

CASSANDRA MARIA NELSON

365 E. Campus Mall, Suite 200
Madison, WI 53715
cmn3zh@virginia.edu
cnelson@slbrownfoundation.org

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS AND EMPLOYMENT

- 2024– Lumen Center, Fellow in Literature
- 2019– University of Virginia, Associate Fellow, Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture
- 2018–2019 University of Virginia, Bradley Fellow, Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture
- 2015–2018 United States Military Academy, Visiting Assistant Professor of English

EDUCATION

- 2014 Harvard University, Ph.D., English
- 2007 Boston University, M.A., Editorial Studies
- 2005 Boston University, B.A., English, *summa cum laude*

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

- 2025 Wisconsin Book of the Month, *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*
- 2023 “Who’s Afraid of the Still, Small Voice?” named an editor’s pick (and top 5th most read article of 2023) by *Common Good*
- 2018 Bradley Fellowship, The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation
- 2015 Lilly Fellowship, Valparaiso University (declined)
- 2014 Summer Scholar, National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute, “Reconsidering Flannery O’Connor,” Georgia College and State University
- 2012 Meringoff Nonfiction Award, Association of Literary Scholars, Critics & Writers
- 2011 William Harris Arnold & Gertrude Weld Arnold Essay Prize, Harvard University
- 2005 Student Speaker Prize, Boston University

PUBLICATIONS

Books

- 2026 *Who’s Afraid of the Still Small Voice?: Essays on Teaching, Learning, and Faith*. St. Paul, MN: One Subject Press (forthcoming).

2025 *A Theology of Fiction*. Menomonee Falls, WI: Wiseblood Books, 2025.

Peer-Reviewed Articles

- 2024 “Forming Souls Receptive to the Counsels of Reason and Value: A Teleological Approach to Christian Prose Poetics.” *Among Winter Cranes* 7.4 (Autumn 2024), October 24, 2024.
- 2014 “Manichaeism and the Movies: Flannery O’Connor and the Roman Catholic Response to Film and Television at Midcentury.” *Literary Imagination* 16.1 (February 2014): 76–94.
- 2010 “Two Allusions in the Provisional Title of Samuel Beckett’s *More Pricks than Kicks*.” *Notes and Queries* 57.2 (2010): 239–240.

Book Chapters

- 2025 “Gratitude and Grace.” In *Our Sense of Gratitude: For Christopher Ricks*, edited by Michael Autrey, pp. 112–117. Boston: Senex Press, 2025.

Essays

- 2026 “A ‘Singular Dream’: *Huck Finn*’s America Turns 250.” *Religion & Liberty* online, June 30, 2026.
- 2025 “That None Should Fall: Hierarchy’s Place in the Story of Salvation.” *Comment* 43.4 (Winter 2025): 57–64.
- 2025 “Confident of Welcome.” *The Raised Hand*, October 1, 2025.
- 2025 “Race Isn’t Black and White: Another Way to Think About Race and Diversity.” *Common Good* 19 (Spring 2025): 64–73.
- 2024 “Strengthen What Remains: The Ripple Effects of Higher Ed’s Obsession with Metrics.” *Minding the Campus*, November 29, 2024.
- 2023 “Who’s Afraid of the Still Small Voice? The Case for Faithful Presence in Education Today.” *Common Good* 13 (Autumn 2023), 32–40.
- 2022 “Authority is Dead, Long Live Authority.” *Comment* (Cardus), July 21, 2022.
- 2022 “Readiness is Not All.” *The Point* 27 (Spring 2022): 79–89.
- 2022 “A Theology of Fiction.” *First Things* (April 2022): 43–50.
- 2021 “‘Hard Liberty’: The Hellish Internet’s False Promise.” *Plough Quarterly*, March 25, 2021.

- 2018 “Time is On Our Side: Reflections on Advent.” *Commonweal*, December 14, 2018: 38–39.
- 2018 “Bracing for Impact: Trauma, Triggers, and the Saving Power of Literature.” *Commonweal*, February 9, 2018: 11–17.
- 2017 “Why the Doily?: Aristotle, Elizabeth Bishop, and the Work of Preservation.” *Commonweal*, November 10, 2017: 44–45.
- 2017 “How We Built This: Commentary on David Foster Wallace’s *The Pale King* and the Collective Distraction from the Reality of Our Own Existence.” *Malibu Magazine* (October 2017): 62–65.
- 2016 “Seeing is Believing: What Flannery O’Connor Meant by Vision.” *Commonweal*, November 11, 2016: 14–17.
- 2016 “Second Sight: Reading Flannery O’Connor and Betty Wahl at Collegeville.” *Bearings Online*.
- 2015 “‘A Thing of Beauty is a Joy for Ever’: Thoughts on the Crisis in the Humanities.” *The Battersea Review* 4 (Winter 2015).
- 2013 “Through a Glass, Darkly: Notes on Screens.” *The Battersea Review* 3 (Summer 2013).
- 2012 “The Woman Who Was Mistaken for Flannery O’Connor.” *Deep South Magazine*, November 2, 2012.
- 2008 “‘What with the Moving and the Children’: Betty Wahl in Ireland and America, 1951–1958.” *The Recorder: The Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 20.2–21.1 (Spring and Fall 2008), 133–159.

Reviews and Review-Essays

- 2025 *Shadow Ticket*, by Thomas Pynchon. For *Common Good* (in progress).
- 2025 *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*, by Jonathan Haidt. *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 77.3 (September 2025): 226–228.
- 2024 *Startling Figures: Encounters with American Catholic Fiction*, by Michael O’Connell. *American Catholic Studies* 135.4 (Winter 2024): 92–94.
- 2023 In Praise of Hidden Things: *Life of the Virgin Mary*, by John Geometres. *Current*, December 20, 2023.

- 2023 Tradition and the Individual Christian Talent: *The Situation of the Catholic Novelist*, by Trevor Cribben Merrill, and *Contemplative Realism: A Theological-Aesthetical Manifesto*, by Joshua Hren. *The Hedgehog Review* 25.3 (Fall 2023), 142–147.
- 2023 The Metaphysics of Birth: What We Are Born For, and Why: *Nativity: Toward a Philosophy of Birth*, by Jennifer Banks. *Comment*, August 24, 2023.
- 2021 When the TV Turns Off: *The Silence*, by Don DeLillo. *First Things* (August/September 2021): 49–53.
- 2021 A Good Editor is Hard to Find: *Good Things Out of Nazareth: The Uncollected Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, edited by Benjamin B. Alexander. *First Things* (February 2021): 57–60.
- 2018 Despair Not, Presume Not: *The Kingdom*, by Emmanuel Carrère. *First Things* (December 2018): 47–49.
- 2017 Losing His Way: *The Schooldays of Jesus*, by J. M. Coetzee. *Commonweal*, July 7, 2017: 33–34.
- 2016 Quotidian Wonder: *Zero K*, by Don DeLillo. *First Things* 266 (October 2016): 59–62.
- 2016 Thrown into the World: *Purity*, by Jonathan Franzen. *First Things* 261 (March 2016): 60–61.
- 2015 Lights in the Firmament (Christmas Critics). *Commonweal*, December 4, 2014: 38–40.
- 2015 Honor Thy Child: *Lila*, by Marilynne Robinson. *First Things* 250 (February 2015): 53–55.
- 2015 Inefficiency Expert: *Suitable Accommodations: An Autobiographical Story of Family Life: The Letters of J. F. Powers, 1942–1963*, edited by Katherine A. Powers. *Essays in Criticism* 65.1 (January 2015): 115–123.
- 2014 Flawed Vessels: *The Liar's Wife: Four Novellas*, by Mary Gordon. *Commonweal*, November 18, 2014: 24–26.
- 2014 Pears Not Pixels: *Bleeding Edge*, by Thomas Pynchon. *First Things* 240 (February 2014): 57–58.
- 2012 “Ignorance Regained”: *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume 2: 1941–1956*, edited by George Craig, et al. *Irish Literary Supplement* (Fall 2012), 21–22.
- 2011 *Beckett and Death*, edited by Steven Barfield, Matthew Feldman, and Philip Tew. *James Joyce Literary Supplement* 25.1 (Spring 2011), 6–7.

- 2011 “A Journey From, and Not To”: *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume 1: 1929–1940*, edited by Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, et al. *Essays in Criticism* 61.1 (April 2011): 96–104.

Editions

- 2025 *Selected Stories of Betty Wahl*. Catholic Women Writers series. Catholic University of America Press (under contract).
- 2016 Advisor on the text. *More Pricks than Kicks*. By Samuel Beckett. New York: Grove Press, 2016.
- 2010 *More Pricks than Kicks*. By Samuel Beckett. Edited and with a preface and chronology (uniform to the series) by Cassandra Nelson. London: Faber and Faber, 2010.
- 2009 “The Other House.” By Betty Wahl. In *The Southern Review* 45.4 (Autumn 2009): 742–757.
- 2009 “Aprille.” By Betty Wahl. In *The Antioch Review* 67.3 (Summer 2009): 480–487.
- 2008 “The Lace Curtain,” “Tide Rips in the Tea Cups,” and “A Shorter History of the Irish People.” By Betty Wahl. In *The Recorder: The Journal of the American Irish Historical Society* 20.2–21.1 (Spring and Fall 2008), 103–132.

Encyclopedia Articles

- 2011 “Ambition, Guilt, and Fate in *Macbeth*.” In *Encyclopedia of Themes in Literature*. Edited by Jennifer McClinton-Temple. New York: Facts on File (2011), 3.942–945.
- 2011 “Race, Religion, and Isolation in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.” In *Encyclopedia of Themes in Literature*. Edited by Jennifer McClinton-Temple. New York: Facts on File (2011), 3.1082–1085.
- 2008 “J. F. Powers.” *The Literary Encyclopedia*, September 19, 2008.
- 2008 “Betty Wahl.” *The Literary Encyclopedia*, June 27, 2008.

INVITED TALKS

- 2025 “Words and the Word.” Madison Catholic Faculty Group, Holy Name Heights, Madison, WI, February 20, 2025.
- 2025 “Can Good Fiction Deliver What Technology Can’t?” Upper House, Madison, WI, February 14, 2025.
- 2025 “Institutions and Authority.” Response to Anne Snyder, “Reimagining Our Moment for Whatever Comes Next,” Lumen Center, Madison, WI, January 31, 2025.

- 2024 “*Homo Fabulator*: Storytelling Man and *A Theology of Fiction*.” St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church, Madison, WI, December 6, 2024.
- 2024 “A Theology of Fiction: What It Is and Why It Matters.” Lumen Center, Madison, WI, April 8, 2024.
- 2023 “From the Golden Mean to Median Humans: Technology and the Sinking Middle.” *Front Porch Republic* 2023 Conference. Madison, WI, October 21, 2023.
- 2021 “‘Hard Liberty’: Milton’s Hell and the Internet Age.” Guest lecture and discussion with students in Literature XI. The Brearley School, New York City, May 20, 2021.
- 2019 “Narratives of Politicization and the Civic Imagination.” Response to Eeva Luhtakallio and Veikko Eranti (Tampere University, Finland)’s “Politicization, Depoliticization, and Grammars of Commonality: Addressing Plurality in Politics.” Power, Agency, and Authority Seminar, Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, University of Virginia, March 12–15, 2019.
- 2015 “‘That Miracles May Yet Be Possible’: Faith and Technology in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon.” Appalachian State University, February 2, 2015.
- 2014 “‘The Order that Appeared, Finally, in the Retelling of Events’: Betty Wahl and *Suitable Accommodations*.” Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers, Boston University, February 12, 2014.
- 2010 “‘Corrigées si on peut dire’ [‘Corrected, if you can call it that’]: Textual Variants in Samuel Beckett’s *More Pricks than Kicks*.” Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers, Boston University, September 29, 2010.

CONFERENCE PANELS ORGANIZED

- 2019 “What Do We Mean by ‘Close Reading’?” Seminar, Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers 23rd Annual Conference, College of the Holy Cross, October 3–6, 2019.

CONFERENCE PAPERS PRESENTED

- 2017 “Sense and Comprehensibility: Revivifying Literature for First-Year College Students.” Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers 21st Annual Conference, University of Dallas, October 26–29, 2017.
- 2017 “Faith, Authority, and Computer Culture.” Southwest Popular/American Culture Association 38th Annual Conference, Albuquerque, February 18, 2017.

- 2016 “From Totality to Silent Reading to Simultaneity: Meaning and Identity in a Digital Age.” States of the Book Symposium, United States Military Academy, September 24, 2016.
- 2016 “O’Connor and Objects: Eyeglasses.” The Society for the Study of Southern Literature Conference, Boston University, March 10, 2016.
- 2016 “‘Possessed of a Selfness, a Teeming Soul’: Terrorism, Technology, and Transcendence in Don DeLillo’s *Mao II*.” Department of English and Philosophy, Faculty Colloquium, United States Military Academy, February 2, 2016.
- 2015 “The Human Eye and the Camera Eye: Flannery O’Connor’s Ethics and Aesthetics of Seeing.” South Central Modern Language Association 72nd Annual Conference, Vanderbilt University, November 2, 2015.
- 2014 “‘Karmic Echoes’: Place and the Past in Thomas Pynchon’s *Bleeding Edge*.” American Comparative Literature Association 2014 Annual Meeting, New York University, March 20–23, 2014.
- 2013 “Meaning Fixed and Free: Pages, Screens, and the Role of the Reader.” Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers 19th Annual Conference, University of Georgia, April 5, 2013.
- 2012 “Manichaeism and the Movies in the Writings of Flannery O’Connor.” ALA 23rd Annual Conference on American Literature, San Francisco, Calif., May 26, 2012.
- 2011 “Boundless Curiosity, from A to Z: Hester Thrale Piozzi’s *New Common Place Book*.” 19th Annual British Women Writers Conference, Ohio State University, March 31, 2011.

COURSES TAUGHT

The Lumen Center

Picturing the Good through Recent American Fiction (Spring 2025)

- Four-week, non-credit reading group designed to deepen participants’ faith formation through the study of American literature.
- Course topics: birth, death, and what makes for the good life—*eudaimonia*—in between. Authors: Saul Bellow, Flannery O’Connor, George Saunders, Tess Slesinger, David Foster Wallace, Tobias Wolfe.

United States Military Academy, Department of English and Philosophy

Introduction to Composition (4 sections, Fall 2015, Fall 2017, Fall 2018; 3 sections, Fall 2016)

- Designed and taught first-year writing seminars to classes of 12–18 students. Course themes centered on technology, media, identity, democracy, and leadership, with texts by Isaac Asimov, Henri Bergson, Don DeLillo, Michel Montaigne, George Orwell, and others.
- Designed and led a workshop on “Bridging the K–12 Gap” for new instructors (2017).

- Organized course-wide events, including a guest lecture by Sir Christopher Ricks (2015) and a performance of contemporary American monologues by Adam Driver’s nonprofit Arts in the Armed Forces (2016) for audiences of approximately 1,300 cadets.

Introduction to Literature (3 sections, Spring 2016; 4 sections, Spring 2016, Spring 2017, Spring 2018; 1 section, Summer 2018)

- Empowered students to tackle challenging texts without fear and with full comprehension.
- Equipped students with an understanding of genre (poetry, drama, novels, stories) and wide historical range, from Shakespeare’s *King Lear* to Julie Otsuka’s *When the Emperor Was Divine*.

The Novel (1 section, Spring 2016)

- Focused on postwar American fiction, by writers including Saul Bellow, Don DeLillo, Vladimir Nabokov, Thomas Pynchon, Toni Morrison, and Marilynne Robinson.

Drama (1 section, Fall 2016)

- Survey of antiquity through the present day, with plays by Sophocles, Marlowe, Wilde, Beckett, Pirandello, Tennessee Williams, and Tom Stoppard.
- Guest lecturers included *Narcos* writer TJ Brady and Oscar-winning screenwriter Tom Schulman, who told our class about the real-life teacher who inspired *Dead Poets Society*.

Harvard University, Department of English

Postwar American and British Fiction, with James Wood (Spring 2013, Spring 2012)

- Head Teaching Fellow (2013).

Castaways and Renegades (American literature survey), with John Stauffer (Fall 2012)

- Arranged a field trip to Herman Melville’s Arrowhead estate after students’ curiosity was piqued by looking at manuscripts of *Moby-Dick*.

Harvard University, Program in General Education

American Protest Literature, with John Stauffer and Timothy McCarthy (Fall 2011)

ADDITIONAL PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AND SERVICE

Kirby Laing Centre for Public Theology

Member, Tech Hub Working Group, April 2023–present

Rivendell Institute, Yale University

Emerging Scholar, Christian Poetics Initiative, February 2022–2025

United States Military Academy

Instructor, West Point Summer Leaders Experience, June 3–16, 2017

Designed and taught a 5-hour workshop on college-level reading and analysis for rising high school seniors interested in attending West Point (six sessions with 36 students/class).

Officer in Charge, Advanced Individual Academic Development, Mongolia, July 3–23, 2016

Led five cadets on a three-week service trip to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, where we taught ESL to 14- to 18-year-olds, and helped institute a Montessori program for children ages 2 to 7.

Oxford University Press

Associate Editor, August 2014–June 2015

Worked with editors-in-chief and editorial boards to commission and publish articles in humanities fields; oversaw peer review; helped establish style guide for the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia* series.

Baylor University, Baylor University Press

Freelance proofreader, 2008–2014

Ensured that scholarly titles in the humanities and social sciences were free from typographical and other errors, and met Baylor style guidelines; organized notes and bibliographic citations.

Boston University, Office of the Provost

Assistant to the Provost, 2007–2009

Edited four issues of the award-winning annual online and print publication *Research at Boston University*. Drafted a mission statement for Boston University (approved by the President and Board of Trustees) and a 100-page self-study report as part of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges re-accreditation process. Prepared correspondence and remarks for the Provost and other senior administrators.

Boston University, School of Education

Assistant to the Dean/Associate Provost for Outreach and Special Initiatives, 2005–2007

Drafted and edited annual reports, speeches, memos, and appeal letters for the dean; provided administrative and logistical support for Step UP, a collaboration among five private universities, the City of Boston, and the Boston Public Schools.

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Reading Partners

Reading Tutor, Sept. 2014–June 2015

Met weekly with two first-grade students at P.S. 188 to help develop their mastery of the alphabet and phonics, and foster a love of reading.

826 Boston

Writing Tutor, Sept.–Dec. 2013

Provided guidance on thesis development and essay revision to students at the John D. O'Bryant School of Math & Science (grades 7–12). Worked with high school seniors to generate essay ideas, develop outlines, and revise drafts of Common Application essays.