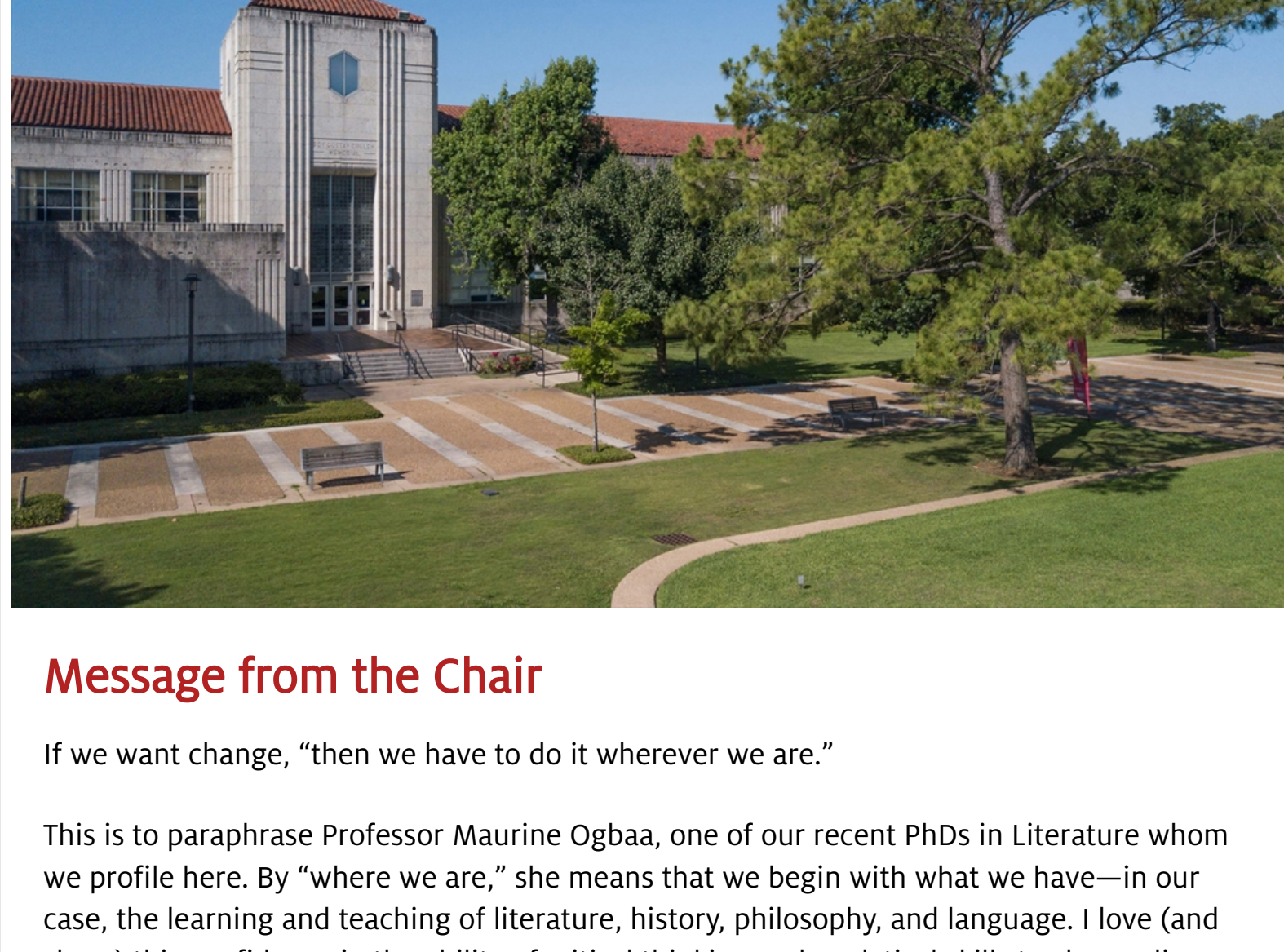


FORUM The Newsletter of the UH Department of English



Message from the Chair

If we want change, "then we have to do it wherever we are."

This is to paraphrase Professor Maurine Ogbaa, one of our recent PhDs in Literature whom we profile here. By "where we are," she means that we begin with what we have—in our case, the learning and teaching of literature, history, philosophy, and language. I love (and share) this confidence in the ability of critical thinking and analytical skills to change lives and the world. With these arts and skills that are the basis of our shared work, we train new generations of writers and scholars who can make good things happen. In this mission, we are fortunate to have friends.

This issue showcases two brilliant components of the life of the English Department—our outstanding majors and graduate students and our forward-thinking, inspiring donors. These folks make change from "where they are"—as beneficiaries of great teaching, as teachers themselves, and caretakers of the communal. In the pages that follow, students report the high impact of the monetary and experiential awards they have earned and donors and visaries explain their reasons for supporting our department. You will learn of beloved emeriti faculty in whose names grateful colleagues and students have created scholarships; of donors from within and outside the department, whose generosity has changed lives; and of talented and deserving students whose experiences with these awards and internships have strengthened self-confidence, led to career pathways, and solidified connections to UH and to English. I am so proud of this issue because I am proud to witness the magic that happens in these matchups.

Look for more stories like this in issues of *Forum* to come because we have other scholarships and awards to showcase and many outstanding students to celebrate. May you, too, become part of the story!

-Ann Christensen

The Rowan Foundation Internship Program and Creative Writing Competition

The Alexandra L. Rowan Memorial Foundation provides special relationship with the Department of English, having [endowed a number of creative writing prizes and literary internships](#) that are awarded annually. The Foundation honors the memory of Alex Rowan, who graduated from the University of Pittsburgh with a double major in English and Communications and died from a Massive Pulmonary Embolism (MPE). The foundation's two main goals are to assist students who share Alex's love of language and literature, and to prevent the loss of more young women to MPE.

The Rowan family recognizes that Alex's summer internships and work experience as an undergraduate helped her find employment shortly after she graduated from Pitt. The Foundation's Creative Writing Support program aims to help UH students replicate this model by funding students to work as interns. The funds students receive make the internships equivalent to a typical summer job; students are therefore able to gain valuable relevant experience while simultaneously earning money to help cover tuition and other university costs. This past summer, the Foundation supported eight UH English undergraduates through the internships with non-profit organizations in education, the arts, as well as commercial advertising and publishing agencies.

English majors thrive across public and private sectors, thanks to the critical thinking skills and rhetorical abilities an education in the humanities engenders. The Rowans recognize the value of those skills, and this funding allows students who might not otherwise be able to pursue unpaid internships the opportunity to do so. The Foundation works with UH via the writing competition they sponsor and by their "Bodiface Initiative" that generously supports creative writing students' attendance at the annual [spring undergraduate writing conference](#) organized by the department's outstanding literary journal, [Glass Mountain](#). For Foundation directors David and Roz Rowan, "the most meaningful [venture] is the internship program that allows students to gain real world experience. This builds their resumes and is guaranteed to improve their chances of finding work post-graduation."

Mr. Alfonso Reyes, who interned with [Gulf Coast: A Journal of Literature and Fine Arts](#), reported, "I am now more than ever sure that I want to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing and then go on to work in publishing. . . . I have realized what an amazing and rare opportunity it is to see so much work from so many emerging writers; I would like to do [this] for the rest of my life."

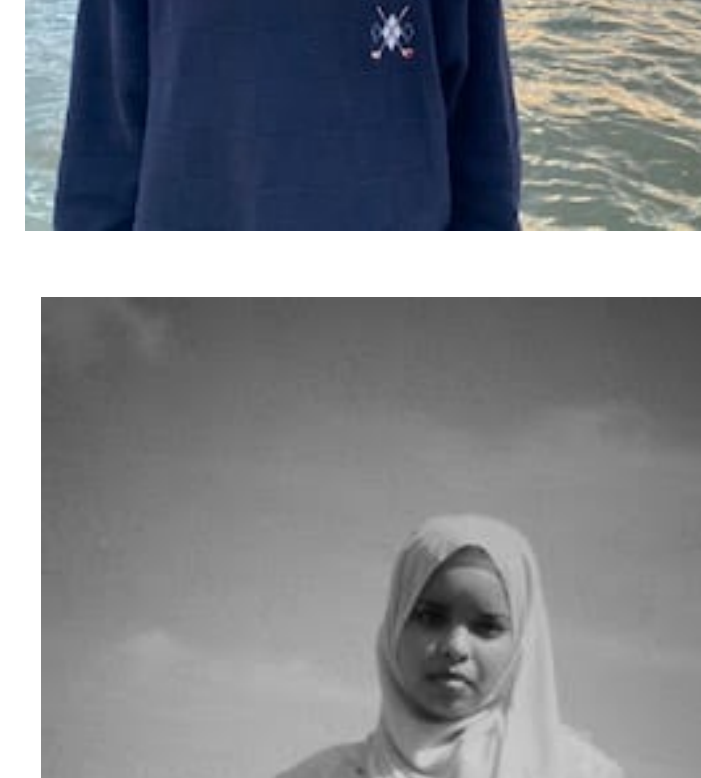
Ms. Shuruq N. Gyagenda, a self-described "aspiring educator" with no formal training in educational institutions, interned with the [Writers in the Schools \(WITS\)](#) Creative Writing Camp. For Gyagenda, the camp "was the perfect first-impression [of an educational setting] for fun, engaging, and empowering learning and teaching." By the end of the internship, she began the process of securing Associate Teacher positions with the Houston-Independent-School District (HISD) and another program.

In addition to the internship program and the Bodiface Conference, the Foundation also supports the [Rowan Writing Competition](#), for which monetary prizes are awarded to undergraduate UH students in the three categories of Fiction, Non-Fiction, and Poetry. Forum is honored to announce the 2021 Rowan Writing Competition winners and honorable mentions:

Poetry

Winner, Gavin Caterina for his poem, "[Heart-Shaped Poem](#)."

Gavin Caterina is a first-year student at University of Houston, who intends to major in English, hoping to enter the creative writing concentration in the fall. He enjoys reading fiction and playing soccer with his family. On book recommendations, he offers up "Spring Snow" by Yukio Mishima.

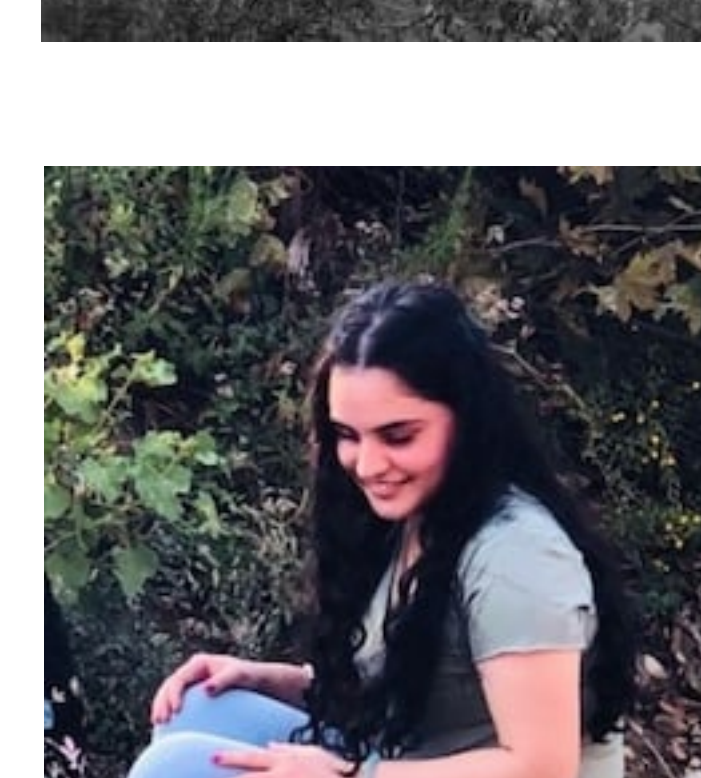


Honorable Mentions:
Michelle Garcia, "El Hombre de la Casa" Jack Morillo, "Tapos / Tapos"
Alfonso Reyes, "Ghazal Concerning Self-Preservation"

Fiction

Winner, Rana Mohamad for her short story, "[The Tiger in the Bathtub](#)."

Rana Mohamad is a senior at the University of Houston, majoring in English with a Creative Writing concentration and a minor in History with plans to pursue an MFA and publish short stories, poems and memoirs. She believes that, through storytelling, a writer can live many lives and explore a variety of questions, all indicative of the human condition. She is especially interested in lyrical fiction and migrant narratives.

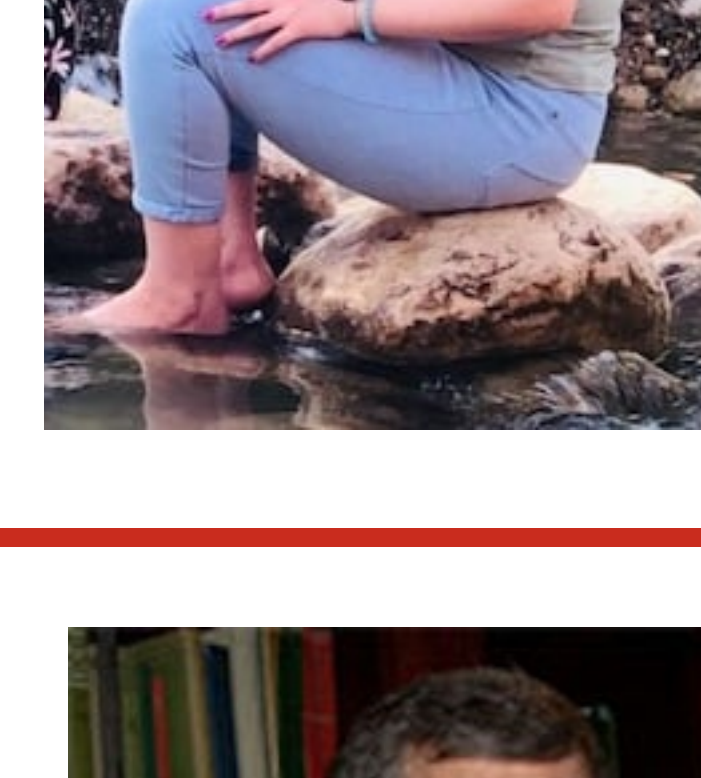


Honorable Mentions:
Kaunain Khan, "August Blues"
Jack Morillo, "Alyssa Linatto is Throwing Up"
Jacob Myers, "The Gates of Greymoor"

Non-Fiction

Winner, Shireen Hasan for her essay, "[The lost souls of Shingal](#)."

Shireen Hasan, an aspiring writer/poet, was born in Iraq and raised in Texas. Growing up Yazidi, a religious minority in Iraq, she uses her writing to understand more about her own culture and connect to the cultures surrounding her. Writing is music to her and something she continues to use to express herself and understand the world around her. She would rather the ink speak for her, for it has more to say.



Honorable Mentions:
Alexis Artega, "Three Things (Love in the Time of Corona)"
Gavin Caterina, "The Ladybug of the Bronx"
Mike Clarks, "Baldwin the Bull"

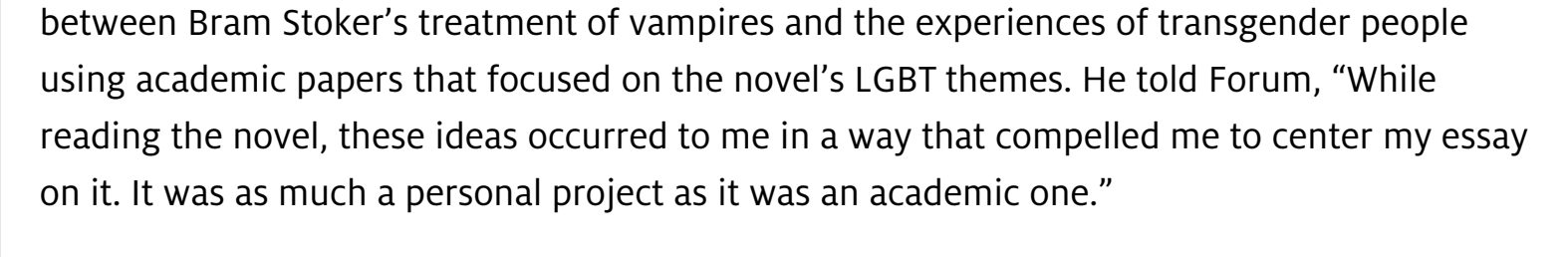
The Rob and Jennifer Reichek Undergraduate Scholarship Honoring Dr. James Pipkin

The Department of English awards scholarships and prizes annually to our talented undergraduate students at the Honors Day celebration in May. Students are encouraged to apply for the Rob and Jennifer Reichek Scholarship Honoring Dr. James Pipkin (\$4000), the Jimmie Katherine Morris Gentle Scholarship in Literary Criticism (\$1000), as well as Creative Writing prizes awarded in different genres. These [competitive awards](#) are adjudicated by Dr. Cedric Tolliver, Director of the Upper Division Committee, chair Dr. Ann Christensen, as well as a panel of faculty members. This process of reading and celebrating excellent student work is rewarding for faculty members and the student body alike. Tolliver spoke poignantly about the importance of these student prizes: "At a moment in history when human existence would be reduced to little more than an endless, life-destroying cycle of production and consumption, these awards signal to our students that there is indeed something of value in the slow and attentive work of serious reflection and thoughtful communication."

The Reichek Scholarship is open to all English Majors concentrating in Literary Studies who are enrolled in or have completed ENGL 3301; it recognizes an essay submitted in that class. The award was honored in honor of Emeritus Professor Pipkin (pictured above on the right), who was endowed as a "Top Prof" at the University of Houston on five occasions and received also teaching awards from Sigma Delta Tau and the State of Texas. The winner of the 2020 Robert and Jennifer Reichek Scholarship was Mr. Owen Larson (pictured above on the left) for his essay, "Trans Fear and the Damsel Hero of Dracula." Larson's essay analyzes the Gothic novel, *Dracula*, in relation to changing/uncommon gender norms and considers the similarities between Bram Stoker's treatment of vampires and the experiences of transgender people using academic papers that focused on the novel's LGBT themes. He told Forum, "While reading the novel, these ideas occurred to me in a way that compelled me to center my essay on it. It was as much a personal project as it was an academic one."

English 3301 instructor Dr. Lynn Voskuil encouraged him to apply for the Reichek award after reading his essay: "Owen's work shows a sophisticated awareness of literary conventions and language as well as the cultural frameworks that contextualize literature. Also impressive is Owen's ability to integrate both primary textual evidence and arguments from secondary sources into his writing. His work shows a student practicing these skills impressively and finding his stride in the process of crafting a significant argument."

Though he worked hard to write the essay of which he was duly proud, Larson expressed surprise that Voskuil wanted to nominate it for the prize and more astonished that he won. In general, he doesn't relish being the center of attention, and so for him "it's really anxiety inducing, but when you're able to [put yourself out there], it can really help to open opportunities like this." He appreciated that faculty members on the selection committee whom he did not know recognized the excellence of his work: "I can't understate the importance to me as a completely independent student paying my own way through college. It's validating that something I'm so personally interested in, my course work, because of this award has been able to ease the more challenging aspects of trying to pay for and finish school."



Spotlight: Departmental Graduate Awards

Have News?
We love hearing from our alumni! Write to the Department of English with your news at: en@news@central.uh.edu

The Wyman Herendeen Award for Scholarly Publication

The Wyman Herendeen Award for Scholarly Publication was endowed by a colleague, also emeriti, to honor the legacy of this scholar, professor, and long-serving chair, whose rigor, kindness, and discipline is well known across our campus community.

Scholar and attorney, Dr. Deborah Selden told Forum, "Four degrees and a master's thesis had not prepared me for the rigors of writing a dissertation with Dr. Wyman Herendeen." At her first meeting with him, she submitted a fifty-page introduction that she believed provided the historical context for her thesis. She soon realized that she needed his guidance, so she began her narrow the scope of her work, noting that only four of the original fifty pages appeared in the final 250-page dissertation! Selden explained, "Too often, critics and editors have an academic agenda they impose on writers and students. In contrast, Herendeen taught me that scholarship is not a competition in which there are winners and losers. Scholarship is a collaborative process in which the dissertation director guides the student to discover or create an approach that adds to and informs the body of scholarship. Throughout the process, Herendeen embodied and insisted upon clarity of expression, honesty of thought, and integrity in scholarship."

Ph.D. Candidate in Literature and Creative Writing (Poetry), Nick Rattner was a student in Herendeen's non-dramatic literature of the 17th Century course. Of the class, he said, "By the end of the semester, it seemed possible that Herendeen might know everything about English literature. But his intelligence was never intimidating or showy. If anything was intimidating it was the example Herendeen set for an ethical commitment to one's field. His brilliance shone in his hospitality, his desire to share his scholarship as well as to welcome new knowledge and his ability to be both rigorous and generous. I feel exceptionally lucky to have studied with him."

The Wyman Herendeen Award for Scholarly Publication of \$1000 is made to the English Department graduate student in English and American literature who has published, or has accepted for publication, the best peer-reviewed essay or book chapter in a journal or collection of literary criticism or scholarship, including textual or bibliographic studies, in a given academic year.

Because of the documented impact of Covid on academic publishing internationally, the Department had no applications in 2020, yet was able to award two prizes in 2021. Ph.D. candidate Anthony Box and M.A. student Evan Horne were each awarded the prize, thanks to the generous donor, Box, one of the recent Herendeen awardees, spoke to Forum about his essay, "What Style Can Add to Genre: Suggestions for Applying Stylistics to Disciplinary Studies" (Colorado University Press, 2020). The volume interrogates how style has been overlooked in Composition Studies and related disciplines, how it can be better integrated, and why attention to style is important. Box described the exhaustive revision process for his winning essay, both before and after peer-review, including a re-write of the first draft and other significant revisions later in the process. He credits his supervisor, Dr. Paul Butler and co-editor of the book, with talking him through his approach and encouraging him. Box's own advice to graduate students pursuing publication: "Just don't give up!"

Box's essay studies disciplinary writing in the context of such programs as writing across the curriculum or writing in the disciplines. He noticed that when these kinds of programs address issues of structure, they rely on genre studies to the exclusion of stylistic matters. For Box, style and genre go hand in hand and cultivating stylistic awareness can serve one's writing in ways beyond attention to generic conventions. To illustrate, Box analyzed articles published in a psychology journal and considered how stylistic awareness could help the authors create better cohesion and coherence.

He found that authors typically started sentences with a transition word (such as "thus," or "specifically"), with little other structural connection between sentences. He explained, "One strategy that might improve the authors' writing would be using what's called the 'given new contract,' in which sentences start with information that's already been given and then new information is introduced later in the sentence as a way of forging connections between ideas. It's not that those transition words don't have value, but that the rest of the sentence wasn't doing any work to connect to previous ideas, so the writing became muddled—creating what I called a sense of 'fake coherence.'"

"What Style Can Add" is Box's first peer-reviewed publication; he found the award validating: "This award is a sign that I'm on the right track. That I am capable of doing this," explaining that he worked various jobs after completing his B.A. and M.A. degrees, but "my interest in this field of study continued to grow, and that's why I pursued further degrees." The prize money was also very welcome since he received it shortly after his daughter, Sofia, was born.

David Judkins Ph.D. Dissertation Progress Grant to Advance Anti-Racist Projects

Emeritus Professor David Judkins (pictured above on the right) played an instrumental role in all areas of academic life during his more than thirty-year tenure on the faculty of the Department of English. He was an award-winning instructor and a leader in such areas as the Faculty Senate, the Graduate Studies Committee, and in his appointment as acting departmental chair. Last year, Judkins gifted the Chair's Excellence Fund with his support to award "what we deem most important," as Chair Ann Christensen told Forum. She appreciates Judkins' trust to appraise the fund wisely and is using it in part to promote work that recognizes Black writers and advances anti-racist scholarship and creative work. Thus, the David Judkins Ph.D. Dissertation Progress Grant to Advance Anti-Racist Projects was established. The award assists graduate students in completing their theses on time. Christensen has also dedicated funds toward programming, scholarships, and anti-racist pedagogy training. The \$2000 award created in Judkins' name will be awarded to a student who is working on a dissertation in areas relating to Black Studies and anti-racism annually each Spring until the money runs out.

Dr. Maurine Ogbaa (pictured above on the left), who graduated in May and accepted a position as Assistant Professor at the University of Texas-Dallas, was the inaugural awardee. Her dissertation, "From Peripheral Metropolis to Inverted Eden: Development, Gender, and Subjectivity in Contemporary, Black-Authoring Bildungsroman," is a study of contemporary African women authors. While the term "bildungsroman" is often thought of as a coming-of-age novel or a novel of formation, Ogbaa conceives of it as a story of development, broadly speaking. Situating the genre within African literary historiography, contemporary African literature, and postcolonial African literature, Ogbaa argues that the novels form a distinct genre that responds to the contemporary moment, (re)presenting the development of young people on the African continent in terms of individual cultivation, societal cultivation, and national development.

Ogbaa told Forum that her dissertation "spoke to the spirit of the Judkins award." I was thinking about how these authors were critiquing anti-Black policies and racist imperial policies that were held-over from the colonial period. When I talk about representation and (re)presentation, I'm thinking about how fiction mediates reality. I argued that the novels were (representing a situation created in part by racialized capitalism that became the interdisciplinarily conventions young people are trying to form themselves. My dissertation uses the interdisciplinarily conventions of postcolonial studies to think about the historical and societal context from which the literature emerges, but also takes seriously the novel's critiques of the national situation. These novels are not interested in the nation as an aspirational form but are engaging in critique that has a certain literary density and dexterity."

When asked about what the award meant to her, Ogbaa explained, "I appreciate Dr. Judkins' unrestricted gift to the department and the way the department decided to direct it to support research that promotes anti-racist work and the scholarly and creative work of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, and the eradication of racism. It felt as though the department was responding to the present moment, to the rallying cry that Black Lives Matter, minority lives matter—if we are going to make these things tangible, then we have to do it wherever we are. As folks in the humanities, we think critically about art, philosophy, culture, society." Ogbaa added that humanists can and should bring their critical and analytical skills to investigate the ways that Black lives are presented in our field.

Ogbaa told Forum that the Judkins award was extremely helpful since the end of the Ph.D. is one of the most challenging moments of graduate student life. Asked for advice to give students writing their dissertation, she said, "keep working! Get the words on the page any way you can. I gave myself a daily word count—the dissertation doesn't have to be poetry, and often the next day you find what you wrote wasn't as bad as you feared. One of the resources I used on campus was the dissertation accelerator ([a program sponsored by the UH Graduate School](#)), which was a huge help because it got me away from worrying about the dog and the dishes. Use any resources and means of institutional support that you can find."

The Zamora Dissertation Completion Award

2021 inaugurated the Department of English Zamora Dissertation Completion Award, thanks to Dr. Lois Zamora's generous endowment. The competitive award worth \$5000 provides financial support to late-stage dissertators in the English Department.

Long-serving member of the Department of English and a post-colonialist scholar, Zamora (pictured above on the right) is a comparatist whose interdisciplinary work bridges Hispanic Studies, Art, History, and Literature. She also manages UH's membership and participation in the Institute of World Literature, an annual month-long conference devoted to learning and scholarship in world literature. Her "New World Baroque and Contemporary Latin American Fiction" seminar always fills quickly and is the stuff of legend among graduate students. Ph.D. candidate in Literature and Creative Writing (Poetry) Robert Madden told Forum, "Dr. Zamora's fantastic class on the Neo-Baroque was very important for my own projects, and more importantly provided me a diagnostic tool to detect the various afterlives of the emergent baroque impulse in literature, art and culture."

Sylvia Garcia, whose Ph.D. dissertation research Dr. Zamora supervises, spoke with Forum about her mentor: "In the moments that I have doubted my capacities as a scholar, Dr. Zamora has encouraged and motivated me, reminding me that I am more than capable of meeting my goals. She happily shares her experience and knowledge with students and demonstrates genuine interest in our growth as scholars. She freely gives her time and knowledge to help students grow."

Dr. Carolann Madden (pictured above on the left), who graduated in May and is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Maynooth University in Ireland, earned the first Zamora Dissertation Completion Award for her dissertation, "The Poet and the Folklorist: Explorations in Expressive Culture." Inspired by her interest in the intersections of creative practices of folklore and writing, Madden looked to the present moment, to the rallying cry that Black Lives Matter, minority lives matter—if we are going to make these things tangible, then we have to do it wherever we are. As folks in the humanities, we think critically about art, philosophy, culture, society." Ogbaa added that humanists can and should bring their critical and analytical skills to investigate the ways that Black lives are presented in our field.

She told Forum, "Folklore has interested poets in part for the sheer magic and imagery found within it, but I am wary and aware of the history of poets using folklore as a sort of 'image-mine.' I try to avoid that. . . . I also try to engage with folklore already connected to me personally, and especially avoid reworking certain practices to better fit my poems. That is, I try to make my poems fit the lore, rather than making the lore fit my poems. Years did the latter, somewhat to the detriment of our people's perception of the folk tradition." Having pursued an M.A. in Irish Studies and having studied and lived in Galway on and off for over 15 years, Madden naturally gravitates to that area of study.

The Zamora Dissertation Completion Fellowship gave Madden a boost during a hard and isolating year (because of both COVID restrictions and the nature of independent study). She told Forum, "Much of my dissertation involves just sitting alone in a room with your thoughts; knowing that other people in our department were aware of my project and saw its merit really gave me confidence." The financial support also enabled Madden to digitize some archival material from Ireland, which became part of the digital exhibit (www.thiarvest.com) that she created during her Fulbright year at NUI Galway. "It is particularly important to me, as a folklorist and an archivist, to help make material created by the people available to the people, and in this case, the Zamora Dissertation Award has helped me do that, as well."

The Zamora Dissertation Completion Award

This has message has been sent on behalf of Dr. Ann Christensen, chair of the Department of English. If you have any questions don't hesitate to call (713) 743-3004, or write en@news@central.uh.edu.

