

SUMMER 2025

GIVE ME GOOD NEWS

The Department of English Newsletter

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 1

What's up with you?

Our English faculty share their latest updates and adventures!

Patrick Chura

Patrick Chura published the essay, "The Women Who Shaped Native Son" in the Salem Press volume, *Critical Insights: Native Son*, edited by Nicolas Tredell (April 2025).

Bill Thelin

Bill Thelin just completed a draft for a chapter in the forthcoming volume, *Disingenuous Rhetorics: The Post-Truth Handbook*. He will be working on other writing projects over the summer while teaching and preparing for Fall 2025.

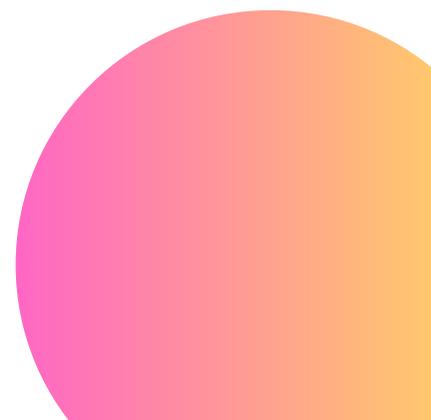


Lance Svehla

Lance Svehla presented his paper "What We've Got Here Is Failure to Communicate: The Rhetorical Strategy of President Joe Biden" at The Joe Biden Presidency: Legacy and Record Conference, University of Mount Union, Alliance, OH, April 2025.

David Giffels

David Giffels has been reviewing page proofs for the upcoming Italian translation of the book he co-authored with Jade Dellinger, *The Beginning Was the End: Devo in Ohio*. Originally published by the University of Akron Press, the translated biography of the Akron-born rock band will be released later this year by the Rome-based Red Star Press as *DEVO: L'Inizio Era La Fine*. Fun fact: "The Akron Sound," a term journalists and music historians have applied to the punk/new wave uprising Devo spearheaded in the late 1970s, translates to "il suono di Akron," which, like everything in Italian, sounds delicious.



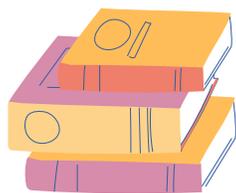
Philathia Bolton

After over a decade of teaching, research, and service at The University of Akron, Dr. Philathia Bolton has accepted a position to teach at The Africa Institute, Global Studies University. She will be joining them this fall as Associate Professor of African and African Diaspora Literature and Cultural Studies. Dr. Bolton joined the English department at The University of Akron in 2013 as an Assistant Professor. While here, she has served in the roles of academic advisor for a number of student organizations, as the Honors College advisor for English students, and has contributed to various advisory committees and boards. Many of our students have enjoyed taking courses with her at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, namely the survey in Black American Literature, the Harlem Renaissance seminar, and the Toni Morrison seminar. We are excited for Dr. Bolton, but we are also sad to see her go. We thank her for her contributions over the years and wish her the very best on her next position.



Alan Ambrisco

Alan Ambrisco has two poems coming out in the 2025 edition of a new literary journal with local ties called *Verdant Wonders*. The poems are entitled "Crooked Cuyahoga" and "The Urban Beaver Speaks," and the journal is a new endeavor by our own Summit Metro Parks. Ambrisco's daughter Elise has a poem called "The Heron" also forthcoming in the same issue. Both poets will read their work during a Verdant Wonders Celebration at the F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm on Saturday, June 14th, 2025, from 12 p.m. to 2 p.m.



Read any good books lately?

Check out our faculty's recommended reads!

Bill Thelin

- *Guide Me Home* by Attica Locke
- *Night of the Living Rez* by Morgan Talty

Lance Svehla

- *Song of a Blackbird* by Maria van Lieshout

Mary Biddinger

- *Martyr!* by Kaveh Akbar
- *Poetry Studio: Prompts for Poets* by Tyler Mills
- *The Rachel Incident* by Caroline O'Donoghue
- *State Champ* by Hilary Plum

David Giffels

David Giffels recommends these three new books with Akron connections:

- *The Project: How Project 2025 Is Reshaping America* by David A. Graham. Graham, a staff writer at *The Atlantic*, is an Akron native and the son of UA history professor Michael Graham.
- *Collegiate Gothic* by Matthew Meduri. This is the debut novel by Meduri, a graduate of the NEOMFA program in creative writing.
- *Scout Camp: Sex, Death, and Secret Societies Inside the Boy Scouts of America* by James Renner, an Akron-based true-crime author and podcaster.

Faculty
IN PRINT
OUR FACULTY'S
NEWEST BOOK
PUBLICATIONS

The Girl With the Black Lipstick
by Mary Biddinger



Mary Biddinger's novella *The Girl with the Black Lipstick* will be released by Black Lawrence Press in July.

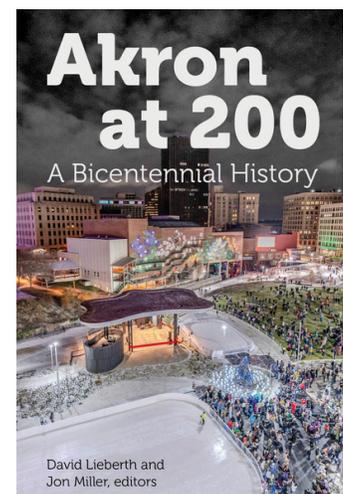
"Mary Biddinger's *The Girl with the Black Lipstick* isn't simply a blast from the past—it is the past—the year 1999 brought back to life in all its Twitter-less, text-less glory, courtesy of the narrator Mary Van Pelt, who blends nostalgia and cynicism in appropriate doses. A graduate student of English, Mary—along with her unnamed and exotic 'Roommate'—explores the bars and streets and beaches of Chicago in between enduring the frequent absurdities of a grad school creative writing workshop. As in much of Biddinger's work, the narrative is never linear, a straight-line journey from A to B along bland interstates, but feels instead like an excursion along the backroads of life where all the good scenery is, served up throughout this book in stunningly original images and observations. This is a story that feels perfectly suited to the novella-in-flash, a reach back to grab the fragments of who we were in the final year of the twentieth century, to hold them to the light in an attempt to understand what peculiar threads connected us."

—Sarah Freligh, author of *Hereafter* and *Sad Math*

Akron at 200: A Bicentennial History
co-edited by Jon Miller

Akron at 200: A Bicentennial History will be published this summer by The University of Akron Press. It's edited by Jon Miller and David Lieberth. It's part of the City of Akron's Bicentennial Celebration. (The city was founded on December 6, 1825.)

It includes chapters by Jon Miller (on Akron in the 1830s), Philathia Bolton (on Sojourner Truth), David Giffels (on "the Akron Sound"), and UA English alum Christi Blythin (on the lives of Akron's domestic servants). It will be about 450 pages, hardcover, and \$50. The book should be ready to purchase before July 4th.



Student Spotlight

with Chloe DiMario



As NEOMFA student Chloe DiMario says, “Every UnClass leaves you with questions.” The Fall 2024 “Out of the Archives: Exploring Akron’s LGBTQ+ History” UnClass was no different, but this time Chloe, along with course instructors Professor Hillary Nunn and Tony Pankuch, Education and Outreach Coordinator at the Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, will have the chance to pursue those questions further, thanks to a \$10,000 grant from the Akron Gay Community Endowment Fund. The funds will help create the Akron LGBTQ+ Archive, an online collection of local oral histories and documents.

Chloe will be working to collect and organize these materials, many of which are connected to the University of Akron Archives and Special Collections’ holdings. As Chloe says, students in the UnClass “found multiple stories to share that clearly showed a rich history somewhat tucked away in Akron’s past, but more than that we found a lack of representation. We explored local churches, The University of Akron, transgender identities and more and yet this only furthered our desire to learn about other identities.”

As Chloe puts it, “This UnClass showed us that Akron’s LGBTQIA+ history is an iceberg that reaches a lot farther down than we originally expected and by now, we’ve barely dived past the surface.” And starting this summer, Chloe will have the chance to dive in further.



***CALLING ALL ALUMNI
& GRADUATING SENIORS!***

The UA English Department has created an alumni database to stay more engaged with our graduates, new and old. We’d love it if you provided updated contact information, including a (non-UA) email and a phone number. That way we can send you digital editions of future newsletters so you can hear what’s happening with us and your fellow alumni. You’ll also get invitations to readings and other special events on campus and in the community. You can update your info on the English Department’s homepage (<https://www.uakron.edu/english/>) or simply use the QR code.

We look forward to hearing from you!



Student Success

by Dr. Alan Ambrisco



In March 2025, Olivia Kurylo and Dr. Hillary Nunn gave an exciting joint presentation to an engaged audience of English Department students and faculty. The presentation was entitled "Staging Shakespeare, Staging Insanity: Nineteenth-Century Popular Images of Asylum Thespians," and it grew out of the pair's work with the Archives of the History of American Psychology, housed in UA's own Cummings Center for the History of Psychology.

In her portion of the presentation, Dr. Nunn made some introductory remarks about the Cummings Center and the challenges and opportunities for research in its archives. Nunn, who was recently recognized by The EX[L] Center for Community-Engaged Teaching methods, has been affiliated with the Center on various projects, and she regularly steers her students to its archives in several of her classes, including both Unclasses and regular offerings.

Olivia Kurylo's portion of the presentation focused on her original research at the CCHP archives. Using an engaging slideshow, she presented historical images of asylum patients portraying Shakespearean characters on stage, a practice that was surprisingly in vogue in the nineteenth century. Olivia discussed both how the cultural impact of Shakespeare helped shape the ways doctors were treating their patients and how patients subsequently internalized these norms in performance of the Bard's plays.

Olivia's presentation was drawn from her senior honors thesis, part of the requirements for her graduating with her B.A. degree this spring. But Olivia is not done with us yet. She's part of the English Department's new Five-Year Accelerated Degree Pathway (ADP) Program, meaning next year she'll complete her M.A. in English as well, cutting the time required to earn both degrees from six to five.

Thanks to both presenters for a fine event!

And Now a Word from
THE AC*

***Assistant Chair Lisa Rhoades**

Hello friends,

What a great semester this has been. As summer greets us, we celebrate our fabulous students and their successes. Spring semester always provides many opportunities, and this year was no exception. Graduating seniors Olivia Kurylo and Abby Divine presented their Honors Projects, compelling us with their research on Shakespeare and Asylums and The Final Girl, respectively. Gwen Bushen, Abby Divine, and Emily Sesto and Makayla Minard presented at the annual celebration of undergraduate research, proudly representing the English Department.

My corner office was full all semester with students stopping by to chat or to add our incredible major or one of our minors. It is always great to see the smiling faces of our students and share in their enthusiasm and provide support for the challenges sometimes faced (the tissues are always available).

This semester marks the beginning of a new pathway for our majors as well. Soon, English majors may choose to participate in a 3+3 accelerated pathway to law school. In collaboration with the highly esteemed UA Law School, qualified undergraduate English majors will be eligible to earn their BA in English and their JD in just six years. This is an exciting opportunity for those students planning a career in law. The English major serves as one of the best undergraduate preparatory programs for a law degree and we are thrilled to offer this pathway.

On a bittersweet note, we bid 13 English majors farewell and wish them well as they open this next chapter in their lives. These students were honored at our annual awards ceremony, a new tradition in the making. We can't think of a better place to celebrate our graduating students than at this annual celebration. We are eager to see all the great things they will do.

I will be available this summer; if you need anything, shoot me an email and we will plan to meet. As always, keep reading and writing and enjoy your summer break.

See you in the fall,

Lisa



Pictured from left to right at the Awards Ceremony: Alec Bender, Abby Divine, Makayla Minard, Rachael Herman, Olivia Kurylo, Nate Young.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR SPRING 2025 SENIORS!

Alec Bender

Jasmine Jackson

Avery Bishop

Olivia Kurylo (4+1 Accelerated degree)

Gwen Bushen

Marla LeNeo

Abby Divine

Makayla Minard

Kelen George

Liv Sweigart

Olivia Gruber

Nate Young

Rachael Herman

Letters

FROM THE CHAIR

Dear English Department Colleagues, Students, and Friends,



Mary Biddinger teaching a writing workshop

As always with the end of the academic year, the past few weeks have been a whirlwind of celebrations, last minute revisions, and a campus bursting with blossoms. Even if our walks are rerouted due to construction, it is hard not to stop and admire the beauty of our university. I enjoy seeing new graduates taking pictures in front of our various landmarks, even if that brings a bit of wistfulness at the same time.

A highlight of the spring semester was hosting this year's NEOMFA graduate reading in the Gardner Theatre at the Jean Hower Taber Student Union. Our fall and spring graduates from all three universities read aloud from their work and enjoyed a reception as well as a visit from Zippy. Many thanks to David Giffels for co-emceeding this event, and the NEOMFA program coordinator David Todd for making all of the arrangements and designing the graduation program. Congratulations to UA NEOMFA

graduates Ariel DeGroff, Jack Etzler, Sylvia Moran, Clover O'Mordha, and Eliza Souers Valle! We have a robust group of incoming NEOMFA students, but will truly miss the outgoing crew.

This spring the University of Akron Press offered a community writing workshop series in collaboration with Elizabeth's Bookshop and Writing Centre, with the support of a grant from ArtsForward. I was grateful for the opportunity to volunteer my time with a kickoff workshop that helped attendees rethink their relationship with their to-do lists. The grant enabled us to also offer workshops from writers Sarah Frelich, Abayomi Animashaun, and Mixby Dickon. Thanks to Brittany LaPointe, University of Akron Press Marketing and Sales Manager, for capturing my workshop members in the midst of an activity.



A visit from Zippy at the NEOMFA graduate reading

I hope everyone has a relaxing summer filled with good books!

Sincerely,

Mary B.



DON'T FORGET

The fall semester kicks off
Monday, August 25th!



**thanks for
reading**
SEE YOU NEXT TIME!

Submit your updates for the next
edition to Kate Christie at
kit4@uakron.edu!



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