

MLA Theses, 2009-present

This is a list and synopsis of many of the theses that have been completed and defended over the past eight years. The list is not complete (for instance, the visual art theses, which are performance-based, are not included). The purpose is to provide current and potential MLA students with an idea of what topics have been selected in the past.

**The Virgin and the Whore: Queen Elizabeth I and Catherine the Great: A Study in Respect and Power** / by Samantha McNeilly. (2009), 125 leaves.

Samantha's thesis concerns two major female historical figures, Queen Elizabeth I of England and Empress Catherine the Great of Russia. The thesis concerns female heads of state in history and in film. Focusing on a Russian queen, Samantha selected Russian history specialist Dr. Lee Farrow to direct her thesis, with Dr. Jan Bulman, who teaches Renaissance history and focuses on women in history, as her second reader.

**The Irish Voice : A Guide to Slang Terms in the Works of Frank O'Connor** / by Emily Laseter. (2010), 107 leaves.

Emily Laseter's thesis contains a slang dictionary, terms used by the famed Irish short-story writer Frank O'Connor. This practical thesis, useful to readers of O'Connor's fiction, was directed by O'Connor authority Dr. Robert Evans, with Dr. Eric Sterling, who publishes regularly on fiction, serving as second reader.

**Rage Inside Religion: Identity and Ideology in the Works of Adrienne Kennedy** / Phadra Carson Foster (2010), 105 leaves.

Phadra Carson Foster wrote her thesis on the absurdist African-American playwright Adrienne Kennedy, covering the following plays: *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, *The Owl Answers*, *A Lesson in Dead Language*, *Motherhood 2000*, and *A Rat's Mass*. Her thesis director was Dr. Eric Sterling, who has published on African-American drama and is currently writing a book on it. Dr. Eric Sterling agreed to direct Phadra's thesis after her first two thesis directors retired. Dr. Barbara Wiedemann, who taught American Literature, served as second reader.

**"The Paradox of Identity: Women as Hidden Authoritarian Figures in Luigi Pirandello's Literary Works"** Brooke O. Moore (2011).

Brooke's thesis concerns the role of women in Luigi Pirandello's drama. Dr. Susan Willis, who has a strong interest in Pirandello and who is a drama specialist, directed the thesis, with theatre specialist Professor Mike Winkelman serving as second reader.

**The Delayed Flight of an Artist: A Psychoanalytical-feminist Perspective of Selected Works from James Joyce / by Kali A. Mobley Piro (2011).**

Kali's thesis covers James Joyce's *Dubliners*, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Stephen Hero*. Dr. Joyce Kelley, AUM's James Joyce specialist, directed the thesis, with Dr. Susan Willis, who has significant experience as a modernist, serving as the second reader.

**Grandparents: Today's New Parents / by Arvilla Fee (2012).**

Arvilla Fee's MLA thesis covers both sociology and writing. Dr. Kimberly Brackett, a specialist in sociology of the family, directed the thesis, and English professor Dr. Alan Gribben served as her second reader. Both faculty members have a strong interest in the family unit. The thesis covers literature and interviews about children who are raised by their grandparents when their parents are unable to honor their commitment. Arvilla also draws from personal experience in her poignant thesis.

**Mockingbird Songs: A Musical Journal through Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* / by Donna Y. Smith (2012)**

Donna's thesis concerns the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* and also contains many original songs about the characters and themes—songs that Donna wrote and performed with a band. Renowned Harper Lee scholar Professor Nancy Anderson, who knew Harper Lee personally and who taught a course on the novel several times, directed Donna's thesis, with Professor Robert Evans, who has published on the novel, serving as the second reader.

**Witches, book binders, and a cat who could predict the weather : stories from the Alabama Writers' Project / Kenny Johnson (2012) 166 leaves.**

Kenny Johnson's thesis concerns Depression-era stories (and oral histories) written by Alabama authors as part of the Federal Writers' Project. Eric Sterling, who is familiar with some of the authors and the short story collection, directed the thesis; Dr. Alan Gribben, who knows much about Southern literature, served as second reader.

**Apollonius of Tyana: A Holy Man of Late Antiquity / by Gregory O. Teal, II (2012)**

Greg Teal, II's thesis concerns Apollonius of Tyana, his life as perceived by Philostratus the second- and third-century Athenian, views on the miracles of Christ, and hagiography and Greek philosophy.

Renowned Greek and Religious Studies historian Professor Michael Simmons directed the thesis, with Dr. Jan Bulman serving as second reader.

**Communicative Language Teaching: Answering Korean Needs in Montgomery, Alabama** / by Emily Margaret Young (2012). 84 leaves.

Emily Young's thesis concerns methods of teaching ESL using cultural and community events to help guide new students. Dr. Eric Sterling, who has taught several ESL composition classes, directed the thesis, with composition director Dr. Elizabeth Woodworth serving as second reader. Emily subsequently became director of AUM's ESL program, a dean of a college overseas, and currently works again with ESL students at AUM.

**Cat Shit in the Attic: A Memoir** / by Lacey Young (2012) 179 leaves

For her MLA thesis, Lacey Young wrote a humorous memoir about her unique family. Lacey selected Professor Barbara Wiedemann, a talented poet, to direct it, with Dr. Elizabeth Woodworth serving as her second reader.

**Women's Attitudes Regarding Indian Removal** / by Martha Leanne Waller-Trupp., (2013), 96 leaves

Leanne's thesis concerns public opinion regarding Indian removal in America from 1813-1903, particularly attitudes harbored by white women. This thesis emanated from research in Dr. Keith Krawczynski's class, so Dr. Krawczynski directed her thesis, with American historian Dr. Ben Severance as the second reader.

**Pink's the Lowest": Homosexual Holocaust: History and Reality in Martin Sherman's *Bent*** / by Lisa Michelle Lawrence. (2013), 71 leaves.

Lisa Lawrence's thesis emanated from her research on the persecution of German homosexuals in Nazi Germany and in concentration camps—research that she conducted in Dr. Eric Sterling's Jewish Literature of the Holocaust class. Lisa chose Dr. Sterling as her thesis director, with Dr. Joyce Kelley, who teaches the Holocaust text *MAUS*, as second reader. Lisa now teaches Holocaust literature at Trinity High School, where she developed the Holocaust class and won a state-wide scholarship from the Birmingham Holocaust Educational Center in order to conduct research on the Holocaust and Holocaust pedagogy.

**Celsus: A Fierce Foe of Christianity, who Argued for the Superiority of Hellenic Culture** / by Michael D. Anderson (2013), 153 leaves

Michael D. Anderson's thesis concerns the controversial Platonic philosopher Celsus, who argued against Christianity. Michael selected Professor Michael Simmons, a renowned Religious Studies scholar who focuses on Greek and Roman historical figures, as his thesis director, with Dr. Jan Bulman serving as his second reader.

**A Man of Exquisite Taste /** by Jina DuVernay (2013), 108 leaves

Jina DuVernay's poignant thesis is an autobiographical novel about the rites of passage of an African-American woman. It tells the story of a woman whose life is shaped by her African-American culture. Because of her strong relationships with Dr. Eric Sterling, along with his experience in teaching and publishing on Africa-American culture, and his experience in creative writing, Jina chose him to direct her thesis. In fact, Dr. Sterling is not only the director but is also a character in the thesis. Dr. Robert Evans, who has also published on African-American literature, is the second reader.

**August Wilson's Look at Three Decades of Twentieth-Century Black America /** by Linda McCall House (2013), 89 leaves.

Linda House's thesis concerns the Great Migration of African Americans to the Northern states (particularly to the Hill District in Pittsburgh) and African-American culture as portrayed in three dramas by August Wilson— *Gem of the Ocean*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Linda asked Dr. Eric Sterling to direct her thesis because he has published and taught a seminar on August Wilson and is currently writing a book on his plays. Americanist Dr. Barbara Wiedemann served as second reader.

**This Thesis Doesn't Meme what You Think it Memes: Internet Memes and Composition Pedagogy /** by Matthew Killian Kemp (2013), 91 leaves.

Matt Kemp's unique thesis deals with rhetoric and pedagogy involving memes—how to employ memes, discourse analysis, and visual communication in the teaching process. Dr. Elizabeth Woodworth, a composition and rhetoric specialist and Director of Composition, was the clear choice to direct Matt's thesis, with Dr. Robert Evans, who has studied, taught, and published on rhetoric, serving as the second reader.

**Goldengrove Unleaving /** by Ken Stephens (2013), 141 leaves.

Ken Stephens's thesis consists of short stories and a one-act play. Because Dr. Eric Sterling has written an award-winning one-act play and has talked to Ken at length about fiction writing, he was the logical choice to direct the thesis. Ken and Dr. Sterling also have a shared interest in the themes that are addressed in the short stories. One of Ken's stories was nominated for a state-wide writing

award. Dr. Joyce Kelley, who, like Dr. Sterling has experience in creative writing, served as second reader.

**Gastronomical Pleasures: A Play /** by Kathryn Pearson. (2014), 52 leaves

Katie's thesis consists of a play along with an essay about playwriting and why she chose to write her thesis as dramatic literature. The play is about middle-aged woman and the sisterhood that can be forged amongst single middle-aged women, particularly with food as the means of fostering and maintaining friendship. Katie chose Dr. Eric Sterling, who wrote an award-winning play and who wrote a play that had a staged reading at Indiana University, to direct it. Theatre specialist Professor Val Winkelman served as second reader.

**The Evolution of the African-American Family /** by Ruby Reed Thomas. (2014), 63 leaves

Ruby Reed Thomas's thesis concerns the social conditions, such as the role of the black family, in African-American culture. Ruby's thesis was directed by Dr. Eric Sterling, who has taught and published on African-American culture and who is currently working on a book on the black family and culture in the twentieth century. Americanist Dr. John Havard served as second reader.

**Becoming the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Writing Teacher: Creating Multiimodal Genres through Text Remediation /** by Antonio Alexander Byrd. (2014), 134 leaves

Antonio Byrd's thesis concerns teaching composition and the English language in higher education, using multimedia communications and rhetoric. Antonio chose Dr. Elizabeth Woodworth to direct his thesis, a natural choice because she is the composition director and a composition specialist. Dr. Robert Evans, who has a strong interest in rhetoric and who has taught Rhetoric and Style, served as second reader.

**The Significance of Missionary Schools for Girls in China /** by Carol Telehany. (2014), 68 leaves.

Carol Telehany's thesis, directed by acclaimed Chinese historian Qiang Zhai, concerns the education of women in China. Because Carol's thesis also concerns missionary work and religious education, it is fitting that Dr. Michael Simmons, Director of the Religious Studies program at AUM, served as second reader.

**An Analysis of Tragedy in *A Dream of Red Mansions* /** by Jialin Wang. (2014), 53 leaves

Jialin Wang's thesis concerns the Cao Xuegin eighteenth-century novel *A Dream of Red Mansions*, focusing on the tragic elements of the iconic book. The novel concerns the fall of an affluent Chinese family. Jialin covers the literary criticism of the novel in depth. Dr. Eric Sterling, who has written on Chinese literature and even presented a paper on Chinese literature at a major national conference, served as director, while Dr. Qiang Zhai, who could not direct the thesis because of his time commitment at the Confucius Institute, served as second reader.

**Undermining Regional Stereotypes in Montana Literature / Lynn Ferguson / (2014), 85 leaves**

Throughout much of Montana literature, writers explore a sense of place. Many Montana writers openly discuss environmental issues, and others come closer to the natural environment as part of a resolution to everyday struggles. Whether discussing relations between Native Americans and Euro-Americans or coming-of-age themes in Montana, these writers explore the natural landscape and celebrate their frontier heritage. Montana's rich geography—with its rivers, prairies, and mountains—enhances these narratives and places these works in a natural context that illustrates timeless lessons about the West. Dr. John Havard, who has studied and written on Western American literature, directed this thesis.

**The Case for Humor in the Classroom / Jason Shifferd (2014)**

"The Case for Humor in the Classroom" explores the potential benefits of incorporating comedy into the teaching process, including lectures, assignments, and discussions. This thesis discusses the psychological benefits of humor in easing student anxiety and stress levels while also enhancing student engagement and memory. The thesis is largely comprised of an annotated bibliography full of diverse sources, some of which discuss humor specifically in writing, some of which discuss humor in academia at large, and some of which discuss the benefits of humor in other fields such as psychology and therapy, the workplace, and everyday social interactions. In addition to the annotations, the thesis contains a personal reflection of the writer's observations on the use of humor both from the perspective of a student and that of an instructor. Dr. Bob Evans has devoted much of his life to humor and was thus the perfect person to direct the thesis. He and second reader Dr. Joyce Kelley are both Distinguished Teaching Professor Award winners at AUM and thus care deeply about pedagogy and discussing innovative methods of teaching students.

**At What Cost: Survival Ideologies in Post-Apocalyptic Novels of the Nuclear Era and Today / by Courtney Lane Rottgering (2014), 126 leaves.**

Courtney Rottgering's thesis deals with post-apocalyptic novels such as Neil Shute's *On the Beach*, Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon*, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, and Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games*. She focuses on dystopic and survival literature, as well as science fiction, which is she why she wisely

selected renowned science fiction specialist Dr. Darren Harris-Fain as her director. Dr. Eric Sterling, who has taught post-apocalyptic literature, served as second reader.

**An Analysis of Character Evolution within Subterranean Science Fiction and Fantasy / Ian Richard (2015)**

The thesis analyzes select works of Jules Verne, J. R. R. Tolkien, George Lucas, and H. G. Wells with specific emphasis on literal and figurative subterranean constructs and processes. The character journeys of Professor Liedenbrock, Bilbo Baggins, Luke Skywalker, Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader, Denton, and the Time Traveller emerge as character evolution case studies within Subterranea, a specific and unique geospatial niche used by science fiction and fantasy artists to self-actualize characters. An authority on science fiction and fantasy, Dr. Darren Harris-Fain directed the thesis, with Dr. Susan Willis, who teaches fantasy, serving as second reader.

**A Distinctive Voice: A Recreation of Episodes from My Grandmother's Life in Her Own Words / Hillary Fowler (2015)**

Considering that 65 million Americans are grandparents and that almost three million of those grandparents are raising at least one of their grandchildren, many would agree that in today's often unstable family structure, grandmothers play a vital role and frequently step in to a matriarchal role for grandchildren. This creative writing thesis offers three stories of her own grandmother, utilizing hand written journals and adopting an unusual approach to storytelling. Dr. Bob Evans, who has much experience with narrative theory, directed this poignant thesis, with Dr. Eric Sterling serving as second reader.

**Zora Neale Hurston's "The Country in the Woman": A Pluralist Approach / Christina Garner (2015)**

Hurston's 1927 short story "The Country in the Woman" features Mitchell Potts—a smooth-talking philanderer—and his wife Caroline who is set in her traditional "country" ways. Partly to make a fresh start and partly to "git de country out dat woman," Mitchell relocates his little family to Harlem, away from Florida and a past littered with his mistresses. The story follows Caroline's attempts to end Mitchell's latest affair and Mitchell's attempts to mold Caroline into what he thinks she should be. This story has all the trademark characteristics of a Hurston classic, but it was lost after its original publication and was only recently rediscovered. This thesis includes one of the first reprints of the work and utilizes various critical theories to analyze the story and to supply some of the critical analysis the story may have received had it not been lost for nearly a century. Dr. Bob Evans, who has published extensively on Zora Neale Hurston and taught a class on her fiction, directed the thesis, with Dr. Eric Sterling, who has published and taught African-American literature, serving as second reader.

**Concepts of Efficiency Implementations: Behavioral and Scientific / by Emilie Whatley (2015)**

Synopsis: The thesis examines two key theories designed to promote efficiency in the workplace and progress in society at large. One of the theories was formulated by B. F. Skinner in his work *Walden Two*. The other was pioneered by Frederick W. Taylor and explained in his work *Principles of Scientific Management*. The thesis will compare and contrast why each theory was deemed necessary, the main principles, how society accepted the theories, and an analysis of the success of the different approaches, suggesting which of the two seems more appropriate in modern society. The thesis derived from work Emilie did in Dr. Keith Krawczynski's class, so he directed it, with Dr. Bob Evans serving as second reader.

**Once We Were Great: Continuing F. Scott Fitzgerald's Story of Tom and Daisy Buchanan Through the Voice of their Daughter Pammy / by Sandra Kay Tippett (2016)**

This thesis examines F. Scott Fitzgerald's writing style in *The Great Gatsby*, imitates that style, and continues the narrative of Tom and Daisy Buchanan through the voice of Pammy, their daughter. The story begins shortly after the death of Gatsby and ends after Pammy's graduation from high school. The goals are to better understand what makes good writing, to teach better writing, and to renew interest in classic literature as opposed to more modern selections. Through eight chapters, the story explores the dysfunction of the Buchanan family, the effects of historical events on the characters, and the social climate of the era. Dr. Bob Evans, who has published on Fitzgerald, directed the thesis, while Dr. Eric Sterling, who has published extensively on modern American literature, served as second reader.

**Generalizing Tarantino: Genre Theory and Modern American Cinema / Clayton Sims (2016)**

This thesis explores the evolution of genre theory over the past forty years and the demonstration of their efficacy through an analysis of Quentin Tarantino's films. Genre theory has expanded beyond application to literary fields to the studies of rhetoric, linguistic, and film. Tarantino's highly-referential style of filmmaking utilizes contemporary ideas of genre's function to create intricately layered recreations of preexisting generic conventions that engage audiences in unique way. This thesis was directed by film buff Dr. Darren Harris-Fain, with Tarantino fan Dr. Michel Aaij serving as second reader.

**The Poems (1906) of Julius C. Wright (1886-1986): A Young African American Poet from Montgomery, Alabama at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century / by Candice Pettaway (2016)**

This thesis offers a fully annotated scholarly edition of Julius Caesar Wright's collection of poems titled *Poetic Diamonds*. The thesis presents clean, correct versions of Wright's poems accompanied by line numbers, and it also offers an alphabetized index of the poems' first lines as well as an alphabetized listing of their titles. More significantly, the thesis provides annotations for each poem which offers historical and biographical information. Moreover, this scholarly edition will make available to readers a fascinating historical document that analyzes the work of a prolific, yet forgotten African American poet. Dr. Bob Evans directed Candice's thesis, while Dr. Eric Sterling was the second reader. Both have published extensively on African-American literature.

**Violence and Grendel's Mother in the Anglo-Saxon Epic *Beowulf* from Poem to Film / John Lenart (2016)**

Grendel's mother's association with monstrosity in the Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf* stems from her willingness to commit acts of violence. Women in the poem mourned, argued, or remained silent, attributes Grendel's mother demonstrates as well. Indeed, her sorrowfulness after Grendel's death and her lack of voice align her identity with those of other women in the poem. Movement towards the dominant culture suggests movement away from the monstrous. Filmic representations continue the trend towards reidentifying Grendel's mother by aligning her identity with the valkyric, Norse heroines similarly associated with violence. The thesis was directed by Dr. Michel Aaij, with Dr. Alex Kaufman serving as second reader. Both are Medievalists and thus were good choices to serve on John's committee.

**Forgotten Freedom Fighters: Gee's Bend, Alabama and the Voting Rights Movement in Wilcox County / Jeremy Jeffcoat (2016)**

The tiny community of Gee's Bend, Alabama is known in popular culture for folk art in the form of handmade quilts. Less well known is the leadership role that the Gee's Bend residents played in the struggle for voting rights in rural southwest Alabama. This project will examine the history of Gee's Bend, and tie the geographic, cultural, and economic isolation of the community to the independence and courage of its residents in the struggle for black enfranchisement. It is the isolation of Gee's Bend that allowed its unique, independent culture to develop and earned the community a lasting place in the hearts of civil rights leaders, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. Keith Krawczynski, who teaches African-American history, directed Jeremy's thesis. The project derived from MLA 6000, Research and Writing, taught by Dr. Seth Reno, who served as second reader.

**'The Muse Glares at Me': Thoughts on Creative Writing and English Composition / Rebekah Shumack (2016)**

Over the past 60 years English composition instructors have been quietly exploring the connections between creative writing and English composition. Only recently however have these connections gained greater interest within English composition itself and in other disciplines. This project explores not only the historical and pedagogical connections between these two different courses, but also how creative writing can be practically incorporated into English composition courses and academic writing in general. In particular, using creative writing as a teaching resource, English composition courses can help students develop a deeper understanding of one's audience and different points of view, as well as how to effectively incorporate research into an essay. Because Rebekah's thesis concerns composition, she chose composition specialists Dr. Elizabeth Woodworth to direct and Dr. Shannon Howard as her second reader.

### **Chaotic Deities in Genre Fiction / Jacob Lambert (2016)**

Focusing on the work of 1930s pulp writer H.P. Lovecraft and modern bestselling authors Stephen King and Neil Gaiman, *Chaotic Deities in Genre Fiction* suggests the importance of man's relationship with chaotic gods in fantasy and horror literature. Man's decisions upon encountering these gods demonstrate his character, and show variations in the fictional treatment of the divine. Because Jacob works with fiction writing, Dr. Blake Gerard, fiction writing teacher and fiction writer, directed his thesis. Dr. Robert Klevay, who supervises the creative writing magazine *The Fillbuster*, served as second reader.

### **Overcoming Disrupted Fairy Tales and Wasted Whiteness: Media Guidelines for Diverse Victims of Violent Crime / Buffy Lockette (2016)**

From JonBenet Ramsey to Natalee Holloway, the news media has made household names out of some victims of violent crime while ignoring others. This thesis examines media bias and framing and offers victims' families advice on working with news organizations to advocate for their loved ones. This thesis was directed by media and communications specialist Dr. Silvia Giagnoni, with Dr. Eric Sterling, who has written extensively about diversity, minorities, and "the other," serving as second reader.