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UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY · COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

Department of English



Message from the Department Chair

December 2021

Dear Alumni and Friends,

As we reach the end of the year, I want to take this opportunity to thank you as friends of the Department of English for your generous support, for keeping in touch, and for helping our students realize their dreams. Everyone has faced the continued challenges of the pandemic in their own way, and winter break will provide an opportunity to rest and reflect upon the year that has passed. Despite the many challenges of the past year under COVID-19, the transition was made from online to in-person teaching in the fall semester, and our wonderful students and faculty have continued to commit themselves to the study and teaching of literature, film and creative writing throughout the year.

Please welcome two new members of the English Department who have joined us since our last newsletter. We are thrilled to call them friends and colleagues in the department. **Dr. Shauna Morgan** has been appointed Associate Professor with tenure, specializing in Creative Writing and African American and Africana Studies. She is a poet, scholar and critic, with expertise in Literatures of the African Diaspora, African Literature and Film, and Postcolonial Literature and Theory. Previously she was Associate Professor at Howard University, Washington D.C. She also holds the post of Director of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives in the Center for

the Enhancement of Learning and Technology (CELT). Also, please welcome Dr. Jap-Nanak Makkar, who joined us last year as a two-year American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) Post-Doctoral Fellow, specializing in Postcolonial and Global Anglophone Literature. At the end of the fellowship, her position will be moved to a tenure-track assistant professorship. **[Read more.](#)**

The department congratulates Associate Professor Crystal Wilkinson on her appointment to the post of Poet Laureate of Kentucky, the first Black woman to serve in this position. A native of Indian Creek, Kentucky, Wilkinson has received much acclaim for her fiction and poetry, including her novel *The Birds of Opulence* (winner of the Ernest J. Gaines Prize for Literary Excellence), and *Perfect Black*, her astonishing new book of poetry published this year by University Press of Kentucky. She was our guest speaker at the English Annual Awards Day in the spring. You can **[listen to an interview here](#)** where she discusses growing up in Appalachia, and her love of writing and teaching. We also congratulate Professor Gurney Norman on **[his induction into the UK Arts & Sciences Hall of Fame.](#)** The author of the legendary novel *Divine Rights Trip*, the book of short stories, *Kinfolks*, and most recently of *Allegiance* (Old Cove Press and Ohio University Press), Gurney has been teaching at UK for many years and was inducted into the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame in 2020. He also received an unusual honor earlier this year when an affordable-housing development near Hazard, Kentucky was named after him, "Gurney's Bend." **[Read more.](#)**

The Visiting Writers Series continued in the fall semester with a sequence of virtual events, including a presentation by Academy-Award winning director Kevin Willmott and readings by Carter Sickels and Nicole Chung. The series will continue in the spring (details below.) We also enjoyed a series of lectures by distinguished presenters. When he came to campus for his induction into the Hall of Distinguished Alumni, Paul Wagner (English '70) talked to a group of students on the subject of his 40-year career as a director of documentary film (see article below by Akhira Umar.) Also, Professor Matt Giancarlo hosted a virtual lecture and classroom visit by **[Eric Jager \(UCLA\)](#)** who talked about writing his book *The Last Duel*, which formed the basis of the Hollywood movie directed by Ridley Scott. We are grateful to you for supporting these and other events, and we hope you will be able to join us online or in-person for one of our readings, lectures, or events in the coming year.

We are so grateful to all our donors, and we want to thank the families of Dr. William H. Jansen II '71 and Dr. Kathy A. Jansen '71 and the late Alice and Paul Richardson '57 for their gifts this year. Bill and Kathy Jansen endowed their gift in honor of Bill's father, William Hugh Jansen, who was Professor of English and Folklore at the University of Kentucky for many years. The William Hugh Jansen Undergraduate Award for Distinguished Writing is selected for writing based on oral traditions, the art of story-telling, or folklore elements. The Paul and Alice Richardson Creative Writing Scholarship supports undergraduate students developing their craft.

Finally, please consider including the Department of English in your annual giving plans. Gifts to the **[English Development Fund](#)** allows us to support students with awards that recognize their achievements and help them to attain their goals, while a gift to our **[MFA Visiting Writers Fund](#)** allows us to bring exceptional authors to campus to enrich our students' learning. Please get in touch with me **jonathan.allison@uky.edu** if you would like to discuss how you can get involved with the department and with the alumni and friends of English. Thank

you very much for your continuing support!

Best wishes,

Jonathan Allison
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Two works of short fiction by English faculty member Crystal Wilkinson and MFA student Adachioma Ezeano have been published in *The Best Short Stories 2021: The O. Henry Prize Winners* (Penguin/Random House). It is rare for a teacher and her student to appear in the same volume, and we are incredibly proud of both of them for this prestigious honor.

Twenty prizewinning stories were selected from the thousands published in magazines over the previous year, continuing the O. Henry Prize's century-long tradition of literary excellence. Guest editor Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a best-selling novelist, has brought her own refreshing perspective to the prize, selecting stories by an engaging mix of celebrated names and young emerging voices.

Crystal Wilkinson, Associate Professor of English and Kentucky Poet Laureate 2021-22, is the award-winning author of *Perfect Black*, *The Birds of Opulence* (winner of the 2016 Ernest J. Gaines Prize for Literary Excellence), *Water Street*, and *Blackberries*, *Blackberries*. Nominated for the Orange Prize, the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, and a Pushcart Prize, Wilkinson's short stories, poems, and essays have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including most recently in the *Oxford American* and *Southern Cultures*.

Adachioma Ezeano is Igbo. She grew up in Nigeria, studied English Education at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, and worked with First Bank of Nigeria before moving to Kentucky. She is an alumna of the Purple Hibiscus Workshop taught by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Her works or interviews have appeared in *McSweeney's Quarterly*, *Electric Literature*, *FlashBack Fictions*, *Deyu African*, *Brittle Paper*, and *The Best Small Fictions 2020*.

Jordan Brower Receives Manuscript Award from the
UK Cooperative for Humanities and Social Sciences

Congratulations to Assistant Professor Jordan Brower, one of four awardees in the first-ever round of grant awards from the [College of Arts & Sciences Cooperative for the Humanities and Social Sciences](#). Brower received the award for his book-in-progress, *Hollywood Signs: A Literary History of the Studio System*. The manuscript follows the arc of the Hollywood system from 1912 to 1952 by way of its engagement with the concept of the “literary.” The book also discusses the permutations of United States-based literary modernism as it occurs within an increasingly commodified and trans-medial culture. The period discussed in this work is set at a junction of economic, legal, and aesthetic circumstances that defined the art and industry of Hollywood.



Before coming to UK, Brower was a Lecturer in the interdisciplinary History and Literature program at Harvard University and a graduate student and then adjunct faculty at Yale University.

The Faculty Manuscript Book Workshops are an opportunity for generating constructive, informed criticism on near-final book manuscripts, when authors can most effectively utilize such feedback. An expert in the awardee’s field will be invited to present their thoughts on the manuscript, followed by a response from the author and discussion with a broader group of invited faculty.

2021 English Department Awards

Thanks to the generosity of alumni and friends, the department is able to reward excellence among its students and faculty by supporting their future scholarship in a variety of ways. Donating to a departmental award is one of the easiest ways for you to make a significant impact on our students’ success. Congratulations to the following:

**William Hugh Jansen
Undergraduate Award for Distinguished
Writing**

Nikinabah McDarment
Hannah Timmerman
Dan Collins (runner-up)
Claire McKinney (runner-up)

Barbara Sutton Cowles Scholarship for an Outstanding Senior

Emilee Veltkamp

**Bill Bridges Scholarship for an Outstanding First-Generation College
Graduate Majoring in English**

Bailee Wingo



At the English Awards Day on May 7, Luke Glaser (B.A. 2013) was named the 2021 English Alumnus of the Year. For a profile of the 2021 Alumna of the Year, Phillis Rambsy, see the article below.

Dantzer-Dantzer Award for Academic Achievement by a Senior
Akhira Umar

Julester Shradly Post Memorial Scholarship
Eli O'Neal

Michael Adelstein Award for Prospective High School English Teachers
Heather Hues

O.J. & Ruby Wilson Scholarship for an Outstanding Senior
Tara Pulaski
Aileen Tierney

Patricia and William Stacy Endowed Scholarship in Undergraduate English
Education
Lily Morris
Kayla Sanchez

Ben Wathen Black Memorial Graduate Scholarship in British Literature
Matthew Wentz

Ellershaw Award for an Outstanding Ph.D. Candidate
Brittany Sulzener
Jillian Winter

**Patricia and William Stacy Endowed Fellowship in Graduate English
Education**
Emily Goldsmith

Robert L. Doty English Graduate Support Fund
Deb Daley

William J. Sowder Award for Best Graduate Student Critical Paper
Alex Gergeley

William Hugh Jansen Graduate Award for Distinguished Writing
Gavin Colton

Betty Combs Owen Recruitment Scholarship
Lucy Jayes

Dantzer-Farquhar Award for Creative Writing
Dan Collins (nonfiction) for "Dear Dan,"
Jamie Moss (fiction) for "Sweetpea"
Nicole Stewart (poetry) "Pantoum of a Supernova"

Nikky Finney Graduate Fellowship
Shanita Jackson

Ellen Rosenman Distinguished Faculty Award
Joyce MacDonald

William S. Ward Prize
Michelle Sizemore

Phillis Rambsy: From Accidental Attorney to

2021 English Alumna of the Year

By Julie Wrinn

Phillis Ramsby (M.A. 1999) grew up in Jackson, Tennessee, and attended Spelman College in Atlanta surrounded by English majors who planned to attend law school. But for Ramsby, also an English major, going to law school just felt too obvious. "I was sick of people talking about law school. So many English majors go to law school, and I felt that was all I heard people talking about was LSATs and law school rankings," said Ramsby.

That contrarian spirit made her an especially receptive audience for a recruiter from the University of Kentucky. In Ramsby's senior year at Spelman, hoping to get extra credit in one of her classes, she agreed to attend a UK representative's talk about graduate programs. That representative was English professor and now Department Chair Jonathan Allison.

"I met a small group of seniors at Spelman, introduced by Professor Anne Warner," said Allison. "I was delighted when Phillis decided to visit the UK campus and then to apply to our M.A. program. She was a very successful student." [Read more.](#)



Phillis Ramsby (M.A. 1999) stayed connected to Lexington's literary community even after graduating from the University of Michigan Law School.

In Memoriam

Ed McClanahan (1941-2021) The author of *The Natural Man*, *Juanita and the Frog Prince* and other works, received his M.A. in 1958 from the University of Kentucky, attended Stanford University, and was part of the outstanding literary talent that emerged there in the 1960s. A good friend of the UK English Department and of many of our Creative Writing faculty, Ed gave frequent guest lectures at creative writing classes on campus and taught English 507 as a part-time instructor in fall 2009. Read more [here](#).

Sarah Schuetze, Assistant Professor of English at University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, died January 10, 2021. She was a graduate of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, the University of Michigan, and the University of Kentucky, where she completed her Ph.D. in 2015 under the direction of Professor Marion Rust. Recipient of an Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies, Philadelphia, PA, and a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship at the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA, she was author of articles on early American and nineteenth-century literature and culture.

Larry Swingle (1940-2020) taught at UK for over 30 years, specializing in 19th Century British Literature and Romanticism. He is remembered for his challenging intellectual style, his wide erudition, and his sense of humor. He is survived by his wife Nikki and daughter Rebecca. He was the author of *The Obstinate Questionings of English Romanticism* (LSU Press, 1987), and *Romanticism and Anthony Trollope* (University of Michigan Press, 1990.)

Visiting Writers Series

The Visiting Writers Series brings nationally renowned poets and writers to campus to perform, teach, and interact with students. All events are free and open to the public, adding to the vibrant literary culture of Lexington. In spring 2022 we are planning several readings by poet [Joy Priest](#), MFA alumni [Austyn Gaffney](#) and [Bernard Clay](#), among others. For more information and to register for upcoming events as they are announced, [please visit here](#).

Paul Wagner (English '70) Connects People to the Past Through Film

By Akhira Umar

Leaning into his excitement to showcase “America and her people,” one University of Kentucky alumnus has graduated from the Big Blue Nation to the big screen.

Academy Award and Emmy Award winning filmmaker Paul Wagner was recently inducted in the Hall of Distinguished. He earned a bachelor's in English at UK in 1970 and a master's in communication in 1972 from the College of Communication and Information. He has produced and directed more than 40 films in his over 40-year career. His affinity for film, however, arose not from a specific passion but from a general interest in communication. [Read more.](#)



Paul Wagner has produced and directed more than 40 films in a 40-plus-year career. While at UK he fell in love with the world of ideas and knew that filmmaking was his entry to further explore this world and share it with others.

GIVING OPPORTUNITIES

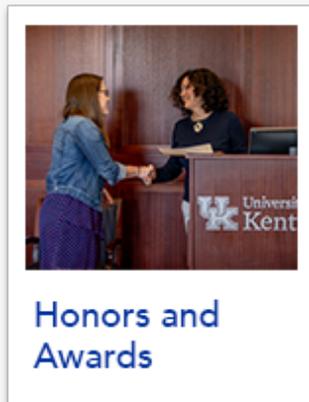
The Department of English fosters intellectual creativity and prepares students to be critical decision-makers and life-long leaders. Integrating award-winning teaching with research into the issues that most animate our world, our faculty in Literature, Creative Writing, and Film work side-by-side with students as they develop into articulate and empathetic citizens of an increasingly complex world.

Your gift to the **English Development Fund** or the **MFA Visiting Writers Series Fund** will provide critical resources to respond to student needs, attract world-class faculty, and support innovative opportunities for growth. Your contribution is an investment in the future of the department and the next generation of students. You can also make your gift in honor of or in memory of a friend, relative, or faculty member.

A gift to other funds the English Department can be made online at www.as.uky.edu/givetoas. Please use the search box in the upper right corner of the screen and type the name of the fund. By mail, please send to:

UK Philanthropy
P.O. Box 23552
Lexington, KY 40523

For assistance, please contact philanthropy officer Teresa Gotthardt at 859-218-5551 or teresawg@uky.edu.



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