

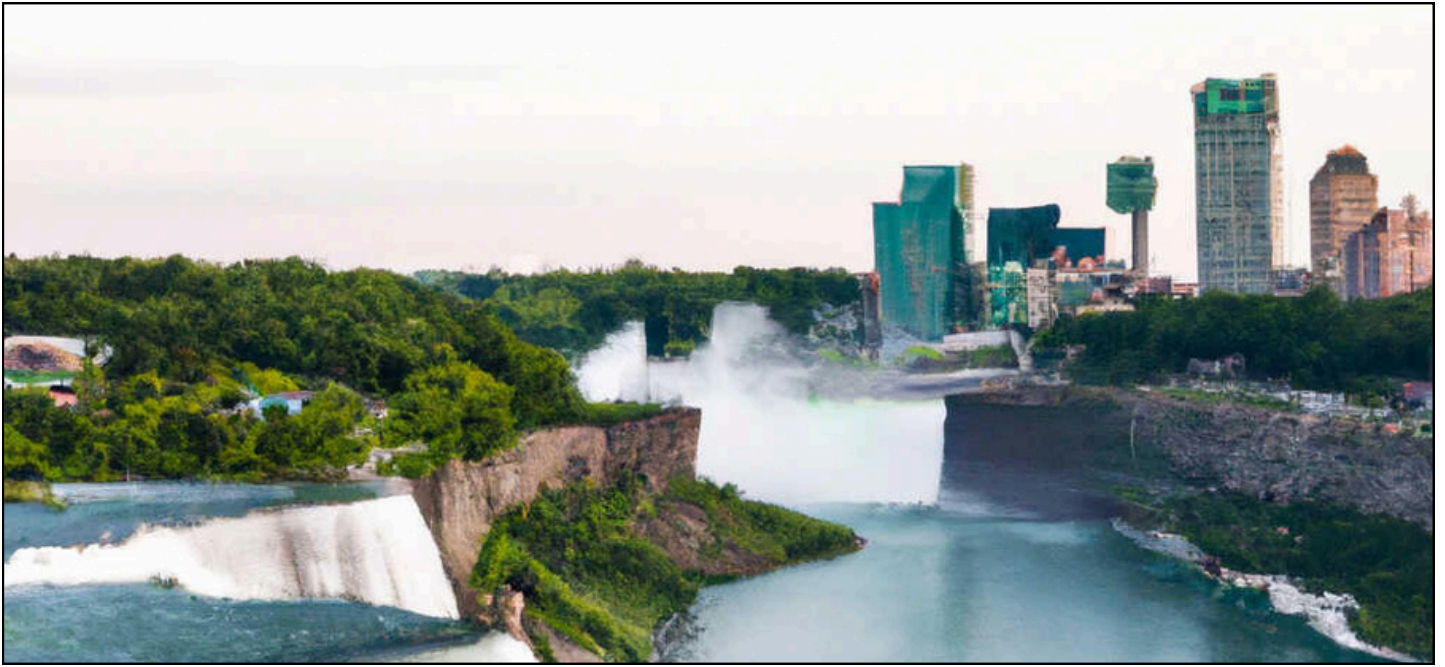


Vanderbilt Creative Writing

Fall 2024 | Volume 3

Vanderbilt University College of Arts and Science





It's the moment after he's returned from services, after the drive from a rural stretch of Niagara Falls Boulevard, past the fields and the unfrozen creek, beneath the low cloud cover, a drive of long silences flecked with murmurs from his wife, Sadie, noting the hand-written sign for cider, a whitewashed motel's blue neon--or naming thoughts: she's ordered extra cream for the guests. No one else speaking, not the older daughter in the backseat, not the in-law cousin. Silence over the engine's low mechanical thrum, the spinning tires. Just those light murmurs, her attempts to stitch together the space, to assert normalcy. Alone maybe he'd have continued the drive, on to the lakeshore, or to a city hotel coffee shop, where he's likely to know no one. One way to hold onto silence.

-- from "Death Lessons," Professor Nancy Reisman
Five Points: A Journal of Literature & Art

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FALL 2024

- VANDERBILT CREATIVE WRITING -



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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Recently, at an airport gate, I watched a mother attempt to steer her toddler daughter into a line that had just begun boarding. Amid announcements over the loudspeaker about tagged bags and group numbers, the little girl would not be contained. She pulled out of her mother's grip, ran to a nearby passenger, then bent low to stare into the muzzle of a support dog. Then, Amelia, I heard her mother call, ran up a seating aisle, giggling and flailing her arms in front and behind her, her little feet knocking over a passenger's coffee, her mother trailing.

I loved young Amelia's self-possession, her unmitigated spirit of exploration and delight. Her child-laden joy and sheer wildness reminded me of the nature of the writer's bounty and dilemma. Our poems and stories emerge out of the tension between a roaming and untamed consciousness and a composing imagination that attempts to impose order. What set of circumstances and fortunate events first brought us to the pleasures of working language in this fashion are chiefly unknown to a reader. But, it is what drives us to tell a story and sing. Even more, it is the feeling we seek when we sit down to write; it is what sanctifies our existence. Beyond the prizes and books, nothing matches the transcendent sensation of writing a world into existence, of giving a portrait of our inner lives out of language such that the world is forever marked by our presence.

One of our colleagues has profoundly impacted readers and students. At the end of this semester, we bid sweet goodbye to beloved fiction writer and faculty member Nancy Reisman. Nancy taught at University of Florida, University of Michigan, before arriving at Vanderbilt University in 2005. Over the years, Nancy mentored a generation of American writers. She profoundly believed in the care and humanity of her students as well as their characters. In this way, Nancy modeled for hundreds of students, here and at other institutions, how to be a working professional writer, but also how to be a compassionate and reflective human being. We have been enriched as a community by her empathy, humor, and dedication.



Third-year MFA students Alissa M. Barr and Carson Colenbaugh.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

The newsletter occasions an opportunity to express immense congratulations to our colleague Lorrie Moore whose novel *I Am Homeless If This Is Not My Home* won a National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction, who hailed the book “an unforgettable achievement from a landmark American author.”

In addition to celebrating and spotlighting the accomplishments of our students and colleagues, in this newsletter, we also herald the arrival of poet Stephanie Niu’s *I Would Define the Sun*, the inaugural winner of the Vanderbilt University Literary Prize. Niu “exercises an expanse of seeing fitting for the complexity of our world.” We aim to platform and nurture talented writers such as Stephanie Niu, thanks in part to the McEntire Literary Prize Endowment and our colleagues in the Chancellor’s Office, Office of the Provost, College of Arts & Science, and Vanderbilt University Press. Special shoutout to Dawn Turton, Gianna Mosser, Tracy Sharpley-Whiting, and Patrick Samuel.

This year, third-year MFA students and faculty excitedly embark on our overseas journey to the Villa Gillet in Lyon, France. Students will be in residence during the stay. Big gratitude to Provost Tracy Sharpley-Whiting, Vice Provost for Arts, Libraries and Global Engagement, Claire Campbell, Lucie Campos Mitchell, director of the Villa Gillet, and Luc Angelini.

The Creative Writing Program in the English Department at Vanderbilt is committed to creating the conditions by which undergraduate and graduate students are empowered to wildly roam to those places where they encounter themselves and us in newer incarnations of human existence and possibility. This issue of the newsletter charts the success of our efforts.

Major Jackson

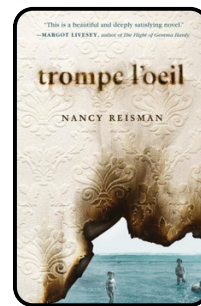
Professor of English & Director of Creative Writing
Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Chair in the Humanities



Photo by Beowulf Sheehan

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT:

An Interview with Nancy Reisman



Congratulations on your recent essay, “Death Lessons,” published in *Five Points* this past spring.

Most of your previous work has been fiction. What can you tell us about the origins of this specific project?

At times, I've drawn on family history as a source for fiction. Recently, I've been focusing more directly on the ways stories are told, by whom, to whom, and when, what might be encoded or perceived. This is territory without sure answers. For some material, I find nonfiction offering more transparency about perspective and more clarity about conjecture. What do I actually know, and what remains unknown? I'm more direct about the ways that my own preoccupations shape what a reader encounters. “Death Lessons” began with my desire and inability to write about my maternal Great Aunt Marian. I could never quite get a bead on her, mostly because I only knew about her hardships. My own comprehension shifted over years. Marian's story, my grandfather's story, and my maternal grandmother's stories of confronting death all remained at a safe distance until I experienced significant losses of my own. In writing “Death Lessons,” I recognized how those stories could have been – or maybe are? – my own, certainly a felt legacy. Life can so easily go off the rails after loss.

You teach and mentor students of all kinds. Some are experimenting with courses outside their primary areas of study; others are serious about pursuing creative writing as a career. How does this diversity impact your teaching? What lessons are universal?

One size does not fit all. I was trained in student-centered teaching, and I'm interested in what writers' goals are for themselves. Sometimes that means serving as a guide while they develop those goals. There are, of course, benchmarks for success in university courses, and for the most part I see those benchmarks in terms of commitment, effort, and completion. Revision reveals change. That's true at all levels.

What I want is for writers to feel confident their own ability to grow in the work. One of the directors of the composition program at UMass Amherst, the very wonderful Marcia Curtis, told new teachers that if our students did not walk out of our classes believing in their own potential, we had not done our jobs. I think this is true at the MFA level as much as for writers working on foundational skills.

What are you currently reading and/or teaching? What ideas does it spark for you?

This semester I'm teaching the MFA fiction workshop and a Gender and Sexuality Studies course called “Reading and Writing Lives” in which we look at a sort of narrative buffet. I have the chance to work with a people who don't identify as creative writers but are jumping right in, and with writers who see creative writing as their life's work. It's a lovely mix. In GSS, I'm especially happy to be reading some of Melissa Febos's brainy amazing essays from *Girlhood*. I recently read Georgi Gospodinov's *Time Shelter*, which is speculative and often feels personal, especially about individual experiences of time, and reread Paul Harding's beautiful elegiac *Tinkers*.

What are you working on now?

I'm working on interrelated projects drawing on family sources from previous generations in Buffalo, NY – queer lives in the rigidly conventional provinces -- and family storytelling, as well as visual art. The move into writing flash memoir and essay and a recent ekphrastic collaboration has me thinking more about hybrid long form work. I think that's where I'm headed.

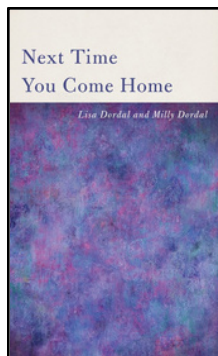
FACULTY >>> ACHIEVEMENTS



Lydi Conklin has a forthcoming publication in *The Yale Review* and is the recipient of a 2023 Pushcart Prize. They recently completed artist residencies through the Resident Artists Program and the Ragdale Foundation, in addition to serving as a summer faculty member for the *Kenyon Review* Writing Workshop. This year, they will serve as a Robert Penn Warren Fellow.



Lisa Dordal's book, *Next Time You Come Home*, was published in 2023. She was a finalist for the 2024 Phillip H. McMath Post-Publication Book Award (U. of Central Arkansas) for *Water Lessons*. This year, her work was published in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Green Linden Press*, *Whale Road Review*, and *Essential Queer Voices of U.S. Poetry*.



Rick Hilles' poem, "Custodians," won Black Warrior Review's 2023 Poetry Contest. His work also appeared in *Provincetown Arts*, *Smartish Pace*, *Southern Review*, *StorySouth*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Last Milkweed* (Tupelo Press), and *The Ecopoetry Anthology: Volume II* (Trinity University Press). He completed residencies with the James Merrill House, the Bogliasco Foundation, and Casa Uno.

Mark Jarman's recent publications include "Anthony Hecht's Poetic Vision," in *Christian Century* and "Of Mere Being: Five Poems by Wallace Stevens," and a book review in *The Hudson Review*.

Sheba Karim's "The Ladies of the City," was published in *Michigan Quarterly Review* in 2023.

Lorrie Moore's novel *I Am Homeless If This Is Not My Home* won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction in 2024. She is pictured here with fellow award winners.



Didi Jackson's work has been published in *Bomb Magazine*, *Sewanee Review*, *Adroit Journal*, *Iterant*, *Provincetown Arts*, and *In the Tempered Dark*, an anthology on grief. Didi traveled to Belgrade in Summer 2024 to collaborate with Vesna Pavlović on the project "Emotional Maps", located at the Center for Cultural Decontamination.

Major Jackson received the Academy of American Poetry Fellowship in 2023. His poems were published in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* and *The New Yorker* (2023). Major received book reviews in *The New York Times* (David Kirby, 2024) and *Publishers Weekly* (2023). He also participated as summer faculty for the Community of Writers conference and completed an artist residency through Civitella Ranieri in Summer 2024.

ZZ Packer's story "Brownies" was adapted to a film of the same name by director Aisha Ford, with Spike Lee and ZZ as executive producers. Her story "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere" was also chosen by Aleksandar Hemon for *The New Yorker's* podcast. The same story was selected for *A Century of Fiction in The New Yorker: 1925 to 2025*. Finally, ZZ participated as a summer faculty member for the 2024 Kenyon Writers Workshop.

Nancy Reisman's essay "Death Lessons" was published in *Five Points* in 2023.



Justin Quarry has a forthcoming essay in *Bennington Review* and his work "Running for My Lives," was published in *Memoir Land*.

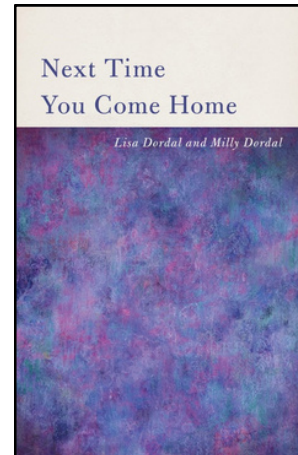
SEND US YOUR NEWS!

Please email any publications, residencies, awards, or other writing-related accomplishments to english@vanderbilt.edu so we can celebrate with you!

FACULTY >>> BOOKS 23-24



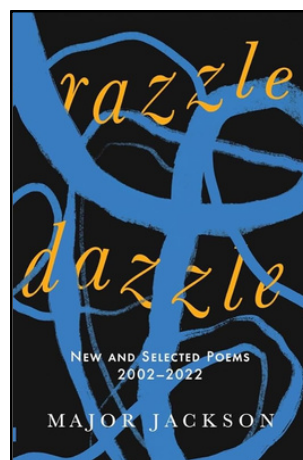
Lydi Conklin's *Rainbow Rainbow* is a collection of stories that celebrate the humor, darkness and depth of emotion of the queer and trans experience that's not typically represented: liminal or uncertain identities, queer conception and queer joy.



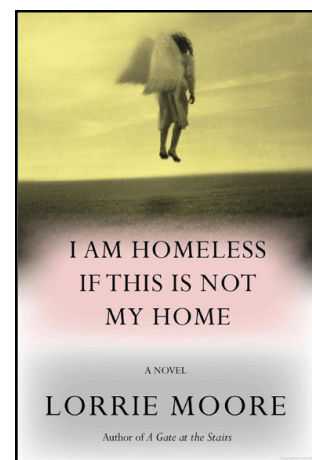
Next Time You Come Home reflects upon motherhood, marriage, grief, the beauty of the natural world, same-sex relationships, and the passage of time, as well as on issues such as racism, sexism, and climate change.



Didi Jackson's poems investigate both sacred and natural spaces. Her poems move grief and emotional suffering to language as a site of recovery and renewal.



Major Jackson offers steady miracles of vision and celebrations of language in rapturous, sophisticated poems.



Lorrie Moore's novel is a daring, meditative exploration of love and death, passion and grief, and what it means to be haunted by the past, both by history and the human heart.



Alissa Barr's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Crab Creek Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Salt Hill Journal*, and elsewhere. Her poems "Broken Blues Ghazal with Ruined Dress and No Pearls" and "Bath Mountain Moon in Winter" are forthcoming in *Poet Lore* and *Muzzle Magazine*.

Nathan Blum's short stories were published in *Ploughshares* (2024), and one is forthcoming in Spring 2025. He attended the 2024 Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and he recently received a Literary Arts Scholarship to attend the Craigardan Arts Residency in New York's Adirondacks. Nathan also completed a book review for the *Chicago Review of Books*.



This summer, **Michael Carlson** attended the Sewanee Writers' Conference, had his work supported by the Kenyon Writer's Workshop, and was selected for future publication by *New Ohio Review*.

Carson Colenbaugh's poem, "Proctor Creek," received an honorable mention in the 2024 Academy of American Poets Poetry Prize Contest.



Christiana Castillo recently secured two other publications in *Room Magazine* and *The Chicago Reader Juror* for the 2024 Scholastic Writing Awards.

Langston Cotman's fiction appears in *The Virginia Quarterly Review* and *BOMB Magazine*. He attended the 2024 Kenyon Review Writers Workshop.



Kumari Devarajan attended the Lambda Literary Writers Retreat for Emerging LGBTQ Voices, where they are a fellow.

Ajla Dizdarević recently received an Honorable Mention for the 2024 National Post-Secondary Russian Essay Contest. Two of her poems were also shortlisted for the 2024 Bridport Poetry Prize, landing her in the top 3% of poetry entrants for this international competition.



Kinsale Drake recently released her debut poetry collection *The Sky Was Once a Dark Blanket* (University of Georgia Press, 2024), which also won the 2023 National Poetry Series.





MFA CANDIDATES

Yevheniia Dubrova is a first-year MFA candidate in fiction from Donetsk, Ukraine. She holds a BA in English and Creative Writing from Dartmouth College. She is winner of the 2024 Lando Grant from the de Groot Foundation for refugee writing.



Sydney Mayes' poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Atlantic*, *The Iowa Review Blog*, *Denver Quarterly*, and others. She participated in the 2024 Tin House Summer Workshop.

Johnny Nagle completed his MA in Creative Writing at Queen's University Belfast in 2023. He is currently working on a revenge/campus novel set in South County Dublin.



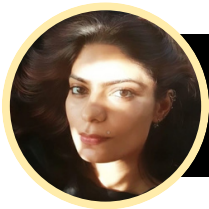
Athena Nassar's poem "This Body is a Songbird in a Kiln," was published in *Missouri Review*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Academy of American Poets*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *POETRY*, and elsewhere.

Lela Ni currently serves as a fiction and nonfiction reader for the *Nashville Review*. She received a Peter Taylor Fellowship to attend the 2024 Kenyon Writers Workshop, where she served as a workshop participant and teaching assistant to ZZ Packer.



Eliana Reeves recently received the Edward Eager Memorial Prize for best undergraduate creative writing. Her poetry can be found in *The Harvard Gazette* and *The Black Warrior Review*.

Iman Saleem is a second-year fiction MFA candidate from Colombo. She graduated from the University of Kent in 2018 with a BA in Drama & English and American Literature. Since then, she has worked as a journalist, covering the mass anti-government protests in Sri Lanka throughout 2022.



Kanchi Sharma is the Russell G. Hamilton Scholar at Vanderbilt University and was recently a Guest Speaker and Teaching Artist at Habib University Writing Centre for the workshop titled "Writing Towards a Social Cause." Kanchi is the Prose Reader for *Quarterly West Magazine*.





Academy of American
POETS



PRIZE CONTEST 2024

Winner: Sydney Mayes

Honorable Mentions: Carson Colenbaugh and Ajla Dizdarevic

The winner of the 2024 Academy of American Poets Prize Contest was 2nd-year MFA candidate, Sydney Mayes. MFA candidates Carson Colenbaugh and Ajla Dizdarevic also received honorable mentions.

Of Mayes's poem, poet and contest judge Carlina Duan (MFA '19) writes, "The language throughout this poem is shimmery, wild, unruly, and electric. I was mesmerized by our speaker, who commands a poetics of attention, and seeks to set the history books straight. This is a poem that revivifies the flattened pages of biography: using poetry as a portal to infuse breath, imagination, and movement back into the record."

In praise of Colenbaugh's poem, Duan writes, "I was delighted and surprised by the poet's sonic and imagistic commands— there is a musicality and a materiality found within this poem."

Duan also writes that she admires "the way [Dizdarevic's] poem locates desire within the physical intimacy of a 'fight.'"

Carlina Duan is the author of the poetry collections: *I Wore My Blackest Hair* and *Alien Miss*. She is currently an Assistant Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She serves as the Poetry Editor for *Michigan Quarterly Review*. Her recent work can be found in *POETRY*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Poets.org*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Poetry Daily*, *The Slowdown Show*, and elsewhere. She is the recipient of literary awards and artist residencies from Tin House, the Academy of American Poets, the U.S. Fulbright Program, Hedgebrook, the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund, and other places.



VandyWrites Contest Winners

Prose

“Agon, Agonis, Agoni” – Paige Elliot

“The Orangery” – Jocelyn Ni

“At the Edge of the Cornfields” – Roy Rao

“Weicman” – Christina Lopez

“The Innkeeper’s Daughter” – Josie Betts

Poetry

“The Fields Have Eyes, The Woods Have Ears,
and The Trees Have Brains” – Eli Apple

“Gravel Garden” – Jaydra Hamid

“A Reader’s Paradox” – Carolina Rocha Lima

“Little Girl” – Rachel Sobers

“Ash Wednesday Mass for the Apostate” –
Chekuba Chukwuma

**Winning works can be found at
spitfiremagazine.com**

2024 Merrill Moore Prize Winners

Poetry: Eli Apple

Fiction: Liam Virott Betts

Nonfiction: Jessica Peng

STUDENT PUBLICATIONS



GRADUATE PUBLICATION:

NASHVILLE REVIEW

Nashville Review seeks to publish “the best work we can get our hands on, period”. They hope to provide a venue for both distinguished and emerging artists.

READING PERIODS:

Nashville Review considers submissions in Fiction, Poetry, Nonfiction, and Translation two times a year—August and January—and typically responds within 4-5 months. It welcomes submissions in Art and Comics year-round. Currently, it is not accepting unsolicited reviews or interviews.

Editors-in-Chief:

Kumari Devarajan
Sydney Mayes

UNDERGRADUATE PUBLICATIONS:

The Vanderbilt Review

Undergraduate Literary and Arts Magazine

Editor-in-Chief: Lillian Zheng

&



To learn more about each magazine and to submit your work, please visit the magazines' websites.

THE VANDERBILT HUSTLER

All Vanderbilt students (undergraduate and graduate), faculty, staff and other community members are encouraged to submit guest editorials and Letters to the Editor for review and possible publication.

vanderbilthustler.com

SPITFIRE

Spitfire Magazine is a literary publication out of Vanderbilt University focused on publishing diverse works of various genres from every type of student. They encourage students of every discipline and writing style to submit their work. They take all prose and poetry as of right now.

spitfiremagazine.com

VANDY WRITES

VandyWrites is a community for Vanderbilt's writers. Contact the president Liam Betts (liam.betts@vanderbilt.edu) if you'd like to connect with our community of Vanderbilt's writers! They host writing hour every Tues/Wed in Sarratt 208 from 8-9 PM. Anyone can stop by, meet other writers, and chat about their projects.

vandywrites.org

THE GERTRUDE C. AND HAROLD S.



Vanderbilt Reading Series

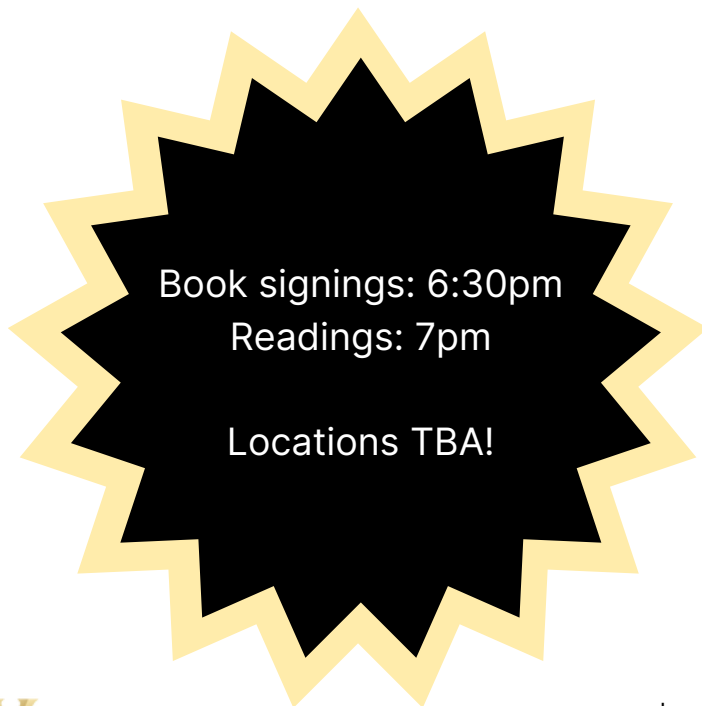


All book signings and readings occur on Thursday evenings from 6:30–8 PM

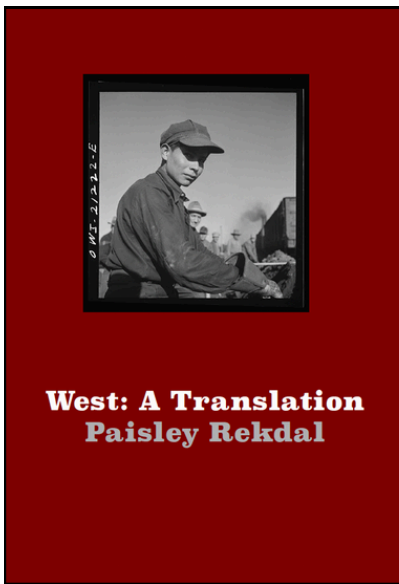
The Gertrude and Harold Vanderbilt Reading Series is named in honor of Vanderbilt founder Cornelius Vanderbilt's great-grandson and his wife. Each semester, the series brings several professional writers to campus to read from their works and visit classes. This unique and extraordinary program gives English department students and faculty, the Vanderbilt community, and Nashville's citizens a chance to meet and talk with some of the best writers of our day.

For event locations and updates, visit vanderbilt.edu/english/reading-series and follow the Creative Writing program Instagram page at [@vandycreativewriting](https://www.instagram.com/vandycreativewriting).

ANNOUNCING
FALL '24 &
SPRING '25
READINGS



SEPT 12: PAISLEY REKDAL, POETRY

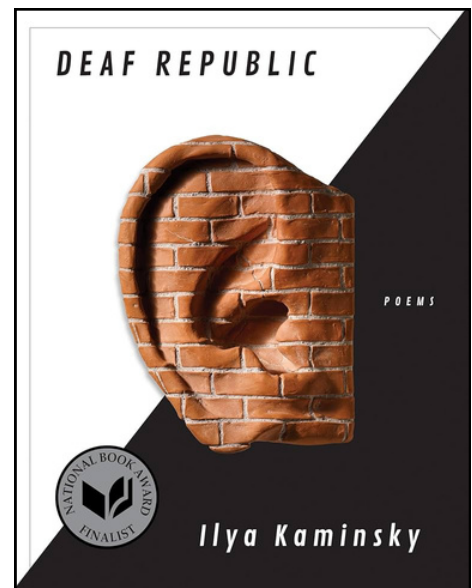


Paisley Rekdal is the author of essays and poetry including *Animal Eye*, *Imaginary Vessels*, *Nightingale*, and *West: A Translation*, longlisted for the 2023 National Book Award in Poetry and winner of the 2024 Kingsley Tufts Prize. Her poems and essays have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and on National Public Radio. Her work has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, Pushcart Prizes (2009, 2013), among others.

Introduced by **Alissa M. Barr**

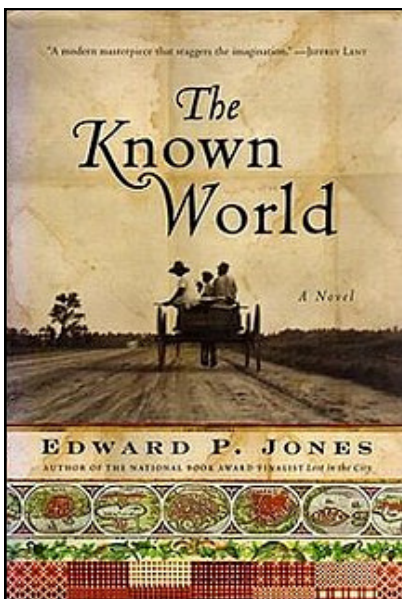
SEPT 26: ILYA KAMINSKY, POETRY

Ilya Kaminsky is the author of *Deaf Republic*, *The New York Times*' Notable Book, and *Dancing In Odessa*, and co-editor and co-translated many other books, including *Ecco Anthology of International Poetry*, *In the Hour of War: Poems from Ukraine*, and *Dark Elderberry Branch: Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva*. He is the recipient of *The Los Angeles Times* Book Award, the Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Academy of American Poets' Fellowship. In 2019, Kaminsky was selected by BBC as "one of the 12 artists that changed the world."



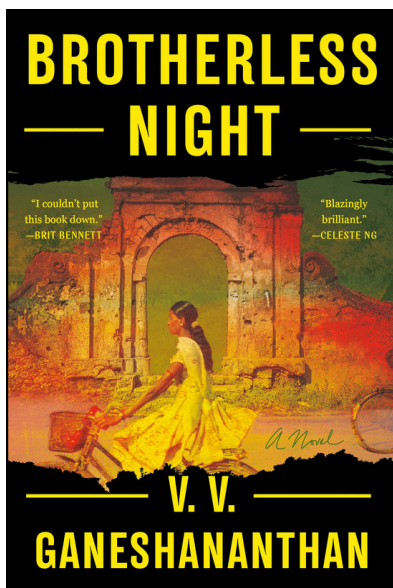
Introduced by **Ajla Dizdarević**

OCT 17: EDWARD P. JONES, FICTION



Edward P. Jones is the author of the short-story collections *Lost in the City* and *All Aunt Hagar's Children*, and the novel *The Known World*, which received the Pulitzer Prize in 2004. His many other honors include a MacArthur Fellowship and the PEN/Malamud Award. He is also the recipient of the National Book Critics Circle award and a MacArthur Fellowship.

Introduced by **Langston Cotman**



OCTOBER 31: V.V. GANESHANATHAN, FICTION

V. V. Ganeshanathan is the author of the novels *Brotherless Night*, a *New York Times* Editors' Choice, and an NPR Book of the Year, and *Love Marriage*. Her work has appeared in *Granta* and *The New York Times*. She is the recipient of awards and fellowships from The National Endowment for the Arts, the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard, and MacDowell.

*Co-presented with the Engine for Art, Democracy, and Justice (EADJ).

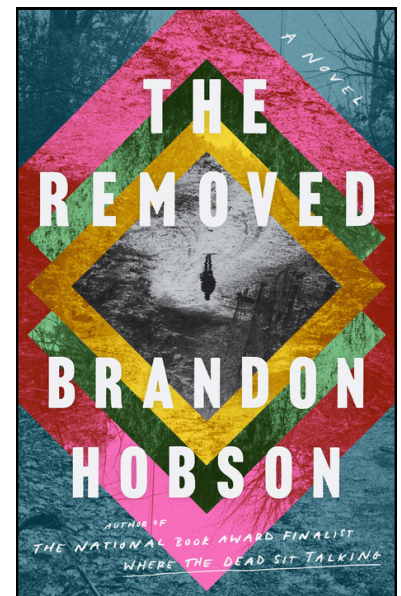
Introduced by **Kumari Devarajan & Iman Saleem**

NOVEMBER 14: BRANDON HOBSON, FICTION

Dr. Brandon Hobson is the author of the novels, *The Removed* and *Where the Dead Sit Talking*, finalist for the National Book Award, and other books. His fiction has won a Pushcart Prize and has appeared in *McSweeney's*, *American Short Fiction*, and in many other publications. He has received fellowships from Guggenheim Foundation, the UCROSS Foundation and Ragdale. Brandon is an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation Tribe of Oklahoma.

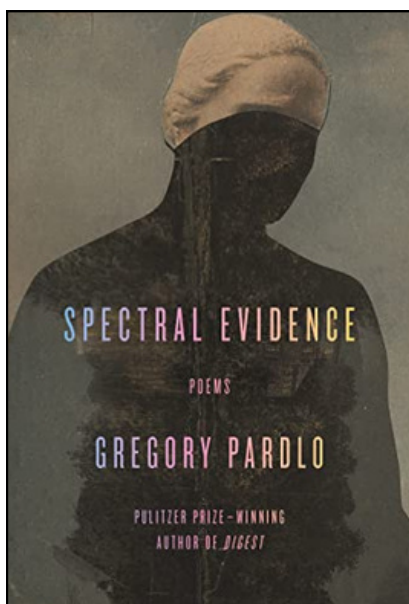
*Co-presented with the Borders of Citizenship Initiative and the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities.

Introduced by **Nathan Blum**

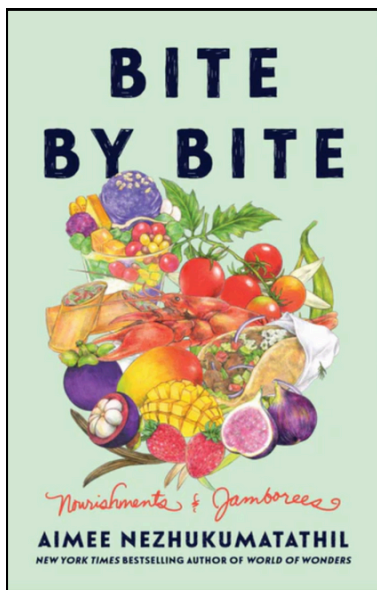


DECEMBER 5: GREGORY PARDLO, POETRY

Gregory Pardlo is the author of the poetry collections *Spectral Evidence* and *Digest*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. His other books include *Totem* and *Air Traffic*, a memoir in essays. His honors include fellowships from the New York Public Library's Cullman Center, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Guggenheim Foundation.



Introduced by **Eliana Reeves**



JANUARY 16: AIMEE NEZHUKUMATATHIL, POETRY

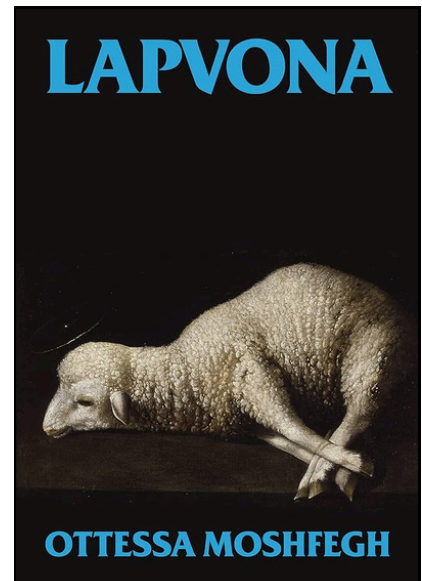
Aimee Nezhukumatathil is the author of the poetry collections *Oceanic*, *Lucky Fish*, *At the Drive-in Volcano*, *Miracle Fruit*, and the essay collections *Bite by Bite: Nourishments and Jamborees* and *World of Wonder*. With poet Ross Gay, she is also co-author *Lace & Pyrite*. Her poems and essays have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Tin House*, *American Poetry Review*, and the *Best American Poetry* anthology, among others. Some of her honors include the Pushcart Prize and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Introduced by Athena Nassar

JANUARY 30: OTTESSA MOSHFEGH, FICTION

Otessa Moshfegh is the author of four novels: *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*, *Death in Her Hands*, *Lapvona*, and *Eileen*. She has been shortlisted for the National Book Critics Circle Award, and she is a winner of the PEN/Hemingway Award for debut fiction. She is also the author of the short story collection *Homesick for Another World* and a novella *McGlue*. Moshfegh has received the Pushcart Prize and a Plimpton Prize from *The Paris Review* for her short fiction, as well as a creative writing fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts.

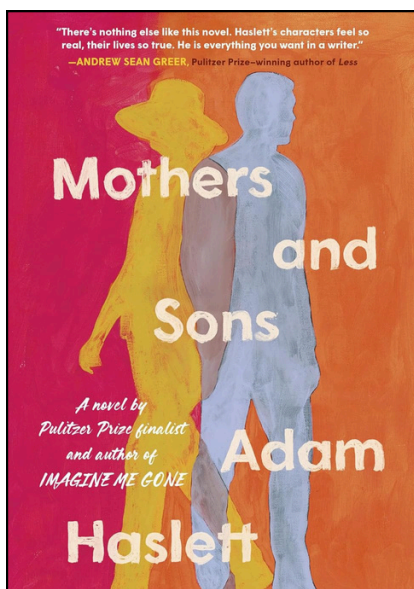
Introduced by Lela Ni

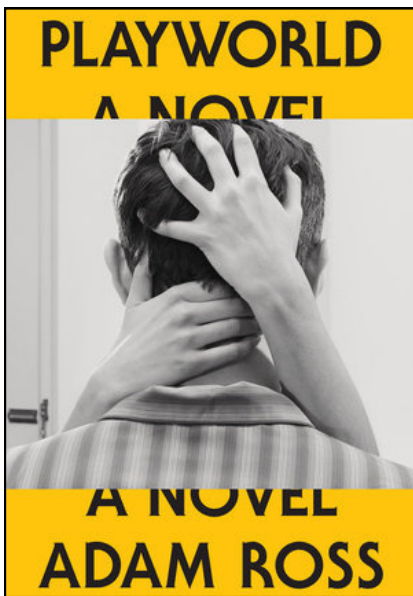


FEBRUARY 13: ADAM HASLETT, FICTION

Adam Haslett is the author of the novels *Mothers and Sons* and *Imagine Me Gone*, finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and winner of the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award. He also penned *You Are Not a Stranger Here*, finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, and *Union Atlantic*, winner of the Lambda Literary Award and shortlisted for the Commonwealth Prize. He has been awarded a Guggenheim fellowship, the PEN/Malamud Award, and various other awards.

Introduced by Michael Carlson





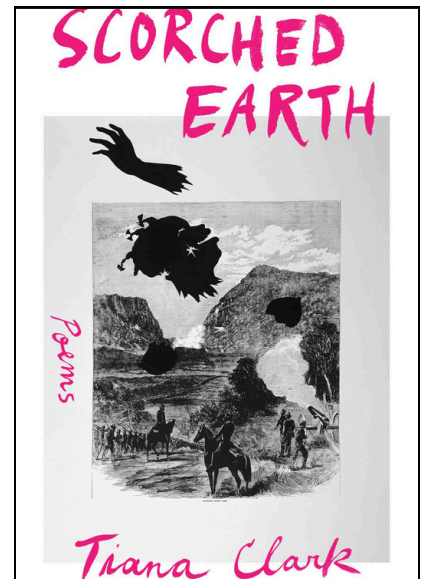
MARCH 20: ADAM ROSS, FICTION

Adam Ross is the author of the short story collection *Ladies and Gentlemen*, and the novels *Playworld* and *Mr. Peanut*, which was selected as one of the best books of the year by *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Economist*. He has been a fellow in fiction at the American Academy in Berlin and a Hodder Fellow for Fiction at Princeton University. Adam serves as editor of *The Sewanee Review*.

Introduced by **Nathan Blum**

APRIL 3: TIANA CLARK, POETRY

Tiana Clark is the author of the poetry collections *Scorched Earth* and *I Can't Talk About the Trees Without the Blood*, winner of the Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize. Clark is the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship, an Amy Lowell Poetry Traveling Scholarship, and the Pushcart Prize, among others. Clark is a graduate of Vanderbilt University (M.F.A.). Her writing has appeared in or is forthcoming from *The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, *Oxford American*, and elsewhere.



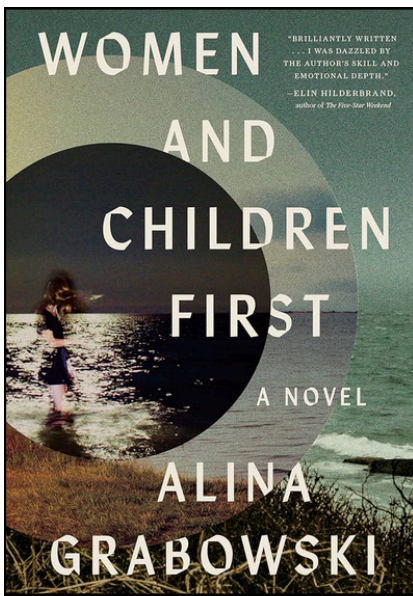
Introduced by **Sydney Mayes**



APRIL 3: KELSEY NORRIS, FICTION

Kelsey Norris is a writer and editor who earned an MFA from Vanderbilt University. Her work has been published in *The Kenyon Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, and *The Rumpus*, among other publications. Her debut story collection, *House Gone Quiet*, is a finalist for the Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction, and is available wherever books are sold.

Introduced by **Kumari Devarajan**



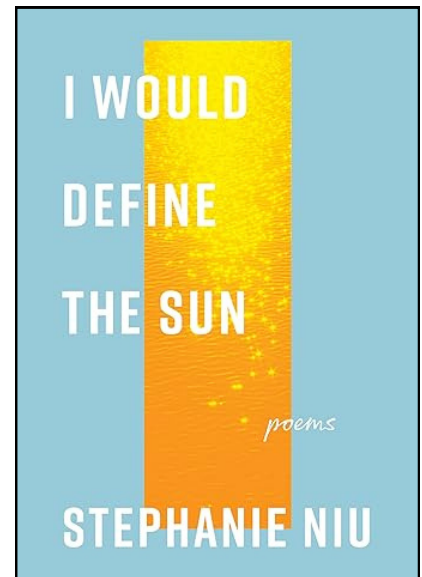
APRIL 3: ALINA GRABOWSKI, FICTION

Alina Grabowski earned an MFA at Vanderbilt University. Her debut novel, *Women and Children First*, was published by SJP Lit in 2024.

Introduced by **Michael Carlson**

APRIL 7: STEPHANIE NIU, POETRY

Stephanie Niu is the author of *I Would Define the Sun*, winner of the inaugural Vanderbilt University Literary Prize. She is also the author of the chapbooks *Survived By: An Atlas of Disappearance* and *She Has Dreamt Again of Water*, winners of chapbook prizes and competitions. Her work has appeared in *The Georgia Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *Literary Hub*, and other publications. She received a Fulbright scholarship for research on Christmas Island's labor history.



Introduced by **Major Jackson**



Please consider making a donation to the Vanderbilt Creative Writing Program to support future events like these. To do so, go to the [Vanderbilt Giving Page](#), enter your donation, select "Other", and search for "Creative Writing Program."

**THIS SPEAKER SERIES IS MADE POSSIBLE BY A CONTRIBUTION FROM
THE GERTRUDE C. AND HAROLD S. VANDERBILT FUND.**

VANDERBILT LITERARY PRIZE

Stephanie Niu, Poetry



Vanderbilt University is pleased to announce **Stephanie Niu** as the inaugural winner of the Vanderbilt University Literary Prize. A panel of jurists selected Niu's ***I Would Define the Sun***, a collection of poems about resisting scarcity through language. The Vanderbilt University Literary Prize was launched earlier this year in celebration of the institution's Sesquicentennial. It will be awarded annually to the sole author of a full-length collection of poetry that demonstrates great poignancy combined with rigor in form, language and artistic vision. The contest drew more than 300 entries.

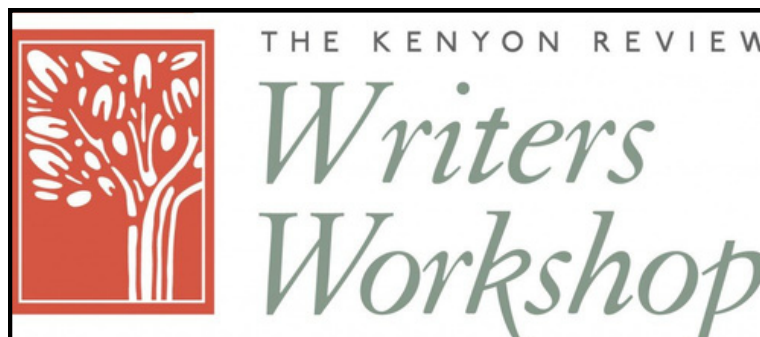


"At this moment of global political upheaval, dizzying technological advancement and general uncertainty, **literature—and poetry in particular—is unmatched in its ability to help us pause and reflect deeply on our lives, our times and what it means to be human,**" Chancellor Daniel Diermeier said. "My office is proud to support the Vanderbilt University Literary Prize and to affirm the importance of the literary arts at Vanderbilt. I offer my warmest congratulations to Stephanie Niu on her fine achievement, and we look forward to welcoming her to campus."

The prize includes the publication of the winning manuscript in print, electronic and audio formats, a publishing contract with Vanderbilt University Press, a \$10,000 honorarium, an invitation to read in the esteemed Gertrude C. and Harold S. Vanderbilt Reading Series at Vanderbilt University, and a one-week residency on campus to engage students and writers in the Nashville community.

The Vanderbilt Literary Prize is made possible with the support of the **McEntire Literary Prize Endowment**. A collaboration between Vanderbilt University Press and Vanderbilt University's English Department and MFA Program, the annual contest seeks to identify works of poetry whose originality is immediately identifiable in how the book, in some combination, renews our relationship to language and expands our conception of poetry; delves into underexplored areas of human experience; makes claims on our lives that are urgent and aesthetic; or promotes historical, social, literary, political, or spiritual awareness.

SUMMER 2024 CONFERENCES



Nathan Blum

"A hidden benefit of writing conferences like Bread Loaf is the opportunity to meet and learn from fellow writers of all ages...To see a twenty-one-year-old and a seventy-one-year-old both participate in a fiction workshop led by a forty-one-year-old—it is a **humbling, inspiring experience**. It felt like an antidote in these divisive times."

Michael Carlson

"Being in close proximity to such exceptionally talented writers allowed me to work out thoughts and concepts I could not have otherwise created. The quality of teaching and one-on-one mentorship at Kenyon was **unparalleled**. Learning and growing with so many admirable hearts and minds for a week is **something I'll never forget**."

Lela Ni

"I loved working with ZZ again—we had a great workshop group and the generative nature of Kenyon was really helpful in getting me back into the rhythm of writing after a long break. It's a really **supportive environment**...From what I heard from other participants, the focus on creating new work and **experimentation** were the biggest takeaways from our week."

VANDERBILT MFAS ANCHOR DOWN OVERSEAS

VU-MFA x VILLA GILLET

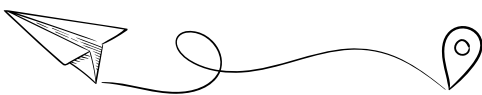


In Spring 2025, Third-Year MFA Creative Writing students will participate in a writing retreat, titled VU-MFA x Villa Gillet. They will visit Paris and Lyon. The trip is a partnership with the Office of the Vice Provost for Arts, Libraries & Global Engagement.

The Villa Gillet is a European and international house of contemporary writing. A place of meeting and creation, it gives a voice to writers, thinkers and artists to make literature and human sciences a common language. It is a laboratory for reflection on practices related to books, writing, speech and debate.

Trip Itinerary

- March 7 | Depart from Nashville
- March 8 | Tour Paris
- March 9 | Take train to Lyon
- March 9-13 | Students in residence
- March 15 | Depart from Paris
- March 16 | Return to Nashville



Bon Voyage!





ALUMNI & DEPT NEWS



MFA

Claire Jiménez's ('13) novel *What Happened to Ruthy Ramirez* (Grand Central) was selected as the winner of the 2024 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction.

Rita Bullwinkel ('16) published her novel *Headshot* in March 2024, which was longlisted for the Booker Prize. It was also included on Barack Obama's 2024 Summer Reading List.

Daniel Perez's ('23) *Kenyon Review* story "Block Party" was selected for the Pushcart Prize and will appear in the 2025 print anthology.

Tiana Clark's ('17) poetry collection *Scorched Earth* is forthcoming in April 2025.

Edgar Kunz ('15) was named a fellow by the Rubys Artist Grant Program.

Alina Grabowski ('19) released her novel *Women and Children First* in May 2024.

ALUMNI, SEND US YOUR NEWS!

Please email any publications, fellowships, residencies, awards, or other writing-related accomplishments to english@vanderbilt.edu so we can celebrate with you!

PHD

Luke Vines' (Student) thesis titled "Textual Resurrection: Suicidal Women in 18th-Century Media" will be released in the Winter 2024 edition of *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation. Vol. 3 of The Collected Works of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, the edition of Barbauld's literary criticism for which he served as assistant editor, is forthcoming with OUP.

Nick Reich (Student) is publishing the essay "An Emergency of Black Diamonds," in a forthcoming special issue of *Callaloo: A Journal of African Diaspora Arts* on the theme of Black Appalachia.

Gregg Hecimovich's (MA, PhD) novel *The Life and Times of Hannah Crafts: The True Story of The Bondwoman's Narrative* (HarperCollins, 2023) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Awards as well as one of the "10 Best Books of 2023" by *The Washington Post*.

Akshya Saxena's (Professor) book *Vernacular English: Reading the Anglophone in Postcolonial India* (Princeton University Press 2022) won the Modern Language Association's 2023 First Book Prize.

Shoshana Adler (Professor) published the essay, "Spoiled History: Leprosy and the Lessons of Queer Medieval Historiography" in a 2023 special issue of *Boundary 2* on the theme of "The 'Medieval' Undone: Imagining a New Global Past."

Jay Clayton (Professor) published the book *Literature, Science, and Public Policy: From Darwin to Genomics* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).



Congratulations

»» *To our Class of 2024 M.F.A. graduates!* »»



From left to right: Alexandria Peterson (poetry), Jess Sumalpong (fiction), Em Palughi (poetry), Kanak Kapur (fiction), and Tan Fireall (poetry).



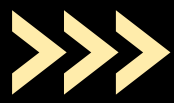
Tan Fireall with Director of Creative Writing, Major Jackson.



Alexandria Peterson and Assistant Professor Didi Jackson.



Associate Professor Rick Hillis, Em Palughi, Professor Victor Judge, and Didi Jackson.



PROGRAM PHOTOS



MFA students and faculty attend the Welcome Back party at The Jackson residence.



End of the Year English Department Party at Barcelona Wine Bar.



Tiana Clark ('17) and MFA students at *The Porch* Annual Fundraiser '24.



Creative Writing Faculty at Chateau West.



Associate Professor Candice Amich and Didi Jackson celebrating the release of Jackson's poetry collection, *My Infinity*, at Parnassus Bookstore in August 2024.



Students and faculty attend the Spring 2024 Alumni reading series event, featuring Anders Carlson-Wee, Edgar Kunz, and Claire Jiménez.





PROGRAM CONTACTS

FACULTY

Administrative Staff

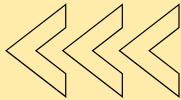
Jennifer Fay
Department Chair

Nicole Amiridis
Administrative Specialist for Undergraduate Programs

Emily Hobbs
Administrative Manager

Arianna Pappas
Administrative Specialist for Department of English Events

Sally Buck
Program Coordinator for PhD & MFA



Fiction

Lydi Conklin, Tony Earley,
Lorrie Moore, ZZ Packer,
Nancy Reisman

Poetry

Rick Hilles, Didi Jackson,
Major Jackson

Lecturers

Lisa Dordal, Sheba Karim,
Justin Quarry, Amanda Little

Department Resources

Special thanks to **Arianna Pappas** and English PhD Student **Luke Vines** for crafting this newsletter. To view it digitally, please scan the QR code below or visit our website.

For program resources, please visit vanderbilt.edu/english.



VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
 CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM
 ALUMNI BOOKS 2008-2024

