

# THE WORD

*a Newsletter from  
the English program  
at Messiah University*

March 2023 | Issue 9

## GIFT YOUR READING

*by Dr. Kerry Hasler-Brooks*

"This semester I've tried to practice this gift of reading, specifically reading the books some of my students have recommended as a way to know them more."

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*Look Inside!*

## RAINS RAIN

*by Nate Castellitto ('23)*

"The collection contains poems new and old, crafted from a true reckoning with the inevitability of unknowingness."

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## TEXTS FOR CALLING

In a new Vocation Seminar course, students selected and read their own self-defined "texts for calling." Here's what they picked!

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## WHERE DO ENGLISH STUDENTS READ AND WRITE?

*by Nate Castellitto ('23)*

"This is how you do it: you sit down at the keyboard and you put one word after another until it's done. It's that easy, and that hard." This is the promise that English author Neil Gaiman offers his students in his first Masterclass on writing. It's that easy, and that hard.

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In previous issues, we've considered tensions often found in the way of writing, specifically a fraught relationship between creativity and productivity. Pleasant elements such as writing utensils and equipment are part of that experience. Another aspect which readers and writers rarely overlook is setting.

At Messiah, there are a few locations that English students appreciate more than any other. The official Language, Literature and Writing Department resource room is the location of preference for a number of them.

"I think my favorite spot on campus to do work is the first floor resource room in Boyer. The view from the window is surrounded by foliage all year round, so no matter the weather outside, the ambience of the room is always so cozy and peaceful," Mackenzie Christie '23 said.

When English and Modern Languages merged in 2021, the room at the very back of Boyer's first floor was reclaimed, in many ways, by English students and their friends. A coffee maker, tea cups, literary journals, magazine issues and puzzles can all be found in this go-to homework spot.

Another popular example is the library. With three stories of varying work environment structures (e.g. glass conference rooms, wooden cubicles, window tables, etc.), students with any method of completing homework can find what they're looking for.

"My favorite spot to do work on campus is the library main stacks. I particularly love reading near the windows when the sun is shining. I find that surrounding myself with books and sunshine makes me feel more inspired and excited about doing work that I enjoy," Lydia Leaman '24 said.

Serena McQuoid '24 enjoys reading and writing at the library, too, where she'll often chat with peers and generate content for the English program's social media accounts. Meanwhile, other students cite more densely populated areas like the Larsen Student Union.

"At the Union, I am able to meet with friends or get a coffee to help liven up the studying experience," Cade Smucker '26 commented. Colby Connolly '26 agreed, saying, "My favorite spots . . . would be in a booth at Union or the library. I find it easier to do work when everyone around me is also focusing on something productive so these spots tend to make work easier for me." The stark contrast between a setting like the library and the Union is a testament to how diversely equipped practitioners of English can be. In addition to these on-campus places, a selection of nearby franchises are sporadic destinations of choice.

**“Processual thought and idea-forming go before the words, and remaining present - forming a sort of intellectual relationship with the context and setting - is a practice English students seem to be doing already.”**

“If I have the chance to go off campus, Idea Coffee in Mechanicsburg has both my favorite latte and my favorite views, which makes it the best of both worlds,” Emma Bane ‘25 said.

McQuoid added, “Down to Earth Café and Denim Coffee are my go-to spots. Not only is their coffee the perfect study treat, but their walls of windows are dreamy. This combo fosters a joy that sparks motivation and nurtures productivity.”

What so many of the responses seem to have in common, interestingly enough, are elements of the natural world, especially spacious windows. It falls in line with American journalist Burton Rascoe’s description of a writer. “A writer is working when he is staring out the window,” he insisted.

That statement, really, is artistically significant. When it comes to craft, whether it be reading, writing or lesson-planning, English students would all agree: it’s not just the words on the page which matter when it comes to output. Like Gaiman suggested to us so pointedly, the doing is the hard part. Processual thought and idea-forming go before the words, and remaining present—forming a sort of intellectual relationship with the context and setting—is a practice English students seem to be doing already.



## Gift Your Reading A Note from the Chair

BY DR. KERRY HASLER-BROOKS

Like many of you, I love small book stores, especially those that specialize in used books. I love to dig through piles of well-worn books, to fall for the look or feel of a book otherwise unfamiliar to me, to find an author or title on my “want to read” list, to rediscover a beloved book I have read and re-read before.

It is a special treat to find an annotated book. Some of you will disagree, but I am intrigued by the words people write in response to the words they have read. Sometimes these annotations are brilliant. Often they are confusing. The best are comical and wise. Always they remind me that words are connective tissue that bind me to others, to real people who have loved and sometimes hated the very story in my hands.

There are two books that I buy every time I find a copy: Wallace Stegner’s *Crossing to Safety* and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. They are the books I most want to share with others. They are the ones I think about and with and through and that I almost obsessively gift to others as a way to share not only the story but myself.

I am a committed gifter of books. Each Christmas my mother now gets hard copies of all the books I will be teaching in the next year, and she reads them, every single one, sometimes even following the syllabus and doing written responses to what she’s read. And her reading is a gift in return, a way that she tells me she sees me, she knows me, and she wants to know me more.

This semester I’ve tried to practice this gift of reading, specifically reading the books some of my students have recommended as a way to know them more. Recently I picked up two travelogue novels, one through time and one through universes, that came highly recommended: *The Midnight Library* and *11/22/63* (Thanks Angelina and Cade!). Neither is a book that I would have found and selected on my own. And that has been part of the gift.

As we head into spring, let me encourage you to give a copy of a most treasured book to someone you know or want to know more. Or, perhaps, ask for a copy of their most treasured book.



**“Early Christians rebelled, advocated, and served joyfully, and they did so during their own suffering and diminished means.”**

## Devotional: Humbly Grateful

*By Nate Castellitto ('23)*

There was a song my mother used to sing to me throughout my childhood. I'm not exactly sure where it first came from, but it went something like, "Are you humbly grateful or grumbly hateful? / What's your attitude? / Do you grumble and groan, / Or let it be known / You're grateful for all God's done for you?"

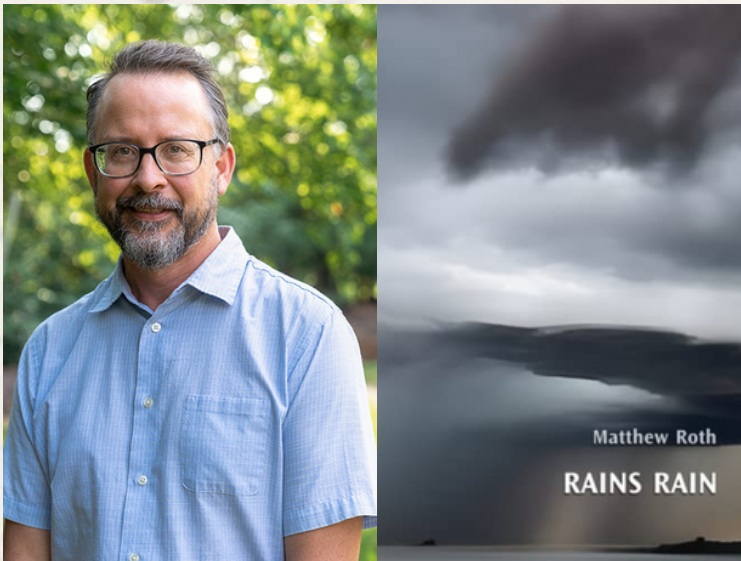
The tune is as corny to me now as it was then, but those words have always stuck with me. Line one's (subversive) syllabic consistency and in-line rhythm, especially, draw out the writer in me. Moreover, its message calls to mind a compelling ecclesiastical writer, the Apostle Paul.

When I look at Paul's letters, I can't help but recognize joyful servants (1 Thessalonians 1, 1 Timothy 6). Early Christians rebelled, advocated, and served joyfully, and they did so during their own suffering and diminished means. Maintaining that community of joyful service is something I've recently struggled with.

Three of my closest friends at Messiah either transferred or graduated last fall, and afterward I immediately felt a loss of positive influence. Peer conflict and financial struggle compounded that feeling, and I soon found myself acting with observable pessimism and plenty of complaints. I was grumbly hateful. Somehow, that release made the circumstances more bearable. But I wasn't happy, and I've since found myself pursuing new friendships which point me toward Christ.

As I've grown both spiritually and professionally this winter, I was amazed once again by the sincerity and faithful conviction with which our English community carries itself. Our classes are filled with students and professors who truly care about their subjects, one another, and justice. They've shown me that, while I've had phases where my attitude and values didn't line up, humility and gratitude ought to go hand in hand. Choosing joy daily is a much healthier way to serve.





Dr. Matthew Roth's second book of poems, *Rains Rain*, was published last month by FutureCycle Press. Described as a "dazzling array of forms, moods, and subjects," the collection fits Roth's ideal aim for a poetry book.

"One of my traits, I suppose, is that I write in a lot of different styles. I'm not a poet who just writes in one way, which probably has made it more difficult to publish a boo . . . My kind of preference for a book has always been for books to be more like a Beatles album, you know, that has something silly, something serious and something amorous all sort of jumbled together," he said.

*Rains Rain* is the fruition of patient writing and genuine life experience for Roth, whose first book, *Bird Silence*, came out in 2009.

"It was a pretty long process," he said of his newest work. "I would say the manuscript's gone through a kind of constantly-evolving state . . . I'm always writing new poems and putting them in and taking other poems out."

The collection contains poems new and old, crafted from a true reckoning with the inevitability of unknowingness. Poems about political climate, parenting and family can all be found in *Rains Rain*.

# Dr. Roth's *Rains Rain* Out Now

by Nate Castellitto ('23)

## Way and Wood

**Too often I find myself  
a noun without a verb  
to take me for a gambol  
down the path to anywhere,  
or else I'm all urge and no  
substance,  
a verb, unsponsored and  
unbound,  
vain wind in a lunar landscape  
where no tree stands.  
On those days, Lord,  
when it seems too much to be  
two things at once, find me  
one word to be and do,  
a way and a wood  
where the meaning is plain,  
where  
flowers flower, falls fall, rains  
rain.**

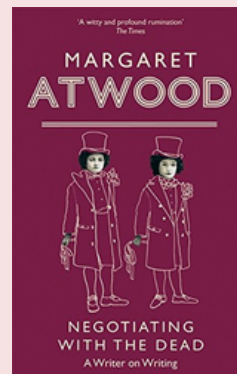
This spring students in Vocation Seminar with Dr. Kerry Hasler-Brooks selected and read a "text for calling" to reflect on their own sense of vocation. Here are some of their selections!

# TEXTS FOR CALLING



"[Saint-Exupéry helps readers] discover what it means to live into our most deep-seated values, and see them nurture not only our own soul, but the souls of those around us."

*Audrey Blunt*



"[Atwood] offers the necessary space for contemporary writers to honor both their heart's most creative desires while making an honest living."

*Nate Castellitto*

"[Slate] invites us to embrace the possibility that we too have the ability to give ourselves a new story."

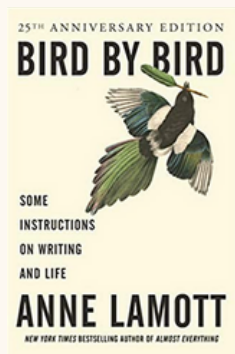


*Kenzie Chrstie*

"Read. Immerse yourself in ideas. Read banned books. Read books by people with whom you do not agree. And when you do not agree with them, say so."

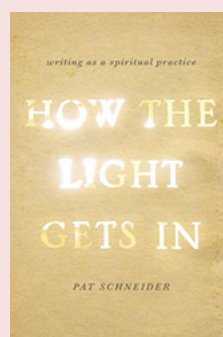


*Jolie Lloyd*



"Lamott seems to suggest that writing and life mirror one another, so much so that learning to write well will teach us to live well, and vice versa."

*Maddi Mosher*



"This book serves as an invitation, as well as a guide to those who desire to connect their writing to their spirituality."

*Julia Wittel*



# Lady Brion

## Poets and Writers Series

On March 20, spoken word performer Lady Brion came to campus to lead a spoken word workshop and perform to a large crowd in the Student Union.

Lady Brion, is an international spoken word artist, poetry coach, activist, organizer, and educator, who has performed all over the world. She performed personal and political poems on Black women's experiences, food deserts, the prison industrial complex, her work as a creative writing teacher, and her mother's life with diabetes.

Check her out at [ladybrion.com](http://ladybrion.com), on social media @ladyBspeaks, or in her published collection and accompanying album *With My Head Unbowed*.

This reading was sponsored by the Paul W. Nisly Endowment created to promote understanding of writing and the study of literature as a form of Christian vocation.



*Listen now!*



## WRITER TALKS



Check the podcast from the Messiah University English program featuring student writers - and special guests - reading and discussing their original poetry and prose.

### Coming Soon

Episode 6:  
Caleb Stassel, "Terminally Online"

### Recent Episodes

Episode 5:  
Elizabeth Movinsky, "Boxing Club"

Episode 4:  
Jack Troy, "The Wind in the Jug"

# Meeting the Monster: A Creative Exploration of Korean Culture and Mythology

Wednesday  
April 26 at 7pm

*Departmental  
Honors  
Presentation*



This original creative writing piece incorporates Korean folklore and myths into personal narrative. This project initially stemmed from Hye Lim's desire to unravel her identity and relationship to Korean culture as a Korean who was born in the Philippines and grew up in Papua New Guinean surrounded by non-Korean communities. By reclaiming Korean folklore and myths as her own story, Hye Lim explores the connection between her life and ancestral history.