wide range of topics, from the systematic racism within comic publishing companies to the specific intentions behind mapping out comic panels/frames. The main point Poll seemed to be making was the connection between the extreme humiliation Aquaman received since

his first appearance and the horrible mistreatment and oblivious mindset towards the world's oceans by humans. Poll showed us comedy spoofs of Aquaman, from a skit in *Robot Chicken* to a parody clip included in *Family Guy*. He then asked the audience why we thought it was such a popular trend to hate Aquaman. The general consensus was that Aquaman's powers are essentially useless, even while in the ocean. Poll then linked this back to the disappearance of oceans from popular literature, stating that the reason we view his powers, dominion over all the world's oceans, as lame is due to the lack of positive imagery of oceans in media. Poll spent much time expanding on this idea, showing us many slides with graphics from comics and video excerpts. After his lecture concluded, he offered time for a Q&A. Few questions were asked, but for those that were, Poll answered them thoroughly, sometimes opening up the discussion to tangents that were not entirely connected to the question but interesting nonetheless.

Within his brief lecture, Poll effectively used a comic character, a superhero dressed in orange and green, to argue for the desperate plight of our world's oceans. This interesting allegory allowed Poll to address world-threatening issues in a light and digestible way while not permitting further ignorance. Take this heavy moment that followed a silly joke about mismatched comic panels. He said, "The one that's becoming a graveyard because of global capitalism." Here, Poll was referencing the decrease in biodiversity of marine environments due to the mismanagement of industry-related processes near or significant to coasts. It's safe to say that members of Poll's audience will no longer be able to scoff at the King of Atlantis.

FROM ENGLISH M.A. THESIS TO PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATION

BY A.J. ROCCA

I finished my graduate thesis in the summer of 2021 in a vacant apartment off Adams Street. My own apartment was having issues so Macomb Rentals let us use one of their vacant apartments with unruptured pipes so that we could have some kind of water access. If you got up early enough, you might instead spot me moving through the muggy morning with a kitchen chair, computer bag, and books on interlibrary loan.



I was writing on Samuel Delany's postmodern science-fiction novel *Dhalgren*, a book that William Gibson once described as "a riddle never meant to be solved." After a year of wrestling with the project, I was about ready to believe him. It was like the novel was fractally complex; every time I thought I was getting close to a coherent analysis of some part, I would uncover another crucial aspect of the work that needed to be fully researched and explored before anything substantive could be said. I wanted to talk about *Dhalgren* as New Wave Science Fiction, but that quickly bled into *Dhalgren* as mythology, and of course talking about *Dhalgren* as mythology meant talking about *Dhalgren* and race, and *Dhalgren* and race could not possibly be unpacked without going into *Dhalgren* and city space...*Dhalgren*, *Dhalgren*, *Dhalgren* . . . Grendal, Grendal, Grendal.

The thesis was full of loose ends, but I didn't have the time or the peace of mind to fully figure out all the connections between them: my grandmother had just died, and my father's family was on the brink of civil war over her estate. Katya and I were negotiating with the university for full-time teaching positions, I just needed to defend.

I went to my thesis committee with a 32,593-word beast complete with footnotes and about fifty entries in the works cited. I stammered through a lot of the defense, trying and failing

to keep my answers short, lost in Delanyland. It was enough to get me through the defense and earn me my M.A., but I left the program with a lingering residue of frustration. For all the time I had sunk into the project, I hadn't managed to articulate what I really wanted to say about *Dhalgren*. But I had a wedding and a new job to worry about and no time for a completed project. I submitted my thesis to ProQuest and left it to gather dust in the stacks of Malpass.

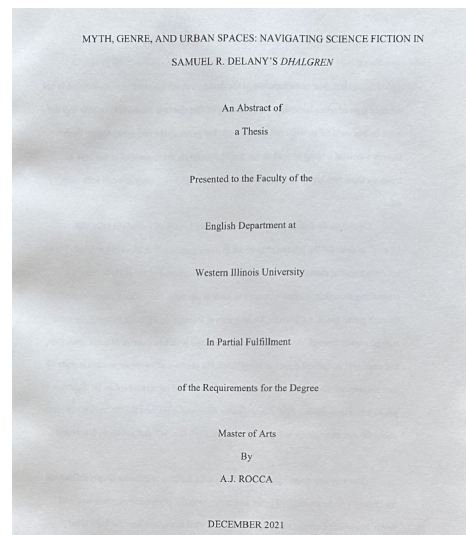
I wasn't able to return to my thesis while I still lived in the old apartment. I knew there was something there worth going back to—occasionally I'd salvaged short sections from it and presented them at conferences to good effect—but every time I tried to work over the thing as a whole, I'd quickly get overwhelmed. I was still too close to the project; it was like the writing had come to embody the chaos of summer 2021, and I couldn't see the way to make it all come together.

A couple months after moving into the new apartment, I sat down in bed with a cup of lemony tea and read through my thesis again, and an amazing thing happened. I finally realized what this damn project was all about. I spent the first couple weeks of 2023 chopping my thesis down to size. I wanted to submit it to *Science Fiction Studies* (*SFS*), the best academic journal for the genre, and their upper limit on submissions was 15,000 words. I had a vision when I had written the thesis. I found I kept digressing from discussing literary genres to discussing city space and vice versa. I realized that the reason for this was because Delany himself views literature itself as a kind of city space. I cut together a new article from my thesis focused around this central insight and worked together with Katya to polish and edit it. I sent off my new 14,300-word article to *SFS*, feeling quite brilliant and confident that *SFS* would think so as well. I received an enthusiastic revise-and-resubmit.

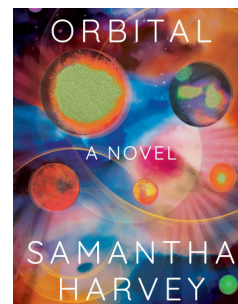
Over the course of the next eight months, I went through three grueling rounds of revision. The first round was with the journal's in-house editors, the second with two outside, expert readers for blind peer-review, and the third with an *SFS* editor again. All three rounds called for cutting. It was almost the exact opposite of my experience writing the original thesis, where I had to read through the entirety of *Dhalgren*'s reception history, half of Delany's oeuvre, and any book or article that I thought might give me some direction for the project. I think during the whole revision process, I only ended up finding an additional two sources on top of the ones already present in my thesis. Instead, the work was on revising and refocusing the project and removing all material that my reviewers

deemed extraneous. I had to cut more than 3,000 words on top of the 18,000 I'd already removed, a process that felt like textual bulimia. Sometimes, I had to delete pages I remembered sweating whole days to write. It wasn't just cutting for cutting's sake, though. The structure of the project was clarified, the prose tightened, and the readings sharpened. I got to watch my article turn into a fine-tuned machine.

Finally, on September 17th, 2023, more than three years since I started my thesis, I got my article accepted for publication. "Samuel R. Delany as Genre Flaneur: Encountering Science Fiction in *Dhalgren*" appeared this March in Volume 51, Part 1 of *Science Fiction Studies*. It is one of the most difficult things I've written in my life, and it's also one of the most satisfying. Writing the article was like diving into chaos and learning how to swim. I emerged with a set of new concepts for understanding literature and the world, and, in my opinion, there is no greater joy in intellectual life.



HAMNER'S BOOK OF THE YEAR



Everett Hamner – A highly meditative, unglamorous vision of life aboard the international space station. A kind of literary answer to the best IMAX treatments of the overview effect, consider it a powerful invitation to awe.

PROUST QUESTIONNAIRE

The Proust Questionnaire is a form of interview, popularized by French novelist Marcel Proust that is focused on the interviewee's personality.

Heya everyone! I'm Natoya C. Raymond, proud representative of the Caribbean and a senior here at WIU. It is an honor to have been chosen for the Proust Questionnaire this year, and I hope that you all enjoy reading this year's publication.

What is your greatest extravagance?

Getting new chapters on anything that is animated or visual. I spend money on posters—anything that helps “colorfy” me!

What is your current state of mind?

Hectic. It is so hectic. I'm holding so many positions: Managing Editor of both *Elements* and *The Mirror & The Lamp*, and I'm doing honors work in the library.

When and where were you the happiest?

I think, looking back, I was happiest in Dominica, my home country. I still miss my family and friends more than I thought I would!

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

I would change my ability to be shackled by my fear. I even have a poster in my room. It says: “Fear is your shackle.” I'm working on it!

What do you value most in your friends?

Honesty. I would rather have friends who are honest with me than friends who would lie to me about my abilities.



What is your most marked characteristic?

My smile! I smile at both appropriate and inappropriate times.

What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?

When you are alone in your room and just staring at your ceiling, saying, “Why am I here?”

Were you to die and come back as a person or a thing, what would it be?

I think I would come back to another time, not the past, but the future. I want to see if it has changed. I'm curious.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Is there such a thing? But my idea of happiness is quite simple, to be with those I love!

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

I'm here: coming to America. It is because I had the courage to leave my home, everyone I know and love, and come here, to meet new people and have new experiences.

What is your favourite occupation?

My favorite occupation: probably one that doesn't exist. I'd love to just have money without doing anything.

What is your favourite color, and subsequently, what is your favourite flower?

Not sure. I used to like blue but it was more because my parents said that was their favorite color when I was younger. I'm not sure I have one. And I like how flowers look, I don't have a preference.

What is your favourite bird [or animal]?

I love cats they are soooo cute and fluffy. They are for sure my favorite animal.

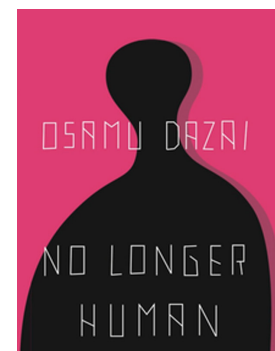
Who are your favourite painters and composers [artists]?

All webtoon independent artists. I appreciate their less realistic designs and I love to see how their art grows over time.

If not yourself, who would you be?

I think I'd like to be some non-human dignitary from another world, one that is filled with magic and wonder

RAYMOND'S BOOK OF THE YEAR



Natoya Raymond – I wish I could give the protagonist a big hug!



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The goal of *The Mirror & the Lamp* is to document the lives and experiences of those involved with the English Department here at Western Illinois University. Our creative non-fiction writing style highlights the individuality of our authors, setting *The Mirror & the Lamp* apart from the strictly journalistic style of Western's student-run newspaper, the *Western Courier*, and the focus on creative works in Western's literary magazine, *Elements*. You can also read more stories on our website. Scan the QR code below to visit mirrorandthelamp.org.



ABOUT THE COVER

Ajayla Ries-Ennells deserves all credit for our cover's imaginative concept, with faculty and students each represented by a collage of their publications set against the Simpkins Reading Room in the background. Nick Rush took Ries-Ennells's idea and brought it to life as a digital image for this year's cover.