

James Robert Garrett, III, M.A. Literature, 2014

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“Some of the best advice I can provide to undergraduate students comes from the words of the wildling Ygritte in A Song of Ice and Fire (Game of Thrones). To the undergrads out there, I will speak to you directly, and I say: ‘You know nothing, Jon Snow.’”



Rob Garrett did not choose to get his MA in literature at Western Kentucky University for most of the usual reasons; he chose to follow his girlfriend Elizabeth (now wife) who had received a fellowship from WKU that allowed her to pursue her own MA in literature. “I thought to myself, ‘I love English as a discipline, and I’ve not really done anything with it since finishing college in 2010. I could go with her!’ I applied for the fellowship quite literally during the last week of the window. I got accepted (I wonder if the powers that be would have awarded the fellowship to me had they known we were a couple?), and the rest is history—really one of those serendipitous moments that everyone always hears about.” Once on campus, Garrett found he loved everything about WKU, from the professors to the campus. “10/10 times I would choose WKU again.”

Garrett was awarded the Robert Penn Warren Fellowship and worked with the Robert Penn Warren Library during his first year of graduate school. As a graduate teaching assistant, he taught English 100 at WKU. Garrett also served as the president of the Student Association for Graduates in English (SAGE) and passed his oral examination with distinction. Additionally, Garrett received the Campbellsville University Excellence in Teaching Award for 2020 and has earned his Rank I as a teacher.

He acknowledged a lot of sentimental feelings when reflecting on his time at WKU and still feels those were some of the best years of his life. Returning to his native state of Alabama to teach high school English and Spanish after graduation with his wife made him apprehensive. “These were both of our first ‘grown-up’ type jobs...we hated to leave Bowling Green (we really fell in love with the area during our two years at WKU), so there was a slight bit of nervousness involved. Ultimately, though, it worked out splendidly!” Garrett ultimately ended up back in the Bluegrass State though, and currently teaches high school English at Breckinridge County High School, where he

uses his MA to teach dual credit courses Freshman Composition I and II and Introduction to Literature. “It is awesome that I get to teach college courses in high school, and I have WKU to thank for that!” Garrett said.

Almost every English professor at WKU made a significant impression on Garrett. “Dr. Wes Berry gave me confidence to be a better facilitator of discussion. I remember I had to lead a class discussion over *Catch-22*, and I was nervous. I went by his office asking for advice, and his general demeanor (I’ll call him a folksy scholar) resonated with me. I never had a bad pop-in with him. That class discussion went well, by the way.” From Dr. Nikolai Endres (“call me Niko”), Garrett learned to appreciate culture worldwide. “The man is a living postcard. A well-read, well-dressed postcard!” Dr. Reames was instrumental in Garrett’s comprehension of literary theory, and Fabian Alvarez served as an invaluable mentor while he was teaching as a graduate assistant. He also credited Dr. David LeNoir for his instruction in writing skills and “Dr. Rigby for not tolerating any degree of foolishness (and for hosting colloquiums that were joys to attend).”

One very specific memory stands out about Dr. Lloyd Davies. In his undergraduate studies, Garrett had decided he did not care for the Romantics but wished he did. He made the decision to take Dr. Davies’ graduate seminar ‘The Romantic Movement.’ “I had heard rumors about his strict specifications for commentaries, so I entered the room that night cautiously optimistic. I can see it now. He walked in, said hello, and showed two videos on the computer - both songs. The first was Peter Green’s ‘Supernatural,’ and the second was Fleetwood Mac’s ‘Albatross.’ Both songs, instrumentals, were set as background to Romantic images (beautiful vistas, wild nature, crumbling ruins...you know the drill). At that moment, I knew I was hooked. I got along well with the Romantics after that, thanks largely to Dr. Davies, a phenomenal professor. I later asked him to chair my oral exam committee.”

And finally, Garrett remembers Dr. Nikolai Endres telling him “I think you are being too literal-minded.” Garrett believes that sometimes it’s just best to get out of your own way and trust your writing instincts.

