

# THE BROADSHEET



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CEREMONY SPRING  
2017

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## Fourth Annual English Awards Ceremony

The English Department conducted its fourth annual Awards Ceremony and Reception at the Writers House on Wednesday, April 26. The department inducted new members into its chapter of the Sigma Tau Delta Honor Society, issued graduation cords to its seniors, presented prizes to the top finishers in the Rev. John R. Aherne Annual Poetry Contest, and concluded by celebrating the productive careers of Professors Kevin Plunkett and Robert "Bud" Keohan. Department administrative assistant Helene Nicotra organized the event, and department chair Professor Steven Scherwatzky served as master of ceremonies.

Professor Ellen McWhorter, faculty advisor and founder of the Merrimack chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, shared with an audience consisting of about 50 students, faculty, administrators and parents her experiences chaperoning five Merrimack English majors on their trip to the annual Sigma Tau Delta conference, held this year in Louisville, Kentucky. This year's conference marked the first opportunity Professor McWhorter has had to accompany more than one student representative from our English program.

Conference presenters Jacques Denault, Dakota Durbin, Bridget Kennedy, and Catherine Tenore-Nortrup presented a slideshow documenting their adventures in Louisville. Immediately following the presentation, Aherne Poetry Contest first place winner Brianna Byam (her poem titled "Bird, On the Old Oak"), second place winner Dakota Durbin (his poem titled "Ken's Korner"), and third place winner Catherine Tenore-Nortrup (her poem titled "Noon") recited their poems for the audience.

*An official publication of the Merrimack College English Department, The Broadsheet is published four times during the academic calendar year. Its mission is to celebrate the English Department's role in promoting the literary arts on campus, to acknowledge the accomplishments of faculty and students, to profile students and alumni, and to create a forum in which issues relevant to English studies can be discussed.*

Following the Aherne readings, Professors Sherwatzky and McWhorter formally inducted into Sigma Tau Delta Brianna Byam, Christina DiMartino, Ryann Gagnon, Matthew Hyzdu, Ashley McLaughlin, Colleen Rockwell, Caitlin Saad and Brittany Shambo. Though seniors Jessica Bruso, Megan Carignan, and Emily O'Brien were unable to attend the ceremony, Brianna Byam, Jacques Denault, Victoria Lambert, Rosemary Morton, Brittany Shambo, Kileigh Stranahan, and Catherine Tenore-Nortrup received their graduation cords from Professor Scherwatzky.

Guest Speaker Duy Doan, author of the forthcoming collection of poems called *We Play a Game* and winner of the 2017 Yale Series of Younger Poets, read original works for the group, and he commented on the ways in which relations among his family members and his obsession with the sport of soccer have influenced his poetry. He advised those in the audience interested in writing to identify the things they are obsessed with and to follow them wherever they lead.

Professor Scherwatzky concluded the formal portion of the ceremony by sharing his experiences serving with Professors Plunkett and Keohan over the last 27 years. He remarked that he will always be thankful to Professor Plunkett for fuelling some of the richest spontaneous conversations about literature he has ever participated in. He also noted with great admiration that Professor Keohan, whose career at Merrimack has spanned

some 62 years as an undergraduate and then as a faculty member, continues to work as a writer for the *Wakefield Item*, published in Wakefield, Massachusetts.



**PROFESSOR SCHERWATZKY  
INDUCTS ASHLEY MCLAUGHLIN  
INTO SIGMA TAU DELTA**

**PROFESSOR SCHERWATZKY PRESENTS SENIOR JACQUES DENAULT WITH HIS GRADUATION CORD**







**PROFESSOR KEVIN PLUNKETT SET TO RETIRE AFTER 33 YEARS OF TEACHING AMERICAN LITERATURE IN OUR ENGLISH PROGRAM**

**PROFESSOR "BUD" KEOHAN WILL BE RETIRING AFTER FIVE DECADES OF TEACHING COURSES IN ENGLISH AND JOURNALISM. HE WILL BE STAYING ON TO HELP THE COLLEGE COMPLETE ITS 75TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION PROJECT.**



**CATHERINE TENORE-NORTRUP ("CAT") AND DAKOTA DURBIN PREPARE TO SHOW SLIDES FROM THE LOUISVILLE CONFERENCE.**



**BRIDGET, JACQUES, DAKOTA, AND CAT POSE AFTER THE AWARD CEREMONY.**



## Would the “Slam-Shadys” Please Stand Up!

By Rachel MacKelcan

Slam poetry, or spoken word poetry, is a popular representation of modern style poetry that allows poets to stand up and speak out for what they believe in; and here at Merrimack College our Slam poets, “The Slam Shadys,” have a great deal to say.

“We take emotions and put them into words with the idea of speaking out on topics we feel need a voice. Maybe it's a societal change, or just something we've experienced and want to share. It's a very open space and group with no judgment, and we learn a lot from listening to each other and the poems that we hear from the community.” For us as writers and as shapers of social change, this is our way to be heard, and to have a finger on the pulse of the community. For now our group is small, but every time we meet, we learn more about what it is we are doing and why—but sometimes it's the why that is the most difficult.

We like to think that, if being a poet was easy, everyone would do it and we've learned that finding out *who we are* as poets isn't always easy. In fact, it's extremely difficult sometimes; we've had some really hard conversations about what we have the right to say—things that make us uncomfort-

able because we are in the place to stand up, but we don't know if our voices, since we are only witnesses to many of those issues, will be welcomed. Talking about things like race and death, for example, means we have to be careful to empathize rather than identify.

Being in this group brings up questions about what we want to talk about and even more so, what we feel we *can* talk about. Race especially is one of those delicate issues. Here at Merrimack and especially in the writing community we aren't the most diverse. People like to think that because we have so many international students and x number of students with non-white backgrounds that we qualify as an inclusive community. However, the truth is, we aren't (and it's not a bad thing; it's just the truth). As an institution Merrimack is not nearly as diverse as it could be, and we as a team have talked about that, because when it comes to race, we can only ask questions regarding what it is like to be anything more than what we are. Slam is a safe place to talk about who we are, reflect on what we've learned in social justice classes, and what we've experienced in the community,

and what we want to say about the knowledge we've gained. So while we can not say that we know what it is like to be Latino, African American, Middle Eastern, Chinese, Japanese, Pacific Islander, or even European we find that just because we haven't lived it doesn't mean we don't want to be able to empathize with others. It does mean, however, that we have to do a little more research and make sure we say it right. The story might not be our story but it deserves to be told.

Some people think that slam poetry is just an outlet for angry people to yell, but it's so much more than that. Since the slam movement started in Chicago during the 1980s, real artists have found very real voices and since then the movement has really bloomed.

Slam has become the platform for all of us to talk more openly about Race, Sexuality, Feminism, Masculinity, Mental Illness, Illness, Wellness, Politics, Media, Philosophy, Life, and Death. It's a way for us to say the things we're often afraid to say, but as poets we need to stand up and do it.

Currently, the trend in slam poetry is relatively reserved for younger people, people like me and my team, people slightly older than us, people in minorities, and people like Neil Hilborn, who as a slam poet performs enthusiastically about his experiences with mental illness and how it has shaped him. In Hilborn's 2013 poem titled "Future," he states, "they keep telling me that seeing things that aren't technically there is called disturbed cognitive function; I call it having a superpower!" Others like Marshall Davis-Jones, write about family experiences. In his poem "spelling father," Jones tells the

story of a perfect way to lose a spelling bee when he spells "father, M-O-T-H-E-R" for all the right reasons. Others, like Savannah Brown and Melissa May, write about their battles with body image and the way the world sees them. Savannah Brown's "Hi, I'm a Slut" challenges the sexualization of women in media and Melissa May's poem, "Dear Ursula," turns the popular Disney villain into an iconic hero that she identifies with.

The great thing about what we're doing is we're learning and acting rather than just sitting on what we see—learning how to say what's on our minds, how to be constructive, how to perform, how to make the most of the syllables and the beat of the words we use. It's Battleship without the game board; it's learning strategy, form, what works and what doesn't. It's strategic wordplay at its finest.

At each meeting, we typically start with either a prompt or by watching one or more clips from artists like the ones above. The topics of what the professional poets say migrate into ours and suddenly we are met with a new kind of experience, and a new way of thinking. So far we have written over thirty poems collectively, but that number is growing every day.

Here are examples of some prompts we have already used:

- Choose a minor character in a famous story or fairytale and write from his/her perspective. (To help us see a story from another angle/point of view that we may not have thought about before)



- Take a line from a song and use it as the first line or inspiration for your poem
- Write about a scene in a photograph. What's in the picture? Who and what's outside of the frame? What's going on?
- A bunch of random emotions are written on scraps of paper and put into a bowl. Each person then randomly chooses one.

Your poem has to reflect that feeling or emotion. Don't tell others the emotion you chose and see if they can guess it.

...and from these prompts and so many more, here are some examples of what we have come up with so far:

### Bank Shot Billiards

We. lurk. late -  
 Dim. street. lights.  
 over  
 cool. pool. halls  
 Old men dwell here like bank tellers used to,  
 Pockets thick, swindlers,  
 waiting for their own kind of transaction  
 But my money,  
 is no good here - and suddenly I realize  
 I got myself locked into their vault  
 like the crypt I am meant to die in  
 Old man strikes  
 White ball.  
 White ball slides across green table  
 Clash,  
 I grab a table,  
 Men snicker  
 I know I have no place here, I move on anyway  
 Men chuckle  
 I Grab a stick  
 Man Laughs  
 Set up ball  
 crash  
 Drop my briefcase  
 He grabs me  
 White cue ball  
 clicks on pool stick



Colors go flying with a clack,  
'SMACK'  
back flat, hands held back  
And suddenly I've been charged for a service  
I had no intention of buying in the first place

### **What Insult is Worse**

You look like a grandmother in that skirt she says to me,  
she eyes me up and down as if looking over a store mannequin  
and not liking what she sees frowns at the lace hem of my skirt  
swishing around my ankles in the spring breeze  
and I am offended  
because I am too young to pick out my clothes, and my mother is always  
right.

At the recital the girl in the front row crosses her legs, black dress to her  
shins when she stands up. Another girl crosses her legs and pulls the black  
skirt down before they tell her to sit like a lady.

She complains that she is not the only one to cross her legs and her friends  
laugh and say that her skirt is too short to be lady-like in the first place. They  
snicker and call the other girl a prude.

At twelve I don't know what insult is worse.

The girls line up in the hallway, arms at our sides,  
the boys stay in class.

Ruler in hand they walk down the hallway checking to see if we have followed  
the dress code. My friend laughed in her hand-me-down skirt, two inches be-  
low the knee and two inches too long. Getting made fun of has its up sides  
she says, no one gets in trouble for being a prude.

I look at mine, dress code, at the knee, a proper length the book says,  
but they make fun of me too.

A girl down the line gets her second warning, it's too short, don't be a flirt,  
they say. God forbid someone sees the skin above your knee, God is watch-  
ing.

Deja vu years later, seventeen, arms to her sides, dress above her fingertips  
last warning, they tell her not to be provocative and call her mom

College, first week, skirt to her fingertips she left to have fun,  
provocative is the goal.

I see her in next to the police,

The tears build in her eyes as she looks at me and says that he called her  
a whore before beating her

I hear them say she was asking for it.

She wasn't.

Aside from the harder hitting topics, the team has also developed topics like "Black Holes, Galaxies, Hi I'm Blonde, Recipes," and so much more that all incorporate strong original voices into powerful pieces.

So far I think everyone can agree that the team has come a long way. We've worked hard. Tapped into a lot of really raw energy, but often times the best poems have come out of that kind of energy. A typical day looks like this: walking into the Writers House at 5:15 on Tuesdays, then sitting down with our faculty advisor Danielle Jones-Pruett for a fifteen-minute lesson, followed by a prompt. We will then most likely avoid that prompt for about ten minutes while we settle in, at which point we will finally focus and go to our corners where we will write in silence for fifteen to twenty minutes. When the writing has concluded, we will talk about the prompt a bit—what was easy to pull out and what was difficult. We'll talk about what it was that made it so easy or difficult to get ideas on a page, then one of us will volunteer to read. The reading process isn't hard, but putting ourselves out there, even in front of our closest friends, hasn't gotten easier for all of us.

We would be lying if it all didn't still make us nervous. But it's worth it. Performing in public, however: that's another story entire-

ly. Since starting the slam team, "The Slam Shadys" have been involved in two competitions, both times against Salem State, both times at the Massachusetts Poetry Festival in Salem, where we battled for bragging rights (because we haven't gotten a trophy yet.) While our competitions in the past have been more like readings, at which one team goes after the other until all poets have performed, a traditional Poetry Slam works a bit differently. In a traditional Poetry Slam the rules entail the following:

Poetry slams are judged by a panel, typically five members picked from the audience or the entire audience as a whole will be given a vote depending on the slam. Competitors will be judged by their pieces as well as their performances. According to PoetrySlam.com, "Winning a poetry slam requires some measure of skill and a huge dose of luck. The judges' tastes, the audience's reactions, and the poets' performances all shape a slam event, and what wins one week might not get a poet into the second round the next week. There's no formula for winning a slam, although you become a better poet and performer the same way you get to Carnegie Hall – practice, practice, practice." In major competitions, large cash prizes are awarded to the victors, but our monetary compensation has yet to be decided.





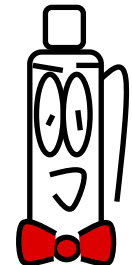
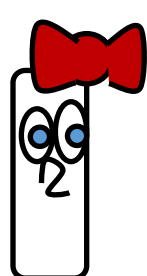

Right now, we have six members, one faculty advisor, and we meet once a week with new prompts each time to draft new material. Every product from the session is then read aloud and given soft critique to build on the powerful images of the piece. Once we have found one to three pieces that speak to us strongly we workshop them until we can decide which one will be our competition selection. Right now, as a team we compete in one competition annually, which always falls on the same weekend as the Massachusetts Poetry Festival. Over the past two years we have all worked to grow the program, add members, and make the competition more significant. In the past the competition was held in Salem at the Mass Poetry Fes-

tival against the Salem State Slam Team; this year, however, we will compete against three teams. As a team we assume this year will be the greatest turnout since the start of the club two years ago and will hopefully attract more faculty and fellow students, but ultimately we really just love to have this chance to express ourselves.

**UPDATE:** on Friday, May 5, the “Slam Shadys” took second place at the Massachusetts Poetry Festival! The team competed using four poems against three other schools teams.

A response to a scholarly paper stating that John Green’s presence on social media launched the careers of two young adult authors

### ***Panelists’ Perspectives on Female Young Adult Authors***

				
<p>JK Rowling</p>	<p>Mary Shelley</p>	<p>Sigma Tau Delta</p>	<p>Penny Pennyworth</p>	<p>John Green</p>
<p>“I never needed a man. I wanted to make my own magic.”</p>	<p>“If getting into this business was as easy as building a monster all young Franksteins would do it. I built my career one part at a time with little help from Percy”</p>	<p>“Young adult fiction is a male dominated industry. It forces brilliant authors to exist under surnames just to get published! Women should be able to produce without the help of any man in this industry”</p>	<p>“I wish John Green would tweet about my books.... But then again, no man has ever been able to fuel or curtail my success. I earned all of that on my own.”</p>	<p>“Your interpretations suggest that my presence on twitter made some young woman's career. I just liked the book. She earned her right to publish herself!”</p>

## The Eighties: Literature, Film, Music and Fun

By: Rosemary Morton

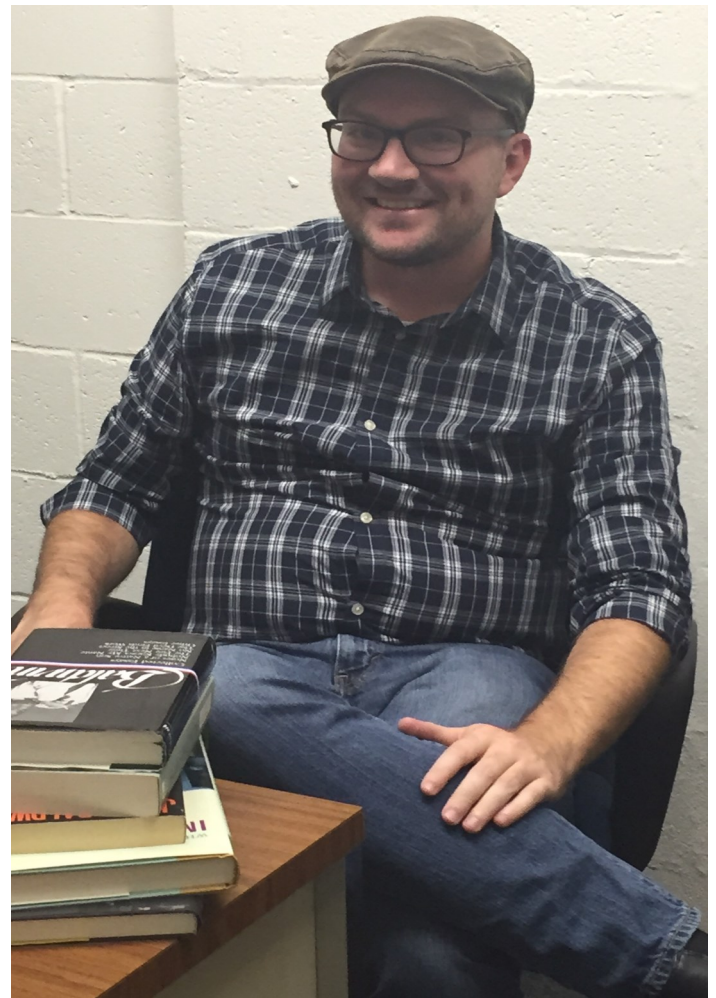
For those who are looking for a great course, I would recommend a new hybrid offered by the English Department called The Eighties: Literature, Film, and Culture in the Blockbuster Era. This course combines everything English majors love.

Taught by Professor Joseph Vogel, The Eighties illuminates many different cultural norms that characterized that decade, a time that introduced blockbuster films, music that today continues to find air time, and literature that inspired popular novels, such as the *Hunger Games*.

The required workload involves watching films and reading novels, and students compose written responses to course texts every week. I asked Professor Vogel for a progress report on the course and he noted that some unforeseen challenges have emerged. “I think the biggest challenge for this course has been that we have a wide range of student abilities when it comes to reading and responding to texts,” he said. “The course counts as an upper-level elective, which usually means it will be comprised of mostly English majors, who are a bit more advanced. Our class, however, only has about 8-9 English majors out of 26 students; the rest are from different fields. So the challenge is trying to equip some of those other students and find ways to get them to participate, while maintaining the rigor and depth expected of English majors”.

The Eighties connects with undergraduates, because its art lingers and students relate to the material fairly easily; much of it continues to surface in contemporary popular culture. For example, stations still play songs such as “Man in the Mirror” and “Like a Prayer” on the radio and many of my friends know how to perform them on their musical instruments. Many of us still marvel at the amazing storytelling capabilities of films we have studied, such as *Back to the Future* and *E.T.* One film that struck a chord with our class in general was *Dirty Dancing*. As Professor Vogel mentioned in my interview with him, *Dirty Dancing* was “one of our best class discussions.” I was familiar with the storyline prior to viewing it in class, because

I had seen a stage adaptation of *Dirty Dancing* performed at the Boston Opera House. Our class discussion zeroed in on the film’s exploration of gender role expectations and, because the story was not new to me, it was interesting to witness the reactions of my classmates. Some students did not like the film, which fuelled discussion of elements from the movie I had not noticed. I found all of this controversy refreshing because most of the people I know outside of our class group had told me they had enjoyed the film.



Assistant Professor Joseph Vogel

Obviously, we have also been examining literary works produced during the Eighties. For individuals who enjoy the dystopian subgenre, this is a great course to take. We have read novels that influenced writers today, such as Suzanne Collins, the author of the *Hunger Games*. I particularly enjoyed Stephen King's *The Running Man*, a possible inspiration for the *Hunger Games*. The novels share similar plot lines. Both feature a deadly competition sponsored by the government. Suzanne Collins has come under fire because the novels' plots were so similar. As a fan of her books, I was intrigued to read another narrative that might have given Collins the push she needed to write her famous serial. Such connections are important to the class, because they demonstrate just how influential the Eighties were and how that historical moment connects to our current culture.

We also discussed the novel *White Noise* by Don DeLillo. Professor Vogel refers to the book as "the hardest novel on the syllabus" and says that he is very interested in how students "digest it." He told me he hopes "people are up for this challenge". For me, this novel did prove to be one of the most difficult to get into; however, it connects extremely well to many of the issues we have interrogated in class, especially the role played by media and the contributions these outlets makes to our perceptions of violence. It was thought-provoking, because it made me view the news far more skeptically. Because the socio-political contours of the Eighties remain related to our own, the course enabled me to look at our current political situation and understand better the relevance of earlier iterations of issues involving gender, race, class and technology.

Many of the narratives we read feature equivocal endings that invoked heavy discussion in the classroom. One of the most interesting discussions occurred the last day we discussed *White Noise*, when the group debated how we should interpret the story's conclusion.

Professor Vogel also shared with me adjustments he plans to make that will improve the course next time he teaches it. One such change "will actually be spending more time on the song lyrics. The 80s are such a rich period for music. The songs really exemplify and speak to what was going on".

Once he makes this adjustment, students will be able to see how music influenced other forms of media, notably film soundtracks. As someone who has always loved theater and musicals, I know I would like to have the opportunity to examine the overlap between these two forms of artistic expression.

The Eighties has been one of my favorite courses at Merrimack. This course makes a great addition to the English program offerings, because it focuses on a very recent cultural moment. The Eighties is fairly similar to other English courses in many respects because we analyze and discuss textual material; however, because it is recent, The Eighties seems to illuminate more connections to our current world. I highly recommend this course because the material can be seen in multiple ways and it is extremely fun to discuss components that prevail in creative media today.





# INTO THE CRYPTS AND MIST: A LOOK AT THE UNDEAD 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

BY: KILEIGH STRANAHAN

Last fall, when I was going through the English Course offerings, searching for the final English class to take in order to complete my major, my heart stopped at the title “The Undead Eighteenth Century.” Something about this mysterious title triggered my interest, because, honestly, I had no inkling as to what it might entail. Ghosts? Graveyards? Zombies? I’m in.

I soon learned that maybe it wasn’t about zombies. But I still thought the supernatural aspects of the course and the blurring of distinctions within Gothic literature sounded like something that would be right up my alley. I signed up with no hesitation. When I asked Professor Scherwatzky why he designed this particular course, he said, “This material is great fun. It touches on issues that really matter to the students, like gender, family, and faith, but with unsettling twists. It really attempts to come to terms with that which we don’t immediately understand.”

Having now taken the course, I would echo everything Professor Scherwatzky said. We began the course with Graveyard poetry, including Thomas Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, Robert Blair’s *The Grave*, and Thomas Parnell’s *A Night Piece on Death*. Each of these poems contains their own gothic elements and messages. All of them address the matter of death, burial, and the afterlife. Graveyard poets tackle the fear of death and anxiety towards what might come after. In *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, my personal favorite of the graveyard poems, Thomas Gray delivers the message that death is the great leveler. No matter who you are in life, whether you’re rich or poor, male or female, educated, or uneducated, we are all going to end up in the same place, six feet under ground.

After finishing with graveyard poetry, we read Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*. This philosophical essay established the elements of the sublime,



which became some of the main tropes in Gothic literature such as terror, obscurity, power, privation, and darkness. Edmund Burke wrote that something could only truly be terrifying if it is obscure or unclear in some way. As a class, we began to see this for ourselves when we started reading the gothic novels.

We began with *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole and then read *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe and *The Monk* by Matthew Lewis. At the very beginning of *The Castle of Otranto*, a large supernatural helmet falls on and kills the young heir to the property on his wedding day. From this scene on, the reader is left with the anxious sensation that the castle is coming alive and taking fate into its own hands. In Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the biggest source of anxiety and terror is the possibility of what could happen to the protagonist, Emily St. Aubert, who is held against her will in a ruined castle by her heinous step-uncle. But whereas in Radcliffe’s novel all apparently supernatural



occurrences ultimately have a rational explanation, Lewis's *The Monk* defies logic and holds nothing back. The fear many of the characters feel is very real. The corrupt Monk, Ambrosio, is capable of great evil and turns out to be under Satan's spell. Each of these novels contain gothic elements like darkness, obscurity, isolation and fear. However, the authors portray their version of the gothic in different ways and for their own literary purposes.

In his *Enquiry*, Edmund Burke establishes the distinctions between the sublime and the beautiful that many 18<sup>th</sup> century authors adapt in their gothic works. Ann Radcliffe, however, differentiates horror and terror for her readers. She says while terror is an expansion of the soul, horror is a contraction. According to Radcliffe, we feel terror in anticipation of something dreadful, whereas we experience horror when we see what we dread before us. For example, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* relies on terror, while *The Monk* mainly implements horror. The characters in *The Monk* face clear and present danger, while the characters in the other novels' fears are often generated by what they do not know. This distinction is relevant in each of the Gothic novels we studied and is satirized in the final novel we read, *Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen. *Northanger Abbey* provides a humorous retort to this distinction by exploring how the protagonist, Catherine Morland, lives in hopeful – and sometimes fearful – expectation that her life will mirror the gothic novels she loves to read.

My absolute favorite part of this course, however, was the discussion of gothic elements in popular culture today. Each student in this course chose a genre of music, a book, a television show, a movie, or anything that contains aspects of the gothic that we have identified. Most horror movies or films have adopted 18<sup>th</sup>-century gothic tropes, often in familiar ways but sometimes in ways that we don't always recognize at first glance. Students presented on a range of topics, including television shows like *Stranger Things* and *American Horror Story*, movies such as *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *The Phantom of the Opera*, to musical genres such as Southern Gothic.

Personally, I presented on a Netflix show, *Supernatural*, that I had binge-watched last semester. I watched this show before taking this course and really had no clue what “gothic” was, except for a fashion trend of wearing all black. However, once in the class, I immediately started making connections to this show. Obviously, *Supernatural* contains many supernatural elements, hence the name. However, I hadn't realized until now how it uses the tactic of obscurity to generate terror in both the characters and the viewer. The settings of the show are often very gothic places like graveyards or very poorly lit locations. The scenes are frequently shot at night, and often the person who is being haunted is isolated and alone.

Professor Scherwatzky hopes that his students take away from this course, “a greater appreciation of the ways in which the past shapes who we are today and how the popular entertainment we enjoy tells us something about our deepest fears.” I definitely think that “The Undead Eighteenth Century” has done exactly that. Not only is the Gothic literature we read extremely entertaining and chock-full of supernatural elements and creepy scenarios, but it provoked us to study our favorite forms of entertainment and examine the different elements that have origins in the English 18<sup>th</sup> century. If you love scary movies, supernatural activity, or any literature that includes drama or scandal, I would highly recommend taking “The Undead 18<sup>th</sup> Century.” You may never look at your favorite show the same way again, but you definitely won't regret it.



## From the Department File Cabinet: Alumni Perspectives

Jessica Furtado

Class of '12

**What kind of professional work have you been doing since graduation?**

"My career path is a bit varied and non-traditional. While in college, I started my small business All You Need is Pug, a handmade line of pet accessories. I intended for this to be a way to make ends meet while I was an undergraduate, but it took off and I have continued developing this business. Since graduation, All You Need is Pug has appeared in InTouch Magazine, Daily Mail, and Fortune, among others. Aside from my work as a fashion designer for pets, I am also a freelance photographer and writer who publishes under the pseudonym JJ Lynne. I am Co-Editor of Poetry for the literary magazine Paper Nautilus, and I also work part-time as Early Literacy Librarian at Middleton's Flint Public Library. I will be opening my second small business as a photographer later this year."



**To what extent has the English major helped you do this work?**

"Being an English major taught me to be creative and analytical, both of which are valuable skills in any field. Above all, studying English made me an effective communicator and marketer. The skills I garnered while studying at Merrimack have allowed me to create strong branding for all of my business endeavors, and to convey my ideas in a way that engages potential customers. As a creative writer, I particularly value my background in English. The professors at Merrimack were incredibly encouraging, but they weren't afraid to show tough love when they knew that I could produce better work. I was at Merrimack before the Creative Writing concentration and Writers House were available to students, but the English Department faculty still managed to push me in the right direction and help pave the path for the published writer that I am today."

**Have you earned any advanced degrees since your undergraduate graduation? If so, what are they? If not, do you plan to pursue graduate study in the future?**

"I had hoped to pursue my MFA in Creative Writing. I applied to and was accepted by several graduate programs, but after a lot of thinking and seeking advice from mentors, I decided to turn these opportunities down. I was surprised when several former professors told me that I was better off not adding more to my student debt. The best advice I received was from former Merrimack adjunct professor Daniel Bosch. When I called him panicked over which decision to make, he basically said that if I have the drive and talent, an MFA may not be necessary. He recommended that I continue to write, attend readings and retreats, and find fellow creatives to inspire me and keep me accountable for my writing. I am grateful for this advice. While I still toy with the idea of entering an MFA program, I will only do so if the education system evolves and provides better financial support for individuals seeking to further their education."

**What did you like best about the Merrimack English major?**

"Having the opportunity to read and discuss so many formative books. Class discussions taught me to be a better listener and gave me the confidence to open up about my own perspectives."

**What advice would you give current English majors?**

"Don't underestimate the value of your own creativity. Where you imagine yourself in 5 or even 10 years may not be where you end up, and that's okay. Rely on your intuition and imagination to lead you in life and in your career, and know that what's right for your peers may not be what works for you, so don't bother to size yourself up against others. Your happiness should be your only gauge for success!"

## Christopher Cummings

Class of '96

### **What kind of professional work have you been doing since graduation?**

"I've worked in a diverse assortment of technology companies, most of them consumer-focused — ranging from online games to online loyalty programs to mobile apps. My journey started in content marketing, moved to community management, and then for the last 15 years I've worked in product management."

### **To what extent has the English major helped you?**

"My studies as an English major have been extremely helpful in my career. To be a successful product manager, you need to be able to communicate effectively, think critically and creatively, and work well under pressure. Being an English major helped me develop skills on all those fronts. While there is a growing emphasis on video and imagery in our personal lives thanks to social media, in the business world written communication is king, which makes writing skills of paramount importance. As an English major, you learn how to read between the lines, deciphering tone and intent of inbound communication, and also to write with precision, with an audience and call to action in mind, for outbound communications. English majors learn pretty quickly to never accept a story at face value, to always question and dig deeper to understand what's truly being said. Learning how to understand different points of view, construct an argument rooted in logic and evidence, and then present your argument effectively — these are all skills that I use every day at work, and having developed those skills as an English major has given me a competitive advantage at work. As a product manager, you need discipline to get your work done. You need to be able to prioritize to make sure you address the most important things first. You have to often adjust your schedule quickly to address rapidly changing situations. English majors learn how to generate high quality work quickly, sometimes with very little warning. We learn how to balance reading 500 page novels while writing 30-page papers and handling a number of short-term assignments."



### **Have you earned any advanced degrees since your undergraduate graduation? If so, what are they? If not, do you plan to pursue graduate study in the future?**

"After graduation, I earned my MBA to help build up my business acumen."

### **What did you like best about the Merrimack English major?**

"I loved how my professors encouraged and challenged me. I never did learn to like Victorian poetry but I'm glad I studied it."

### **What advice would you give current English majors?**

"Some people argue that an English major is only worthwhile if you intend to be a teacher or a journalist. Nothing against either of those professions, but that argument is without merit. Be passionate about your degree, learn as much as you can, take advantage of any internships that are available, and everything will fall into place."



## John Moreschi

Class of '08

**What kind of professional work have you been doing since graduation?**

"I am currently an Assistant Counsel in the Massachusetts Senate's Office of Senate Counsel. Before that, I worked as Counsel for Congresswoman Katherine Clark, first in her Massachusetts Senate office and then in the U.S House of Representatives."

**To what extent has the English major helped you do this work?**

"It has helped a lot. Writing a legal memo or policy memo is practically identical to writing an English paper; they all come down to identifying a theme, analyzing information to back it up and clearly explaining the argument for it."



**Have you earned any advanced degrees since your undergraduate graduation? If so, what are they? If not, do you plan to pursue graduate study in the future?**

"I have a J.D. From Boston College Law School."

**What did you like best about the Merrimack English major?**

"It was a nice excuse to read a lot."

**What advice would you give current English majors?**

"My big advice for anyone in school, not just English majors, is to intern as much as possible. It's the best way to (1) learn what you would actually enjoy as a career, (2) meet people who can act as mentors and (3) position yourself to get the job you want once you've graduated."

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Interviews were conducted by Dakota Durbin.





# The Sigma Tau Adventure

By Bridget Kennedy



Several weeks ago, five members of the Merrimack College chapter of Sigma Tau Delta flew to Louisville, Kentucky to present at our first academic conference. This is a follow-up to the article I wrote for the last issue of *The Broadsheet*. To write the sequel, I asked my co-presenters to check back in and share experiences from the trip. Though we were well prepared for the presentations, it felt surreal reading in front of academic peers and then watching as strangers engaged us about our papers. For my part, the opportunity to present and also explore a new city made it well worth the week of editing and all the time it took to write the paper in the first place. Life lesson: hard work really will pay off in a big way.

## Dakota Durbin

This was the first scholarly convention that I have attended and my first paper presentation. It was a genuinely amazing experience, from the travel to Kentucky

as part of an English major entourage to the individual sessions at which we presented. Being surrounded by peers whose passion for literature and writing matched my own was something that was truly special and inspiring. I read my paper at a session specifically focused on close-readings of Shakespeare and listening to fellow panelists was so humbling and comforting because these were people my own age who were interested in the same kind of texts and ideas that I have become passionate about. I learned so much and their papers were so well articulated and intriguing; I was surprised at the fact that, instead of feeling unworthy to present in the same room with them, I felt proud that I qualified to share the podium. When I stepped up and began to read my work to an attentive audience I instantly felt like I had stepped in to join that ongoing conversation about literature I had heard and read about. It was a surreal moment for me. More than anything, I want to continue reading and writing, so that I can stand up at that podium again. I urge all those who have the opportunity to speak and be heard to do it. You will find it liberating; it is an experience I now hold dear.



## Rachel MacKelcan

For me, the best part of the conference was finding my passion again. It was sitting in sessions, local hangouts, the bar where F. Scott Fitzgerald was inspired to write *The Great Gatsby*, and playing a rather horribly executed round of pool where I was finally able to get out of my everyday rut and just be myself again. As an English major, and more importantly, as a writer, I spend a lot of time stuck in my own head, wondering if what I have to say is institutionally correct; but there I stood reading the most unconventional of papers and I was suddenly able to see that the people that laughed when I began were amazed and impressed when I finished. For me, the greatest part of Louisville wasn't the conference, the acceptance, the cool pubs, or even the chicken and waffles. The greatest part of Louisville was feeling and hearing my heartbeat again. From there I was able to start thinking again, really thinking, about what it all means to be a writer, a scholar, and in the case of many pieces I heard, a woman in this field.

**Bridget and Rachel waiting to present at the Modernist Coming of Age panel**



## Catherine Tenore-Nortrup

I'll admit that at first the thought of going to an international conference made me nervous, but it turned out to be one of the best academic experiences that I've ever had. Most people attending the conference were either presenting papers or chairing events, which made it fairly easy to get to know other attendees. It was also nice to know that everyone there had something in common. Presenting was a lot of fun in that we got to talk about subjects that we love with other people who were passionate about the same thing, people who cared enough to want to know more or question your thoughts. I also feel really lucky to have gone with such a great group of people; everyone was eager to see what the conference had to offer. The moment we landed in Louisville everyone was looking for events to attend and places to go. During the day we went to different analytical and creative panels, and then we explored the city in our free time, going everywhere from a small pool hall to the hotel at which F. Scott Fitzgerald worked. Overall, it was a great experience and my only regret is that I won't get to go again next year!



**Cat chats with fellow panelists at the Nature Poetry panel**



## Jacques Denault

The conference was an amazing experience, both as a student, and a writer. Seeing the other presentations, as well as listening to the other panelists in my own session, gave me so many new ideas, and new ways of looking at old ones. The subjects ranged from Gothic literature in the age of the computer, and what stories do for video games, to classic points of conversation, like Shakespeare, or Chaucer (and yes, even Milton). However, I have to say that much of the experience was not from the convention itself, but the exploration and bonding that the group of us shared on our trip. Whether it was getting "Lost" looking for a billiards hall, or stumbling onto restaurant after restaurant, the experience brought everyone in the group so much closer, and even though I've only gone this one year, it will be an experience that I will miss each year going forward.

Jacques performs an original poem at the Creative Poetry Submissions panel



## Bridget Kennedy

So, I've made it far enough in my academic career not only to attend an academic conference, but to have the incredible opportunity to have a paper accepted for presentation. This year's Sigma Tau Delta International Honors Society Conference in Louisville was the reason behind so many of these firsts in my life. As I said, it was my first time at a conference and presenting a paper. It was also my first time off the East Coast, and my first time flying. Honestly, I was way more nervous about navigating the airport and catching flights than I was about presenting. As silly as this might sound, I felt so grown up in a way, as all those creative stories I told at sharing time in preschool culminated in the sharing of my own literary analysis. Hearing the presenters in some of the other sections made me feel like a part of a larger discussion on works I have read, and I enjoyed hearing about poems and stories I hadn't read yet to discover new additions to my academic reading list.

I loved touring Louisville; it is an amazing city! There is so much to do, and even though we packed those four days full of restaurants, adventure, and conference activities, I still can't wait to go back and continue exploring (and enjoying more hot browns and chicken & waffles). We found a pool hall built in an old bank and discovered how terrible we all are at the game, followed a restaurant passport tour all the way to the hotel that inspired *The Great Gatsby*, and visited an Insta-famous doughnut shop to try out crazy flavors like Captain Crunch and bacon.

Seeing the city was a personal victory and reward for being brave enough to submit and present a paper. This trip also provided a chance to relax for a few days, take some time to refocus, and use that renewed sense of adventure to fuel the rest of the semester. I have been bitten by the travel bug and can't wait to use that to my advantage when writing and figuring out what I want in my future.



Jacques, Cat, and Dakota attending Rachel's and Bridget's Panel.



Bridget, Rachel, Jacques, Cat, and Dakota at the Troll Pub Under the Bridge (yes, it's really in a dungeon/basement under a bridge!)

## The Broadsheet Production Staff

Dakota Durbin

Bridget Kennedy

Rachel MacKelcan

Rosemary Morton

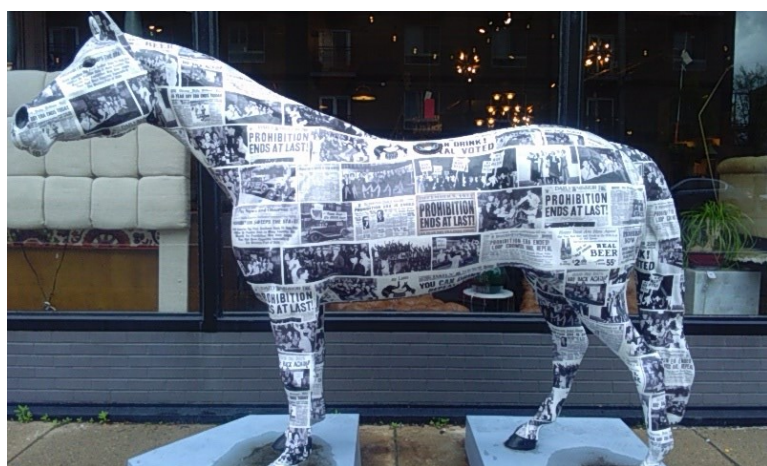
Kileigh Stranahan

## Faculty Editor

Professor Paul Vatalaro



Rachel, Jacques, Bridget, and Cat outside the Seelbach Hotel, where F. Scott Fitzgerald was inspired to write "The Great Gatsby"



One of many themed horse statues found in Louisville. This one, in front of a print shop, is covered in newspaper headlines from when Prohibition was repealed in the city of bourbon!