

Volume 26, Issue 4

A Journal of the Plague Year Volume IV

"Once the faintest stirring of hope became possible, the dominion of the plague was ended."

Albert Camus, *The Plague*

Pandemics tend to make people pessimistic, and there have been many times over the course of this last semester that I have dallied with despair. But with the election behind us, the vaccine on the way, and the semester coming to a close, we can feel hope stirring in our hearts. But hope is not only based on objective conditions; it emerges and is sustained by the intersubjective bonds we sustain when times are hard. And so I want to offer my gratitude to all of you, in this year-end issue of *Reading Matters*, for contributing to our collective departmental endeavor, which has given me hope during a period of distress and disorder. Hope is strengthened by the knowledge that we can rely on each other when times are tough, and I feel that we have proven that truth by triumphing over the many challenges that have faced us this fall. Winter won't be easy, but I hope we all can be sustained by the simple success of putting this semester behind us and knowing we continued to work together even as we struggled in isolation. Your many achievements below attest to this passion and persistence.

Happy Holidays.

Faculty Matters

Melissa Febos's essay from her forthcoming collection, *Girlhood*, is in the [Winter 2020 issue](#) of the Paris Review. She also published a short essay on [Vogue.com](#).

Donika Kelly's poem "[Though you cannot name them, they exist](#)" was commissioned by Musiqa, a music collective in Houston, Texas, and presented in conjunction with Trevor Weston's "Stars," which premiered November 14th, 2020. Her poem "[Calling: Marfa](#)" was published on *The Atlantic* online.

Grad Matters

Matthew Helm's work on Christopher Isherwood is a part of the online exhibition [Crossed Lines](#) for literary telephones, and was featured in *The Guardian*. In addition, he was awarded a \$2,500 grant from [Travel Iowa](#) to run a second

printing of his booklet on Iowa food traditions. He also received the UIowa Graduate Post-Comprehensive Research Fellowship.

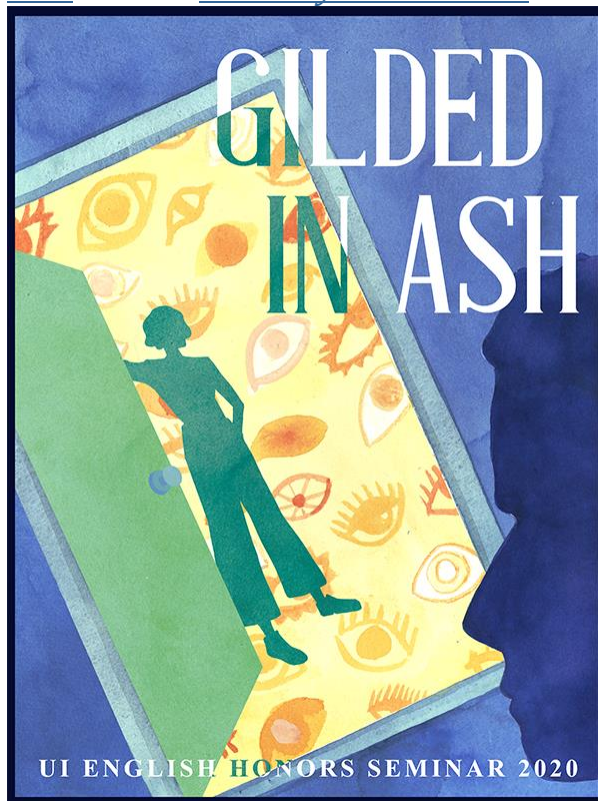
Congratulations to **Maddison McGann**, who was awarded the CLAS Dissertation Writing Fellowship.

Congratulations to **Tatiana Schlote-Bonne**, who won the [Diverse Worlds Grant](#) from the Speculative Literature Foundation.

Congratulations to **E Mariah Spencer**, who has been awarded a Ballard Seashore Dissertation Fellowship for the Spring 2021 semester.

Undergrad Matters

The nineteen students in Harry Stecopoulos' Honors Seminar in Fiction have completed an exciting revision of *The Great Gatsby*. Art forgery, Madam C.J. Walker, a five-alarm fire, Catholic school: this version has it all! Entitled "Gilded in Ashes," the novel will be available online early next semester thanks to the help of the Digital Studio. A print edition will follow. Local press coverage has appeared in [Iowa Now](#) and the [Iowa City Press-Citizen](#).



Staff Matters

Corey Campbell had a short story published in the Fall 2020 issue of [Nashville Review](#).

GEL Matters

In most Spring semesters, we run our Service Learning courses in conjunction with Grant Wood Elementary: busloads of UI students visit Grant Wood each Friday to be “reading buddies” for students there, and at the end of the semester we bring busloads of the Grant Wood students to campus, where you may have seen them storming the halls of EPB and doing writing workshops in Gerber Lounge and hip hop dance workshops in Voxman. This year, with schools at ½ capacity (or totally online), it was not possible to do this kind of in-person program. But rather than drop it, our service learning TAs, Margaret Yapp (poetry, WW) and Sarah Adler (NWP), reconceived it, and have applied for a Course Development Grant from CLAS that would allow them to revamp the program for a virtual world.

Their proposal asks questions that many of us have been considering of late: “how do we strive for social justice while we remain foreseeably distanced? How does one build community in a time of isolation? We imagine a new version of this course to be an exploratory venture into the new, evolving forms of social justice catalyzed by the pandemic. We hope an updated version will both reflect and build upon current uncertainty of social engagement, while also providing an opportunity for students to learn about community work in Iowa City and beyond.”

They plan to invite a “variety of guest lecturers to share their experiences and wisdom in writing, social work, community organizing, environmental research, and more. Potential groups include representatives from Iowa City’s [Public Space One](#), Chicago’s [Free Write Arts and Literacy program](#), which provides programming for incarcerated and criminalized youth and young adults in the performing, visual, and literary arts, as well as [The Loft Literary Center](#) in Minneapolis, an organization that seeks to foster a thriving literary community in the Twin Cities through adult and youth writing classes, readings, and other events.” Ultimately, students in the class will connect with a local Iowa City organization of their choice to explore ways to “safely and responsibly engage in social justice during the coronavirus.” It sounds like a fantastic class, and is just another example of the truly heroic work our grads have been doing during this time.

Blaine Greteman, GEL Director

Faculty Assembly Matters

The Faculty Assembly took up the question of promotion of instructional track faculty: is the current system working, is it a problem that there is not yet any Full Professor of Instruction/Practice? Are current guidelines broad enough to accommodate the diversity of departments and ITF roles within those departments (some instructional track faculty are not only teaching, but serving administrative roles like DGS; we're all aware of the heroic work that Anne Stapleton has done in our department). Where should lecturers put their "above and beyond" when they are considering promotion?

As is often the case in Faculty Assembly, there were fewer answers than questions and ponderings, and a resolution to form a committee to think about IFT promotion. Please let me know if you have good/strong ideas on this issue. I'm considering joining that committee to do my bit, and if so would welcome your input.

Blaine Greteman, Faculty Assembly Representative

Library Matters

Greetings from the library! My name is Rita Soenksen (rita-soenksen@uiowa.edu) and I am liaison librarian to the English and Communication Studies departments. My background is in African American literature and I hold graduate degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I've had the pleasure of working with some of you but wanted to remind you that I am here to help, especially during these challenging times. As your librarian, I can create course guides, provide course instruction on utilizing library resources, and aid with resource requests (including digital resources for student viewing). If you have any questions on library services, please let me know. I look forward to supporting your research and instruction!

Rita Soenksen (she/her/hers)

English and Communication Studies Librarian

University of Iowa Libraries

100 Main Library

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Upcoming Matters

"Mothers of Invention" - Afrofuturism and Speculative Fiction (Part II), with special guest Deborah E. Whaley - December 14, 2020
| <https://www.youtube.com/myharlemstage>