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THE WORD

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
AT MESSIAH UNIVERSITY

What Is the Best Writing Tool?

By Nate Castellito

Every writer has a handful of tools they enlist to write with. These tools allow us to capture our experiences, the ideas of our imagination, and moments of insight. When it comes to this subject, some writers are understandably more particular than others. I spoke with a few professors in the department and asked them, “What’s the best writing tool?”

Professor Markley, who teaches Introduction to Professional Writing, Magazine Feature Writing, and Short Story, is a professional writer. Like many of us these days, he does much of his work online. “I like Word because it offers more tools than I could ever need while composing,” he says, “and I find I am more open minded about editing my own writing if I am working in Word, compared to working within some other platform or display media. When I am finished [writing] in Word, I just copy/paste the contents into whatever delivery tool I will be using.” Whether it be Word, Docs, or a similar word processor, most English students and professors have extensive experience writing digitally. With assignments and class material having to be uploaded to Canvas anyway, it’s practical to then compose on a computer, too.



However, Professor Whitehead and Dr. Roth still elect to write in a physical space when possible. They have preferences for the pens and pencils they use to do so as well. Professor Whitehead, a fiction writer and teacher of Fiction Workshop, Screenwriting, and Short Story, remarks, “A physical notebook is my favorite tool. Not just because it is a private space, but because it is portable and accessible and allows me to

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use the page space in a way I do not find in many other word processing programs. My favorite pen is a Sharpie S-Gel no-smear, black or blue.” Dr. Roth, who teaches Introduction to Creative Writing, Critical Theory, Poetry Workshops, and Senior Seminar: Writing, is a poet. He adds, “I like to compose by hand, in pencil. My pencil of choice is the Palomino Blackwing 602. While most pencils scratch and skitter, Blackwings move across the page with creamy consistency and a line that is neither too thick nor too thin—a real sensory pleasure.”

As intriguing as the reasons for their preferences are, the history of Dr. Roth’s go-to pencil is an even more fascinating story. The Palomino Blackwing 602 “was the pencil of choice for many of the great writers, composers, and artists of the 20th century (including my man, Nabokov), but it went out of production in 1998 after the machine that makes the unique ferrule (which holds the removable eraser) broke. In the years that followed, individual pencils were selling for as much as \$40 on Ebay! Thankfully, a new company came along in 2008 and purchased the rights to make them again. Reviewers say they are very close to the originals,” Dr. Roth explains. “Be careful, though!” he adds. “Once you get hooked, you’ll never go back to Ticonderoga, and at \$2 per pencil, you’re likely to have spent all your literary prize money before you actually win.”



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: KIMI CUNNINGHAM GRANT

A Conversation on Research,
Storytelling, and the Legacy of
Japanese Internment



Last month, students and faculty had the opportunity to hear alumni and novelist Kimi Cunningham Grant ('02) share her relationship with and knowledge about Japanese American internment during World War II. The event was sponsored by the English Department and Asian Student Association.

Grant’s first book, *Silver Like Dust*, is a memoir about her grandparents’ experience as Japanese Americans interned during World War II. She shared her process of writing the memoir, as well as the preliminary questions that led to the transformative project. Grant also discussed the role of research in creative writing and the importance of storytelling. Before answering questions from those in attendance, Grant read an excerpt from her upcoming novel, *These Silent Woods*. A literary suspense novel, *These Silent Woods* follows a father and daughter as they face the ghosts of their past in the Appalachian Mountains. The novel is set to release on October 26th, 2021 and is available for pre-order online.

Grant is a two-time winner of a Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Memorial Prize in Poetry and a recipient of a Pennsylvania Council on the Arts fellowship in creative nonfiction. She has published three books (*Silver Like Dust*, *Fallen Mountains*, *These Silent Woods*). Grant graduated from Messiah College (now University) in 2002 and then earned her graduate degree from Bucknell University.



*"Language can
can never live up
to life once and
for all. . . Nor
should it yearn
for the arrogance
to be able to do
so. Its force, its
felicity is in its
reach toward the
ineffable."*

-Toni Morrison

Words and Silence

A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

DR. KERRY HASLER-BROOKS

As readers and writers, many of us are committed to the powerful roles words play in our lives, our work, and our world. This is embedded in the mission of the Messiah English Department: "We are guided by the understanding that language significantly shapes our identity, deepens our interactions with others, and enables us to change the world." Each day, with this principle at our core, we practice the work of language. It is a work of the mind, spirit, faith, emotion, integrity, creativity, and reconciliation. In the words of Toni Morrison, "We do language. That may be the measure of our lives." This doing of language is a call to wield words actively as living tools that shape the world and our place in it.

As I wrote in a recent reflection for the *Christian Century*, "I am a lover of words." I am also a lover of the silence that sits between and around our words. One of the losses of the last year in my own life has been the loss of silence, not the silence that imbues some of my favorite solitary activities – a long run, morning yoga, prayer – but the messier silence that can surround a whole body of people reaching toward quiet, the silence rich with the noises of shifting bodies, stifled whispers, sniffs, coughs, and breaths that accompany a gathering of friends. This corporate silence has always been part of my church life. It does not translate very well in the virtual spaces where my beloved church community has been meeting for the last year. I miss it.

And so, I have turned to my students, fellow lovers of language, and found the fellowship of that much-missed messy silence. I begin many of my classes, as some of you know well, with a time of silence. Some of us use this silence to pray. Others take stock of the things crowding their mental landscape. Others remember with intent the bodies that carry them throughout the day. This is not a pure auditory experience absent of all noise. Rather, it is full of the shuffles, taps, and hums that are always part of our gatherings, some of us on Zoom and some of us in the classroom, where we think and talk and breathe and move together. This silence has restored me more than once. In the silence I pray, inhaling, "Lord, Jesus Christ," and exhaling, "have mercy on me," and my faith is formed with each breath. In the silence I hear my students breathing and moving as the body of witnesses. In the silence I understand more deeply the craft of language that I hold dear.

Though it is the primary tool of my chosen craft, language is limited. There are things – the most painful and the most miraculous – that escape our words, things that are unsayable and unwriteable. The best writers know the limits of their words. "It all means more than I can tell you," writes Marilynne Robinson in her novel *Gilead*, "So you must not judge what I know by what I find words for." The best writers are called to reach past those limits all the same. As Toni Morrison writes, "Language can can never live up to life once and for all. . . Nor should it yearn for the arrogance to be able to do so. Its force, its felicity is in its reach toward the ineffable."

May your words, surrounded by care-filled silence, change the world.



"My job is difficult, but it is so good. I get to find new ways to teach my students and new ways to allow my students the space to express themselves in a comfortable environment."
- Haley Keener

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT:

HALEY KEENER AND LYDIA PEBLY

This spring, the English Department has five seniors who are student teaching during their final semester at Messiah. We had the chance to speak with two of them: Lydia Pebly (above) and Haley Keener (right). Lydia is teaching at the Harrisburg School District's SciTech campus, and Haley is teaching at the Marshall Math and Science Academy in Harrisburg.

Nate Castellitto: Has student teaching been easier or more difficult than you anticipated, and why?

Lydia Pebly: "Because the Harrisburg school district is still entirely virtual, I wasn't sure what to expect when I began student teaching. In some ways it has been easier, and in other ways more difficult. Since I'm teaching from my house (the women's resto house) on campus, I haven't needed to commute, and I have access to everything in my house all the time. Navigating teaching while living with five other people has been a challenge, but my housemates have all been fabulously flexible and supportive.

Haley Keener: "Student teaching has definitely not been what I expected. I've been dreaming of becoming a teacher since I was in the eighth grade, but no one could have prepared me for student teaching during a pandemic. When I imagined student teaching, I imagined walking the halls of the school saying hello to my students, laughing with them in between classes, and watching them grow each day as we learned together. Instead, I log into Zoom every morning to be greeted by black boxes instead of faces, and Zoom chats instead of laughter and voices. The lack of personableness possible in an entirely virtual classroom makes my job much more difficult. How do you engage students in learning when they don't ever turn on their cameras or microphones, when your interaction



with them takes place through grading and Google Classroom? My job is difficult, but it is so good. I get to find new ways to teach my students and new ways to allow my students the space to express themselves in a comfortable environment."

Nate: What is the most unexpected thing you've experienced student teaching?

Lydia: "I think the most unexpected thing that's happened so far has been my cooperating teacher handing over almost complete control of his Feminist History class to me. I was super excited to learn and teach a class outside my certification area, but I never expected to be able to plan and design the majority of the class."

Haley: "I never expected that I would be teaching social studies. My certification is in secondary English, and now I find myself teaching Social Studies and English. I also certainly did not expect to love teaching social studies so much. Meeting my cooperating teacher last year in Junior Field and watching her teach Social Studies and ELA in connection with one another was a novel idea to me, and she has actually inspired me to become certified in Social Studies after graduation."

Nate: What is one thing you've learned so far?

Lydia: "One thing I've learned so far is flexibility. I'm a planner and I like to be in control, but as a teacher, especially a virtual teacher during a pandemic, you have to constantly adjust to the unexpected and unplanned.

"Haley: "I've learned so much so far in my placement, but perhaps the most important thing is how important schooling is for my students. My students come to school to learn, to socialize, to relax, and to grow. Unfortunately Zoom makes it harder for some of my students to accomplish those things. Being on Zoom has taught me how vital the brick and mortar atmosphere is in education, and I am constantly being reminded that my students desperately want to be back in school. Overall, this placement has taught me never to take the experience of in-person schooling for granted again.

Also student teaching this semester are Brendan Labra (Cumberland Valley High School), Jacob Rice (Central Dauphin East High School), and Kate Thompson (Steelton-Highspire High School). We wish them all the best in their placements and the beginning of their English-teaching careers.

English Students, Alumni, and Faculty at the 2021 Virtual Humanities Symposium

The Center for Public Humanities held its annual Humanities Symposium from March 1-6. This year's theme was "A Conversation on Freedom." Several members of the English Department presented in the Symposium, including students, alumni, and professors.

On March 2nd, English student Daniel Smutek presented as part of a panel titled "The Road to Freedom is Fraught with Struggle." The panel discussed the women's suffrage movement, drawing on the film *Iron Angels*. Later on, Dr. Smith delivered a lecture titled "What Does it Mean to be Free? – Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton in Conversation." In the lecture, Dr. Smith explored the differing notions of freedom in the works of the three British authors and their application in today's politics. To conclude the evening, English Department alumna Cora Taylor '15 unpacked the relationship between freedom and education on a panel with other teaching professionals. Their presentation was titled "A Conversation on Education as Freedom Work."

On March 3rd, a panel of students from Dr. Hasler-Brooks's FYS class last fall presented work they had written centered around the topic of "Literacy as Freedom." Following their timeslot, a panel of students from Dr. Corey's Writing for Social Change class shared work from social change advocacy campaigns they organized during the fall semester. Including English students Olivia Bardo, Nate Castellitto, and Ned Kuczmynda, the panel focused on the "Perils and Possibilities of Writing for Social Change in a Polarized World."

Finally, on March 5th, English students Lydia Peibly and Haley Keener presented their senior seminar research on a panel with other Humanities students. Lydia presented "Critical Literacy, Community, and Freedom in the Narratives of Frederick Douglass and Anthony Ray Hinton" and Haley presented "Flawed Freedom: Conceptions of Race and Freedom in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*."

Poetry on the Nation's Highest Stage

by Nate Castellito, Class of 2023

In January 20th, Amanda Gorman made history. At just 22 years old, she became the youngest poet to recite an original work at a U.S. Presidential Inauguration. Her poem, "The Hill We Climb," grabbed national attention for its inspirational message. Responding to racial violence, political division, and a year-long pandemic, Gorman's poem called for collaboration and pondered a brighter future. It came at a much-needed time for a nation looking to rebuild. She spoke to us all:

"And yes we are far from polished.

Far from pristine.

But that doesn't mean we are
striving to form a union that is perfect.

We are striving to forge a union with purpose,
to compose a country committed to all cultures,
colors, characters and
conditions of man.

And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us,
but what stands before us...."

In tackling issues of racial and economic injustice, Gorman's work brings to mind a rich history of poetic truth-telling in the U.S. Over the last three centuries, African American poets such as Gwendolyn Brooks and Langston Hughes turned to verse to share their forebears' stories as enslaved people and their own as victims of racial discrimination.

Their provocative and elegant pleas for compassion, justice, and transformation are in good company, both preceding and following Chicano poets the likes of Estela Portillo-Trambley and Rudolfo Anaya and Asian American poets such as Lawson Fusao and Carlos Bulosan. They were accompanied by feminist poets, some by the names of Adrienne Rich and Sylvia Plath. And the North American Indigenous poets, including Olivia Ward Bush-Banks and Ruth Muskrat Bronson, raised their voices in the triumphant chorus. What these delicately

metamorphic poets have in common is that through their craft, they inspired change and a more just future for their descendants.

Today, Gregory Pardlo, Fatimah Asghar, Ocean Vuong, Shonto Begay, and countless other visionary poets continue the mission of speaking about the impact social injustices have on marginalized communities. Not only have the voices of recent and contemporary poets challenged inequality with fervor and responsibility, but they've expanded the reach of such poetry, too. Whether it be Tyehimba Jess's ownership of the sonnet, Julia Alvarez's expansion of "the American dream," or the late Tupac Shakur's activism through hip hop, new voices and forms take poetry to new place. These locations present new arenas of conversation where justice and compassion can be more completely realized. In Gorman's words,

"...So while once we asked,
how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?
Now we assert,
How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?
We will not march back to what was,
but move to what shall be.
A country that is bruised but whole,
benevolent but bold,
fierce and free..."

What Gorman's historic moment means is somehow more than an incredible, extraordinary achievement. She's carried the torch of thousands of poets before her in describing the truth as she sees it, reminding her readers of where they might stand in the truth, and inspiring each of us to join in solving the obstacles ahead. It is no mistake that readers, writers, and teachers, too, often find themselves near monumental moments of critical reflection. The importance of poetic thinking and fellowship in a nation with no place to go but forward cannot be overstated.

“Whether Past or Yet to Come”

BY MATTHIAS TAN, CLASS OF 2021

Whether Past or Yet to Come

Whether it is past or yet to come,
a great ship of human nails runs aground,
from it the dishonored dead descend
led by the Betrayer and our ancient foes
arraying on vast plain under twilight sky.
The Watchman blows a mournful horn.

Whether it is past or yet to come,
rainbow light scorches the twilight gloom,
as gods in their armor form ranks before the Tree.
I stand among those who died with courage and
raise voices in song to steady our hands as
the last rainbow crumbles to nothing

Whether it is past or yet to come,
we keep our swords in hand and sing
amidst the clash and fall of gods,
amidst death throes of beast and giant,
as the sword of fire plunges into the earth,
and all is washed away in ash.

Whether it is past or yet to come,
I see waves of time wash the ash away as
corn ripens in lands that have never been sown
as a newborn sun rises to warm a new earth.
The Tree splits open for a man and his wife
and they fall joyously into soft grass to begin again.

The first time I found again this twilight plain
in a dusty book, recognition seized me.
This vision new and altogether familiar
that I have fought or will fight upon that field,
that the earth will somehow be renewed,
Whether it is past or yet to come

Whether it is past or yet to come,
When the knowledge despair and ash invade,
I sing again a prayer for courage,
A song that is sung within the hall of the gods.
Let the flame wash over, let ash fall –
I will remain to begin again.

“Types of Embrace”

BY ELORA KEMPER, CLASS OF 2022

A friend's embrace –

not a person who has peaked into the well of my soul,
hauling up a clammy bucket
from which to sip –
is limited to a breast-to-breast interaction.

Shrinking

Short-lived

The absolute definition
of our relationship.



Author's Note:

“Although this poem functions well as is, I feel the desire to continue describing the different types of embraces. There is more to explore in addition to this description of a shallow relationship. I see myself writing two more stanzas: one about deep committed friendship, and the other about romantic love.” – Elora Kemper



Author's Note:

“Poetry, for me, is a process of finding a seed and causing it to bear fruit through careful pruning. If you are able to find some fruit in this poem-in-process, I am thankful, but not quite satisfied yet. The seed is there, but I will experiment with form and word-choice with each successive draft to allow that idea to flourish.” – Matthias Tan



"Ode to a Book"

BY JOLIE LLOYD, CLASS OF 2025

To hold a book in your hands
Is to hold a castle of words
A labyrinth of ideas
An extension of the mind
A mirror to reflect the human soul
To open a book
Is to open a door to another world
To escape from reality
To take the hand of a best friend
To read a book
Is to enter into another life.

Department Events and Deadlines

March 31

Honors Project Proposals due for the 2021-2022 academic year. You can find the application [HERE](#).

March 31

Submissions due for the 2020-2021 issue of *The Peregrine Review*. Email your poetry, prose, and art/photography to peregrine@messiah.edu for a chance to have your work featured.

March 29 - April 6

Advising Week for Fall 2021 Registration

April 8

Poets and Writers Reading and Workshops with Zetta Elliot. You can read more about Zetta Elliot here: <https://www.zettaelliott.com/>.

April 15

Honors Project Presentations from Emma Spronk and Olivia Bardo

April 22

Honors Project Presentation from Joel Pace

TBD

Senior Celebration - Details to come.

Publishing Opportunities

Peregrine Review

"The Peregrine Review is a literary magazine composed of poetry, prose, and artwork. Pieces included are crafted by Messiah students, faculty and staff and are edited by students. Past submissions include, but are not limited to: creative nonfiction, short stories, literary criticism, and photography." The Peregrine will be accepting submissions for the 2021 edition until March 31. Submissions should be emailed to peregrine@messiah.edu.

Journal of Student Research

"Journal of Student Research (JSR) is an Academic, Multidisciplinary, and Faculty-reviewed Journal devoted to the rapid dissemination of current research published by high school, undergraduate, graduate, and post-doctoral student authors." JSR has published authors from more than 300 schools around the world. Projects on all topics are welcomed, and students will receive feedback from the publication once their submissions are reviewed. Volume 10, Issue 3 submissions are due April 30, 2021 at 11:59 p.m. More information available at <https://www.jofsr.org/index.php/path>.

Inquiries Journal

"Inquiries Journal is an open-access academic journal that highlights the work of students at the undergraduate level and above. The journal publishes work across a range of academic disciplines with a particular focus on the social sciences, arts, and humanities." Submissions are accepted on a rolling basis. More information available at <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com>.

Sigma Tau Delta Journals

"The Sigma Tau Delta journals (Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle and Sigma Tau Delta Review) publish annually the best writing and criticism of undergraduate and graduate active chapter members of the Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society." Sigma Tau journals are catalogued with the Library of Congress, and honors for best writing in each category (poetry, critical essay, short story, and creative nonfiction) are awarded. Submissions for 2022 journals are due between April 12 and May 10, 2021. More information available at <https://www.english.org/publications/journals/index.shtml>.

The Adroit Journal

"We're looking for work that's bizarre, authentic, subtle, outrageous, indefinable, raw, paradoxical. We've got our eyes on the horizon. Send us writing that lives just between the land and the sky." The Adroit Journal accepts prose, poetry, art, and interviews and reviews. Proposals for interviews and reviews are open for submission, and the remaining categories will be open in April. More information available at <https://theadroitjournal.org/about/submissions/>.

Internship Opportunities

Technical Writing Internship at Maximus

Bloomsburg, PA

"The Technical Writing Intern works with the MAXIMUS IT Knowledge Management team to create and revise technical documentation in support of MAXIMUS IT activities and goals. The Intern experiences a real-world professional environment, including project planning, collaboration with subject matter experts, and use of online tools." More information available [HERE](#).

Content Writer Intern at Envision2bWell

Philadelphia, PA

"We are looking for people (2-3) that are passionate about content blogging/writing in the health and wellness space who want to push the envelope and expand their talents. This is an excellent opportunity to build your skills/portfolio, strengthen your resume through published blogs, articles and posts, and make new connections with colleagues around the globe." More information available [HERE](#).

Technical Writing Internship at McKesson

Moon, PA

"The Technical Writer [at McKesson] will research, plan, organize/design, write, and edit audience-appropriate documentation and will be responsible for all aspects of the technical documentation delivered." More information available [HERE](#).

Summer Teaching Internship at Classical Charter Schools

Bronx, NY

"This is an opportunity for 4-6 Juniors (Class of 2022) interested in educational equity to spend 7 weeks at one of the highest performing schools in the country, during our Summer Learning Academy for scholars from Kindergarten to Eighth Grade. Upon successful completion of the internship, high-performing interns will receive an offer to join our prestigious ClassiCorps Teaching Fellowship, to which only 3% of general applicants are admitted annually." More information available [HERE](#).

To contribute to the newsletter, please contact us.

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