

THE WORD

MARCH 2024
ISSUE 13

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE MESSIAH UNIVERSITY ENGLISH PROGRAM

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KEHLER



A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR:

MENTORING IN COMMUNITY

“My approach to mentorship is an expression of my relational personality and the attentiveness to story that defines my discipline and my scholarship. As many of my academic advisees can attest, I simply cannot have a short conversation about course registration because I want to know what each of them is learning, asking, navigating in their inevitably complex lives. I want them to tell me their story, and I often share pieces of mine. In many ways, I do this as an outpouring of my own longing for mentorship and a response to my own experiences, both good and bad, with mentors throughout my academic and professional life.”



Scan to read more about Dr.
Hasler-Brooks' commitment
to, and struggles with,
mentorship.

THE LOVE IN OUR MIDST

While there is no true hierarchy when it comes to books of the Bible, we certainly have our favorites. We love the Gospels (duh), the letters of Paul, Psalms, some of the Torah, select portions of Jeremiah, and the mysterious Revelation. Now don't get me wrong, our emphasis on these books is by no means a bad thing, but it is strange that some biblical books get cast into a lesser category. One of these "lesser" books that I particularly enjoy is Zephaniah, which takes place during the early parts of King Josiah's reign (somewhere in the mid 600s BCE) and offers a fascinating picture of the way God cares for and interacts with His people. If you were to stop reading right here and pick up Zephaniah, you might be a little taken back. Zephaniah is an absolutely terrifying book! Its presentation of God's wrath is dark and vivid. The book is basically three chapters of intense rebuke and warning, with plenty of fire and brimstone to make you pucker up. Its tone is bleak and seems pretty hopeless, but then the narrative shifts. After 2 chapters and 13 verses of rebuke, Zephaniah reminds us of the identity God has given the people of Israel. This identity is not defined by the wrong that they do, but by the great love He has for them.

It is pretty easy to read Zephaniah and get caught up in the judgment. This judgment certainly is not meant to be glossed over, but it goes far deeper than fear mongering. God's judgment in Zephaniah is meant to direct the Israelite people back into His loving arms. The Israelites had become slaves to their sinful ways and their enemies, the Assyrians, were upon them, so God sent Zephaniah to offer a warning, a way out, and a beautiful reminder that they are deeply loved by their Creator, a Creator who has taken away their judgment and is in their midst redeeming all things. Pretty awesome, right? What I appreciate most about this message is how it remains true today. As a chronic screw-up saved by grace, I can be pretty discouraged by the weight of my own sin and the sin in this world. It can be easy to fall victim to the wrath-centered gospel and the feelings of unworthiness that accompany our sin. Zephaniah shows that this is the complete opposite of what God desires for us. God is not calling us into depression, but fullness of life. He is offering us liberation from the heartache of this world, and calls us to live in the warmth of his love and forgiveness. So don't be caught up in the weight of sin. Return to the Father, bask in His love, and delight in His singing.

by Adam Carter ('25)

"THE LORD YOUR GOD IS IN YOUR MIDST, A MIGHTY ONE WHO WILL SAVE; HE WILL REJOICE OVER YOU WITH GLADNESS; HE WILL QUIET YOU BY HIS LOVE; HE WILL EXULT OVER YOU WITH LOUD SINGING."

Zephaniah 3:17 (ESV)

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: SHAY QUINTIN

WHAT DO YOU DO?

I work in the Instructional Services Department at St. George's, a boarding school in Rhode Island. In my work at the school, I help provide individual support for students looking to improve executive functioning skills like time management, assessment preparation, note taking, communication with teachers, and more. Much of my work includes working with students who have learning differences.

HOW HAS THE STUDY OF ENGLISH PREPARED YOU FOR WHAT YOU DO?

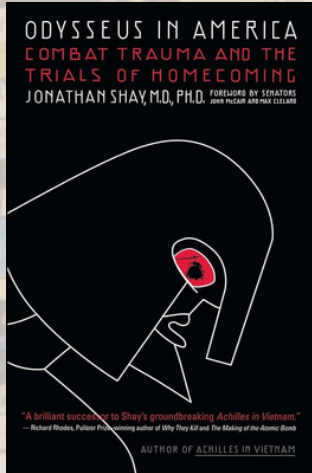
In my job, I constantly communicate with teachers and students on a daily basis through conversations or emails. Messiah's English Department helped prepare me to support students with writing assignments. I typically help students interpret and apply teacher feedback from assignments they've submitted. Studying English taught me how to ask questions and provide feedback.

FAVORITE MESSIAH ENGLISH MEMORY?

I'm not entirely sure what the course was at the time, but I do know it was my senior year. Dr. Corey ran a poetry in place workshop at one of the Harrisburg middle schools. We walked with the middle school participants to the cemetery that was a block away from the school where we then explored the living histories of the people buried there. Later, we helped students draft poems related to the stories we read. That day stood out to me as a time when I saw the clear ties between one's life story and physical place. Though I've never really enjoyed poetry, that class activity opened my eyes to the power of listening to and uncovering the stories around you.



STUDENT BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS



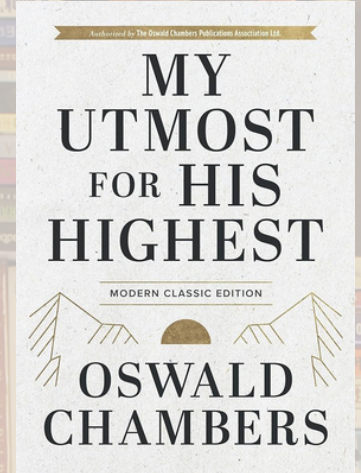
-Micaiah Saldaña ('24)



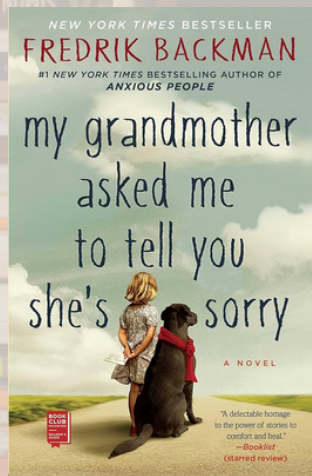
-Colby Connolly ('26)



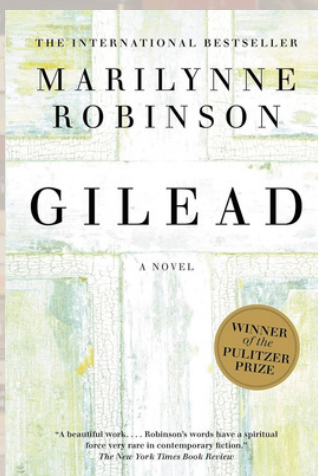
-J.T. Crocenzi ('25)



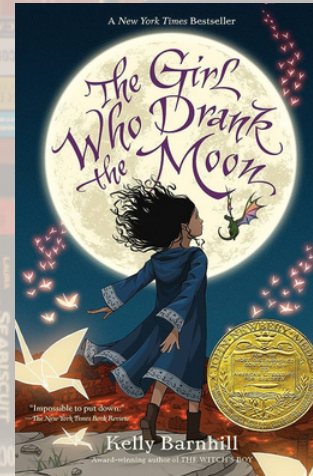
-Bryce Arnold ('25)



-Courtney Kehler ('24)



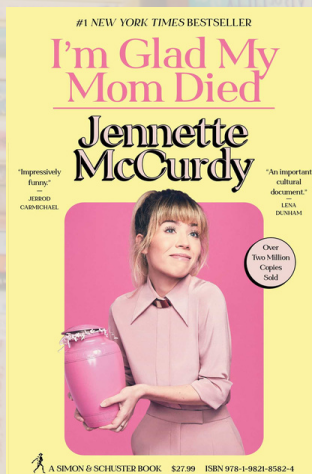
-Lydia Lehman ('24)



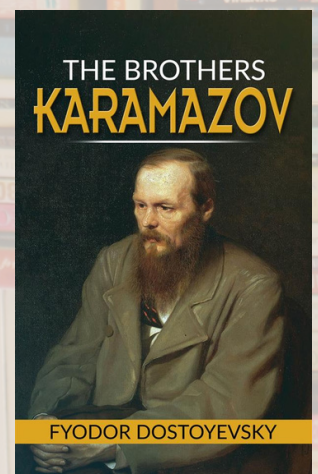
-Micah Turner ('24)



-Sydney Zikan ('24)



-Emma Bane ('25)



-Olivia Reardon ('26)



-Ana Sakore ('25)



-Adam Carter ('25)

THE BENEVOLENT BAND OF THIEVES:

THE DEEP HISTORY OF LITERARY IMITATION

Every now and then during the last 20 minutes of my Free Verse Workshop, Dr. Roth challenges us with a writing exercise. These exercises vary from focusing on certain images, playing with an emotion or idea, emulating a certain style, and more. They always offer an exciting surprise and an opportunity to create and possibly ignite an idea that may be of value. One class Dr. Roth challenged us to create an imitation of a famous poem. He specified by explaining he didn't want us to just draw inspiration from the poems, but to basically recreate the poem in our own words. Something about this exercise made me a little uneasy. Was I supposed to just rip off someone's hard work? Am I throwing originality and creativity out the window? Noticing our confusion, Dr. Roth shared a quote from T.S. Elliot, "Good poets borrow, but great poets steal." While the origins of this quote are a little convoluted - and may be attributed to some journalistic meddling - there lies meaningful truth within it.

In our individualistic self-sufficient world, imitation can be a pretty unsettling word. Nobody wants to ride the coattails of others! We want to forge our own path, write our own story, fight our own fight, or maybe this is all just me. All I know is that to me the idea of imitation feels fake. When I write, I want to create and do my own new thing, not steal. (This could also explain why I'm not that great of a poet!) In my naive, unimportant opinion imitation or stealing feels like a lazy copout for unimaginative poets... but I would say T.S. Elliot is a pretty hard-working, imaginative guy, so there must be some validity to his quote.

As I looked further into Elliot I discovered that he really did practice what he preached. In his poem "Cousin Nancy" Elliot swipes a verse straight from George Meredith's poem "Lucifer in Starlight". This line in question "The army of unalterable law" (Elliot, Line 13) (Meredith, line 14) acts as the final line in both poems yet the work it's doing is very different. One reader even noticed the robbery which prompted a response from Elliot who claimed the theft was meant to be discovered. You see Elliot's intentions weren't to lazily get away with not having to write a final line, but instead connect his reader to the broader world of poetry. Elliot sought to bring to life the Victorian verse with his modern musings. This allowed for Elliot's poem to gain depth from Meredith's and allowed Meredith's poem to be more accessible through Elliot's. This offers a bit of insight into the true meaning of Elliot's quote. This "stealing" that the great poets take part in isn't for self glorification but an act of love to heighten the work of another. To bring another piece into the modern sphere and create an avenue for deeper understanding. Stealing can be a defamation or cheapening of the value of someone's words, but Elliot's version of stealing is actually a celebration of these words.

Believe it or not literary "stealing" has an extremely rich history that goes far beyond T.S. Elliot. One of my favorite poets and former U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins found his voice through stealing. Early in his career Billy Collins saw Wallace Stevens as the "apex of poetry" so Collins decided to write exclusively Stevens intimidations in hopes of becoming "a second rate Wallace Stevens."

This led Collins to find new apexes and new poets to imitate until finally he discovered his own unique voice.

John Milton was another great imitator. In his masterful epics *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* Milton “steals” from both the Bible and ancient epic. This allows Milton to resurrect the dying tradition of the epic and offer thought-provoking backstory to scripture. Milton by no means seeks to replace the stories of the Bible but “to justify the ways of God to man” (Milton, *I* lines 25-26).

One of the most fascinating members of this brood of thieves is none other than the Bard himself, William Shakespeare. In many ways Shakespeare is possibly one of the most creative people to ever live. He invented over 1,500 words and phrases, was a master of wordplay, and wrote some of the most famous pieces of literature ever. And while this may be a bit of a shock, almost all of Shakespeare’s work was “stolen.” Shakespeare would “steal from anywhere and everywhere.” He took Plautus’s *The Brothers Menaechmus* threw in an extra set of twins and boom *The Comedy of Errors* was born, found a Norse legend called Hamnet and made it a masterpiece, took the story of King Leir and made *King Lear*, and there are plenty more examples. Through these great stories Shakespeare saw an opportunity to take what people know and turn it into something that can challenge and entertain, a way for him to connect the familiar stories of old to the challenging themes and problems of the modern day.

As the 20 minute writing period ticked away, I stared down at my writer's notebook in disgust. My work felt unoriginal and uninspired, leaving me with the question of how could I create such a terrible rip off? With five minutes left in class, Dr. Roth asked if anyone wanted to share their work. I looked down once more at my pieces, thinking to myself how this could ever be a valid means of creating art and knowing there was no way I would share this garbage. Then I heard my classmates share*. I heard beautiful poems that used the words of another to create vulnerable and intimate moments. Some “stole” entire refrains, others “stole” a single line. What I heard completely shifted my viewpoint on literary stealing. Their work was fresh, beautiful, and brought to life the work of these great poets in ways I never would have thought. All this led me to realize that maybe my reluctance to imitate was making me the unoriginal or uninspired one.

by Adam Carter ('25)

***FIND AN IMITATION
ON THE NEXT PAGE!**

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**SCAN TO LISTEN TO ADAM'S
PODCAST, WRITER TALKS!**



WORKS IN PROGRESS:

STUDENTS OF DR. ROTH'S FREE VERSE POETRY WORKSHOP

Sheep | Courtney Kehler | After "Sanity" by Caroline Bird

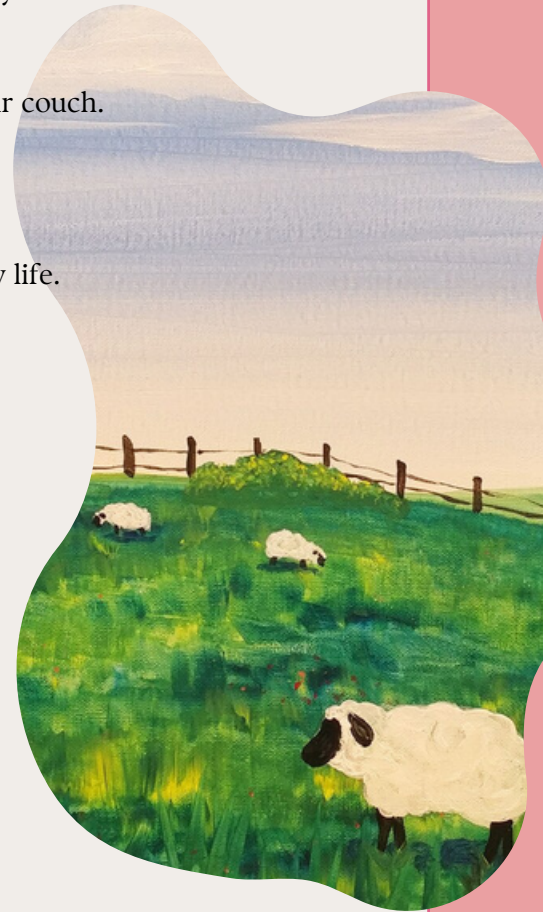
You cry.
You drive. You drive. You drive.
You enter a house that is not your house but is your house—at least for a few days.
The sheep are dots of black and white in the distance.

You run. You read novels. You sit on the couch that is not your couch but is your couch.
The sheep jump into their bins of winter grain out of pure ecstasy.
You and your mom watch jellyfish drift in aquarium tanks on Christmas Day.
You cry in the shower. You work distractedly.
The sheep amble around their pasture, fluffy and fat with the expectation of new life.
Three weeks pass.
You leave.

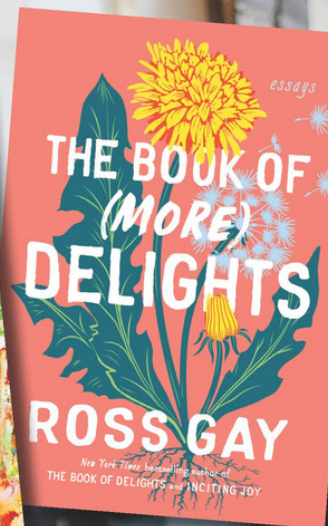
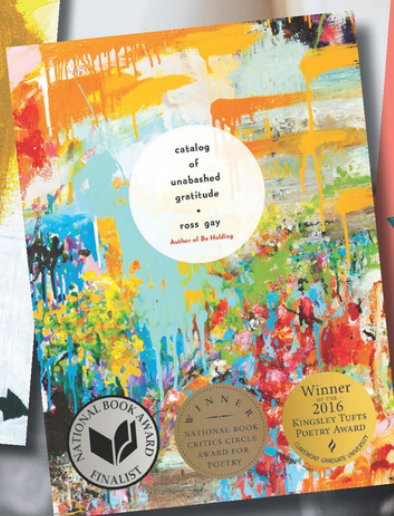
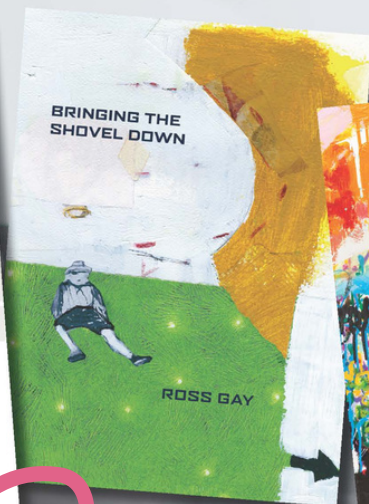
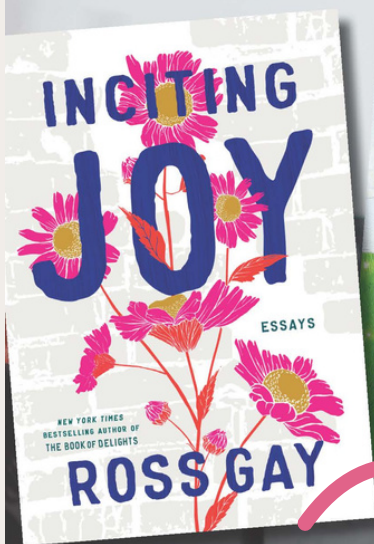
You return.
You realize that you will—probably—stay here for months instead of weeks.
The farm thaws and fills with color.
Lambs race against the setting sun for the sheer thrill of running.
You put new sheets on the bed and books on the windowsills.
Your mom puts tulips on the kitchen table that is not her table but is her table.
The baas of sheep lost to each other in the long summer grass fill your ears.

You leave and return and leave and return.
The lambs grow almost as big as their mothers.
You walk. And walk some more.
You plant flowers in the garden that is not your garden but is your garden.
You pick wild daisies. You eat blueberries just plucked from their bushes.
You make routines. You watch the maple leaves outside your bedroom window turn gold.

You try to make yourself a home that is not your home but is your home.
The sheep—incomprehensibly— eat grass.



"I modeled this poem on Caroline Bird's "Sanity," a poem we discussed in class. I sought to emulate Bird's short, choppy sentences and focus on a specific theme and period of time—for my poem, I chose to write about the year or so I have spent living on a farm. My writing process for poetry is fluid and dependent on feedback. I tinker with a first draft until I'm happy with it, and I then listen to and incorporate feedback from my peers into subsequent drafts. This is my second draft of this poem; I aimed to make the poem's story clearer and add some more concrete images in this draft, and I hope to tighten the language and incorporate feedback on it into future drafts."



Ross Gay

Ross Gay is the author of four books of poetry: *Against Which*; *Bringing the Shovel Down*; *Be Holding*, winner of the PEN American Literary Jean Stein Award; and *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude*, winner of the 2015 National Book Critics Circle Award and the 2016 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award. In addition to his poetry, Ross has released three collections of essays—*The Book of Delights* was released in 2019 and was a *New York Times* bestseller; *Inciting Joy* was released in 2022, and his newest collection, *The Book of (More) Delights* was released in September of 2023.



Wednesday
MARCH 20, 2024

Hostetter Chapel
7:00PM



DEPARTMENT OF
LANGUAGE, LITERATURE
AND WRITING