

English Graduate Program Newsletter

Welcome to the third issue of the English Graduate Program Newsletter!

The end of the Spring semester is a busy and transitional time, as many students complete their programs and others make plans for writing, coursework, travel, conferences, and Co-operative Education placements during the summer semester. I am delighted to extend my warmest congratulations to the students graduating from our MA and PhD programs this summer, as well as to the faculty—especially supervisors—who have supported them throughout their journeys.

Spring is also a particularly active period for the Graduate Committee, as we worked to admit a new cohort of students for September 2026. This Fall, we look forward to welcoming three new PhD students, eighteen full-time MA students, and several new part-time MA students (the application portal for the part-time program remains open). I extend my sincere thanks to committee members Dr. Kim Blank, Dr. Nick Bradley, Dr. Chris Douglas, and Dr. Eric Miller for their thoughtful work in assessing applications. I am also deeply grateful to Graduate Secretary Deborah Ogilvie for her outstanding support of the admissions process and her guidance to applicants. Our thanks as well to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Humanities Dean's Office for their funding, supplemented by generous donor contributions in addition to the RA awards provided by Dr. Janelle Jenstad and Dr. Charlotte Schallié. I am looking forward to hosting an informal online orientation for new students on 5 May, followed by our full program and TA orientation in the first week of the semester.

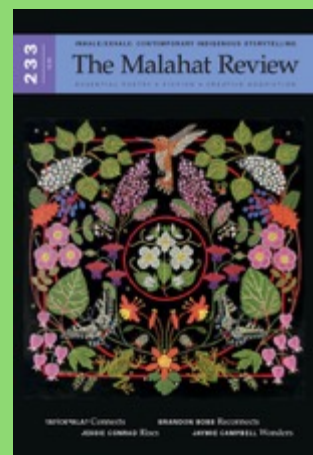
Please enjoy this newsletter, compiled by our talented Communications Assistant, Kit Kennedy (an undergraduate Writing major). The issue highlights the varied and valuable contributions our graduate students make to the research and teaching life of our department and the wider campus community. In particular, the student spotlights and interviews give a taste of the breadth of experiences and opportunities offered by our program, as well as the warm and collegial culture that defines it. I wish you all a wonderful summer, and I hope you will stay in touch to share your news and accomplishments.

Alison Chapman
Graduate Advisor

Featured in this issue are three
student interviews!

*“The course was all about
learning and self-learning.”*

—Madisen Roberts reflects on her
experience in
ENSH 522: Contemporary Indigenous
Story as/and Medicine
Keep reading for the full interview!



Funding News

[Centre for Studies in Religion and Society Graduate Fellowship](#)

Rebekah Stuiwe

[University of Victoria Lowens Fellowship](#)

Caden Elliott

[Annual Giving Student Caller Scholarship](#)

Kiera Clark



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Congratulations to these students on their success!

TA Spotlight: Sarah-Grace Ramsay (MA Student)

This semester, I've been working as a TA for ENSH 322: Shakespeare on Screen with Erin Ellerbeck and ENSH 311: Crime and Detective Fiction with Sheila Rabillard. Last semester, I worked as a TA for ENSH 354: Shakespeare's Comedies and Romances with Richard van Oort. I had previously taken these classes as an undergraduate student at UVic, and I have enjoyed seeing them from a different perspective. Each professor has given me valuable mentorship. I love learning from them about their different approaches to teaching.

As a TA, I have had the opportunity to develop a variety of skills. When grading papers, I have to give concise, clear feedback to students. This process has helped me become a better writer overall. I also enjoy reading students' diverse perspectives in their papers. My favourite part of being a TA has been speaking at the front of the classroom. I had the opportunity to lead two discussions about Shakespeare's plays in ENSH 322. I was nervous at first, but I ended up having fun and learning from the experience. In ENSH 311, I had the opportunity to lecture and lead a discussion on two short stories by Patricia Highsmith, an author I enjoy reading outside of school.

Spotlight: Joanne Barnes (MA Student)

Enjoying My Second Act

“I’ve always had a passion for fine arts, which translated into many years of dance, music, and, for over 20 years, active involvement in the local theatre scene, performing in numerous stage plays, musicals, and film productions. In 2024, I received concurrent offers to do both a Master of Arts in English at the University of Victoria and the Creative Writing Certificate program at The Writers Studio at Simon Fraser University. I chose the MA Program at UVic. It’s a decades-old dream: to attain that degree.

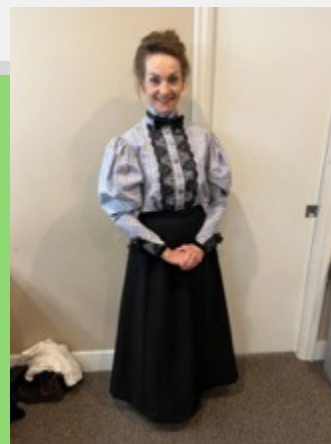
I’m doing this journey as a part-time student, balancing my studies with family, professional writing demands, and theatre projects. Sometimes all of my passions simultaneously intersect, which can be challenging. In the summer of 2025, I wasn’t able to attend the first class of my summer course due to a contractual acting commitment I had on a film set. The day of my second class, I was exhausted from the prior day’s 13-hour film shoot. I knew the tight course timeline meant it was critical to catch up on introductory content. However, with intensive review of the Zoom videos and text reading, plenty of positive self-talk and liquids to rehydrate, I managed to turn the dial on my stress. In November of 2025, I was cast in a local play, *Unity 1918*, written by UVic’s Kevin Kerr. I not only juggled rehearsals with class presentations and papers and writing articles to deadline for a local publication but had to face other challenges like finding the fastest route home so that I could get to the theatre on time! On one occasion, I recall taking every back road I could because traffic was backed up on McKenzie Avenue. Between the usual pre-show nerves and the anxiety of travel, I’m not sure which one won out that day.

There are always challenges with performing on stage or screen. Among my most memorable moments are: I’m waiting offstage in a theatre in the park performance, my heart is racing, awaiting my cue to enter and...a stray dog piddles on my gown! Lighting is set, cameras are rolling, I open my mouth to speak, when suddenly the deafening engines of a plane overhead drown out the sound. So too, there have been moments and learning curves in my grad program from navigating the labyrinth of online registration to mastering software programs to becoming familiar with the university world that has changed so very much since my undergrad days. Just like theatre, however, it’s all about learning, being brave, and trusting that one way or the other, the show must go on.”

Joanne also shared with us some details of her exciting film and theatre projects:

“I’ve been a movie enthusiast my whole life. This year it was a surprising twist to see my face on the big screen. The 2026 Victoria Film Festival, held from February 6-15, featured a mix of international and Canadian films, two in which I had a role. The first was *Lucid*, an arty horror feature film, by Victoria’s Deanna Milligan and Ramsey Fendall. The film, which had its world premiere at the Fantasia Film Festival in 2025, won for Best Canadian First Feature at the Victoria Film Festival this year.

The story is about a Mia, young art student who is stuck in a creative block, and with the help of a unique candy elixir, breaks through only to find herself trapped in a surreal dreamscape. I was cast in 2023 as “Ethel”, the grandmother who raised this young woman when her mother abandoned her at my front door. My scenes with “Mia” were very emotional and, at times, challenging. Before the shoot, I got the chance to take a class in making pottery, as my character was a clay artist. Spinning the pottery wheel with my foot, while creating with clay in my hands, while speaking my lines, and with a roaming dog on set; well, it was a great juggle! The second film was *The Ballad of Sloth Shot*, a sci-fi western short. I was cast in 2024 as “Dr. Helena Watt”. She provided comic relief in the storyline, and so, she was a ton of fun to play.



© Joanne Barnes



I was fortunate to work with a wonderful group of artists, and we all became like family by the end of the filming journey.

Badges & Bullets is a stage play that I co-wrote with my husband. It was first performed as a radio play for Radio Sidney; it was subsequently presented at the 2022 Victoria Fringe Festival. Here is our original billing about the show: ‘It’s 1942 and the world is in turmoil and so are the performers at CNB radio! Set during the Golden Age of Radio, this comedy takes the audience into the studio where panic ensues, chaos reigns, and the show must go on the air!’ The play was submitted recently and has now been accepted for the Readers’ Theatre event at Langham Court Theatre in Victoria. This presentation will take place in May.”

Publications

Saba Pakdel (PhD student): “Black Migrants and Climate Change Vulnerability Amid the Great Smog of London in Sam Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners*” *M/M Print Plus* January 2026)

Article Summary: “What would it mean to reread Sam Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), as a narrative about the representation of Black migrants during the smog? The smog, the 1950s’ concerning ecological and climate issues, results from the mix of coal-burning smoke with London fog. Upon combustion, coal emits visible *black* smoke into the lingering fog, causing various health and respiratory hazards. *The Lonely Londoners* depicts the 50s when the Windrush generation of migrants, particularly Black Afro-Caribbeans, arrive in London during the smog and, at the same time, encounter growing racial and anti-immigrant sentiments. In this essay, I will argue that *The Lonely Londoners* astutely places racialization and pollution as figures and metaphors of each other, as though their qualities overlap and/or are shared.”

([M/M Print Plus](#))

Stephanie Erickson (PhD student): “Reading Our Relations in the Past and the Future: A Métis Approach to Reading Wahkohtowin in katherena vermette’s *A Girl Called Echo* (2017-2021)” *Pawwatamihk* (<https://pawaatamihk.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/Pawaatamihk/article/view/82>) (December 2025)

Article Summary: “This paper explores Métis author, katherena vermette’s graphic novel collection, *A Girl Called Echo* (2017-2021) for the ways in which it presents Wahkohtowin-centered storytelling. Engaging with genre conventions of post-apocalyptic narratives and Métis theory of Wahkohtowin and Indigenous resurgence, this reading of vermette’s text draws connections between historical fiction and futurity.”

Interview with Madisen Roberts (MA)

On taking [ENSH 522: Contemporary Indigenous Story as/and Medicine](#), a hands-on workshop course led by Richard Van Camp, Stephen Ross, and Iain Higgins, where students produced a special issue of *The Malahat Review*

Q: Can you give me an idea of what this course entailed?

A: It was a great graduate course to end my year on. The course itself was about publishing and creating stories and helping to create stories for the *Malahat Review*. Our goal was to create a collection of stories for a special issue, [Inhale/Exhale: Contemporary Indigenous Storytelling](#). Most of what we did was submission reading and doing a lot of the selection work. A lot of our coursework was about bunching these stories together for how they would fit into the issue. Some of what we came up with were themes of memories and healing. We got into groups, and my group focused on non-fiction and read those submissions (which was really fun, because I usually only read poetry and fiction).

Q: How did you find your experience encountering non-fiction? Were there elements that surprised you?

A: It was very cool. I was a little scared to do it because I wasn't sure if I'd find it interesting at first. But all the non-fiction pieces we read were so beautiful. The one I championed was based on a talk the author gave, which he rewrote as a non-fiction piece. It was so enticing. In the end, I was really happy we ended up doing non-fiction.

Q: Dr. Higgins [course instructor and Editor of the *Malahat Review*] mentioned this was one of the last courses you took at UVic. Could you speak a bit to how you feel about this being a kind of cumulative course?

A: This course was extraordinary. It was a little difficult because it was on Zoom since it was a summer course, and there were so many things I wanted to talk about that can be hard over Zoom. There were some days, though, when we got to meet in person, and those were really special. We talked a lot about the stories and listened to people telling stories; it was amazing.

It was a good class to end my degree with. It was fun to explore different topics, especially Indigenous literature, which I haven't had the opportunity to study very much. It was also nice to finish my degree with a course that was so creative.

Q: Could you talk a bit about why unique courses like this feel important? Do you think we'll continue to see more of this kind of thing in the future of the humanities?

A: I definitely think it's important, especially as an English student. This course allowed me to be creative and think outside of what typical critical theory is. Though most graduate courses are extraordinary in that sense as well, this course, in particular, was really awesome. Most of the assignments were journal entries. For example, the first assignment we did was a "coming to" story, positioning ourselves with where we were in regard to what we knew, and I think that was a really awesome way to start the course. Then, to finish the course, we reflected on and rewrote our "coming to" story with what we learned: **the course was all about learning and self-learning.**

Q: What particular skills do you see yourself taking from this course into your future?

A: We did a lot of podcast work, and we had a whole day dedicated to learning how to use UVic's podcast studio in the library. The idea was to learn to do interviews, and while we ultimately didn't have time to include these in the *Malahat* issue, I think that will be one of the things I take forward: confidence talking to authors, and asking questions that are not usually asked when it comes to stories and learning and writing. Especially valuable are the skills around interviewing and thinking about framing questions to potential special issue authors.

Q: What was your graduating MA Essay topic, and how do you see this course fitting with that work?

A: My MA Essay focused on sexualization in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*. I was looking at how sexualized violence is transmitted and translated through classical stories to medieval stories, specifically. And how Chaucer dealt with assault in his writing, and how empathic he was towards women, versus how classical authors like Ovid spoke about rape in their writing.

This course was pretty separate from that work, though there are themes in the stories that can connect to what I was talking about. This proved my thesis that sexualized violence and stories of trauma are always going to be transmitted through history, no matter what.

Being dialled in on my thesis for so long and having this course to take a step back from it was really nice.

Q: Richard Van Camp was a guest editor for this edition of the *Malahat Review* and a course instructor. What was it like working with him?

A: The classes were every Tuesday and Thursday. Dr. Stephen Ross and Dr. Iain Higgins were course instructors, and on Thursdays we got more into the coursework. Every Tuesday, Richard would lead the class and tell stories and talk about Indigenous publishing. He talked about how Indigenous publishers take on the stories, and how we, as outside readers, can learn from that; and also, what our place as outside readers is, and how much of the story we can edit. But mainly he was amazing. He told a bunch of stories, and every day it was full-circle moments. It felt like we were sitting around a campfire for those classes.

We talked a lot about stories as medicine, which was kind of the theme of the course.

Q: Did that theme of “stories as medicine” connect with your research?

A: Yeah, exactly, how stories are told in different ways, and how that can help anyone heal.

Q: Was there anything else you were hoping to say about the course?

A: I think overall, I think the course was amazing, especially with reading all the stories we got to read. And doing it in groups was really cool, because we got to focus on our stuff, but then we were also able to see the things that were chosen from the other groups, and what they saw as potentially the best stories from their pile. That was really interesting.

Also, being able to just hold an actual tangible copy of the work we did, when the issue was finally published, was incredible.

Madisen will be starting her PhD at Queen Mary University of London in September, where she will be analyzing medieval genealogical rolls. In the meantime, she has been catching up on reading new stories and getting back into creative writing!

“The only thing Madisen doesn't mention in her generous comments on the course, though it's implicit in them, is how enrichingly *collaborative* everything was. Richard Van Camp shared his gifts as a storyteller and author and mentor and as someone grounded in his Tlicho Dene world, Stephen Ross shared his gifts as a thinker and literary scholar and pedagogical innovator, and the students shared their intelligence and experience from a wide range of backgrounds, not to mention their inspiring willingness to go with the necessary flow as we figured out collectively how to do what we were doing. We all trusted one another, and we all learned from one another in ways that we can carry with us into other courses and activities. Six weeks in the summer is not enough time to put together a special issue of a quarterly magazine, especially when you are also exploring other things in the course too, but it is enough time to do the hard work of reading, championing, selecting, and planning—and to think about what you are doing and why. As Madisen says, learning and self-learning were at the heart of the course, and the students can be very proud both of the ways in which they shaped and shared that learning and of the special issue of the magazine to which they contributed so significantly.” —Dr. Iain Higgins

Critical Humanities Commons Spotlight: A Letter from Jai and Sarah

[The Critical Humanities Commons](#) is a space where interdisciplinary scholarship unfolds through creativity, conversation, and commitment to social justice. The Commons strives to bring people together to think, learn, and teach across disciplines to create new approaches for public dialogue.

We stand steadfast on our four foundational pillars of – **Expertise, Collaboration, Exchange and Dissemination**. With care at the center of creative inquiry, these pillars frame a joyful space where humanist ideas are encouraged to engage with the urgent questions of our time and gesture towards a more equitable and accessed-centered world.

Our commitment to equity means we look for ways to integrate undergraduate and graduate students as co-organizers, researchers, and decision makers, rather than passive learners. Our Commons Lounge is an inviting space for students to relax, socialize, or work collaboratively—with refreshments available! The Lounge is also available for event bookings, such as a group meeting or cross-department conversations. To support graduate students, we have organized the following through the Commons:

Grad hour at the Commons Lounge every first Wednesday of the month 12-1pm, with refreshments. We encourage students to attend, learn about our programs—or suggest new ideas! —and socialize with their peers.

Critical Encounters Speaker Series featuring topics ranging from principles of social justice, Indigenous Resistance, disability and insights for imagining access, care and community. We also feature a graduate panel for students to showcase their work to the community

Accessible Pedagogy Workshops, where teaching assistants can learn how to integrate or enhance accessibility in their courses. The workshops also focus on proactive design, flexible assessment, inclusivity, and interdependence, principles from Disability Justice.

Book Club a place to join our community of readers! This year's selection is *Our History is the Future* by Nick Estes, who will deliver the *Critical Encounters* Lansdowne Lecture on March 31. Have an idea for next year's book club? Reach out to us! We provide copies of the book to the first 10 graduate students who sign up.

Public Humanities Grant offers students funding to organize events. For instance, recipients of the 2026 grant include organizers of the Cultural, Social, & Political Thought program for their annual graduate conference.

With our mission – “Rooted in care. Driven by ideas” – the Commons aims to provide a supportive academic and social environment for graduate students. We are always open to new ideas and pitches for events, workshops, or other forms of collaborative engagement that brings together communities across Humanities and the broader UVic campus. Come visit us at Clearihue C305!

With joy—

Jai Virdi, CHC Director

Sarah Lawrence, CHC Administrative Assistant

Conferences

Jordan Price: “‘writing a self / a country’: Western Alienation and National Allegory in bpNichol’s *The Martyrology*,” Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English Conference (Montreal) (4 June 2026).

“I will be presenting a paper on the postmodern Canadian poet bpNichol, Fredric Jameson, and Western alienation.”

Caden Elliott: “Ars Moriendi Poetics in *Richard II*,” Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies Fiftieth Anniversary Conference (Montreal) (6 June 2026)

Gaurav Jain: “Bid Up the Body: Affective Overflow and Marilyn’s *Brute Archive*,” Rewriting: University of Toronto Graduate English Association Annual Conference (Virtual) (23-24 April 2026)

Gaurav Jain: “Cringe, Click, Repeat: Funny Feelings, Affective Overflow, and the Doomscrolling Critic” and “The Queer Fool’s Etiquette: Gary Snyder’s Fire Writings and the Refusal of Redemption,” Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English Conference (Montreal) (4-7 June 2026)

Gaurav Jain: “Not Sick Enough: Comic Overflow and Affective Freedom in Mohammed Hanif’s *Karachi*,” Canadian Association for Postcolonial Studies Annual Conference (Montreal) (4-6 June 2026)

Jordan Price: “‘they . . . hold the Christian religion in . . . sovereign contempt’: William Blake’s *Muhammad* and Anti-Empire Defiance,” Dalhousie Graduate History Society Conference (Halifax) (June 15 2026)

Roxy Moldovanu: “Pushing Against the Restraints of the Unconscious: A Lacanian Reading of *The Giver*,” Memories & Dreams: Exploring Perspectives on Past, Future and Possibility in Materials for Young People, Graduate Student Conference (Vancouver) (July 17 2026)

Babak Ashrafxhani Limoudehi: “The Anthropocene and Post-Pastoral Landscapes in J.G. Ballard’s *The Day of Creation*,” the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada Conference (Edmonton) (June 16-20 2026)

*“This paper argues that J.G. Ballard’s *The Day of Creation* renders the global scale of the Anthropocene tangible by situating its environmental/ecological transformations within the specific context of Thatcher-era Britain. Through the novel’s central metaphor of a self-consuming, man-made river, Ballard dramatizes how local landscapes are entangled with broader planetary processes. Drawing on the concepts of post-pastoral, (post)wilderness, and geological agency, the paper shows how Ballard reconfigures conventional nature narratives by dissolving the boundaries between untouched wilderness and human-shaped environments.”*

Interview with Chantal Bilodeau (PhD Student)

Q: To start, can you tell me about your program of study and what drew you to choosing UVic?

A: I'm a first-year PhD student in English. I've been working in theatre up until I came here. My work in theatre is at the intersection of storytelling and climate change. I was interested in UVic because it has a high reputation for climate action.

I moved here from New York because I wanted to live in a smaller city. The English department seemed really welcoming. I was also interested in the [Cultural, Social & Political Thought program](#), and I loved that even though I'm in English, UVic has a theatre program and an environmental studies program.

Q: What made you decide that this was the time in your life and career that you wanted to come to UVic for your PhD?

A: I think, because the landscape was changing around what I was doing, I wasn't having as much of an impact anymore. I wanted to give myself new tools to feel like I could still contribute. It was also a way to challenge myself: moving from being a practitioner to being a scholar.

Q: How do you find that being in a PhD program affects your creative writing?

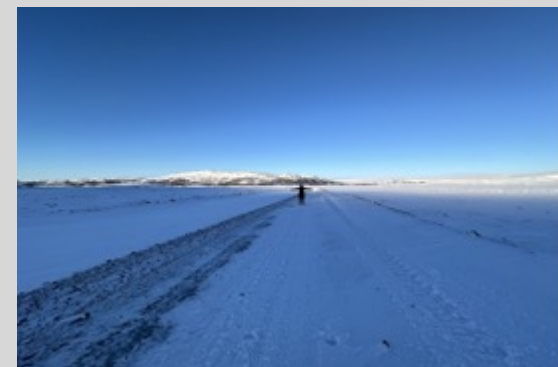
A: There's no time to write, especially being in the first year. I'm also in the [Coastal Climate Solutions Leaders Program](#), which requires additional courses. The time for writing will come next year.

Q: Can you tell me about the projects you've been working on?

A: I've been focused on a series of plays I've committed to writing about the Arctic, one for each country in the Arctic. I'm trying to create personal stories that engage with climate change. It's a process of discovery. I try to find the hope and the positive, as well as the particular issues that these communities are experiencing, and to find the poetry in that.



© Chantal Bilodeau



Q: What's something you've found in your research that you think people don't know about and that should be talked about more?

A: One of the things I learned relates to the first play I wrote about Nunavut: here's a population that doesn't have a lot of resources other than the subsidies they get from the federal government. We from the south then come and say you can't exploit your resources—but then we're doing it in the rest of the country. There's this tension of who gets to do what.

Or when I went to Norway, they became a very rich country in the 70s because they found oil, and now people have a weird relationship to that. More recently, they've been electrifying everything and selling their oil to other countries.

Economics and politics tie into the work on climate change. There's also a cultural aspect: what does it mean if you're an Inuit community that has always lived a certain way, and now the ice is gone?

Also, it's so beautiful up there.

Q: What's been the most (or one of the most) rewarding parts of your UVic Experience so far?

A: People are really nice; everybody is so helpful. I like the university setting and the intellectual grounding that UVic provides. I think I've read more books in my first year than in the last ten years. I like the opportunities for cross-disciplinarity. I'm talking to scientists, engineers and people in public administration, to name a few. These are people I might not have encountered in my life.

I did my master's in Playwriting, which is interdisciplinary in its own way, but we were all in theatre. Here I interact with students in Philosophy, Law, Anthropology in the CSPT concentration, and also with scientists in my climate classes.

© Chantal Bilodeau

Q: Is there any advice you'd like to give to prospective PhD students?

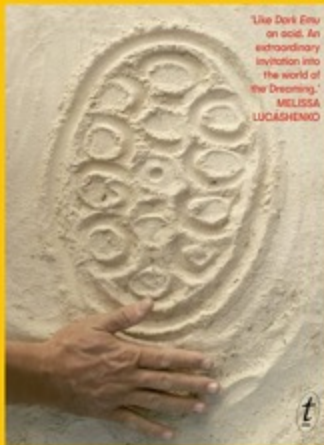
A: I appreciate the fact that I didn't come straight from my master's; there's something about having some experience, and going down a few blind alleys, that allows you to focus on what you really want to do.



Sand Talk

Tyson Yunkaporta

How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World



Q: Are there any books you've read recently that you could recommend for us?

A: I just read *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* by Tyson Yunkaporta. The author is from Australia, and looks at settler knowledge through an Indigenous lens, the reverse of what usually happens. It's fascinating. In one part, he describes how Indigenous Australian communities physically place memories in rocks in the landscape.

Q: What places on campus have you found to hang out in?

A: I like all the little paths and how much nature there is around. The library has been great. I went to Mystic Vale for the first time just the other day.

The fact that it's not downtown and surrounded by concrete— I appreciate the nature. I've seen George (UVic's resident peacock) a few times, and the cherry blossoms are out. And there's been no snow!



© Thomas Andrews

Q: What else are you working on just now?

A: I'm continuing to work on [Climate Change Theatre Action](#) (CCTA), which I launched with three colleagues in 2015. CCTA is a worldwide festival of short plays about the climate crisis that brings people together to foster conversations around climate issues and inspire action.

Spotlight: Tess Hole (PhD Student)

I have been really grateful and excited to have joined and become a part of the University of Victoria English Department and community this past year. Since I moved to Victoria as a PhD transfer student, I have felt welcomed with full support by my wonderful supervisor, Dr. Stephen Ross, as well as the entire department and graduate student cohort. I am very grateful to have received funding awards this year to support my research, such as the Pat Koster Scholarship in Early Women's Writing, the Robert W. Ford Graduate Scholarship, and the Herbert Bertram Falkenstein Graduate Scholarship in Humanities.

I have recently expanded my research on medicine and literature with a special focus on medicine and ethics, which is an exciting development to support the course I am designing for my candidacy portfolio. My course explores medical advancements from the late eighteenth century until the present day with a special focus on medical developments alongside literary representations, to illuminate the shifting relationships between practitioners and patients. My upcoming dissertation research explores in-depth the special topic of medical advancements of the early twentieth century, including the advancements of facial and limb prosthetics and other medical practices in Britain after World War I. I am very excited to continue the work with my supervising committee, Dr. Jaipreet Virdi and Dr. Magdalena Kay. Some recent highlights of this semester included being invited to guest lecture for two writing workshops for ENSH200, to guest lecture on "The Medical Humanities" for ENSH231, as well as leading a guest lecture on Interiority, Alienation, and the Ill Body in Virginia Woolf's *On Being Ill* and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* for ENSH101. I was also given an opportunity to guest lecture on Althea Davis' poem "Kinder Than Man" for ENSH101, where I invited the students to approach the text through a critical animal studies lens. I recently completed my certification in Narrative Medicine from the Temerity School of Medicine (University of Toronto) in 2025, and it has provided an exciting approach to bridge the worlds of medicine and the humanities in both my research and teaching this year.

TA Spotlight: Caden Elliott (MA Student)

Throughout my first full year as a Master's student, I have had the privilege to be a teaching assistant in three different courses: Professor Shlensky's ENSH 326: American Film Narrative, Professor Ellerbeck's ENSH 322: Shakespeare on Screen, and Professor Kuchar's ENSH 355: Milton. Not having any prior experience with TAing, working these three positions in the span typically allocated for two was a challenge, but a phenomenal experience that has made me a better teacher and student. What was particularly unique about my experience was working for Professor Kuchar, as his Milton class needed a TA to fill in for the second half of the semester. I was thrilled by the opportunity, as it allowed me to work directly for and with my supervisor and teach within my primary research field: early modern poetry. Thanks to this opportunity, I was able to make a direct connection with students during office hours, as well as co-lead a lecture in special collections, where we looked at various texts in our vast seventeenth-century collection that related to Milton and his works: a 1669 copy of *Paradise Lost*, multiple copies of *Eikon Basilike*, and more. This is not to say that my other classes did not provide me with anything fruitful; in fact, quite the opposite. The pairing of Professor Shlensky and Professor Ellerbeck's classes on film provided a fascinating reflection on the medium in relation to literature. I was much more at home working with Shakespeare adaptations, but TAing is not always about comfort: being exposed to multiple films I had not seen and had no experience analyzing through grading for American Film Narrative allowed me to escape the echo chamber of one's research area, and I am incredibly grateful for that.

Other Graduate Achievements

PhD student **Saba Pakdel** was the featured reader for the “Off the Shelf Poetry Reading Series” at SFU’s Belzberg Library (27 February 2026).



MA Student **Kiera Clark** has accepted an offer of admission with funding to the **PhD program in English at Simon Fraser University**, beginning in Fall 2026. She will be researching representations of gender in early modern English drama under the supervision of Dr. Ronda Arab. Kiera has also been nominated for the 2026 John H. MacDonald Awards for Excellence in Student Journalism for two articles she wrote for *The Martlet*, UVic’s independent newspaper: “[Taqsiqtuut Research-Creation Lab uses Indigenous art practices to foster creativity](#)” (Indigenous Reporting Award); “[Sea cucumber crime and illegal fishing impacts global ecosystems](#)” (Science Reporting Award).

Many congratulations to PhD Student and Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Scholar **Stephanie Erickson**, who joins the English Department on 1 July 2027 as **Assistant Professor of Indigenous Literatures and Cultures**.

This summer MA student **Maya Wei Yan Linsley** will be teaching **MDIA 325: Fans and Media Fandom**, UVic’s first-ever course on fan studies. MDIA 325 was completely full within 48 hours of enrollment opening. Maya is really excited to be teaching this course.

Maya has also accepted an offer to attend the UBC iSchool in fall 2026. She will be studying a combined Master of Archival Studies and Master of Library and Information Studies.



Q: Can you tell me a bit about your research?

A: I'm working on eco-fiction from the 1980s, which was a period when Margaret Thatcher and her new liberal policies were dominant in England. I believe it's a period of Renaissance in English eco-fiction novels.

My project looks at how some writers pushed back against Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal policies and, in doing so, reshaped the nature novel. They began to connect local, rural places to larger global environmental issues. This shift helped bring out new ways of thinking in literature, like the post-pastoral world, which focuses on in-between spaces like edgelands, and the Anthropocene, with all its global landscapes and ethical concerns.

Q: Dr. Chapman mentioned you have a background in theatre and literary criticism. How do you feel these factor into your current studies?

A: Theatre has always been part of my life, and it's something I grew up with; I have experienced acting, directing, have translated many plays from English to Persian, and have written columns on performances. Beyond theatre, I've long been interested in literary criticism, especially environmental criticism. That came from years of my environmental activism back home in Iran. This background led me to eco-theatre and its emergence in the 20th century, which reflects a growing environmental awareness. Eco-theatre was my originally planned PhD project; it was meant to be a joint project between the English and Theatre departments at UVic. However, I had to change my first supervisor for a few reasons and was unable to continue with the previous project. Parts of that project were completed by me and are now under revision to be published in a couple of journals soon.

Then I began writing a new proposal, and I shifted my focus to fiction while retaining the same era and my theoretical/conceptual framework. It is so exciting, as it helps me figure out how different genres frame ecological issues in distinct ways and how various narratives can influence people's perceptions of environmental policies, climate change, and ecological issues.

Reading fiction through a material ecocritical lens—where landscape, matter, and non-human forces can be read not just as setting, but as active participants, actors, and agents in the narrative is very gripping.

Q: Why did you choose UVic?

A: When I was looking into graduate programs, a former classmate from Iran, who was already in the English program at UVic at that time, told me to check UVic out. Then I realized I was already familiar with some of the faculty's publications. I researched more, and honestly, the faculty were the main draw. I remember I said, "Well, this program is incredible, and it'd be a great fit for me." I also looked into the city of Victoria, because my wife and I grew up in Iran along the Caspian Sea, which has weather similar to Victoria's. In the end, it just seemed like a really wonderful and welcoming place to live, study, and work.

Q: What do you feel has been particularly valuable or exciting about your time at UVic?

A: In my personal view, an English PhD program is really two things: your own personal research and teaching. Honestly, I'm very excited about both.

I've always loved teaching. I was a faculty member back in Iran, and teaching here at UVic in both English and the Academic and Technical Writing Program has been such a great experience. I love it.

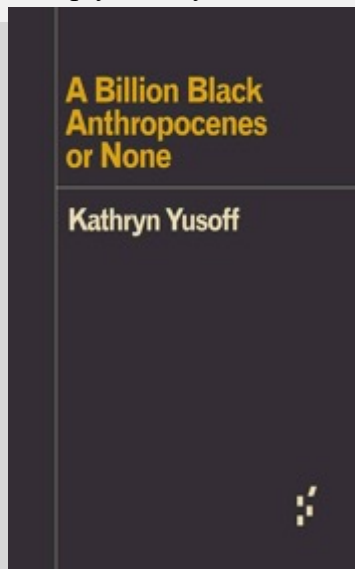
When it comes to research, I should say I am really lucky to have such knowledgeable and supportive supervisors, who make this experience so enriching for me! Also, getting to work as an assistant in other departments has been incredibly amazing. I got to meet experts in all kinds of fields. Things that connect to my interests, like the global political economy, the Indigenous policies, land ownership, and eco-localization. It's really broadened my perspective, which can affect my future projects. I definitely want to do more teaching and research; I never get fed up with it.

Q: Do you have a favourite spot on campus?

A: The walking trail behind family housing on campus. The place is surrounded by arbutus trees with blackberry bushes in some spots; it's gorgeous scenery. I go there all the time to walk, especially in the summer. My daughter loves running along the trail and picking and eating wild blackberries; it makes the place even more special to me. It's a really relaxing way for me and my family to slow down and hang out. It's far from the haste of the day.

Q: What advice would you give about a PhD program to those looking into them?

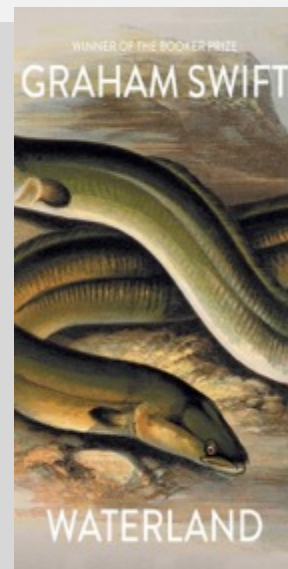
A: First, I would say, choose a program and location where you can actually see yourself living for a long time, at least five or six years, if not more (Victoria feels like paradise). A PhD program is a big commitment, and a big chunk of your life. So that's important, of course, the program matters, but your day-to-day life matters just as much. Choosing the right supervisor is also important in your journey and future decisions. And my final advice? Invest deeply in all your interests; the scholar you become will be richer for every opportunity you embrace.



Q: Last, I wanted to ask if you have any book recommendations you can give for summer?

A: I've got two recommendations, both of which are books that I have recently read. For those who are interested in environmental criticism, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* by Kathryn Yusoff.

For a novel, I have a fabulous work to recommend: *Waterland* by Graham Swift, which is about how human actions and history are wrapped up in the natural world. It is a decades-old book but is really worth reading.



Spotlight: Maryssa Grayer (PhD Student)

Maryssa Grayer is a PhD candidate in the English department. Her dissertation, titled “[P]leasant things ... to him forbidden:” *Disability, Sexuality, and Fatherhood in Victorian Marriage Plots*, focuses on how British novels and short stories from 1853 to 1901 exclude male characters with disabilities from their marriage plots and on the ways in which these characters attempted to restore the masculine status lost to them by that exclusion. She argues that the commonly accepted perception that disability is a feminizing experience, coupled with British and European nineteenth-century discourse about the threat that the disabled body posed to national and evolutionary progress, underpins the exclusion of male characters with disabilities from Victorian marriage plots and their conventional “happy” endings. She looks forward to defending her dissertation this summer (2026).

Over the spring semester (January-April 2026), Maryssa was the recipient of a President’s Fellowship in Research-Enriched Teaching (PFRET). This award helps PhD students and postdoctoral fellows to embrace new teaching and mentoring opportunities and to provide more research-based learning experiences for undergraduate students. Thanks to the PFRET, Maryssa was able to teach ENSH 342: Victorian Representations of Disability, which involved sharing her knowledge about Victorian fiction and culture as well as disability studies. During her time at UVic, Maryssa has been the recipient of several other awards, including a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Canada Doctoral Fellowship (2022-2025) and the Dean’s Dissertation Year Scholarship in the Humanities (2025-2026). Currently, Maryssa proudly serves as the Graduate Student Representative on UVic’s Scarborough Charter Steering Committee, helping to redress anti-Black racism and foster Black inclusion and flourishing. In the summer, when she is not preparing for her dissertation defence, she will be working as a Research Assistant (RA) for Dr. Jaipreet Virdi (Associate Professor, History).

TA Spotlight: Anna Emmans (MA Student)

My experience as a TA has been one of my favourite parts of the UVIC English MA. It has been enlightening to be on the other side of the classroom, and I have so enjoyed getting to see the work that the students are doing. Getting to TA for two different classes was particularly enlightening because I got to experience how different class make-ups can affect teaching and marking style.

Last semester, I was a TA for Sheila Rabillard's course ENSH 324: Comics and Graphic Novels. This class was on the smaller side, so I got an opportunity to lead a writing workshop and to co-teach a lecture with my co-TA, Mckenna. I really enjoyed getting to experience all of the aspects of teaching, from preparing a lecture to directly interacting with the students and trying out different pedagogical strategies in order to try and meet them at their point of need.

This semester, I worked as a TA for Matt Pollard's ENSH/GMST 342: A Cultural History of Vampires. This class is much larger, so my work has been more focused on notetaking and marking. This was a fascinating experience because, not only because it is cross listed in another department, Germanic studies, but it focuses on film as well as literature. It was so fun to get to interact with students from different disciplines and see how their differing perspectives shaped their understandings of the texts. Marking provided an opportunity to get to directly interact with a wide variety of students' ideas and passions around the figure of the vampire, which broadened my own understanding of the vampire as a cultural figure.

TA Spotlight: Roxy Moldovanu (MA Student)

I'm a first-year English MA student and CGRS-M grant holder for my research on affect theory and children's literature. In the Fall 2025 term, I was a TA for ENSH 355: John Milton, and I am currently a TA for ENSH 232: Literature and Myth. The opportunity to be a TA at UVic has been a highlight of my MA degree so far! Making English an accessible discipline is one of my biggest values as both a student and a scholar. The courses in which I assist teaching can introduce intimidating texts for new students, and I always want to reassure students that they are not alone in feeling overwhelmed by new challenges. Despite these challenges, I seek to remind them that they are capable of working with class materials in extraordinary ways. Holding office hours has allowed me to explore many students' ideas and provide further questions for them to pursue in their papers and their future research interests. The fact that students attend my office hours is very meaningful to me.

I have also had the chance to practice crucial skills as both a teacher and a scholar through my work with my supervisors, Dr. Gary Kuchar and Dr. Eric Miller. One of the most fulfilling instances I have had as a TA was teaching a guest lecture for ENSH 232: Literature and Myth on Ovid's "*Echo and Narcissus*" and Lord Alfred Tennyson's "*Tithonus*." I am grateful to Dr. Miller for giving me the chance to lead a class. Though I came in with my own research and perspectives, it was wonderfully insightful to hear from the students on their understandings of Echo and Narcissus and their first reactions to the story of Aurora and Tithonus. I enjoyed being able to provide some critical background on the texts while also hearing students challenge these ideas. Following Dr. Kuchar's and Dr. Miller's examples, I was happy to relate the texts we studied in my lecture to contemporary issues and to hear students' affective responses to these connections. It has been incredibly rewarding to work with young scholars and to work with my mentors. I am grateful to the English Department for giving me the opportunity to partake in such a fulfilling experience.

“EGSS has had another busy year supporting our lovely graduate students. This year, we’ve hosted several social events, providing students with the opportunity to eat, drink, and build connections across cohorts.

Preparations for our “Spring into a New Book” book and bake sale are in full swing. Thanks to the generous donations of several professors and students, we will be selling a variety of different books—alongside delicious cookies, brownies, and other such baked goods made by graduate students—to raise money for the society. The funds we raise will allow us to continue stalking the grad lounge with snacks, drinks, and sanitary supplies, and it’ll provide us with the funds necessary to run a few social events over the summer semester. We’re looking forward to spending time in the sun with everyone this summer!”

— Rebekah Stuive, Grad Rep



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Thank you to everyone who submitted their good news and photos!

Thanks to Deborah Ogilvie (Graduate Secretary) and Dailyn Ramirez (Senior Admin Officer) for all their support of the Graduate Program.

This newsletter was created by undergraduate student Kit Kennedy as part of a work study position for Dr. Alison Chapman

Have something to share in our next newsletter? Fill out our submission form [here](#).

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