ENGLISH NEWS

2025-2026

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

IN THIS ISSUE

1 Chair's Remarks

2 Atlantic Undergraduate English Conference

3 English Honours Colloquium

4 MA Colloquium

6 Student Awards and Prizes

8 Welia'lioq Nitape'skw – Netukulimk

10 Honours Reviews

12 Faculty Profiles

16 English on the Line

17 Speaker Series

18 Department Updates

19 In Memoriam

20 A Tribute and Celebration

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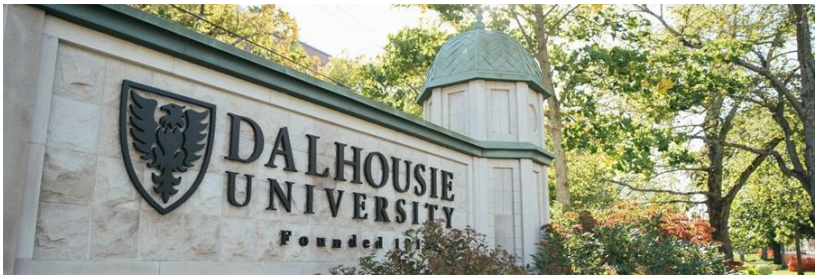


CHAIR'S REMARKS

BY ERIN WUNKER

When is a year not an interesting one?

This year began with an unprecedented lockout of DFA members by the Board. The silver lining of being locked out of our jobs and kept from our students was, I think, the camaraderie and solidarity that developed on the picket lines. Whether those lines were on the virtual pickets, outside in all weather, or at negotiating tables, English and Creative Writing faculty joined DFA members across the university to demand fairness. Solidarity was palpable, and many of us met the new graduate cohort when they showed up to visit at picket sites or at the weekly rallies. I think it is important to hold on to the ineffable magic of solidarity with one another for a shared purpose of making the conditions for teaching and learning strong. One of my favourite signs read "Our Teaching Conditions are Students' Learning Conditions." We are in this project together.

The return to classrooms and research was anything but "regular"— a truncated semester was a challenge. Again, it was incredible to see the ways in which folks held one another up despite myriad obstacles. As a department, we celebrated the creativity and dedication of students through the Varma Prize celebration and the fourth-year Honours Colloquium.

Winter brought many snow Mondays as well as unexpected curveballs to our program delivery. Again, I am heartened by the ways in which colleagues—faculty, staff, and CUPE—work together for the shared mission of delivering curricula we know to be meaningful and well-considered. Highlights of this term again came from the work of undergraduate and graduate students. The awards listed in this newsletter shore up my observation, but a list can't tell the whole story. We have witnessed hard work, dedication, and loss. We've navigated change in ways that make me confident for the future, even as changes promise to continue if not increase. I'm grateful to be in this department; this year taught me once again that we care about students, the work we do, and one another, even (especially) when that care is worn thin.

As the year comes to a close, I wish to congratulate and thank Drs. Lyn Bennett and Trevor Ross, as well as Mr. Lesley Choyce, who are all moving into retirement. Finally, I want to thank Dr. Shero Sheik for his time with the Department as a Donald Hill Postdoctoral Fellow.

ATLANTIC UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH CONFERENCE

BY JENNIFER ANDREWS

A group of students from Dalhousie University's English Department, consisting of Kate Duncanson, Celia Fournier, Anna-Claire Cook, Lauren Sooksom, Tracy Lin, and Molly Dineen) attended and presented their work at the 2026 Annual Atlantic Undergraduate English Conference, held March 20th to 22nd, at the University of Prince Island in Charlottetown. This wonderful group of students did a fabulous job of delivering both creative writing and academic papers. The work presented was excellent and yielded lots of great questions from audience members, consisting of peers and faculty members from the various participating universities (UNB, U de Moncton, UNB, Dalhousie, Acadia, St. Mary's, St FX, Mount Saint Vincent, STU, UPEI, and UNBSJ). The students also shared their deep gratitude to and delight with the Dalhousie English department's amazing faculty members. With most of group graduating this year and moving on to graduate school or teacher education training, this was a great way to finish their time as Dalhousie English students! Thanks to Norma Ranieri for her diligence in organizing the trip details.

From left to right: Celia Fournier, Tracy Lin, Kate Duncanson, Lauren Sooksom, Molly Dineen, and Anna-Claire Cook.

HONOURS COLLOQUIUM

Students in the English Honours program complete the Honours Capstone course and thesis each year, writing both analytical and research-creation projects. This year, despite a hectic and shortened Fall term due to the lockout, they still presented versions of their projects at our annual colloquium, which they also organized. In the Winter term they then published their projects on DalSpace, our institutional archive. You can see the program for the colloquium below, and can view their and past students' projects on the archive.

Morning: McCain 2130

9:45: Jason Haslam: Opening Remarks

10:00 – 11:15: The Historical Canon and Its Witchy Discontents

Judah Onstad-Bauld: Accessing God in Man Through Poetry

Justin Spence: Historical and Mental Revolution in *Prometheus Unbound*

Lauren Sooksom: Re-Imagining the Pendle Witches: Using Historical Fiction to Give a Voice to the Oppressed

11:30 – 1:00: Stories of Gender and Resistance

Margot Peluso-Pope: Home Is Where the Heart Is: Female Isolation within the Home as a Nation-Building Force

Cassidy Thrower: Becoming the Other: Political Structures and Migrant Dehumanization in Hage's *Cockroach*

Riana Surovkin: Piecing Together the Language: The Importance of Teaching Phonics over Three-Cueing to Learners

Tracy Lin: Narrative and Empathy: Writing as an Act of Attention

Afternoon: McCain 2130

1:00 – 2:00

Lunch in the Lounge

2:00 – 3:30: Stories of Gender and Resistance II

Ava Court-Hampton: How the Relationship Between Economics and Female Romantic Choice Impacts Female Friendships in *Jane Eyre* and *Pride and Prejudice*

Celia Fournier: Hardy's Corruption of Love and Confrontation of the Fallen Woman Trope

Molly Dineen: Feinberg's Archival Closet: Archiving Lesbian Gender Performance7 in *Stone Butch Blues*

Anna-Claire Cook: "Unplugged": A Speculative Case Study of the Present through Fictions of the Future

3:30: Closing Remarks

MA COLLOQUIUM

While the Fall term is capped by the honours colloquium, the Winter term sees the equally celebratory and exciting MA colloquium, in which our students present their in-progress thesis work. You can see the program below, and some pictures from the day (all taken by our resident portrait photographer and graduate program administrator, Angie Morash!) The pictures follow the order of the program.

AGENDA

Opening Remarks - 12:30 PM

Panel 1 - 12:45 PM - 1:45 PM

- Serafina Piasentin
- Benjamin Bush-Anderson
- Johanna Gibson

Break - 1:45 PM - 2:00 PM

Panel 2 - 2:00 PM - 2:45 PM

- Julia Palmer
- Ashley Anderson

Break - 2:45 PM - 3:00 PM

Panel 3 - 3:00 PM - 3:45 PM

- Naomi Boswell
- Morgan Kittson

Followed by closing remarks and a small reception in the Department of English Lounge, room 1186.

THESIS TITLES:

SERAFINA PIASENTIN - "Poetic Traces of My Matrilineal Ancestry in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia"

BENJAMIN BUSH-ANDERSON - "*hYeah:* Pulmonic Ingressive Affirmative in Maritime English"

JOHANNA GIBSON - "*Syrinx:* A Creative Exploration of Trans Narratology and Pan-Generational Community"

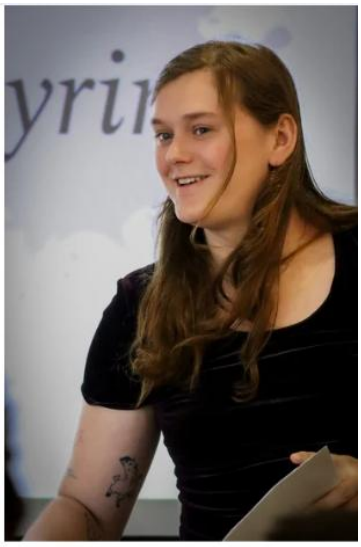
JULIA PALMER - "*Mothering* in the Anthropocene: Sigrid Nunez's *What Are You Going Through* and Sheila Heti's Motherhood"

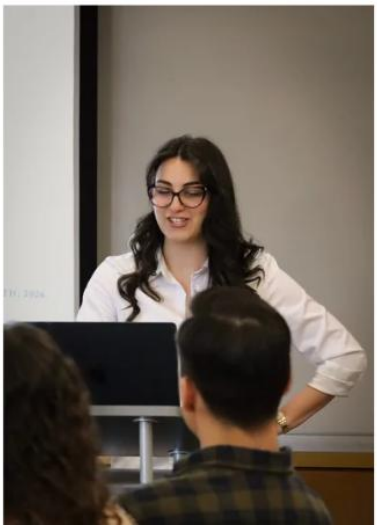
ASHLEY ANDERSON - "'Life Branching Out': Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf, and Diary Writing as Authorial Formation of the Mad Female Self - An Autotheoretical Essay"

NAOMI BOSWELL - "Re-Threading the Weft of the Family Tree: How Adoptive Mothers Mend Fractured Kinship in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Ta-Nehisi Coates' *The Water Dancer*"

MORGAN KITTSON - "'Eat for Us': *White Is for Witching* as a Culinary-Roman"

MA COLLOQUIUM





STUDENT AWARDS AND PRIZES

Every year the department recognizes students with prizes and awards celebrating academic and creative achievements. These students and their work—especially during the disruption of this year—are inspiring! Congratulations to all!

Undergraduate Awards

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):
Cole Jolley

Archibald MacMechan Scholarship
(granted to a graduating English student who has demonstrated special abilities at the Undergraduate level):
Molly Dineen

Avie Bennett Prize
(for best essay in Canadian Literature):
Margot Peluso-Pope: for "'Toy Weathers Mean Less than We Assume': Lisa Robertson's Deconstruction of Nature's Function in Lyric Poetry"

Bennett Chittick Prize
(for an outstanding student in a 1000-level English course):
Luke Jillings

Bruce and Nora Stovel Prize
(Dr. Nora Foster Stovel (PhD, Dal) has established a memorial prize in the name of her late husband, Dr. Bruce Stovel (Assoc. Prof., Dal, 1975-1985) and her own name for a student entering a Concentrated Honours in English program and who demonstrates academic excellence):
Chloe Cook

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):
Ashlyn Rodrigues, Sally Golden, and Hazel Somerville

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):
Lauren Sooksom and Molly Dineen

Kim Rilda LeBlanc Memorial Award
(established to recognize outstanding interdisciplinary initiatives between the arts and the health sciences, and it honours the memory of this former graduate student in English):
Madelyn Iwankow, for "Frigid Safekeeping"

Paul McIsaac Memorial Prize
(for a student in the second or third year of study in English who demonstrates an enquiring and original mind):
Sara Edmundson

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):
Tracy Lin

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):
Carmen Gessell

University Medal in English
Molly Dineen

University Medal in Creative Writing
Lauren Sooksum

Graduate Awards

Dr. Malcolm Ross Graduate Scholarship
(awarded to an outstanding MA or PhD thesis on Canadian Literature):
Morgan Kittson, Ashley Anderson, Serafina Piasentin, and Julia Palmer (all MA)

Hilda and Albert Tyler Prize in English
(awarded to the leading honours graduate in the department of English pursuing MA or PhD):
Johanna Gibson, MA

Lynne & Clyde Evans Scholarship in English
(awarded annually to an outstanding graduate student in Dalhousie's English department):
Cassidy Serhienko, PhD

Margaret (Goode) & Derek McLaws Bursary in English
(awarded to a graduate a student of the Department of English):
Aisha Rahman, PhD

Patricia Keene Scholarship in English
(awarded to deserving graduate students within the Dept of English):
Julia Palmer, MA

Southern African Student Education Project
(Dalhousie's Southern African Student Education Project [SASEP] offers qualified black Southern Africans an opportunity to study for an internationally accepted graduate degree:
Naomi Boswell, MA

STUDENT AWARDS AND PRIZES

Creative Writing Awards

Varma Prize in Gothic Literature

First Prize: Seth Enman, “Twilight”

Second Prize: Gabriel Milhet, “The Horrors of Howe Hall”

Third Prize: Eoin Forbes, [Untitled]

Honourable Mentions:

Audrey McDonald, “The Library”

Tessie Doyle, “Eavesdropping”

Kali Reyno-Chiasson “Donor One”

Clare Murray Fooshee Literary Prizes

Poetry

First Prize: Gabriel Milhet, *Enslaved Black Women Poems* (4 individual poems)

Second Prize: Charlotte Hawboldt, “Still, the question of Love’s fourteenth sonnet”

Third Prize: Jasmine Rodman, “The Thing Between Us”

Fiction

First Prize: Seyede Hadis Hosseini, “Footprints in the First Snow”

Second Prize: Anna-Claire Cook, “Nine O'clock on a Wednesday Night”

Third Prize: Celia Fournier, “Beasts”

The cover of *Fathom*, our student-edited creative writing journal (Celia Fournier and Laura Sooksom, Chief Editors)

NOCTURNE: DAL GALLERY & DAL CRWR COLLABORATION

For a number of years, the Creative Writing Program has collaborated with the Dalhousie Art Gallery to host an interactive night of art and writing for visitors during the Nocturne festival that takes place every October across the city. This fall, during the Regarding Land exhibition, writer and educator Heather Jessup, artist Nour El Sabeh, and students from our Creative Writing Program, with curator Pamela Edmonds, guided participants through a series of writing prompts inspired by the themes of land, memory, and migration.

Photo by Nour El Sabeh

WELIA'LIOQ NITAPE'SKW - NETUKULIMK

Sometimes we can forget the influence that work by members of our department has on our larger communities. On occasion, though, it becomes more visible. Recently, we were told of a project initiated by Dr. Amy Mui in 2023. This project, Welia'lioq Nitape'skw – Netukulimk, is a tribute to the dedication, determination, ambition, empathy, and true leadership displayed by many women across Dalhousie, including several from our department, such as Sue Goyette (whose work on “A Modern Mi’kma’ki” was one of the project’s inspirations), Becca Babcock, Heather Jessup, and—from a bit earlier—Lucy Maud Montgomery. The team's current focus is creating a network of native plant gardens throughout the Dalhousie campus to support biodiversity and engage with the community.

Some of the core elements of the project as described to us by a project member are:

- Goldenrod (Solidago) - Nova Scotia is the native range for roughly 18 species of Goldenrod, a plant that is often blamed for allergies however it is not wind-pollinated; the blame for allergies lies with Ragweed (that flowers at the same time). Dispelling this myth is part of the education outreach.
- Habitat creation focusing on Osmia lignaria, a native bee. Known as the blue orchard bee or mason bee, these are solitary though they will nest in aggregations if the conditions are suitable. This means each bee is a “foundress” - a thread that ties nicely to the efforts of women at Dalhousie. Since the Goldenrod blooms for a long time and lasts late into the season, it will provide these queens with the necessary sustenance while they forage before winter.
- Hand-painted signs with Mi'kmaq language - people walking by, or through Chemistry, will see the local language through passive observation. These will inevitably fade - the hope is they will eventually be replaced by other language/words/elements - that will also fade and be replaced. Two-eyed seeing.
- The Poetry of Lucy Maud Montgomery - https://allpoetry.com/In-the-Days-of-the-Golden-Rod. The line 'plumes uplifting, in light winds drifting' used to highlight the myth of Goldenrod. Potential for 'Nothing Gold Can Stay' by Robert Frost to emphasise fleeting nature.
- Using the methods of planning for seven generations in a different, non-human perspective. The reproductive cycles of pollinators means that the time period for seven generations is only a 3-5 year window, the exact amount of time it takes to build a new garden.
- Emphasis on creation of sanctuary. Most pollinator gardens are built for the human eye - we want to see flowers and butterflies but fail to provide them somewhere to stay. Dead branches, leaf litter, rock piles etc will be present. An old wooden lobster trap will be repurposed into a bug hotel - this installation will provide students with an observable habitat that can be used for study (particularly BioBlitz). An aspect of the design is turning items that were designed to ensnare, into a place for refuge (see below). The lobster trap is an iconic Maritimes image, and a nod to the work of Alexa Goodman with abandoned fishing paraphernalia (Ghost gear).
- Wildlife Windows - another element incorporated into the design. The ability to witness nature without putting yourself into it - the viewing window from inside the Chemistry Building will allow people to observe outside all year round.
- Welia'lioq (Thank you - plural)
- Nitape'skw (my female friend)
- Netukulimk (living sustainably/harmoniously)

We hope you can visit campus and appreciate this amazing project, but in the meantime, please enjoy, on the next page, some photos that were kindly provided to us!

WELIA'LIOQ NITAPE'SKW - NETUKULIMK

HONOURS REVIEWS

As part of the Honours Capstone course (ENGL 4900), students complete several "public humanities" writing projects, in which they review or discuss cultural events in the city. Below are a few examples.

SHELTER IN TEXT

By Lauren Sooksom

My earliest love for literature stemmed from its ability to help me make sense of the world around me, work through complex emotions, and give me a sense of belonging that I often lacked in real life. Attending the launch for the essay collection *Shelter in Text: Essays on Dwelling and Refuge* (U of Alberta Press, 2025), edited by Myra Bloom and Kasia Van Schaik, allowed me to thoughtfully connect with these childhood values and reflect on this power of literature in an academic context, ultimately showing me that I am not alone in this wonderful experience of finding safety through the page.

Shelter in Text explores its title in two ways: through representations of "shelters in text" and the experience of "texts as shelter." Following these two approaches, the book is comprised of academic essays, creative nonfiction pieces, and essays that combine both styles, broken into four themes: "Indigenous and decolonial approaches to land and space," "Gothic Returns and Dystopian Hauntings," "Dwellings and (Un)real Estate," and "Cities and Public Spaces." The editors began the launch by explaining this structure and giving brief readings from the collection's introduction.

The next to read was Dal's Creative Writing advisor Dr. Heather Jessup, sharing a section from her creative nonfiction contribution, "Library Books for the End of the World." This piece is written to Jessup's child and focuses on the six children's books her household checked-out that became unreturnable when the first COVID lockdown began. Her family used these texts as a shelter in early COVID's uncertainty. These books' familiarity became a constant, and the simplicity of the children's stories helped Jessup make sense of the unfamiliar world.

Then, Dr. Erin Wunker, Chair of Dalhousie English, gave a reading from her academic and creative combination essay "Outsider Affects and Ordinary Care: Radical Love as Shelter in Claudia Dey's Heartbreaker." Following the same thread as Jessup, Wunker re-read Dey's Heartbreaker in early COVID and found shelter in its contents. Wunker argues that Dey's story explores how showing love doesn't mean one has to be constantly present. Sometimes, it is more appropriate to love from a distance, as the mother character does in Dey's story. Through this, Wunker examines how the novel discusses love as shelter, as well as how she finds shelter in the text's message, as the defamiliarization of love through the act of separation speaks directly to the ache of quarantine.

Last to read their contribution was Dr. Geneviève Robichaud from her essay "Paper-Spaces: A Poetics of Habitation." Robichaud describes the state of limbo she experienced, after finishing her PhD, having a child, and moving to a new town. She expresses the complex emotions she felt and how the PhD, though difficult, had been a sense of stability in her life. Raising a baby, however, was unfamiliar and scary. Nevertheless, like her other contributors, Robichaud found shelter in text. While her baby slept, she would dedicate her time to writing, and from this, found comfort in the uncertainty of this new chapter of her life.

These samples of *Shelter in Text* reminded me of the reading list for ENGL 3255, "Contemporary Women's Writing," a class I took last semester. The COVID theme was reminiscent of Zadie Smith's *Intimations* and Rachel Cusk's *Second Place*. The topic of loving from a distance reminded me of *Loved and Missed* by Susie Boyt. Further, it was impossible not to think of Karla Cornejo Villavicencio's *The Undocumented Americans* when discussing shelter and safe havens. This launch gave me a new thematic thread to trace in future readings and made me want to return to this book list to see what new ideas this lens might reveal.

Rather than a formal Q&A round, a relaxed reception followed the readings. We drank wine and snacked on intricately presented finger-food. Keen first-years bought copies of the collection, made extra special by the present editors and contributors signing them. I couldn't help but recognize that the launch had created the effect that the collection seeks to capture—it had given the attendees shelter. Because of the text, we spent a cozy evening in the King's President's Lodge, connecting through a love for literature. I cannot recommend *Shelter in Text* enough, as it beautifully achieved exactly what it sought to do.

HONOURS REVIEWS

POETIC LICENSE: READINGS AND CONVERSATION

By Margot Peluso-Pope

On November 8th, 2025, as part of the seventh annual AfterWords Literary Festival, five authors gathered in a completely sold-out Bus Stop Theater to discuss poetry's radical world-building potential and to demonstrate the spoken word's power in conjuring laughter and building connection.

First up was Lisa Martin, who read from her book published this May, *A Story Can Be Told About Pain*. The excerpt Martin chose centered on Raymond, a handyman who has a fraught relationship with his father. Raymond's father lives in an assisted living facility that backs onto the ruins of an abandoned psychiatric hospital. Martin posed the question, "how do we live with the ruins?" and suggested that the way to move from dereliction to reclamation was through care, which can be enacted through the crafting of stories. Her voice broke mid-reading, which I assumed was from the story's emotional weight—an assumption she corrected by saying "I'm used to reading poetry, and there's a lot of words here." The room, gathered for an evening of discussing "Poetic License," laughed.

Next, André Alexis read "Pu Songling: An Appreciation" from his recent short story collection *Other Worlds* (also published in May). The story centered on an impossible task imposed by aging magician and healer Pu Songling—inspired by the real-life Qing dynasty Pu Songling, author of "Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio"—who demands that his potential apprentice prove herself by raising the dead. Alexis read with impeccable comic timing, the story's absurd humour cultivating laughter in the warmly lit room.

After the intermission, AfterWords Co-Founder Steph Domet returned to introduce the second part of the evening: conversation between Sue Goyette, Billy-Ray Belcourt, and katherena vermette. Steph noted that Belcourt and vermette had been coveted presences since the very first AfterWords in 2019. Steph introduced Goyette, the conversation's moderator, and her acclaimed book of poetry *Oscar. Oscar*. Her eyes went wild. *Ocean*! The room exploded into laughter.

Taking her seat beside Belcourt and vermette, Goyette addressed the audience with care, framing this event as a safe space to "get together and remember the power of story." Goyette stated that poetry can provide "reminders of what it's like to be human," in its structure which plays with convention and in its orality which brings us back to our bodies. Belcourt replied, "I was first a poet. When I turned to other genres, I had to quiet the poet," and vermette added, "poetry is my home. It's the place that's always with me." While poetry is an original state for Belcourt, he also describes using it as a form of resistance to colonial discursive hegemonies, stating in *A History of My Brief Body* that he leverages "[t]he alphabet, grammar, and syntax" in resistance to "the rhetorical trickery of colonizers" (Belcourt 7), attempting to build, through poetry, "a new grammar of living" (Belcourt 131) which "pr[ies] open space to live in an uninhabitable world" (Belcourt 8).

Belcourt read from *The Idea of An Entire Life* and vermette read from *Procession*, their respective poetry collections published this September. In conversation with Belcourt's statement that "when language is imposed on Indigenous authors, we gravitate towards disrupting it," vermette discussed her documentary *This River* (NFB) which follows an Indigenous group searching the Red River for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's

Bodies and was filmed while she worked on her poetry collection *River Woman*. vermette contemplated how the poetics of water come through in her anticolonial work: "I like winding, I liked disobeying. I dislike punctuation," showing how she seeks a poetic grammar which resists colonial conventions.

After an engaged and thoughtful discussion, the poets opened the floor for questions. An audience member asked for their "advice on reading poetry when you don't fully get it?" and vermette recommended that they "get lost in the language. Read it really fast … you don't have to 'get it.' Just get lost in the play of the words." After an evening of sharing poetry which created a space of openness and care, Goyette encouraged everyone to "keep your hearts open as long as you can." Cultivating open-heartedness not only unfolds spaces for care, which Martin argues makes a fragmented world liveable, but also leaves room for ineffability, the space of slippage between words where "the light gets in" (Cohen) and where poetry happens.

FACULTY PROFILES

A few colleagues have retired over the past year. In both this and our next newsletter, we wanted to celebrate their work and achievements while also wishing them the best on their next chapters.

Prof. Bennett with close friend (name unknown)

LYN BENNETT

Editor: When did you start in the English department at Dalhousie? What comes back to you most clearly when you think to your first years at Dal?

Lyn Bennett: I first taught at Dal in 2002. I had an amazing line-up of courses, from Introduction to Literature to Tragedy to The History of Literary Criticism. It was my first time teaching my own courses, something I chose not to do while finishing my PhD, and it was thrilling and challenging in so many ways. I had so many excellent students that year (and every year at Dal, really) who fuelled my energy in the classroom. I put so much into my teaching that I needed to pop home for a quick nap between classes, which was easy because I lived very close by. But that also meant that I needed to do all my course prep and marking in the evenings and on weekends. Teaching did, of course, become easier over the years, but it never became less thrilling. Exhausting as it is, I loved teaching, and I loved being in the classroom. I really miss the students, their energy, their enthusiasm, and their excitement – a university classroom is a very special place to be.

Ed.: If you could reinforce any one thing about this department, something you admire or that you think could guide it going forward, what would that be?

LB: Apart from its notable collegiality, intellectual agility, and endless imagination, I most admire the department's commitment to the students, the faculty, and the university – as I see it, we have always focused on the greater good while managing always to uphold disciplinary integrity and our dedication to our students. Our students don't always know this, but the department is replete with world-class scholars and researchers who are widely respected leaders in their fields. If there's one thing I would change, it is the reluctance of members to openly celebrate their successes and to promote them: our students are most often unaware of just how accomplished their professors are, and they need and want to hear it.

Ed.: Did you have a favourite course to teach? What made it so special?

LB: I think my favorite courses to teach were all 3000-level, and include Renaissance Poetry and Culture 2, Literature and Medicine, and Close Reading. If I had to pick one over the others, I think it would be Close Reading, the class that most clearly brought together my expertise in rhetoric and writing with my work as a literary scholar. I always front-end loaded the course with poetry, which may have been challenging for the students but was eminently useful because of poetry's unique reliance on the deft and concentrated use of language. I really loaded that part of the course with literary and rhetorical terms and techniques before moving on to drama, short stories, essays, and novels. It was amazing to watch students "get it" and to see their exuberance as they used what they learned, deploying their new-found tools in their work; for many students, the course gave them the perspective, the vocabulary, and the confidence to more clearly impart what might otherwise be only sensed or intuited. And the wide range of periods and genres we covered – from Tudor sonnets to Milton's *Areopagitica* to Wharton's *Age of Innocence* to Orwell's *1984* – allowed students more clearly to see the primacy of literary and rhetorical technique and, most importantly, to better understand how language does its work in the world.

Ed.: You helped to lead the writing studies curriculum in the department as well as the writing requirement (WR) for the College of Arts and Sciences. The department is currently at a transitional moment, where the WR is being moved to large interdisciplinary courses managed under the general Arts and Social Sciences curriculum. If you had to identify the most important reasons for advanced education in writing and rhetoric within English programs, what would they be?

LB: I may come under fire for this, but I have always said that ours is a discipline that relies on knowledge and ideas from many others, including history, sociology, philosophy, classics, gender and

women's studies, biology, and environmental sciences (the list goes on), and we all know that literature does not emerge from or exist in a vacuum. Beyond the objects of study that in part define us, what distinguishes English from other disciplines, I have long argued, is our intense and practiced attentiveness to language. Students may do a lot of writing in other disciplines, and as the Writing Across the Curriculum (WACC) theory proposes, they do need to practice writing in those disciplines. As rhetoricians and literary scholars, however, we are uniquely poised not only to show them the how of writing in academic genres, but also the why. Why, in other words, does language have the effect it does? Why do some persuasive acts succeed where others fail? Why do diction, syntax, and tone matter? Many students do succeed in "breaking the code" of good academic writing, managing mostly by trial and error to figure it out for themselves, but many more benefit from making explicit what would otherwise be only implied. Throughout my teaching career, I would hear students lament, "Why has no one told me this before?" Sure, students do learn to write by getting lots of practice in a particular genre and by trying to sound like the scholars they're reading, and I would be the last person to dispute that imitation is a key principle of rhetoric and essential to learning effective communication in different contexts. But invention, arrangement, and style are just as important – and they are also the canons of rhetoric that a Department of English is uniquely equipped both to understand and to teach.

Ed.: Your research also helped to develop a departmental specialty in Health Humanities, as evidenced by your research monograph, *Rhetoric, Medicine, and the Woman Writer, 1600-1700* (Cambridge UP, 2018). The social and cultural effects of the COVID pandemic continue, including on campus: do you think there are elements of those early modern texts that can teach us something now?

LB: Yes – that we need each other when times get tough. I did teach some plague texts in my Literature and Medicine course that included Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* and Albert Camus' *The Plague*. Both are works of fiction, but their relevance was very clear in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. Both works depict people behaving badly in the interests of self-preservation, and their biggest lesson is that, above all, we need to preserve our humanity even in the face of unimaginable adversity, and that empathy and cooperation are key to doing so. In that class, I also taught the medical writings of medieval abbess Hildegard of Bingen in tandem with Victoria Sweet's memoir, *God's Hotel* – a book much loved by both my undergraduate and graduate students that shows Sweet, who was a practicing physician completing a PhD on Hildegard's work, bringing the medical theories and practices of the twelfth-century German healer to her convalescent hospital in twentieth-century San Francisco. In topic and in place, Sweet's work is very different from Defoe's or Camus's, yet it also teaches – by positive rather than bad example – that we need to look after one another, that empathy and humanity are key to successful healing, and that the more holistic approach of Hildegard's "slow medicine" has its place in the modern world.

Ed.: An element of your research that I keep going back to is the Early Modern Maritime Recipes database. There's a lot of really fascinating research and material there (including your essay on frog-spawn water!), but of course it's also really fun to explore the recipes themselves. Have you made any or do you have a favourite?

LB: My collaborator, Edith Snook of UNB, and I made a couple of recipes for the launch of the EMMR database. Edie made what was supposed to be Hasty Pudding that turned out more like a curling stone, and I made mushroom ketchup (the precursor to Worcestershire Sauce) that was so salty to be almost inedible – but, to be fair, it was meant to be sprinkled on food or added to sauces and not served in the paper shot cups I passed around. I came to the EMMR project through my interest in medical remedies, and those still fascinate me the most, but I'm not likely to make any, especially given that some of their ingredients may be poisonous. Though I don't think any of the food recipes are health hazards, we'd probably never make most of them – I don't know anyone who has pickled beef, mixed up a fruit cake that calls for twenty-five cups of flour, or concocted their own paint. Even so, exploring the recipes is a great deal of never-ending fun. There's much more that could be done, but we do have a book with McGill-Queen's University Press coming out in September that represents a small portion of the recipes in the database. The book is titled *Early Modern Maritime Recipes: Circulating Knowledge in the Atlantic World*, and we will be doing the rounds with various talks and launches. The latest from the publisher is that the book has already generated a lot of advance

FACULTY PROFILES

interest, so presenting our work will certainly keep us busy for a while. Among other things, I will likely be talking about gout treatments that include a pulverized kitten and a fattened goose – needless to say, I won't be making those, but they sure are fun to talk about!

Ed.: Any current reading/viewing/listening suggestions?

LB: I have a stack of books, mostly by people I know, that I've been collecting for some time but never found the time for. I'm currently reading my colleague Alice Brittan's brilliant, wide-ranging, and nuanced *The Art of Astonishment*. My stack also includes books by Carol Bruneau, Becca Babcock, former students Harriet Lye and Aly Coy, and many others. I'm a big multi-tasker, so I'm also reading Lauren Bates' *Men Who Hate Women*, Hillary Rodham Clinton's *What Happened*, and Nimbus press's *Les Acadiens de la Nouvelle-Écosse* – becoming more fluent is one of my retirement goals, so I am reading the latter in French. I also took up guitar a few years ago, and I am working hard to improve now that I have more time. So I've been listening to music that inspires me, artists like Noah Kahan, Maggie Rogers, Soccer Mommy, Lily Allen, Taylor Swift, and Ottawa's Lynne Hanson all fall into that category along with old favorites I'm learning to play by artists that include Gordon Lightfoot, The Tragically Hip, Blue Rodeo, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Pearl Jam, and Green Day. So much music, so little time! It's summer, so we haven't really been watching any new series or films, but we did go to see Spielberg's *Disclosure Day*, which is hardcore Hollywood but just as enjoyable as everything else he's done. I had a great time!

LESLEY CHOYCE

Editor: When did you start at Dalhousie? What comes back to you most clearly when you think to your first years at Dal?

Lesley Choyce: Officially, the record states I started in 1983, but I think I was teaching as a part-time sessional for a year or two before that. I remember the old English Department house on Henry Street with fondness. It was there that Professor Emeritus, Malcolm Ross, was willing to help show me the ropes, encourage my teaching and writing, and become a close friend with excellent advice.

I remember the department itself feeling quite British to me given the professors, with Roland Smith (from South Africa) as chair. The whole shebang felt quite daunting to be honest.

Ed.: In addition to English and Creative Writing, you've been involved with the Transition Year Program for close to forty years. Recently there was a threat to its funding that (I believe) was resolved. How important—not just to the students, but to our larger communities in Dalhousie, Halifax, and Nova Scotia—do you think this program is, and why?

LC: Teaching in the TYP has been the highlight of my academic career. The close-knit faculty and the enthusiasm and diversity of the students made for stimulating teaching experiences. So many of our students went on to be professionals and leaders in their communities. TYP was the big stepping stone that allowed that to happen. I was very privileged to be part of that process. The program is an essential aspect of Dal and needs to continue at the level it is at in order to properly serve the Black and Mi'kmaq communities as we have in the past.

Ed.: If you could reinforce any one thing about the programs you've been involved in (Creative Writing, English, the Transition Year Program) or the university in general, something you admire or that that you think could guide it going forward, what would that be?

LC: At the core of my own teaching has been the emphasis on independent thinking, critical thinking, and creative thinking. What goes down in the classroom is most vital, so reasonably small classes are essential. It's the interaction therein that really matters.

Large classes, reliance on technology and AI present enormous challenges for all departments. Without denying those realities, instructors need to be inventive more than ever and steer students away from merely doing the required work, but instead going beyond the basics. This means being a teacher who truly inspires. Easier said than done, I know. I feel like I was fortunate enough to span my career through a kind of golden age of university teaching. My sincere hope is that this era is not over, and that will require faculty with a genuine love of classroom teaching, enthusiasm and true compassion for all students.

FACULTY PROFILES

Ed.: Did you have a favourite course to teach? What made it so special?

LC: I was part of the small group that created the Creative Writing program for the English Department along with Andy Wainwright, Stephen Kimber and David Overton back in 2006. This allowed me to teach sections of Creative Writing: Fiction. Since then, working with students who were both young and old writers has been most rewarding. Again, it was the lively interaction and the discussion of craft that made the classroom time slip away. I met many creative and spirited individuals during that time that inspired me to keep up my own writing and publishing. I especially loved when some student – usually the quietest person in the class – shared some fragment of fiction that blew me away. In my mind, I would think, *Holy Smokes, this person is a much better a writer than me*. I'd have to take a deep breath and thank them for sharing and hope my small bit of advice could help in some way.

Ed.: Of course, beyond your work at Dal, you are a renowned author and publisher. You founded Pottersfield Press in 1978, which has been a vital publisher for a wide variety of authors and editors. You and I were recently talking about the Canadian science fiction anthologies published by Pottersfield, starting with *Visions from the Edge: An Anthology of Atlantic Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy*, which you co-edited with John Bell (1981) and *Ark of Ice* and *State of the Ark,* expanding more generally to Canadian SF (1992 and 2023). But I also know the importance of *The Mi'kmaq Anthology* (Pottersfield 1997), which you co-edited with Rita Joe. There are too many others to mention! So, this is likely an impossible question given the range of works published by Pottersfield over the past five decades, but are there any that stand out that you are particularly proud of, or that you find yourself returning to?

LC: I published a few dozen first-time authors (including a few former Dal students) and that was always a thrill. I also had the privilege to work with writers such as Harold Horwood, Thomas Raddall, Farley Mowat, Maxine Tynes, Jim Lotz, Neil Peart, Joan Baxter and Lenore Zann, just to name a few.

Perhaps one of the greatest highlights was this. In 2022, Pottersfield published *Writing with My Eyes*, an autobiographical book by Angela Parker-Brown, a former TYP student of mine with ALS. Hers was a brilliant, honest memoir written entirely with eye-gaze technology due to her incapacitation. Her spirit shone through every page and the book went on to inspire many, many readers before and after her death.

Ed.: You've also written over 100 books, ranging from literary fiction to YA fiction, to poetry, to nonfiction. Dare we ask what's next?

LC: I'm now up to book 105, a novel titled *No More Fridays*, published by Fernwood in Canada and available from Columbia University Press in the U.S. I am finishing a literary novel called *Mistaken Serenity*, co-writing a book with British comedian James Mullinger and working on a manuscript of travels in the Celtic world. More to follow if the muse is kind as they used to say.

Ed.: Do you have any current reading/viewing/listening suggestions?

LC: The following books:

- *Island* by Alistair MacLeod
- *Aimless Love* by Billy Collins
- *Around Ireland With a Fridge* by Tony Hawks
- *Perfect Motion* by Jono Lineen
- *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman
- *The Tibetan Art of Living* by Christopher Hansard
- *The Art of Pilgrimage* by Phil Cousineau
- *Prince of Tides* by Pat Conroy
- *The Austens* by Sarah Emsley

Over and out…

ENGLISH ON THE LINE

We don't want to dwell on it, but we think it important to offer a brief visual document of the efforts of many members of the English Department during the lockout of faculty and subsequent job action that took place from August to September 2025. This is only a small sample of the immense work by department members. From top to bottom, picket captain Kathy Cawsey with picket friends on Pink Shirt Day; Andrew Brown, LiLi Johnson, Erin Wunker, and special guest at a rally; Julia M. Wright (on the (w)right) as part of the DFA Bargaining Team; Asha Jeffers (left, middle row), virtual picket co-chair, and some of the online picket team; Jason Haslam and the Job Action Committee leads on the day the tentative agreement was signed. (All photos taken from DFA social media—if you would like to add credit information, please contact us.)

SPEAKER SERIES

As with every year, we had an exciting and invigorating set of talks in our weekly(ish) Speaker Series. These events are open to everyone (and free!), so keep an eye on our website for next year's series!
https://www.dal.ca/faculty/arts/english/speakerseries.html

September

26: Department Meet and Greet

October

3: "Retelling Robin Hood," a book talk with Amy S. Kaufman

17: Dr Kasia van Sheik and Dr Myra Bloom, *Shelter in Text* book launch (King's, 6:00-8:00 pm)

24: PhD Prospectus Colloquium

31: Varmania!

November

Thursday Nov. 6 (11:30 – 1:00; location TBA): "Read Aloud: Two Picture Books with Emma FitzGerald"

Thursday Nov. 20 (11:30-1:00; location TBA) : Sheheryar Sheikh, *The Post-9/11 Great American Novel*, book launch

28 Ronald Huebert, Reading from *Loving John Donne: A Novel*

December

Dec. 12: Honours Colloquium

January

23: Emma Kuzmyk and Addy Strickland, "*This Wasn't on the Syllabus*: Student Voices Beyond the Classroom."

30: Helen Pinsent: "There [Should] Be Blood: Genre, Ethics, and Good Death in Contemporary Horror Television"

February

Friday Feb. 27 (1:00-2:30 p.m): Elamin Abdelmahmoud, *Son of Elsewhere* DalReads event; cosponsored by Dal Reads and Medical Humanities Certificate (Wallace McCain Learning Commons)

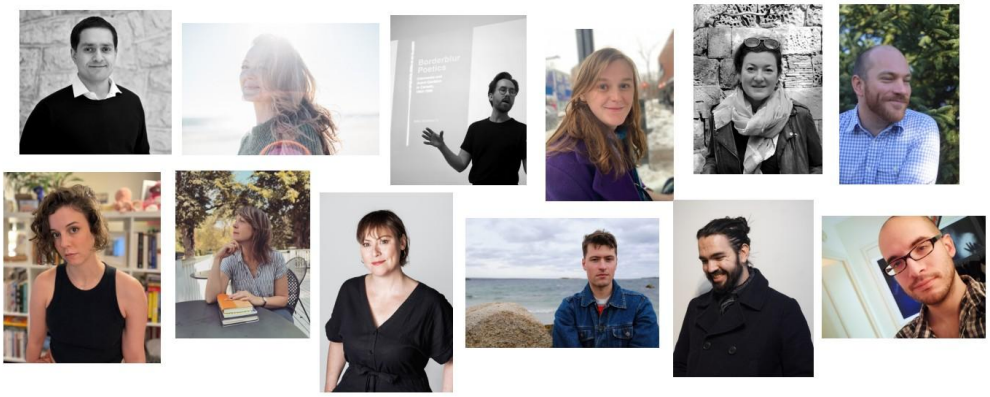
March

6: Dalhousie Creative Writing Program Faculty & TA Reading, featuring Shero Sheheryar, Allison LaSorda, Eric Schmaltz, Johanna Gibson, Erin Wunker, Bart Vautour, Emily Cann, Heather Jessup, Rebecca Babcock, Benjamin Bush Anderson, Nic Paquette, Daryl Bruce

13: LiLi Johnson and Asha Jeffers, "Family Matters: A Joint Book Launch"

20: Len Diepeveen: Reading, *When I Come Back, We Will Talk*

27: Jason Haslam, Asha Jeffers, and Isaac Saney, "Anthologizing Afrofuturism" Panel and *Broadview Anthology of Science Fiction* Launch (cosponsored with the Black and African Diaspora Studies Program



Creative Writing Faculty & TA Reading

Friday March 6th 3pm -4:30pm, McCain 3198

followed by conversation and snacks in the English Department lounge

Readings from: Shero Sheheryar, Alison Lasorda, Eric Schmaltz, Johanna Gibson, Erin Wunker, Bart Vatour, Emily Cann, Heather Jessup, Rebecca Babcock, Benjamin Bush Anderson, Nic Paquette, Daryl Bruce

ALL ARE WELCOME! Come meet the faculty, chat with current creative writing students, eat snacks!

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Becca Babcock's new novel *Driving Into the Sun* (NeWest Press) will be published in September 2026.

Kathy Cawsey and Elizabeth Edwards are hosting the prestigious Malory conference at King's and Dalhousie August 6-8, 2026, with speakers from around the world. See: https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/maple-malory-ii-tickets-1981342524828

Lesley Choyce's 105th book was published by Roseway / Fernwood in Canada and available from Columbia University Press in the US. *No More Fridays* is about a young person's struggle to cope with alienation and grief through philosophy, science, nature, and relationship. The novel reminds the reader that a mind open enough can accept that the death of a loved one is never the end of the story. https://fernwoodpublishing.ca/book/no-more-fridays. The novel was inspired by a former student of Choyce's in the Transition Year Program who was afflicted with ALS and wrote a book about her life through the use of eye gaze technology.

Jason Haslam published *The Broadview Anthology of Science Fiction* *https://broadviewpress.com/product/the-broadview-anthology-of-science-fiction*, as well as the articles "Ellison, Delany, and the Forgetting of Things Future" (*African American Review*), "Power Disruptions: Delany's and Okorafor's Lyric Energies" (*ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*) and "Seaweed Salvation: Herbert, Badiou, and the Terror of the Transcendent" (*Science Fiction Studies*). He also received a Dedicated Service Award from the Canadian Association of University Teachers for his work with the Dalhousie Faculty Association, as well as the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Award for Service Excellence.

Heather Jessup with alum Tarini Fernando (Class of '21) published "Rationale, a Conversation between Tarini Fernando and Heather Jessup" in *Evolving Strategies for Writing Feedback on Creative Manuscripts: A Multi-Genre Pedagogy Guide* (ed. Leah McCormack, Routledge). The chapter concludes with Heather's written comments on Tarini's story — a story which went on to win $1000 dollars as a finalist for the 2022 Bridge Prize under the title "Durian Days." Heather also has a chapter in *Shelter in Text* (see p. 6, above).

Billy Johnson, former postdoctoral fellow and colleague in our department, will be starting a new tenure-track position as Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the University of Prince Edward Island.

Rohan Maitzen has written the introduction to a new edition of Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (Flame Tree). Her review of Elizabeth Strout's *The Things We Never Say* appeared in the May 15 issue of the *Times Literary Supplement*. She was also interviewed (it was, and we quote, "a delightful conversation") for a piece in the *Globe and Mail* by J. D. M. Stewart titled, "It took me six months to read the 800-page Middlemarch. Here's why I think you should, too" (20 April 2025).

Zoe Lambrinakos-Raymond (PhD candidate) presented the paper "Collage, Poetry, and Praxis: Mina Loy's Multimodal Disruptions" at the annual conference of the Modernist Studies Association in Boston and will be part of the "Junior Scholars' Session / Roundtable" at the 2026 AIERTI/IAWIS (Association internationale pour l'étude des rapports entre texte et image/International Association of Word and Image Studies) conference in Amsterdam this coming August.

Eric Schmaltz has published a new collection of poetry, *I Confess* (Coach House Books), which also placed in the Alcuin Society's Competition for Awards For Excellence in Book Design in Canada, an award shared with Coach House Book'' designer Crystal Sikma.

Julia M. Wright, FRSC was honoured with both a King Charles III Coronation Medal and a Keats-Shelley Distinguished Scholar Award (the Keats-Shelley Association of America awards two each year). She also published *Thomas Moore and the Transatlantic, 1800-1840: The Local, the Global, and the Mobile* with Edinburgh University Press and a chapter on John Wyndham's Kraken Wakes in the *Routledge Handbook of Critical Ocean Studies*. Her essay on pandemic Gothic appeared in *Medical Humanities* (BMJ), and she also co-authored "The Next Leap Forward: Clean Air for Canadians" for *Policy Options*.

IN MEMORIAM

BRIAN I. GILLIS (1983 – 2025)

We were profoundly saddened to learn of the passing of former colleague Brian I. Gillis, who worked in both English and the Indigenous Studies program.

Brian's full obituary can be seen here: https://www.dignitymemorial.com/en-ca/obituaries/halifax-ns/brian-gillis-12542122

A TRIBUTE AND CELEBRATION

The following was offered to the newsletter by Dr. Sheheryar B. Sheikh, the Donald Hill Family Postdoctoral Fellow in our department. We want to add that it has been a true pleasure hosting Dr. Sheikh, who has enlivened our department with his scholarship, his creative work, and his collegiality!

(Dr. Sheheryar B. Sheikh)

I write this in tribute and in celebration of the three years I've spent as Donald Hill Family Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of English at Dalhousie University. I was honoured by support from incredible scholars, and inspirational people, including the outgoing Chair, Dr. Lyn Bennett, and the new one, Dr. Erin Wunker. Professors Asha Jeffers, Sue Goyette, Jason Haslam, Bart Vautour, Billy Johnson (among many others in the faculty) have acted as soundboards and founts of wisdom and mentorship, and I have grown tremendously with their guidance. At the foundation of it all has been the relationship with my fellowship mentor, Dr. Heather Jessup—I cannot fathom or articulate in words the energy and enthusiasm she brings to everything that she does, and the vast range of illuminations she has enabled in my professional practices and personal growth.

Knowing what a grand little department this is, it's no wonder it invites and nurtures such an excellent calibre of undergraduates and post-graduates. Emily Cann, Jack Amos, and the many others who have contributed so much wealth in literary terms and collegial ones, inspire and renew my faith in the literary arts constantly.

Thank you for giving me a departmental home where I continued and honed my literary practice, published my first monograph, and drafted several creative and critical works that I hope to refine and publish in the coming years. Dalhousie and its English Department will have a special place in my heart, and it will always feature in all my tributes to come.

-- Dr. Sheheryar B. Sheikh

English News is published periodically by the Department of English in cooperation with FASS Alumni Relations and Communications, Marketing & Creative Services at Dalhousie University.

Editor: Jason Haslam

With thanks to: Angie Morash, Norma Ranieri, and all our contributors!

Special thanks to our donors for making our prizes and student events possible!