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OUACHITA NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita students honored for their work published in “Assayers 30”

By MacKenzie Hall

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ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Three Ouachita Baptist University students received awards for their nonfiction work featured in “Assayers 30,” the annual publication by Ouachita’s Department of Language and Literature.

The top three winners from this year’s publication are Cora Saddler, a senior English and Spanish double major from Cabot, Ark.; Sydney Motl, a sophomore English major from Arkadelphia, Ark.; and Saboot Esho, a junior graphic design and psychology double major from Erbil, Iraq. Their work was chosen by a panel of faculty members led by Dr. Doug Sonheim, professor of English and holder of the Clarence and Bennie Sue Anthony Chair of Bible and Humanities at Ouachita.

Other students whose submissions were included in “Assayers 30” are Aubree Seibert, a senior chemistry, biology and applied physics triple major from Wylie, Texas; Lizzie Horton, a freshman from Arkadelphia, Ark; Meredith West, a sophomore kinesiology/leisure pre-professional studies major from Sherwood, Ark.; and Elaina McKenzie, a senior English major from Gulfport, Miss.



Photo 1 Cora Saddler

Submissions from 2021 graduates Ashley Harrison, a communications & media/film and Spanish double major from Argyle, Texas, and Russell Wallace, a biology major from Bryant, Ark., were also included.

“Assayers” began 30 years ago as a tool to teach nonfiction writing and research skills to Composition 101 students, though submissions are not limited to this class. The collection includes both personal and research essays from students.

Saddler was awarded first place for her essay, “The Bartleby Dilemma,” on the short story “Bartleby, the Scrivener” by Herman Melville.

“My essay is about the story of ‘Bartleby, the Scrivener’ and the ways people—both in the book and critics of the work itself—have, I think unfairly, interpreted Bartleby as a symbol or concept that ultimately reflects anything but Bartleby himself,” Saddler said. “My goal was to bring back his humanity and try to argue for an interpretation of Bartleby with more emotionality and sympathetic imagination.”

Saddler said she hopes readers will learn the importance of keeping an open mind and not be defined by their past selves.

“I hope readers are encouraged not to let other people define their sense of self, and that they keep an open mind and do the same for others,” she added. “We are more than the work we put out, and we don’t have to be defined by the people we used to be. Bartleby defies easy categorization, and I think we do too.”

Motl won second place for “The Art of a Woman,” a research essay that analyzes a painting by Italian artist Artemisia Gentileschi.

“The painting is called ‘Judith Slaying Holofernes’ and it depicts Judith, a Jewish woman, beheading an Assyrian general who is attempting to invade her town,” Motl said. “What is interesting about Artemisia’s depiction is that Artemisia herself was raped and chose to bring that to trial; when keeping that in mind, the details that only a woman who has experienced violence herself can paint really come to life.”

Through her essay, Motl sought to bring awareness to victims of sexual assault or abuse through knowledge of gender.

“I would love for more to be aware of the new perspective that a thorough knowledge of gender can provide,” she said. “Having the ability to view art, literature or the world through the lens of gender can bring a whole new awareness of the issues facing those around them, especially victims of sexual assault or abuse.”

“Knowing My Mama,” the third-place essay by Esho, tells the parallel stories of her life and the life of her mom.

“‘Knowing My Mama’ is a comparison between me and my mom. When COVID-19 hit, I couldn’t go back home to Iraq; I was really sad, and it brought me down,” reflected Esho. “It got me thinking about who my mom was before she had me and how when she was in college; she was away from home and family because there was a war going on. It’s basically me drawing strength from my mom and her story.”

Esho was inspired by a newspaper editorial by Edna Lepucki that describes the connection between mothers and their daughters.

“This writer had asked all different girls to send pictures of their mamas before and after they gave birth. It was talking about how those women were the same women that they were before,” Esho said.



Photo 2 Sydney Motl



Photo 3 Sabaoot Esho

The award winners and other writers featured in “Assayers 30” were honored at a brief ceremony on Sept. 2.

Dr. Jennifer Pittman, acting chair of the Department of Language and Literature, said she sees the value of sharing this work with the Ouachita community.

“I think it’s really important for the students who write to showcase what they have done because they all work really hard on those papers,” Pittman said. “I also think it is important for students in the community to see their classmates’ writing and see that good work can be done in all the classes.”

For more information about “Assayers 30,” contact Dr. Doug Sonheim at sonheimd@obu.edu or (870) 245-5554.

-30-

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