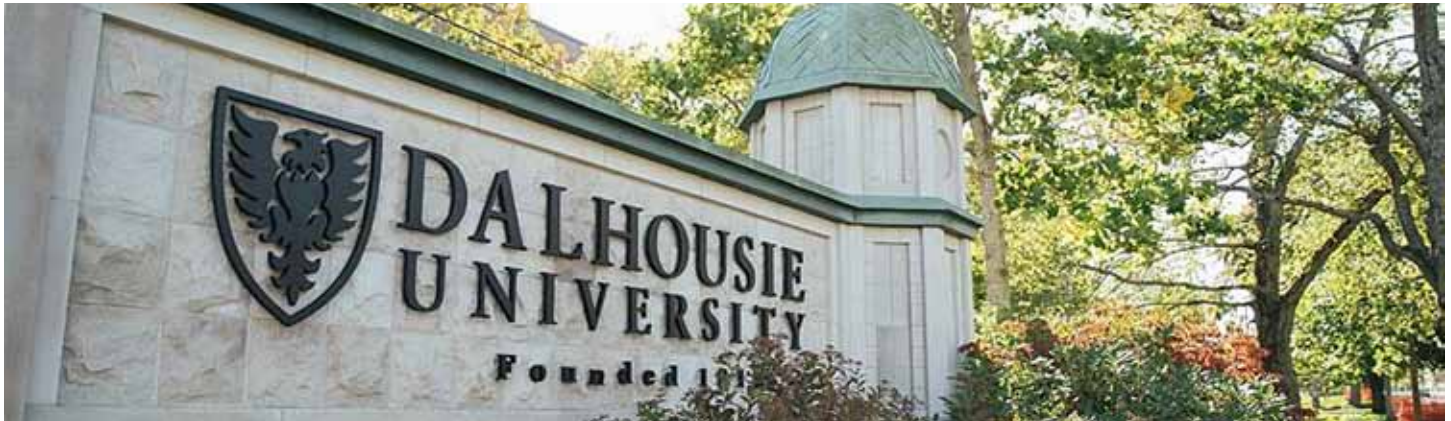


# ENGLISH NEWS

The Newsletter of Dalhousie University's Department of English and Creative Writing Program

Summer 2023



## The Chair's Remarks

By Lyn Bennett

This is my second contribution to the Department of English Newsletter since taking up the role of Chair in 2021. Like last year's, this issue of our newsletter underscores the diversity and richness of a department that continues to excel in every way. Notably, we last year reported on the publication of Honours graduate Keanan Byggdin's debut novel, *Wonder World*; this year, we are pleased and very proud to announce that Keanan's work was awarded the 2023 Thomas Raddall Fiction Award, a significant honour that also comes with a \$30,000 cash prize. Warmest congratulations to Keanan and to all the English and Creative Writing graduates who continue to amaze and inspire us every day. In other prize news, Professor Alice Brittan's *The Art of Astonishment: Reflections on Gifts and Grace* was awarded the Grand Prize for Nonfiction by the Next Generation Indie Book Awards, while Professor Heather Jessup's essay "Klein Bottle" was chosen for inclusion in the 2023 collection of Best Canadian Essays. Congratulations, both!

We are also happy to announce that Dr. Lili Johnson, formerly of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Yale PhD, is now a very welcome member of our department, and we look forward to the new courses and new perspectives she brings to English and Gender and Women's Studies. We are also happy to welcome Dr. Katie Turcotte and Dalhousie PhD Dr. Brittany Kraus, who have been appointed to full-time positions in our department for the coming year. In so many ways, our PhD students and graduates continue to shine: not only were there three successful

defenses in the past year, two of our graduates have recently been appointed to tenure-track jobs, Dr. Krista Collier-Jarvis at Mount St. Vincent University in Halifax and Dr. Geordie Miller at Mt. Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick. Another Dalhousie PhD, Dr. Becca Babcock, who teaches in our Creative Writing program while serving as the Assistant Dean of Student Matters of our Faculty, has been awarded the President's Sessional and Part-time Instructor Award for Excellence in Teaching – all while publishing her second novel, *Some There Are Fearless*, this past spring. As amazing as these accomplishments are, there's a whole lot more in this issue that attests to the quality of our programs, our graduates, and our professors.

On that note, I'd like to extend warmest congratulations to my predecessor, Dr. Jason Haslam, whose impressive record of teaching, research, and service have made him our department's McCulloch Professor of English. This is a significant honour, and it is very well earned. Congratulations, Jason!

Finally, I'd be remiss not to mention that Dr. Julia Wright received the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Dedicated Service Award for her many contributions to service locally, provincially, and nationally.

There's a whole lot more that I could report, but I will leave you to read more about the many achievements of our instructors and our students. We love sharing good news, and we wish you all the best for a happy and healthy autumn. ■

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# Student Profiles

## MICHAEL CAMERON

**NL:** Could you describe your background: where you come from and what academic or personal route brought you to the Dalhousie English Department?

Having grown up in St. Catharines, Ontario, and not knowing what I wanted to pursue past high school, I stayed close to home and started my undergraduate at Brock University in general studies. Philosophy grabbed me first; I ended up majoring in philosophy and then following it up with an MA in the subject at Brock as well. Brock's philosophy program, however, isn't typical among English-speaking schools. Whereas most university philosophy departments specialize in analytic philosophy, Brock focused primarily on continental and Eastern philosophy: I had the pleasure of taking courses in existentialism, Buddhist philosophy, French feminism, Hindu philosophy, and poststructuralism. Much of the work I studied, then, was inherently interdisciplinary, and I gravitated towards those works that blended the literary and the philosophical: Plato's dialogues, the Bhagavad Gita, existentialist and absurdist fiction (Camus, Sartre), French literary theory (Kristeva, Deleuze), etc. When I decided to make the jump back into academia after a three-year break, I chose to lean into the literary side of my interdisciplinary interests. I went looking through the academic articles I had referenced in my MA thesis (the topic of which was a philosophical analysis of the experimental work of American literary author William S. Burroughs), the goal being to find a graduate supervisor who might share my interests, and I found that one of these pieces had been written by Anthony Enns, professor of English at Dalhousie University. The rest, as they say, is history.



Michael Cameron is currently working on his dissertation. In the meantime, he has a contract for a volume in the Cambridge Elements in the Gothic series, tentatively entitled "On Last Men and Future Monsters: Toward a Gothic Sympathy."

**NL:** Can you tell us about your experience and your development as a graduate student at Dalhousie? Were there any particular courses or professors that stand out in your memory?

Thinking back over the past six years – one year of MA and five years now PhD (the latter interrupted and delayed somewhat by Covid...) – it strikes me just how much I have learned and how much I have grown as a result of my studies in Dalhousie's English department. The mentorship and support I have been given, from both faculty and my fellow graduate students, have been invaluable to my development as an academic and, quite frankly, as a person. I have also learned much on account of having the opportunity to teach, as I know that I am a much

better writer today for all the times I was a TA for ENGL 1100: Writing for University. It is hard to choose courses and professors that stand out against what is already an outstanding department, but I would say the class with the greatest impact on my direction so far has been Jason Haslam's course on 'Cli-Fi' or Climate Fiction, which I had the pleasure of taking in the first semester of my MA. My research and work for this course, notably my final paper on H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, set me off down the academic path I am still following to this day.

**NL:** Tell us about your current interests and projects (academic or otherwise).

Academically, my interests are quite varied, but the study of 'extinction narratives' serves in many respects as the gravitational center around which most of my interests revolve. Beginning with my MA thesis work on H.G. Wells and 19th-Century theories of evolution, degeneration, and extinction, I have since expanded my interests to the study of extinction narratives of all sorts: biblical apocalypses, pre- and post-Darwinian theories of catastrophism and species extinction, "Last Man" narratives and post-apocalyptic fiction, accounts of endangered species in popular science and the cultural imaginary more generally, etc. My dissertation – tentatively titled "The Last [Hu]Man from the Age of Revolution to the End of History" – touches on most of these topics. Beyond academia, I have a few other projects brewing in the background. Notably, I drafted a short novella at the height of the Covid pandemic to which I plan on returning when I have more time, as it needs some heavy editing. Inspired by my research and the isolation I felt during the lockdown, this novella is itself a "Last Man" narrative starring a lone human being (though with an AI companion) on a great ship sailing a world of only ocean – my initial idea was "Moby Dick meets Noah's Ark with a good dash of Sci-Fi," and I think this describes it reasonably well. Maybe I'll try to publish it someday, who knows...

**NL:** You will be publishing a volume in the Cambridge Elements in the Gothic series. Can you tell us how that came about and outline the book's argument?

At the outset of my PhD, I planned to write my dissertation on the theme of cross-species sympathy/empathy as it appears in post-apocalyptic literature, and to this end I wrote and presented a few short pieces at academic conferences. Though in time the focus of my dissertation changed, I knew that preliminary work I had done could someday be retooled into publishable work, and so I put it on the backburner. (To return briefly to the topic of an earlier question, this eye for salvaging discarded work to be used for later projects is something I cultivated thanks to the advice of many of my Dal professors.) One day while scrolling through Twitter (this was before Musk's reign of terror), I saw a tweet by Dr. Angela Wright of the University of Sheffield requesting proposals for a series

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## BRENNA DUPERRON

**NL:** Hi Brenna. Could you describe your background: where you come from and what academic and/or personal route brought you to the Dalhousie English Department?

Hi! Thanks for having me! I grew up on Kwikwetlem territory, in a city colonially known as Port Coquitlam in British Columbia. My mom jokes that I went as far as I could yet still stay on the continent.

From a young age, I was a medievalist nerd, obsessed with all things Arthurian or Robin Hood. By the age of 15, I read Malory in full. When I found out I could study medieval literature/languages in university, I was hooked. I pretty much moved across the country for Dr. Kathy Cawsey. Her focus on the medieval

### *CAMERON, continued*

she is co-editing: the Cambridge Elements in the Gothic. Works in this series and others under the “Cambridge Elements” label are, to put it simply, the novellas of academic writing, their length and scope somewhere between a scholarly, peer-reviewed paper and an academic monograph. Thinking about it, I noticed that the missing link between the arguments I had written in those earlier conference papers was in fact the Gothic: the inter-species sympathy I was describing in works such as Wells’ *The Time Machine* and Matheson’s *I Am Legend* is a Gothic sympathy, a sympathetic connection between beings that monstrifies the human in such an exchange. I felt like the Cambridge Elements in the Gothic would be the perfect place for this work, and Dr. Wright and her colleagues agreed. A date has not yet been set for its publication, but I suspect it will appear sometime in 2024.

**NL:** Any recent books you’ve read had an impact on you and that you’d recommend? Current discretionary reading?

The work that has made the most impact on me recently isn’t a book but a television show – *Severance*. It only has one season so far, but I think they’ve been signed on for a second. The show follows a few characters who have their memories split between their work life and their home life. In other words, when they are outside they don’t remember anything about what they do in the office, and when they are at the office they don’t remember anything about who they are when they are outside. What really strikes me about the show is its rich and complex tone: it strikes an incredible balance between a moody, psychological thriller; a surreal, kafkaesque nightmare; and an absurd, Beckett-esque comedy. I highly recommend it for anyone who likes their media weird. The book I am most excited about reading is Louise Erdrich’s *The Future Home of the Living God*, as a post-apocalyptic novel about humanity “evolving in reverse” is right up my alley, but I only just bought it the other day and haven’t had the chance to read it yet. ■

representations of language and literacy was an exciting fit for my own interests, and I was eager to come out to Dalhousie to work with her.

**NL:** Can you tell us about your experience and your development as a graduate student at Dalhousie? Were there any particular courses or professors that stand out in your memory? How did you decide to specialize in reading Medieval texts from an Indigenous perspective?

My integration of Indigenous and Medieval Studies pre-dates my time at Dalhousie. At SFU, I had quite a few friends engaged in Indigenous Studies. In listening to them describe their work and the theorists that they engaged with, my brain kept connecting it back to “oh! That would be a cool way to understand x in y medieval text.” On the personal front, my family has connections to the Métis community. Growing up, my father was strongly rooted in the Métis Nation community, programs and leadership. In recent years, archival documentation doesn’t seem to align with the family’s understanding of our identity, which is something that I’ve been working through personally and professionally.

Under Dr. Cawsey’s tutelage, I’ve grown a lot as both a researcher and a writer. It’s been a pleasure to work with her as she has an incredible ability to balance compassion with kicking my butt! She constantly pushes myself and my thesis to keep elevating it to the next level. My first year here overlapped with Dr. Melissa Furrow’s last. It was a pleasure to learn from her grad seminar on dream visions, and she was one of the first to encourage me to use ‘unconventional’ theories in approaching medieval texts; in particular, the use of mansplaining to understand the gendered interactions in Langland’s *Piers Plowman*. Overall, the English department has a lovely collaborative atmosphere of celebration and encouragement.

**NL:** Tell us about your current interests and projects (academic or otherwise). You have an interesting blog focusing on “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight” in the context of indigenous “rolling head” stories: could you say something about that?

Sure! My blog is working with two main Indigenous epistemologies. The first is Anishinaabe Jill Carter’s concept of red reading, where one reads Euro-centric texts with Indigenous perspective and methodologies. The second is Lee Maracle (and others) ideas around Indigenous story itself being a form of theory. In this series, instead of doing a comparative reading, I am reading “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight” through the “Rolling Head” stories. By doing so, we can reconsider some of the primary themes of the medieval poem, such as its use of monstrous races,

[...continued on page 5](#)



Brenna Duperron is currently working towards her PhD in Medieval Studies

# Student Profiles

## BILLY JOHNSON

**NL:** Could you describe your background: where you come from and what academic and/or personal route brought you to the Dalhousie English Department?

Coming to Dalhousie in September was a homecoming for me. I grew up in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, and I moved to New Brunswick to pursue my BA at St. Thomas University and my MA in English at the University of New Brunswick. In 2015, I began my PhD at the University of Toronto, where my dissertation focused on publishing history in Atlantic Canada. I knew that Dal, with its special collections, proximity to relevant archives, and stellar faculty, would offer the ideal fit for my next project. With the support of Dr. Jason Haslam, I was fortunate enough to obtain SSHRC and Killam postdoctoral fellowships at Dal. Halifax has changed a lot in the 15 years since I left, but I think that's part of what makes it such an exciting city in which to live and study.

**NL:** Tell us about your current interests and projects (academic or otherwise).

My current academic interests revolve around two book projects. The first, *Publishing Place*, is both a critical study of periodical form and a cultural history of periodicals published in the Maritime Provinces in the early 20th century. It's easy to forget that, before the rise of radio

and television at mid-century, periodicals were the primary medium through which editors, writers, politicians, and activists could reach and influence the public. This was especially true in peripheral, economically depressed regions like the Maritimes. And so, the book focuses on a range of overlooked periodicals—from socialist papers and little literary magazines to Black nationalist magazines—to examine how editors situated literature at the core of their political programs and imagined new ways of relating to place. Reading these periodicals can thus help us rethink the relationship between periodical form, editorial practice, and space in the twentieth century

The second book, *Northern Nadir Undone*, is still in the early stages. It takes up questions posed in *Publishing Place* to explore the relationship between modernism and Black expressive culture in early 20th-century Canada. That

period is often considered a “nadir” or low point of race relations in Canada, but it also witnessed the emergence of new and significant Black literary and print cultural forms. Barred from Canada's rising commercial presses, Black writers and editors founded magazines and newspapers, turning to self-publishing, pamphleteering, and folk culture to respond to the

rapid transformations of 20th-century modernity. From poetry collections and novels to political-religious, these texts imparted new meanings to the relationship between literature and social life. Ultimately, I want to think about how, in doing so, these writers contributed to a modern literary and political aesthetic.

These two projects have been consuming most of my time and interest now, but I have set aside three weeks this summer to act as a research consultant for a film by the Venezuelan director Jorge Thielen Armand. I've known Jorge since we were both undergraduate students, and I love his films, so I was excited to support his Canada Council application to research a film set in 20th century Nova Scotia. He was awarded the grant, so we'll be travelling throughout Nova Scotia, visiting archives, and scouting locations through the end of June and early July.

**NL:** Among your research interests is a figure who should be better known in Nova Scotia, Arthur Huff Fauset. Can you discuss how you came to be researching this figure and his significance in cultural history?

Fauset is a fascinating figure, at various times an author, anthropologist, folklorist, teacher, and labour activist. At the height of the Harlem Renaissance, his short stories appeared alongside works by Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, and Zora Neal Hurston. But unlike those writers, Fauset has received almost no recognition in histories of the period. When he's discussed at all, he is generally remembered for folklore he collected in the American South. Rarely mentioned is his first scholarly work, *Folklore from Nova Scotia* (1931). The collection was the result of an incredible, intensive period of fieldwork. In just over six weeks in the summer of 1923, without the aid of any recording devices, the 24-year old Fauset collected nearly 200 folktales from informants in more than a dozen Black communities throughout Nova Scotia. The result was the first substantial collection of folktales reported in Canada and the only collection of Black Canadian folklore published in the early 20th century.

I think there are various reasons as to why the collection was mostly ignored in its time and since, but part of its neglect—and its importance today—has to do with popular representations of Canada's east coast. The Black Nova Scotian folklore collected by Fauset is not easily reconciled with the image of a quaint, idyllic and predominantly white fisherfolk that emerged in the works of more renowned folklorists like Roy Mackenzie and Helen Creighton. So, though Fauset's work is important on many levels, I think *Folklore from Nova Scotia* is especially crucial for disrupting persistent and exclusionary narratives of Canadian cultural history. In short, the stories he collected reveal thriving and incredibly diverse Black folk cultures in interwar Canada, cultures that have yet to be sufficiently acknowledged in Canadian scholarly and public history alike.



Billy Johnson is currently a postdoctoral fellow working in the English Department

**NL:** What directions do you think your research might take in the future.

One important aspect of modern culture in Canada that both of my current projects suggest, but which neither focuses on directly, is the role that rural spaces played as sites of cultural innovation throughout the 20th century. Many of the writers and publishers I examine were working in urban centres, but many were not. This is significant, because though modern Canadian literature frequently imagined rural spaces or took them as settings, those rural spaces are rarely considered as material sites of cultural production. The result is not only a partial picture of Canadian society, but also a failure to question colonial constructions of rurality that assign specific classed, gendered, and racialized stereotypes to rural spaces. I think this results, in part, from what has been called the “metropolitan bias” in literary and print culture studies: the assumption that modernity itself was an urban phenomena. So, I’d like to think through and interrogate that bias as it applies to 20th-century Canada, not just in terms of regionalism or the imagined division between “country and city,” but as a foundational belief that has had concrete, material implications for the development of Canadian culture and its infrastructure.

**BRENNA DUPERRON, continued**

landscapes, and punishment. In these blog posts, I engage with the concept of monstrous races as a key element in colonialism and marginalization through the colonial potential of the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The Green Knight’s forceful disruption of the Arthurian Camelot, and his symbolic space as a conflation of both the conquering Britons (Brutus) and the defeated Giants (Gogmagog) from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain*, posit him as a potentially colonizing force to Camelot itself—one that Gawain and Arthur are tasked with overcoming; however, this colonizing danger is ultimately overturned and nullified by the reveal of Morgan Le Fay (a close kin of Camelot) as the instigator of the disruption and his othered space as a monster.

**NL:** What directions do you think your research might take in the future.

My first goal is to shape my thesis into my first book with some potential archival travel in this revision process! Unfortunately, due to COVID, I’d had to focus my attention on digital manuscripts or print facsimiles — thank goodness for digitization librarians!! My thesis focuses on how female mystics, like Margery Kempe, engage in collective storytelling in their life narratives with an emphasis on aesthetically capturing both visual meditation and oral interactivity on the static page through what (Cherokee) Thomas King would call interfusional literature or (Stō:lo) Lee Maracle’s ‘Word Art.’ My next step is to engage with these manuscripts firsthand in order to fully experience their purpose. For example, there were these manuscripts that created visual maps for guided meditations, including flaps for

**NL:** Any recent books you’ve read that had an impact on you and that you’d recommend? Current discretionary reading?

One writer whose works I’ve been recently influenced by is the Haitian historian and anthropologist Michel Rolph Trouillot. His best-known book *Silencing the Past*, is as relevant today as when it was published nearly three decades ago. His ideas are sophisticated, but his writing never becomes so dense that its inaccessible. But I’m also getting to read fiction! I recently re-read Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* just after reading Jonathan Escoffrey’s debut novel *If I Survive You*. Though published 80 years apart, they pair so well — and not just because they’re both set in Florida and involve major hurricanes. Finally, I have to mention that I recently returned to Katherena Vermette’s poetry collection *North End Love Songs* (2017). I can’t recommend it enough—it’s an emotionally challenging, lyrical collection that deals with very specific injustices confronted by Indigenous peoples in Winnipeg. But it also conveys the profoundly contradictory feelings of love and hate and nostalgia and disillusionment we often feel for the places in which we live or grew up. Perhaps it resonated all the more having recently returned home! ■

manual interaction. These visualizations would allow the enclosed religious to engage in pilgrimage. You can see one here: <https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/rf352tc5448>. It starts on page 10. They are quite beautiful, and I look forward to getting my hands on one in the future!

**NL:** Any recent books you’ve read had an impact on you and that you’d recommend? Current discretionary reading?

Ooh so many options! I am one of those people that has multiple books on the go at the same time.

On the medieval front, my summer TBR includes Jonathan Hsy’s *Antiracist Medievalisms*. I also highly recommend Paul B. Sturtevant and Amy Kaufman’s *The Devil’s Historian*, which works through many of the myths that have been created about the period. It looks at the realities of racial and gender diversity in daily medieval life while tracing the historical patterns that created the monocultural and extremist myths.

I would also suggest for anyone looking to learn more about Indigenous-Canada relations, Lee Maracle’s *My Conversations with Canadians*, or to learn more about Residential Schools, Isabelle Knockwood’s *Out of the Depths* is a painful but beautiful memoir of her time at Shubie.

My current just-for-fun read is often whatever is on my son’s bookshelf. He’s recently gotten into the Terry Pratchett *Discworld* series, which has been a fun fantasy romp — though who knows there is probably a project hidden in there somewhere! ■

# Student Awards and Prizes

Every year the department recognizes students with prizes and awards, most nominated by faculty members. These students and their work — especially during the disruption of last few years — are inspiring! Congratulations to all!

## Avie Bennett Prize

(for best essay in Canadian Literature):

Prize divided (\$602 each) between **Alison Keogh**, “Funny Boy: an Exploration of Patriarchy and Colonialism” and **Sam Sumner**, “Ecocritical Storying: Embodied Metaphors of Sickness and Healing in ‘On the Wings of this Prayer’”

## Bennett Chittick Prize

(for an outstanding student in a 1000-level English course):

**Morag Brown**

## Paul McIsaac Memorial Prize

(for a student in the second or third year of study in English who demonstrates an enquiring and original mind):

**Eva Dobrovolska**

## Samantha Li Memorial Award

(established by family, friends, faculty, and students to honour the memory of Samantha Li, for a student who demonstrates intellectual reach and creativity, a passion for the exploration of literature and ideas, and generosity toward and engagement with fellow students and professors):

**Cassandra Burbine**

## Allan & Lura Bevan Scholarship

(a memorial scholarship established by colleagues and friends of the late Allan Bevan, awarded to a student in the Major program):

**Gillian Owensby**

## Graham Creighton Prize

(awarded annually to students entering their 4th year of study in an English Major or Honours program who have demonstrated a high level of academic excellence):

Split between **Erin Inglis**, **Laura Gilron**, and **Zia Shirtliffe**

## Archibald MacMechan Scholarship

(granted to a graduating English student who has demonstrated special abilities at the Undergraduate level):

**Brandon Hachey**

## Margaret Nicoll Pond Memorial Prize

(endowed by Mr. F.H. Pond of Halifax in memory of his wife, the late Margaret Nicoll Pond, a gifted teacher of English and a devoted alumna and governor of Dalhousie University. The prize is awarded to the woman graduating in English with the highest academic standing):

**Sabina Willmott**

## James W. Tupper Graduate Fellowship

(awarded to students selected on the criteria of the GPA of all English classes who are going on to do graduate work):

Split between **Susanna Cupido** and **Cassandra Burbine**

## Malcolm Ross Thesis Prize

(awarded to an outstanding MA or PhD thesis on Canadian Literature): **Brittany Kraus**

## University Medal in English

**Sabina Willmott**

## University Medal in Creative Writing

**Sabina Willmott**

## Varma Prize for Gothic Literature

1st place: **Nicolas Paquette** for “A Macabre Ballet”  
2nd place: **Ashley Bradford** for “Penelope, Penelope”  
3rd place: **Ben West** for “Lupine”

Honourable Mentions: **Isabella MacKay** for “The People on The Other Side”; **Johanna Gysbertsen** for “Deteriorate”; and **Eva Abou-Samra** for “Dear Adam”

## Fooshee Prizes

Poetry:

First Place: “For Joyce” by **Cassandra Burbine**  
Second Place: “After the Pastoral” by **Sasha Pickering**  
Third Place: “Ekphrasis” by **Susanne Cupido**  
Honorable Mention: “Swimming” by **James Lee**

Fiction:

First Place: “Some Inanimate Thing” by **Anna Mack-Keyte**  
Second Place: “Oh Ephraim” by **Susanne Cupido**  
Third Place: “Fruits du Jour” by **Anya Deady**  
Honorable Mention: “Even the Darkest Night Will End” by **Tessa Schaeffer**

## Dr. LILI JOHNSON

**NL:** Hi LiLi, and welcome to the English Department. Could you describe your background: where you come from and what academic and/or personal route brought you to the Dalhousie English Department?

Thank you so much and I'm excited to join the English and GWST communities! I'm originally from the United States (Amherst, Massachusetts). I got my B.A. in Social and Cultural Analysis at New York University and my Ph.D. in American Studies at Yale University. For the last three years I've been an assistant professor of Gender & Women's Studies and Asian American Studies at University of Wisconsin-Madison.

I was able to spend some time in Halifax with my partner during the pandemic and really fell in love with the city and Dal community. It's a privilege to join the English Department and GWST Program and I'm excited to share my interests in Asian North American Studies, family and kinship, and new media and visual culture.

**NL:** Can you speak about your current interests and projects (academic or otherwise)? Could you say something about your work on Asian American adoption narratives – how did you come to focus on that? Do you have any thoughts at this point where your research might lead in the future?

Most broadly, my research is focused on Asian North American family and kinship, race and multiculturalism, and visual cultures. My current book manuscript is titled *Technologies of Family: Asian American Racial Formation and the Making of Kinship*. Expanding conceptualizations of family and kinship beyond just biological reproduction, the project traces the construction of the Asian American family as a systematic site of racial formation. It argues that kinship has historically been constructed through, what I call, "technologies of family" – systems such as government bureaucracy, immigration policy, photography, online profiles, and ancestry tests, each of which serve as a case study. These technologies demonstrate how Asian American family and kinship have been endowed with narratives and fantasies of identification, intimacy, and belonging that define racial categorization. I'm also working on a project more specifically focused on Asian North American adoption narratives and the meaning of race in transracial adoption (when a family adopts a child of a different race).

I became interested in race, family and kinship, and adoption in part because I was adopted from China myself and grew up in a White American family. For adoptive families, the stories told about how children arrive in the family or who resembles who (or doesn't resemble) are different than biological families. And ideas and narratives about race, kinship, genetics, and inheritance were often at the front of my mind as I was growing up.

In college, I developed an academic interest in how and why certain concepts like race, gender, or identity are so meaningful in society and to our sense of identity and self. My undergraduate senior thesis was titled "Discourses of Family in General Biology Textbooks" and examined how our basic understandings of biology seem "objective" and "scientific" but are still shaped by the language in our culture. For example, many of us learn "You get 23 chromosomes from your mom and 23 chromosomes from your dad." But this isn't the case for adopted people, people who were conceived through egg or sperm donation, blended families, or queer families. "Mom" and "dad" are social terms.

Even now, many years later, I'm still interested in how society and culture are reflected in how we narrate and make sense of our lives. And I see my research expanding to think, not just about Asian North Americans, but also about the meaning of race and multiculturalism more broadly and how they are represented in contemporary culture, especially under neoliberalism.

**NL:** What about teaching: are there any courses you will be giving that you are particularly looking forward to? Any areas in which you hope to expand our current offerings (such as Asian American/Canadian)?

In Fall 2023 and Winter 2024, I'll be teaching ENGL 1100 Writing for University, and in Winter 2024 I'll be teaching a seminar that I've taught before called *Race and Gender in Digital Worlds*. I really love teaching that class because it's an opportunity to explore Media Studies, New Media Studies, and Visual Culture, and apply those fields of study and methods in close reading to our everyday digital lives. This includes looking at a range of topics from the military history of GPS to the male gaze in social media to the use of AI in controversial technologies like ChatGPT.

I also teach courses such as Asian North American Feminisms and a class called *Adoption, Race, and Kinship*. I hope to expand our current offerings not just in Asian North American and Asian Diaspora Studies but also in courses that critically focus on race, multiculturalism, and visual culture. For example, I envision new courses such *Race and Identity Politics*; *Mixed Race Studies*; and *Photography and Memory*.

**NL:** When you're not working on research, what do you like to read or watch? Any recent books or shows that affected you and that you'd recommend—or maybe not?

I'm a big binge-watcher of both movies and TV. I've been really excited to see the surge in Asian American and Asian diasporic narratives coming from A24. I would

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Dr. LiLi Johnson was hired this year to English and Gender and Women's Studies.

# Faculty Profiles

## Dr. ALICE BRITTAN

**NL:** Hi Alice, and let me first congratulate you on receiving the Grand Prize for Nonfiction given by the Next Generation Indie Book Awards. Can you talk about your book and what you were trying to do in it? How would you situate it in the landscape of current writing about literature? Has your work on this project had an impact on your pedagogical approach, and if so how?

When I first started writing *The Art of Astonishment: Reflections on Gifts and Grace* in around 2010, I imagined it as a purely academic book about the evolving history of the gift. I spent about four years researching and writing that book, and then, in 2014, my husband's work took us back to Toronto. I had a six-month sabbatical and I was granted eighteen months of unpaid leave from Dalhousie. 2014 marked the twenty-year anniversary of my sister-in-law's unsolved murder, which took place in Toronto. Living in that city again—for the first time since 1997, when my husband and I left to attend graduate schools in Philadelphia—reconnected me with family in a new way. I was able to spend time with my in-laws and parents, and to think about the forces that have shaped our lives and the lives of my children. During this time, I considered quitting my job and leaving academia. I began to re-write *The Art of Astonishment* so that it was both a work of scholarship and a piece of life writing. I realized that my interest in ideas of gift and grace is not merely intellectual, but deeply rooted in the histories of violence that have shaped my family for several generations, and that I could draw on that knowledge to deepen and enrich the book. It took about five years for me to rewrite the manuscript; I had to invent the voice and method that would allow me to weave together materials as disparate as The Iliad and the story of my grandmother's hair salons in a seamless and convincing way. It was a difficult process, but it was worth it.



Alice Brittan's *The Art of Astonishment: Reflections on Gifts and Grace* (Bloomsbury) won the 2023 Grand Prize for Nonfiction given by the Next Generation Indie Book Awards.

My work has completely changed my teaching. I now regularly teach our department's very popular undergraduate course in the personal essay (ENGL/CRWR 2010), and I also teach a 4000/5000 level seminar on new forms of scholarly storytelling that blur the divide between intellect and emotion, life and the library, argument and story. I also supervise Honours, MA and PhD projects that do the same thing. It's been an exciting re-invention, both for me and my students. Chat GBT and other AI platforms will place even more pressure on our teaching, so it feels like the right time to make students excited about the creative possibilities inherent in the essay form.

These days, lots of scholars are interested in inventing new ways to do our work. Just a few examples: Saidiya Hartman, Jennifer C. Nash, Rita Felski, and

Christina Sharpe. These writers mix scholarship with narrative, prose poetry, memoir, life writing, reportage. Scholarship can take a lot of different forms without sacrificing rigor. You can tell a story and have footnotes.

**NL:** What about your other current interests and projects (academic or otherwise), and where you think your work might go in the future?

Right now I'm working on a new book project whose working title is *Unspeakable Things: Writing in the Dark Forest*. The "dark forest" is a reference to the famous opening lines of Dante's *Inferno*, in which a middle-aged man loses his way and finds himself in the *selva oscura* that is quite literally a portal to hell. In recent years, I too have found myself in a dark forest, but with problems that are quite different than those faced by Dante's medieval Christian pilgrim. Like *The Art of Astonishment*, this new book launches from life experience: first, my decades-long struggle to cope with the symptoms of endometriosis, a poorly understood and under-researched gynecological disease that causes chronic pain (among many other problems); and second, my experience of "suppression," a hormone treatment for endometriosis (and some forms of estrogen-fed cancers) that causes medical menopause. There are countless epics, poems, novels, movies, TV shows, and nonfiction accounts of what happens to men in midlife; there are very few stories out there about what happens to menopausal women. As a woman, I'm infuriated by this storytelling desert; as a scholar, I'm fascinated. And that's where *Unspeakable Things* begins: with rage and astonishment. It's always been fertile ground.

**NL:** You first came to the Dalhousie English Department in 2003. What changes have you noticed over the years since then? Are the students, undergraduate and undergraduate, significantly different?

Our department has shrunk a lot since 2003. When I first arrived, the English department had about twenty-three full-time faculty. Now we're down to fifteen or sixteen. On a more positive note, we've recently managed to hire several new faculty members and we've begun to grow our course offerings in creative writing, which is exciting. Among students, both graduate and undergraduate, I notice a new hunger for non-traditional forms of scholarship. Graduate students, in particular, are aware that their degrees may not lead to academic employment, and many of them are interested in how they might use their research skills to produce more genre-fluid and public-facing work.

**NL:** And finally, the question we ask of everyone, when you are not driven by the demands of academia, what do you like to read or watch? Any recent discoveries that you'd like to share with our readers?

Lately I've been seeking out books by writers that are new to me. I like to make sure that I don't stay in a rut, only reading writers whose work I know and

[...continued on page 9](#)



**Becca Babcock** received the President's Sessional and Part-time Instructor Award for Excellence in Teaching. She continues as Assistant Dean (Student Affairs) in the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, and will also be teaching English and Creative Writing. Her new novel *Some There are Fearless* (Nimbus) was published in Spring 2023.

**Morgan Beck** presented "The Whole Picture: Smoothness and Backgrounds in *Ducks*" at the 2023 ACCUTE conference.

**Alice Brittan's** *The Art of Astonishment: Reflections on Gifts and Grace* (Bloomsbury) won the Grand Prize for Nonfiction given by the Next Generation Indie Book Awards.

**Keanan Byggdin**, recent graduate of the Honours English and Creative Writing programs, won the 2023 Thomas Raddall Fiction Award for their novel *Wonder World*. It is a \$30,000 prize.

**Michael Cameron** presented "The Endings of H.G. Wells" at the 2023 ACCUTE conference.

**Krista Collier-Jarvis** accepted a tenure-track position at Mount St. Vincent University.

**Darren Dyck's** dissertation, *Will & Love: Shakespeare and the Motions of the Soul* (directed by John Baxter) has just been published by Cascade Books. He currently teaches at Ambrose University.

**Olivia Fader**, who majored in English and Gender Studies, has been hired as Dalhousie's first advisor to support 2SLGBTQ+ students.

**Ben Gallagher** published *A Grief Cave: Thirty Poems and an Essay* (Frontenac House) in Winter 2022.

**Shauntay Grant** edited an anthology of plays entitled *From The Ashes: Six Solo Plays* in June with Playwrights Canada Press. She gave the keynote at the upcoming Canadian Association for Theatre Research conference (June 15-17 at Dal), speaking about the anthology and my work in theatre in general (as playwright, performer, editor etc). Her picture book *My Fade Is Fresh* was published in November 2022 by Penguin; it's received starred reviews from *Booklist*, *Kirkus*, *School Library Journal* and others. Her picture book *Sandy Toes: A Summer Adventure* (the first in a series called Let's Play Outside, published by Abrams Appleseed) was released in May. It received a starred review by *Quill &*

*Quire*. The second book in the series, *Snowy Mittens: A Winter Adventure*, will be published in September 2023. Another children's title, called *When I Wrap My Hair*, will be released in January 2024 by HarperCollins.

**Shawna Guenther** successfully defended her Ph.D. thesis.

**Sue Goyette's** latest poetry collection *Monoculture* (Gaspereau Press) was a finalist for the Maxine Tynes Nova Scotia Poetry Award.

**Kala Hirtle** successfully defended her Ph.D. thesis.

**Heather Jessup's** essay "Klein Bottle" was published in the collection *Best Canadian Essays of 2023* (Biblioasis).

**Billy Johnson** presented "From Halifax to Harlem: Arthur Huff Fauset's Folklore from Nova Scotia" at the 2023 ACCUTE conference

**Brittany Kraus** successfully defended her Ph.D. thesis, which awarded the Malcolm Ross thesis award.

**Lezlie Lowe's** latest book *The Volunteers: How Halifax Women Won the Second World War* (Nimbus) was published in 2022.

**Bart Vautour** presented "Adapting the NSCAD 'Project Class' to the Poetry Workshop" at the 2023 ACCUTE conference.

**Julia M. Wright, FRSC** has published the co-authored policy briefing, *Protecting Expert Advice for the Public: Promoting Safety and Improved Communications*, and testified as a member of the Royal Society of Canada COVID-19 Task Force to the meeting of the Senate of Canada Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Technology. As President of the Academy of the Arts and Humanities for the Royal Society of Canada, she co-authored a joint statement, "Support for the International Research Community is Crucial, Especially During Times of War" in the *Globe and Mail*.

**Erin Wunker** presented "Ditches, Witches, and Vinegar the Cat: Sylvia Townsend Warner's Hot Flashes" at the 2023 ACCUTE conference.



Becca Babcock with her President's Legacy Award

## ALICE BRITTAN, continued

admire. I loved the Chilean writer Benjamin Labatut's novel *When We Cease to Understand the World*; the Norwegian writer Roy Jacobsen's *Barrøy Quartet*; anything by Annie Ernaux. Karla Cornejo Villavicencio's *The Undocumented Americans* is stunning. I've also been reading the essays of Natalia Ginzberg, the creative nonfiction of Katherine May, and lots of books about how menopause changes your brain. Oh, and watching the final season of *Ted Lasso*. ■

## LILI JOHNSON, continued

recommend *Minari* (2020), *Everything Everywhere All At Once* (2021), *After Yang* (2021), and *Beef* (2023 on Netflix) as examples of this. I especially loved *Everything Everywhere All At Once* because of how it balanced both sci-fi and diasporic narrative. And as someone who studies family and kinship, I enjoyed its representation of kinship as a dynamic and changing encounter between family members rather than a biologized inevitability. ■

# Friday Speaker Series 2022-23

## OCTOBER

14: Juliet Wells (Goucher College), “Americans for Austen.”

21: Creative Writing Faculty Reading (Ben Gallagher, Cooper Lee Bombardier, Asha Jeffers, Sharon English, Lezlie Lowe, Heather Jessup, Alice Britain, Rebecca Babcock, Sue Goyette)

28: Varma Prize Winners, (Miles Anton for “Atop the Hill”; Todd Conrod for “To My Roommate”; Susanne Cupido for “Argyle Street Sonnet”; Emily Eddy for “The Dance”; Laine Freeman for “Mother”; Scott Galbraith for “Collector”)

## NOVEMBER

25: Richard Van Camp, “The Joy of Reclaiming Family Medicines for Yourself, Your Community and for Future Generations.” (online).

## DECEMBER

2: Honours Colloquium: Susanna Cupido, “Adapting Chaucer’s “The Pardoner’s Tale” for the Stage”; Brandon C. Hachey, “That shame shall never frome you”: New Masculinities in *Le Morte Darthur* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*”; Lindsay Church, Doctoral Prospectus; Luther P. Hewitt-Smith, “Intergenerational Trauma and Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments”; Loren Krusselbrink, “The Oriental and Small-Town ‘Outsider’ in Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford*”; Cassandra Burbine, “Whose flesh has crossed my will?” : The Abject Horror of Diane di Prima’s *Dinners and Nightmares*.”

7: Honours Colloquium cont.: Trisha Malik, “Why This Metamorphosis?”; Sabina Willmott, “A Conversation With Selin: Meaning, Truth, and the Academic/ Personal Divide in *The Idiot* by Elif Batuman”; Ian Simon, “Extreme States: Karl Ove Knausgaard’s *A Death in the Family* and *A Man in Love*”; Emily McCarthy, “Manmade Monsters: Sympathy and Narrative in *Frankenstein and Matilda*”; Cormac Newman, “The Human Condition: A Synthesis of Spirituality and Sensuality”; Caitlin A. Comeau, “Onelight Theatre and the Great Canadian Theatre Company: Contributions Towards Community.”

## JANUARY

13: Brad Congdon, “Weird Masculinity: Gender and Eugenics in the Works of H.P. Lovecraft and Robert Howard.”

27: Lilli Johnson, ““Lucky Girls’: Race and Gender in Transnational Adoption Narratives.”

## MARCH

3: Kathy Cawsey, “The Grammar of Rape in Chaucer and Gower.”

10: Asha Jeffers, “The Model Minority in African and Caribbean Immigrant Literature.”

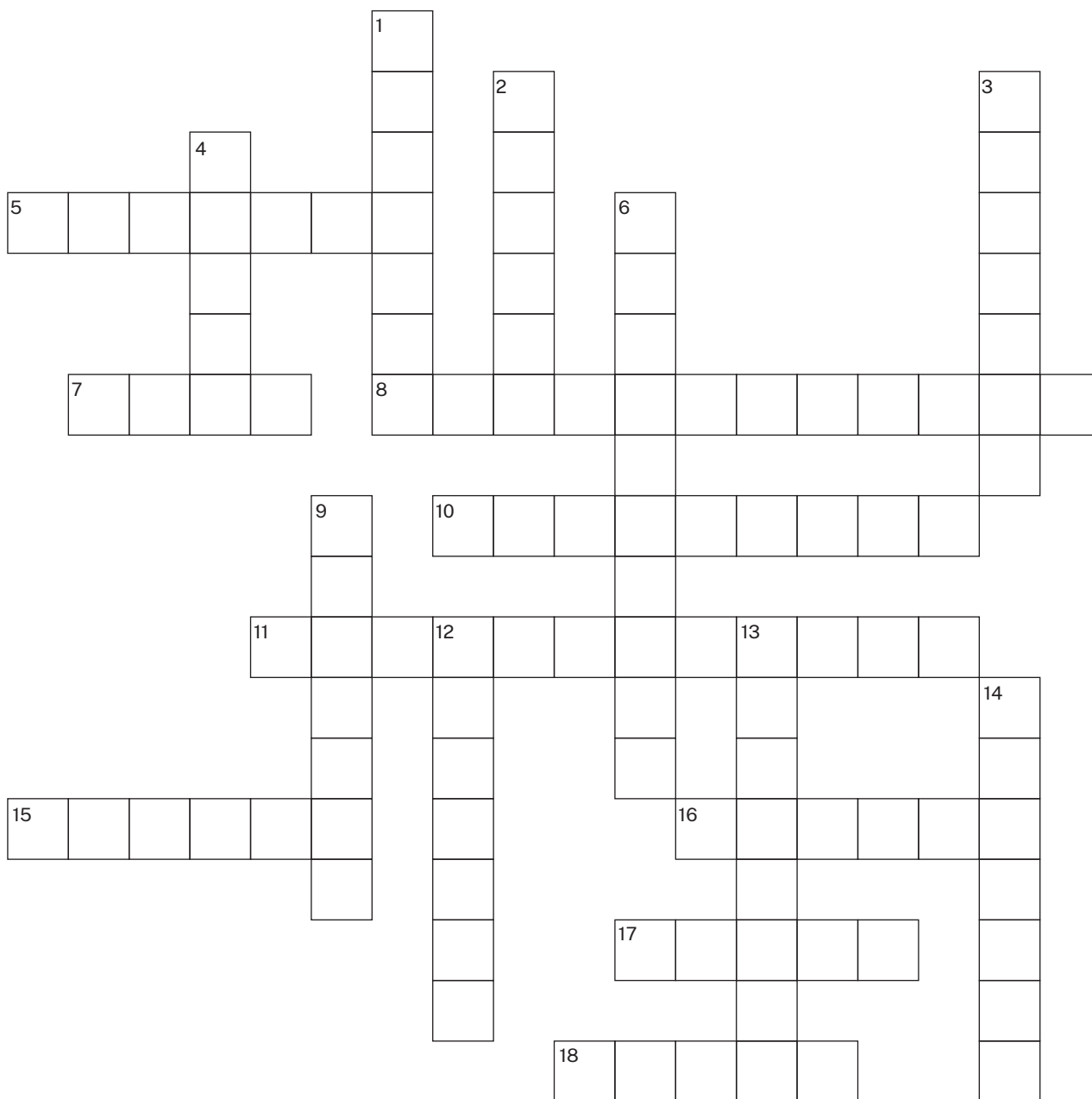
17: Michael Cameron, “The Last Man and Gothic Sympathy.”

31: Jennifer Andrews, “Moving North: Canada as a Receding Mirage of Salvation in Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God*.”



Brad Congdon at the Friday Speaker Series

# Words, words, words.



## DOWN:

1. she came back to haunt her mother
2. Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the...
3. Tennyson's idle king
4. a comfortable kind of scarecrow
6. Gat-tothed was she, soothly for to seye (three words)
9. where Watson got his wound
12. Sutpen's
13. Spenser's name for Elizabeth
14. Persuasion's fatal leap (two words)

## ACROSS:

5. he loved well, but too much
7. perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame
8. Tess was one
10. it counteth the steps of the sun
11. topic of the women who come and go
15. it saved Ishmael
16. where they order this matter better
17. this mountain has a voice
18. care sat on his faded cheek



Dean Jen Andrews at the Friday Speaker Series

**DALHOUSIE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
FRIDAY SPEAKERS SERIES**

**November 25, 2022: Richard Van Camp**  
The Joy of Reclaiming Family Medicines for Yourself,  
Your Community and for Future Generations



**Online via Zoom | Friday 25 November | 3:45-5:00pm AT**

Join us for a lively conversation with Tłjchǫ Dene author and storyteller **Richard Van Camp** as he shares his journey of reclaiming family recipes, photos, videos, songs, names, cooking techniques and more. We promise uplifting stories and gifts!



  
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Heather Jessup at Varmania

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Answers to crossword: DOWN 1. Beloved, 2. flower, 3. Ulysses, 4. Yeats, 6. Wife of Bath, 9. Maiwand, 12. Hundred, 13. Gloriana, 14. The Cobb; ACROSS 5. Othello, 7. lust (Shakespeare's sonnet #129), 8. d'Urbervilles, 10. sunflower, 11. Michelangelo, 15. coffin, 16. France, 17. Blanc, 18. Satan