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MFA in Writing Newsletter

ICCC, University of Saskatchewan

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COORDINATOR'S NEWS

COORDINATOR'S REFLECTIONS: YEAR THREE

BY JEANETTE LYNES

I hope you enjoy the second annual **PAPER PODIUM**, the newsletter of the MFA in Writing. This issue offers some new features, including articles on teaching craft, mentorships, and a 'What I'm Reading' feature by our MFA students.

2013 was a special year; on October 26th, the first graduates of the MFA crossed the stage at convocation and accepted their degrees. We are so proud of **ANDREA LEDDING**, **LORELIE GERWING-SARAUER**, **LEANNE BELLAMY**, and **ADAM HAWBOLDT**, the intrepid pioneers of the MFA in Writing. Congratulations! We were happy to honour these inaugural graduates at a reception at the Graduate Commons at the end of November. Thanks to **DEE HOBSBAWN-SMITH** for her story on our first grads.

The MFA is thriving; this fall (2014), six more writing students will receive their degrees. Upcoming thesis projects include the program's first poetry thesis in Cree and English. Also this fall, the Class of 2015 joined us, hailing from four different countries. Among these students is our first writer from Toronto. Welcome, all, to the University of Saskatchewan! Our new students dove right into cultural life in Saskatoon, launching the **RIVER VOLTA READING SERIES**.

Our students' accomplishments and activities are overviewed in this newsletter. I'm also delighted to announce that the first Virtual Writer in Residence in the MFA is **MATTHEW HALL**. His essays will soon be featured on the program's website. We continue to have excellent visiting speakers in the MFA's Writ 990 course and we were so fortunate to have author **ROSS KING** give the second annual 'Writing Life' lecture in early November, a collaboration with CDAR, the College of Arts and Science Book Club, the Department of English, and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Culture and Creativity (ICCC). We also have amazing mentors in the MFA, and their voices are featured in this newsletter.

I would like to express a heartfelt thanks to **DEE HOBSBAWN-SMITH** and **SARA-JANE GLOUTNEZ** for their assistance with this newsletter. Thanks, as always, to the College of Arts and Science, the Department of English, and the ICCC. Assistance from staff in the Administrative Commons is greatly appreciated, with a special note of thanks to **ALLISON FAIRBAIRN**, **NADINE PENNER**, **DONALDA SVARC** and, for web support, **KRISTINE EGGERTSON**.

WHAT I'M READING

DEE HOBSBAWN-SMITH (CLASS OF 2014):

THE PUSHCART PRIZE XXXVII: BEST OF THE SMALL PRESSES 2013 EDITED BY BILL HENDERSON

CLEAR SKIES, NO WIND, 100% VISIBILITY BY THÉODORA ARMSTRONG

LEAVING THE SEA: STORIES BY BEN MARCUS

"I'm going through my short fiction collection in preparation for turning it over to my editor this fall for publication in 2015, and as I read, my Q is always this: how to make my writing more complex, deeper, jumpier? Reading other writers is my telescope into the land of potential."

OCEAN BY SUE GOYETTE

ALPHABET BY INGER CHRISTENSEN

ETERNITY TAKING ITS TIME BY MICHEL PLEAU (TRANSLATED BY HOWARD SCOTT)

RAPTURE BY CAROL ANN DUFFY

POEMS OF RENÉ CHAR, TRANSLATED BY MARY ANN CAWS AND JONATHAN GRIFFIN

"Other poets are my favourite launching pad for writing."

UOFS'S MFA IN WRITING PROGRAM CELEBRATES INAUGURAL GRADS

BY DEE HOBSBAWN-SMITH

The autumn Convocation at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon marked a historic event when the first cohort of Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Writing students graduated from the fledgling program after successful defences of their creative theses. The MFA program is one of Canada's newest creative writing programs, and was shepherded into being in 2011 by Professor Emeritus Robert Calder, Dean of Arts and Humanities Peter Stoicheff and administrative whiz Sabrina Kehoe. In October 2013, the four inaugural candidates convocated and completed their degrees.

"I'm incredibly proud of our inaugural graduating students in the MFA in Writing," says the program's director, Jeanette Lynes. "They've lived through the bumps of a new program establishing itself; I think of them as the Trailblazing Four. They've set the tone for this fledgling program – it's energized, engaged, and diverse."

The four grads are indeed a diverse lot. Cape Bretoner **ADAM HAWBOLDT** is a working journalist who moved to Saskatoon to earn his MFA. "I was told to get a creative writing degree – and to work on my writing – by the editorial team at the House of Anansi when they rejected my work," he says over a beer at Louis' Pub. While thinking about his thesis, Hawboldt watched a Norwegian documentary about love addiction, and was struck by the illness's perfect narrative arc. The result was *Soju* (Korean for "rice wine"), Hawboldt's novel, set in Seoul, Korea, where Hawboldt has spent time. "I didn't want to write just another love story," he says wryly. "A young Canadian man in Korea meets the love of his life. Again. It's a vicious cycle."

"In the course of this program, the biggest thing I learned was to apply pressure to my work, to turn coal into a diamond," he says. "Everything has to mean something [in the novel] and move something forward." Hawboldt was mentored in his novel-writing by Saskatoon writer David Carpenter. "Carp is great," Hawboldt says. "He understood what I wanted to do and helped me get there. I'm a fan of minimalism, and I believe that verbs fuel all good writing. I aimed, in the style of Raymond Carver, to leave [the story] hanging. I'd say to Carp, 'Don't go Lish on me.'" (Gordon Lish was a notoriously aggressive editor who shaped Carver's minimalist writing style.) Hawboldt is at work on a new novel.

LORELIE GERWING SARAUER, a writer and artist living in Saskatoon, is attracted to narrative, which she expresses through drawings and paintings as well as writing. She previously earned an MFA in Visual Arts from Concordia University. Her U of S thesis is a novel, titled *The Van Der Weerds*, a tale told from the points of view of thirty-year-old Katie and her parents Harold and Donna. Estrangement, addiction, death and the custody of a four-year-old niece and granddaughter are part of this story. Her mentor was Regina novelist and short story writer Sandra Birdsell.

Sarauer plans to spend her time doing more visual art associated with narrative. "It's a relief to be done, but I feel some disappointment too," she says. "There's so much more to learn."

ANDRÉA LEDDING, a Saskatoon homemaker, came into the MFA program to further her poetry-writing. For her poetry/prose collection titled *Flett*, a complex interweaving in English, Norse and Beothuk, the language of the now-extinct aboriginal people of Newfoundland, her mentor was Eastend poet and fiction writer Seán Virgo. Virgo's "wise and benevolent support, mostly virtual as we were in different parts of the province, was absolutely treasured and invaluable," Ledding says. "What a wonderful person to have at your back! He and I were both busy and our time was at a premium, and we worked efficiently but productively together across that distance."

Ledding, who was shortlisted for the Lieutenant-Governor's 2013 Emerging Artist Award, is also a playwright. Her first play, *Dominion*, opened Toronto's 2012 Weesageechak Festival, and was the first work staged at the new Aki Studio Theatre, a core component of that city's Native Earth Performing Arts organization. Ledding's Métis culture is deeply embedded in her art and her life. She volunteers in several aboriginal literary organizations and has returned to university to earn her Ph.D. "It is my great hope to work for change within the academy which ultimately works to enrich both the academic experience, and the level of diverse community engagement," she says.

The fourth graduate, **LEANNE BELLAMY**, is currently enrolled in Education classes at the U of S, and teaches English 110 at Horizon College and Seminary in Saskatoon. “I had two related reasons for earning my MFA in writing,” Bellamy explains. “To understand literary criticism, you should write literature. And number two, I always wanted to write.”

Bellamy originally thought her thesis would be a fantasy novel; instead, she wrote a collection of poetry, titled *Everything is an Argument* – examining community, spirit, nature and poetics through the lens of her deeply held Christian beliefs – under the mentorship of Saskatoon-based poet Barbara Klar. “I love and like Barbara,” she says. “She’s Nice. Grumpy. But so am I. And she was good at pointing out what was working, which gave me confidence, and what wasn’t and why.” Bellamy, who hadn’t written poetry before entering the MFA program, focussed on technique at first, unsurprising in an analytical woman attracted to a good argument about Kantian philosophy, structure and history. “I didn’t have a voice at first, but I learned that I love the traditional forms – sonnets are the best form ever! I do I think I have a voice now.”

Now that she’s completed her degree, Bellamy plans to carry on writing poetry and a novel. “Finishing my defence felt great,” she says. “I’m having trouble believing I’m finished. A big part of the MFA was developing basic skills and a discipline: what does it mean to write? I know now that it’s a lot of work. I think of myself as a beginning writer.”

Planning for the MFA program began long before its inception. Stoicheff, Vice-Dean at the time, remembers inviting Winnipeg’s former mayor Glen Murray Glen Murray to participate in 2005 talks about *The Creative City*. “Murray commented on Saskatchewan’s high per capita number of Governor-General’s Award-winning writers, and said that we must have a great creative writing program. I was utterly chagrined because of course we had no program, only some classes. I used his comment to re-ignite questions about why not.” At the time, there was no financial or administrative room in the English department for a creative writing program, so discussions began to determine a logical home. In 2008, with the birth of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Culture and Creativity under its first director, David Parkinson, the nuts and bolts of building an MFA program began to link.

“We were adamant about consulting the writing community about what the degree should look like, and we had two meetings where we invited a couple of dozen writers from in and around Saskatoon,” Calder recalls. “The consensus was that we should create a degree program that was ‘uniquely Saskatchewan.’”

After consulting with leaders of other Canadian university writing programs, the team settled on incorporating a mentorship program to solidify the bonds between the university and the province’s community of writers. “One thing was certain,” says Calder, himself a Governor General’s Award-winning writer. “It should be an MFA, not an MA; that is, it should focus entirely on creative writing skills with no requirement to take literature courses. As well, we wanted students to have the opportunity to specialize in non-fiction as well as the usual poetry, fiction, and drama.”

To that end, Stoicheff says, and to ensure the MFA program was available to all kinds of people interested in a high level of writing, candidates with strong writing backgrounds but no bachelor’s degree are considered eligible for acceptance.

“We knew that there would be a number of potential students who had not done a BA, or indeed any university degree,” Calder explains. “Many people turn to writing in middle age or even later, after they have sorted out their career, their personal lives, etc., and perhaps become more reflective. Some of these people are, in fact, more qualified to do a degree in writing than recently-graduated students with an Honours degree in English: they may have published substantially in journals and even in books, and they may in fact be professional writers. Thus they would flourish in a writing degree program, and it would be ridiculous to exclude them.”

Calder observes that the same principle of valuing practical, non-university experience was in operation when award-winning poet Patrick Lane, who didn’t graduate from high school, taught a course in the U of S English department because he had published a dozen books and had won a Governor General’s Award for literature.

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“We wanted such students in the program because we knew that they would enrich it,” Calder concludes, “bringing all kinds of real-world experiences that would be useful to the other students.”

Ledding, the first student to be admitted without a BA, concurs. “My greatest challenge was some of the institutional and bureaucratic barriers that face certain students, particularly those who don’t fit neatly in an institutional box,” she says. “But to balance that out, my greatest supporters were working within that institutional context to bring about much-needed change to the kind of gatekeeping that chases away those whose learning and ‘street-cred’ is alternative, experiential, creative, practical and hands-on. Those of us who don’t fit neatly into boxes, but are a valuable asset because we are ‘unboxed.’”

Lynes feels the MFA program’s inaugural graduates have set a high standard, “with respect to writing quality, recognition through scholarships and awards, and community engagement - projects at Sherbrooke and Core Neighbourhood Youth Co-op, to cite only two examples.”

“Success looks like what is currently happening,” says Kehoe, acknowledging Lynes for her commitment to the program. “What will be ultimately amazing is to have every thesis published – a row of books by our graduates.”

According to the Dean, current successes can also be measured by the quality of the inaugural applicants, as well as by the quality of the director, awards granted to students from outside the typical recognition field, and the international presence in the third cohort (students from England, Finland and Australia as well as Canada). The yardstick for the future is considerably longer, Stoicheff says: “The writing community seeing [the MFA program] as a good and successful thing and wanting to be a part of it. Our writers going on to write and gather attention for their work. Students from all over. That will be success.”

“We feel pretty privileged to be the first alumni,” says Ledding, “in on the ground floor and spreading the word about an epic program under a talented director, Jeanette Lynes, who has been our number one supporter: cheerleader and author extraordinaire while she balanced all her departmental and administrative duties and her own career.”

A variation of this piece originally appeared in On Campus News.

WELCOME TO CANADA

FROM BRISBANE TO BROADWAY BRIDGE

BY AARON GARRAD

We moved from Brisbane, Australia to Saskatoon in fall, 2012. While the dogs and chickens stayed behind, our two cats made the trip, arriving 28 hours after leaving Australia. Their carrier did a great job. In fact, Matilda and Blue were so well cared for that my wife says she’s flying with JetPets next time.

Our first stop after arriving and quickly settling in was Cabela’s. There’s no shop like it back home. We take all our Antipodean visitors there, dropping in after collecting them from the airport. We’ve even shipped the odd parcel of Cabela’s merchandise back to Australia, although mossy oak lingerie hasn’t made it onto any Christmas lists as yet.

The climate is the biggest difference between Canada and Australia. On Christmas day, Brisbane is 70 degrees hotter than Saskatoon, with cold ham for supper on one continent and baked ham on the other. Culturally though, there isn’t that much difference. It’s probably the easiest country in the world for an Australian family to relocate to, so much feels familiar. It must be that British heritage we share, although I do wonder why cricket is not the staple summer sport like the rest of the Commonwealth countries. Oh well, your loss.

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Life in Saskatoon is going smoothly: kids busy with school, wife busy with work, and me busy with uni. I'm very impressed with the campus and the course at U of S. This is my third university for graduate writing, and Jeanette's MFA program is the best I've studied in. I'm looking forward to meeting my mentor and starting work on my thesis.

So, after eighteen months in town, what I like most is Original 16 beer, Lucky Bastard vodka, and cinnamon rolls from the Wapiti Ski Hill (all creative thought stems from my stomach). If only I could supplement that with Australian heavy cream (50% milk fat), meat pies and the warbling of a lone magpie at sunrise.

And now for a treat:

AARON'S BRIEF GLOSSARY OF AUSTRALIAN SLANG

STRAYA	=	AUSTRALIA
DUNNY	=	TOILET
BUDGIE	=	NATIVE AUSTRALIAN BIRD
DUNNY BUDGIE	=	FLY
BUDGIE SMUGGLERS	=	PAIR OF TIGHT SPEEDOS
CHOOK	=	CHICKEN
BUSH CHOOK	=	EMU
BUM NUT	=	EGG
DOG'S EYE	=	MEAT PIE

SASKATOON INSTEAD OF THE MOON

BY CAMILLA (ISA) LAUSAS

Maybe I should do something new with my life. Being a full-time artist starts to lack structure. I need a frame for the mess I call my life and my work. Picture, picture, poem, poem, book, in the drawer, exhibition, same again. I need feedback. No more art schools, though. I'm sure they're all the same. What if I found a new place (again), with different perspectives on writing? Where that kind of place would be? On the moon?

From Finland to France to Scotland to South Africa. I had seen pretty much every country in Europe. When I started to feel claustrophobic was usually when I would take my backpack and leave for a country I didn't know yet. This time I needed more than a random adventure. Through the wide world of internet I heard about an MFA Writing program in an unknown place called Saskatoon. There was something appealing, something unique about it that caught my eye. I hadn't been to Canada. Discovering a new continent through writing? Now that was a project for me.

When all my friends and family started to get exasperated because I couldn't tell them where I would spend the next two years of my life, I decided to check the location of Saskatoon on a map. It was a few days before my departure. It could have been on the moon except that everyone knows where the moon is. After a few months, what do I have to say about it? Sure, it's pretty cold, and the distances to the nearest grocery stores are ridiculously long for a pedestrian. I still don't always accept a ride in -50°C. Fresh air makes me feel alive. Saskatoon in itself, for someone who has travelled through several continents, is a small town in the middle of nowhere. But the moon is also a small satellite in the middle of nowhere and people have received inspiration from it for centuries. People still admire its beauty. Its presence in writing cannot be denied.

The best part of exploring an unknown world is the encounters on the way. Even if everyone doubted that there would actually be any living thing in the middle of these prairies, I have proof: there is a wide range of living creatures here. They make art and play music, they write, they have ideas to share, and are always kind and welcoming. They make me feel less like a homeless hitchhiker in space. This is why I am glad I chose Saskatoon instead of the moon.

WHAT I'M READING

DANIELLE BRUNI-BOSSIO
(CLASS OF 2015):

MICHELANGELO AND THE POPE'S CEILING BY ROSS KING
DOLLYBIRD BY ANNE LAZURKO

"I heard the authors speak and was inspired to buy their books."

SAGA BY BRIAN K. VAUGHAN, ILLUSTRATED BY FIONA STAPLES
CAUSEWAY BY LINDEN MACINTRYE

"This graphic novel was for my Book as Object class. We had to read a bunch of graphic novels for homework and pitch our favourite one to the class. What fun! I picked up Linden MacIntrye's because we were looking at it in our non-fiction class and it seemed like a good read. None of these books have anything to do with research for my thesis project (well, maybe Saga), but I am trying to read more - just for the sake of reading!"

OUR MENTORS ROCK!

ANDRÉA LEDDING (CLASS OF 2013) ON HER MENTOR, **SEÁN VIRGO**:

“Seán Virgo has been mentioned in passing in national newspaper columns as “criminally under-recognized” and is immensely talented, a multi-genre writer and editor and someone I first met years ago at one of the very first provincial writing events I attended. I was impressed then by his skill, his writing, his reading, his knowledge, his presence, his spirit, and his generosity. In terms of discussing readings and subject matters, voicing, structure, what I wanted to do: his wise and benevolent support, mostly virtual as we were in different parts of the province, was absolutely treasured and invaluable. And not only is Seán a treasured and invaluable resource, but I wanted to work with someone from a distance. I knew given my physical limitations — attending school, working, raising my family — that adding in too-frequent face-to-face meet ups was not conducive to a productive work schedule for me. He and I were both busy and our time was at a premium, and we worked efficiently but productively together across that distance, joined geographically from time to time with great delight. What a wonderful person to ‘have your back,’ and that is the real strength and uniqueness of this particular program; SK has a fabulous and rich literary community for participants to draw upon.”

...AND ON MFA IN WRITING CO-ORDINATOR, **JEANETTE LYNES**:

“... a talented director, Jeanette Lynes... has been our number one supporter: cheerleader and author extraordinaire while she balanced all her departmental and administrative duties and her own career.”

JAMES PEPLER (CLASS OF 2014) ON HIS MENTOR, **DAVID CARPENTER**:

“The most valuable aspect of the MFA in Writing at the U of S is the pure amount of writing I’ve been able to complete in such a short time. And the best part is that so much of it has been tempered through the mentor program. Having access to David Carpenter, my mentor and one of Saskatchewan’s best writers, has been invaluable. His guidance has kept my work polished and my project focused. I’ll graduate with more than just a thesis; I’ll have reams of work from which to draw, and a tight connection to the prairie writers’ community.”

DEE HOBSBAWN-SMITH (CLASS OF 2014) ON HER MENTOR, **SANDRA BIRDSELL**:

“What is it I am writing about? What a big question, one a writer needs to ask every time the moon turns, every time the stars blink. Desire is at the heart of every story – why a character does what she does. Desire. What do my people want above all else? I am grateful for Sandra’s insistence that I slow down and drop deeply into my writing, and for her meticulous eye – both for fine detail and the big picture. Mostly, though, I’m grateful for her lesson that people’s internal lives form the blood and bones of a piece of fiction –not what they do, or how, but why. We seek to know ourselves when we read a story. We seek to understand the human heart.”

LEANNE BELLAMY (CLASS OF 2013) ON HER MENTOR, **BARBARA KLAR**:

“I learned from her, liked her. She was nice. Grumpy, but so am I! She was good at pointing out what was working –which gave me confidence – and what wasn’t, and why. She helped me develop a discipline and my poetic skills – I had never written poetry before!”

ADAM HAWBOLDT (CLASS OF 2013) ON HIS MENTOR, **DAVID CARPENTER:**

“Not so long ago I read a quote by Junot Diaz, author of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Diaz said that colleagues are wonderful, but mentors — that’s where the real work gets done. Diaz was absolutely, nail-on-the-head right. I didn’t know how right until I ventured outside the workshop setting and started working one-on-one with my mentor, Dave Carpenter. With Dave, that’s where rusty nails were chewed. That’s where the sleeves were rolled up past the elbow and the real, grinding, gnawing work took place, big-picture stuff. We’re talking narrative arc, changing major players in story, plot alterations, character motivation, desire. We’re talking about cutting the fat and creating prose that cuts and bounces across the page. But Dave was a wise and understanding task master.

You know how every now and then a person comes along and gives you the right advice, that push in the right direction at exactly the right time? Dave was that person. I knew it from the very beginning. I knew we’d make a good team from the moment I told him to be ruthless with my manuscript — the way Gordon Lish was with Raymond Carver’s writing — and Dave understood exactly what I was talking about. Heck, not only did he understand, he went on to tell me stories about back in the day. About hunting with Carver and Richard Ford. About peacocks and corduroy country roads and... hell, if you want to know about it ask Dave yourself. Not only is he a excellent mentor, he’s also one helluva storyteller.”

LORELIE GERWING SARAUER (CLASS OF 2013) ON HER MENTOR, **SANDRA BIRDELL:**

“Working with Sandra was nothing short of fabulous -- an experience I’d happily repeat. She was especially helpful in regard to point of view, setting, and the use of repetition. I learned a great deal from her.”

SARAH TAGGART (CLASS OF 2014) ON HER MENTOR, **DAVE MARGOSHES:**

Dave Margoshes first appeared in my inbox in 2007, at the end of an email that begins: “Thank you for your fiction submission to *Grain* Magazine. We’ve given it careful consideration, and regret that we are unable to offer publication.”

The email’s funny not only because it came from Dave, then fiction editor of *Grain*, but also because I now work at *Grain*. The next email with Dave’s name in it appears sometime in 2009, in a list of the writers included in the 21st edition of the *Journey Prize Stories*. I received the email because I was on that list, too. The story that appears in the *Journey Prize anthology*, “Deaf,” was the one I sent to *Grain*. There’s no accounting for taste!

Years later, I was accepted to the MFA in Writing at the U of S. In my research for a mentor, I came across Dave Margoshes. Dave had books of all colours under his belt (and an MFA from Iowa to boot). It seemed like the universe had slowly been trying to get us together (even though our relationship began with rejection) and I was finally ready to listen. Thankfully, so was Dave, and when I asked him if he might like to work with me on a novel I was calling *Pacifique*, he said yes. He put me to work right away, months before we were officially supposed to begin, by going through a stack of my short stories and telling me what he thought. In this way, I learned how Dave works: he tells it like it is. Given his experience, his chops, I’m liable to take his advice. So when we got to the novel part of the mentorship and he suggested my first chapter was worthy of the recycling bin, I listened. And started over.

I started over less as I got my feet under me, but I always knew that if I had to scrap another chapter, I’d have Dave at my back. If I’ve murdered my darlings, he’s an accessory.

MIKA LAFOND (CLASS OF 2014) ON HER MENTOR, **BILL ROBERTSON**:

"My mentorship experience was very beneficial in several ways. We met to workshop my poems from my thesis and to discuss the craft of writing once per week throughout the summer. I had the opportunity to meet the manager of Brick Books and view a reading that was recorded for the Brick Books website. I was also given a tour of Thistledown Press, introduced to the staff, and they spoke to me about the process of getting published by their company. These two experiences gave me an opportunity to be introduced to the world of publishing.

With the guidance of my mentor to focus my writing and reading in specific areas, I managed to have the complete manuscript done by the beginning of August, and a third draft done by December, 2013. In December, for our final meeting, we sat and read my manuscript out loud. That was a really good experience, because not only did I get to practice reading, I also heard my poems being read to me. This final meeting led to the edits for the third draft of my thesis. I really found it helpful to have the insight from a published author and the one on one time to work specifically on my project. The mentorship gave me areas of my writing to focus on improving and also gave me the opportunity to hear what my strengths are as a writer.

Throughout the mentorship I was given me some assigned readings. Some titles that were especially helpful for learning the craft of poetry were: *The Word, The Voice, The Text* by Anne Szumigalski, *Letters to a Young Poet* by Rainer Maria Rilke, *Western Wind: an introduction to poetry* by John Nims and David Mason, and *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* by Paul Fussell.

I am very happy with how my mentorship portion of my thesis project turned out. It was a very valuable experience for me. I feel that because of the mentorship my thesis manuscript has reached the level of writing that I had hoped to accomplish for myself."

WHAT I'M READING

GAYLE SMITH (CLASS OF 2015):

TEACHING A STONE TO TALK BY ANNIE DILLARD

"I was intrigued by the term "eco-feminism" mentioned by a member of our non-fiction class. For some random reason I wondered if there was such a school of thought as Eco-Christianity, so I went on a Google hike. As it does on a cyberspace walk, one path leads to another, and I came across Annie Dillard, winner of the 1975 Pulitzer Prize for general non-fiction for her book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.

At one time, Dillard was called "spiritually promiscuous." She pushes boundaries. What really intrigued me was how she wrote about the environment. One of the benefits of "eco-cyberspace" (it saves trees) was that I was able to immediately download *Teaching A Stone to Talk* from the library. On her website, Dillard calls it a collection of narrative essays. Some of them are hard to describe, but she invites the reader to think differently about the environment. She takes the reader on an imaginative journey through the landscape of the earth and the mind."

TEACHING CRAFT

MANTLE

BY SEÁN VIRGO

What does an elder really do in our tribe, what should s/he be?
Teach, said Theodore Roethke, as an old fishing guide takes out a beginner...
Wallace Stevens named the apprentice ephebe, a warrior-in-training. And why not?

I think we should see the ephebes as our own younger selves.

You flood them from the random of your own gleaned knowledge, glancing off anything of theirs that you see belongs only to them; that is thrillingly, scarily even, mysterious to you. For they know things that you do not, just as your own self at their age or stage knew things that you've now forgotten or cannot recover.

Sometimes you're lucky, as I was here, and your ephebe is a gem: original, passionate, humorous, greedy.

Technique, yes. The Distiller's art. An infectious, sarcastic contempt for cliché. But mostly what to read. And more than that: "Go to the library – how blessed you are to have that library close by, that living memory - go wayfaring there and let the books find you, for they will." Those stacks are the enchanted forest, paths and trails through a greenwood where mischievous spirits wait in ambush to transform you.

You'll find the true mentors there, as I did. Ted Roethke for one:

"The professor is supposed to know. I am not of that breed ... A teacher, I exist to save the young time... Art is the means we have of undoing the damage of haste. It's what everything else isn't... The nuttier the assignment, often, the better the result... Teach as an old fishing guide takes out a beginner... Go thou and do otherwise..."

MENTORING

BY DAVID CARPENTER

I don't have a degree in creative writing but I did some workshops with some of the best mentors, including two with Bob Kroetsch, a writer and poet who seemed to enter our seminar room each time on a great wave of inspiration. He took his job seriously, and he was never easy on me. By the end of the second workshop, however, summer of 1978, he told me he thought I was a real writer. Coming from Bob, these words meant a lot.

Two decades later I re-encountered Bob at Sage Hill, where he was teaching the fiction writers' colloquium while I was doing the fiction workshop and Warren Cariou was teaching the introductory course in fiction and poetry. As a creative writing teacher, an English prof and as the editor of his first book, I had mentored Warren. I love the continuity of that and I want it to keep on going as long as writers wield words on a page or a screen.

This brings me to the MFA program at the U of S, where I've been mentoring again. I love the whole process from idea to final manuscript. I love the way I get to know each writer as s/he goes through the paces. I love the engagement of it, which in turn reminds me how utterly important the writing vocation is and how important books are to our culture. I say this to my mentees, whom I never call mentees because the word reminds me of blubbery mammals that swim in tropical rivers. But to you, my former writers-in-training, I wish you good luck in your writing, and when that luck arrives on your doorstep and your books begin to emerge, good mentoring to you as well.

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SARAH 'N' ME (AND THE HUNT FOR THE ELUSIVE PACIFIQUE)

BY DAVE MARGOSHES

Sarah Taggart – it's a Scottish name, she tells me, asking if I'll be her mentor. My only previous acquaintance with things Scottish is a certain whiskey I'm fond of and those irritable wailing bagpipes. Will she be more like the former or the latter? Taggart – it's a Gaelic word meaning "writer girl." It brings to mind, of course, Ayn Rand's iconic Taggart Transcontinental Railroad and the doomed Taggart Bridge across the Mississippi and Taggart Tunnel through the Continental Divide. Could this Sarah be a descendant of the legendary capitalist hero Nathaniel Taggart? "The public be damned," he famously said – words to live by, and certainly a mantra for any self-respecting novelist-to-be. We write, after all, for ourselves, don't we? Could this Sarah, this writer girl, be another iron-willed Dagny? Or is she, perhaps, a granddaughter of Jim Taggart, the enduring (28 years on British TV) Scottish sleuth, a mixture of charm and Brillo pad? With literary forebears such as these, this Sarah Taggart could turn out to be a formidable wordsmith.

Now flash forward nine months. Her novel written (well, a very promising first draft, anyway) and we're still speaking to each other. Our relationship? As stimulating as Scotch whiskey, as musical (not irritable at all) as bagpipes. Another meaning of that Gaelic word: "delightful."

And, oh, that novel of hers? It's about a woman named Pacifique who may not really exist – much like her creator. I mean, How do I know there really is a Sarah Taggart?

BEING A MENTOR

BY WILLIAM ROBERTSON

I was honoured to be asked to be a mentor to a student in the MFA writing program. The fact that Mika Lafond was a former student of mine, both in first year English and in a creative writing class, made the prospect of working with her that much easier-going and workable right from the start. In fact, we got right down to work and I had her bring me poems to our first meeting.

Besides poring over her poems and using them as teaching tools in terms of structure, language, rhythm, tone, truth, and all those other good things, we varied our meeting grounds to include a number of Saskatoon cafes and, particularly, the Mendel Art Gallery, where, after doing our work, we always toured the gallery and conservatory. We also managed a couple of field trips, one to meet with Kitty Lewis of Brick Books--ever the enthusiastic voice for Canadian poetry and small press publishing--who was in town to do some recordings, and one to Thistledown Books, where Jackie Forrie took us through the press and explained the business to Mika.

Besides watching Mika's work improve--not that it needed a whole helluva lot from me--and watching her manuscript take shape, I felt very much enlivened by the process--the little step-by-steppedness of it--and felt it affect my own work, often left lying in lifeless apoplexy as I teach full-time. Poor excuse. Her enthusiasm for her work, which I was supposed to be fostering, rubbed off on me. The mutuality of our commitment to poetry was a spiritual joy. And to talk of important books to read, on top of that, hold them in our hands, look over passages that I showed her and should look over regularly myself, was also a big boost.

The mentoring time ended all too soon. I miss it. Jeanette asked me if I'd do it again. Absolutely.

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ONCE UPON A TIME

BY SANDRA BIRDSSELL

Once upon a time when I was a young writer, Alice Munro came to read in a bookstore in my city. The audience was a group of preschool children seated on the floor. Within minutes, they were expressing their disappointment that this was not the kind of story-telling they had expected. I lurked behind a bookshelf choosing to remain unseen, as was my way as a young writer, irritated on Munro's behalf that the children's minders hadn't done a bit of research before deciding this outing would be of interest to their charges. As Munro read I wanted to hear how she heard her own work, the voice she had listened to while she wrote, where she paused, what she emphasized, the cadences of her sentences.

I seldom missed a reading, and consumed stacks of anthologies, interviews with writers talking about their work, their process, what had inspired them to write a particular story, their struggles and moments of grace. Much of what they had to say contributed to my own process in some way, even if it was only the recognition that, yes, that's the way it seems to be for me, too.

Now, when I find myself mentoring a writer, I recall my reluctance to reveal myself, the fear that I might not have what it takes to write convincingly. I think about how to go about instilling confidence, while knowing a certain kind of confidence can sometimes be too much of a good thing. At the same time I'm prepared to be amazed by a sentence, a phrase, by a character, to recognize the creativity and inspiration behind them. I'm reminded again that there are things to be gained from what others have written, even if it's reaffirmation that, yes, this is what it takes, this same energy, dedication and passion infusing page after page.

A TRADITION IN THE MAKING – THE MFA "BUNNYHUG"

BY JEANETTE LYNES

Some university students, on graduating, receive a golden ring. Others, a silver pin. Here on the prairies, we like to stay warm and cozy, and do things a bit differently. Our first MFA graduates (Class of 2013) received a bunnyhug. No, this is not an embrace from a warm fuzzy animal before it hops quickly away towards an endless horizon. A bunnyhug is known, in some parts of the world, as a 'hoodie'. In Saskatchewan a bunnyhug is a bunnyhug is a bunnyhug. Each MFA class chooses its 'text' to be printed on the back of the hoodie. The first graduating text was composed by Andrea Ledding: "I came for the bunnyhug – I stayed for the MFA in Writing". This year's graduating text is now being drafted collaboratively. Will the Class of 2014 top this witty text and come up with something better? Stay tuned!

WHAT I'M READING

SARAH TAGGART (CLASS OF 2014):

BEST AMERICAN NONREQUIRED READING 2011

REBECCA BY DAPHNE DU MAURIER

THE AGE OF INNOCENCE BY EDITH WHARTON



HEADWATERS OF THE RIVER VOLTA

BY CHELSEA FORBES AND SARA-JANE GLOUTNEZ

The River Volta Reading Series started at the very first MFA event of the year – the reception. For many of us, it was our initial meeting with the people who would become our colleagues, editors, and friends. It was in a conversation with poet Mari-Lou Rowley that Chelsea and I found ourselves joking about starting a reading series in the living room of my apartment. We were laughing, but Mari-Lou wasn't kidding when she said, "Why don't you go for it?"

We kept coming back to it, this idea of a literary reading series. Both Chelsea and I got started on open mics and we wanted to share that opportunity with the new writers, emerging writers and first-time writers of Saskatoon. On a Sunday, we attended Tonight It's Poetry, enjoyed it, but knew that we were after a different venue. Well, we knew about ten people in Saskatoon between us and we'd met most of them that first afternoon. We had no idea where to start, where we could hold it, and especially how we could do it all for free.

Wine was consumed and the dictionary consulted. We chose a name, one that would represent writing and place, the art and the location. Out of a long list of different words relating to the city and to writing we chose 'River' to represent Saskatoon and the South Saskatchewan, and 'Volta,' which is the turn in a sonnet. Little did we know that the Volta River is in fact a real place in Ghana. There is no originality in writing.

We bussed around Saskatoon, checking potential venues and were fooled by a Long and McQuade salesman. (Nothing is ever five pounds.) So we hit the pavement. We walked all over the city looking for potential venues, getting turned down by their managers, and putting up black and white flyers with masking tape. A month later we were lugging an amplifier and mic stand to our first reading at D'Lish Café, with Mari-Lou Rowley and Mitch Spray as our inaugural readers. The next month, we featured Matthew Hall and Calgary-based David Eso. In January, Adam Pottle and James Pepler read fiction for the first time on our stage.

The ICCC noticed what we were doing and wanted to help us out. They now provide our series with funding, which allows us to grow our little project into an established part of this community. Our goal from the beginning was to have a place where great writers could share their work and where everyone would be welcome to come and enjoy it.

Our events take place the last Wednesday of the month from 7-9 PM at D'Lish Café (702A 14th St E). The River Volta Reading Series is a non-profit series for local or touring poets. We feature two poets a reading, as well as host an open mic session at the end. You can find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/therivervolta. We hope that you'll come and join us.

POETRY

FALLING OFF

BY CHELSEA FORBES

I dreamt the floor rose up to meet me
slapped my face and kissed my teeth
as blue grayed to morning,
wooden planks fell from my lips.
Even rubies are hard to swallow,
but in another room or verse you could be choking
up toads
the bathtub full of snakes, lizards, and the occasional wasp.
This is better.

DO I LOVE THIS CITY

BY CAMILLA (ISA) LAUSAS

Stricken with love

During my daily walk

How I love this city

I thought

Surprised

Do I love this city?

-50 below Celsius

Such emotion

Spilled

Here and there

No trace

In landscape

Faded plastic flowers.

WHAT I'M READING

ANDRÉA LEDDING (CLASS OF 2013):

THE ORENDA BY JOSEPH BOYDEN

"I had to email Joe when I finally finished it at 3 AM over the Christmas break. Talk about an ambitious undertaking. (On a personal note: I had been writing one of my fiction manuscripts in three voices, and was advised I should stick to one narrator, so I was happy to note that Joe can get away with it. Precedent!)"

THE INCONVENIENT INDIAN BY THOMAS KING

"There are no less than three copies currently on the shelf in the main campus library, what's your excuse?"

OUR MFA STUDENTS: CREATIVITY WORKS

Mudita is an ancient Sanskrit word that means "joy and pleasure at the successes of others." It offers a more collegial worldview than **schadenfreude**, a German word meaning "delight in the misfortunes of other." Here's a celebratory look at the recent successes of our MFA in Writing students.

PUBLICATIONS, PRIZES, SCHOLARSHIPS:

Alumna Andréa Ledding was shortlisted for the Lieutenant-Governor's 2013 Emerging Artist Award.

dee Hobsbawn-Smith was the first English department grad student to be awarded an Innovation and Research Scholarship towards research for her thesis, *The Dryland Diaries*.

Elise Godfrey was awarded SSHRC funding toward her thesis, *Rabbit Lake*, which is encouraging news for current and prospective students. It is not true that creative projects aren't academic enough; poetry manuscripts can get funding!

dee Hobsbawn-Smith's fifth book, *Foodshed*, won the inaugural Best Culinary Book Award at the 2013 High Plains Book Awards in Billings, Montana.

dee Hobsbawn-Smith's first poetry collection, *Wildness Rushing In*, will be launched by Hagios Press in May.

Mika LaFond has poetry forthcoming in fall 2014 in *Cihcêwêsin: new writing from indigenous Saskatchewan*, published by Hagios Press, compiled and edited by Trent University indigenous studies teacher Neal McLeod. Cihcêwêsin is the name of an old Cree man from the James Smith reserve. It means "a twisting echo," a powerful booming sound.

One of dee Hobsbawn-Smith's essays appeared in *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, published by the University of California at Berkeley. A second was longlisted for the 2013 CBC Canada Writes Creative Nonfiction Contest, and a third won Honourable Mention in *The New Quarterly's* 2013 Edna Staebler Personal Essay Contest.

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dee Hobsbawn-Smith had poems accepted for publication by *Grain*, *Freefall* and *Vallum*, and a poem of hers will appear in *Up My Alley*, an anthology recognizing the work of Regina painter Wilf Perreault to be published by Coteau Books in fall 2014.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND VOLUNTEERISM:

Sheila Jantzen facilitated a three-day YA book club at McNally Robinson in February 2014, focussing on *Dust* by Arthur Slade.

Chelsea Forbes and Sara-Jane Gloutnez started The River Volta Reading Series.

James Pepler read at The River Volta in January 2014.

dee Hobsbawn-Smith and Andréa Ledding read at 2013's The Word On the Street.

James Pepler, Elise Godfrey, Sarah Taggart, dee Hobsbawn-Smith and Andréa Ledding read at the 2013 "Eat These Words" Community Supper, co-presented by Slow Food Saskatoon and the Open Cooks Society as part of the inaugural Wild About Saskatoon NatureCity Festival.

Andréa Ledding is poetry co-editor for *The Fieldstone Review*. She continues to volunteer with SAWCI and the Anskohk Aboriginal Literature Festival.

Danielle Bruni-Bossio is Graduate Editor-in-Chief of the new online peer-reviewed undergraduate research journal, USURJ, which launched in February. For more information, visit usask.ca/urj.

Sheila Jantzen, dee Hobsbawn-Smith, and Sara-Jane Gloutnez served as poetry readers for *The Fieldstone Review*.

dee Hobsbawn-Smith facilitated the week-long 2013 Saskatoon Sage Hill Teen Writing Experience at Frances Morrison Library, and will repeat the Experience in 2014.

Andréa Ledding presented on opening and MFA panels during the 2013 SWG conference in Regina. Her play, "Dominion", is included in Tier One of the 2014 of the Saskatchewan Playwrights Centre Spring Festival. She received an Honourable Mention for fiction in the 2013 John V. Hicks awards, the third year running she was a finalist or winner.

James Pepler, Elise Godfrey, Sarah Taggart and dee Hobsbawn-Smith read at Literary Eclectic VII, an English graduate student conference hosted by the U of S.

Andréa Ledding was a feature reader at McNally Robinson for Paul Zits' launch of his new poetry book, *Massacre Street*.

James Pepler and dee Hobsbawn-Smith read thesis excerpts at the SWG's "Reading at the Market" series.

OTHER DISTINCTIONS:

Alumnus Adam Hawboldt submitted his novel, *Soju*, to two presses, and began work on his second novel in December.

dee hobsbawn-Smith's poem, "Pelican Touchdown" appeared in the program of the 2013 Mayor's Cultural Gala.

DEFENDING A CREATIVE THESIS

BY DEE HOBSBAWN-SMITH

Practise on family members and poets willing to ask hard questions. (Refer to Number 17 in our pan-galactic circular: “How to Find a Poet in the Off-Season.”) Focus on committee members’ irises and faces using an echo-locator if necessary.

Use new technology and tools. Don’t use new technology and tools. In all cases, eschew chalkboard and chalk eraser dust. Studies show that chalkboard dust can corrode the arteries leading directly to the sea of creative thought.

Avoid excessive use of stimulants or depressants beforehand. Or not.

Bring notes. Know who you want to dance with before you knock on the door. Avoid acts of self-sabotage. In cases where your artist’s statement remains at home in drawer, shoot from the lip and aim high.

Tell yourself: “I am not being grilled in an oak-panelled boardroom.” Wear comfortable shoes that won’t squeak and distract committee members. Avoid fidgeting if your shoes do squeak.

Find new words for expressing humility. Invent them if your thesaurus fails.

Accustom yourself to the in/formality of sitting or standing while addressing an audience. Map your road. Begin with purpose. Influences. Sketch in scenery. Tenses. Voice. Themes. Imagery. Try embroidery floss, magic markers, coloured push-pins. Do not resort to a trail of breadcrumbs unless you are feeding magpies or ducking a wizard.

Know the unknowable. Defend the indefensible.

"SOUP, ANYONE?" THE MFA SOUP KITCHEN OPENS

BY JEANETTE LYNES

Here’s a scenario. You’ve just moved to a new country, province, or city. You are a writer. You are about to embark on an intensive course of study that involves producing a book-length work of creative writing in about a year and a half. You need to find a place to buy groceries. One October morning, you step outside to discover that your denim jean-jacket isn’t warm enough for the climate of your new home, and after waiting for the bus to campus for a few minutes, you can’t feel your ears. You must buy some gloves yesterday; you need your fingers to keyboard your next writing assignment. Or you live steps from the University of Saskatchewan campus, or nearby, and you have spent many hours alone in front of your computer, writing.

No one needs to be told that writing is a solitary activity, and here’s a news flash – social media isn’t enough to keep us feeling connected to each other. In December 2013, MFA in Writing students and the Program Coordinator began to gather once a month to dine on homemade soup, read creative work, and socialize. Thus the MFA Soup Kitchen was born. We also, during these meetings, bring items for the Saskatoon food bank. Thanks so much to those MFA students with vehicles who have offered rides and deposited the food bank donations – and to all MFA students who have shared work. Our writing feeds us, but we can’t live on it alone. We hope those who have received our food bank donations have also felt nurtured.



WHAT I'M READING

ELISE GODFREY (CLASS OF 2014):

VOW TO POETRY BY ANNE WALDMAN

GOSSAMURMUR BY ANNE WALDMAN

THE ANGEL OF HISTORY BY CAROLYN FORCHÉ

UNDARK BY SANDY POOL (RE-READING FOR THE MANY-ETH TIME)

THE PLACE OF SCRAPS BY JORDAN ABEL

DISOBEDIENCE BY ALICE NOTLEY

OUTSKIRTS BY SUE GOYETTE

IMAGINING LANGUAGE: AN ANTHOLOGY EDITED BY JED RASULA AND STEVE MCCAFFERY

OULIPO COMPENDIUM EDITED BY HARRY MATHEWS AND ALASTAIR BROTCHE

"Hilary Clark recently lent me *Imagining Language* and the *Oulipo Compendium*. These books have helped me open to the possibilities embedded in the found and borrowed text I am currently working with."

COORDINATOR'S NEWS

Jeanette Lynes' sixth collection of poetry, *Archive of the Undressed* (Wolsak and Wynn) was shortlisted for two Saskatchewan Book Awards in 2013: the City of Saskatoon Award and the Poetry Award. In September 2013, Jeanette was the inaugural writer in residence at the Kingston Writers' Festival. Her poetry recently appeared in *Grain Magazine* (Vol. 40, No. 4, Summer 2013), *Arc Magazine's* issue on the north (Arc 72, 2013), and *Numero Cinq* (numerocinqmagazine.com – Vol. IV, No. 7, July 2013). Her poetry is forthcoming in *I Found it at the Movies: An Anthology of Poems about Film*. Ed. Ruth Roach Pierson (Guernica, 2014). Jeanette's essay, "Saskatchewan Poets of the 1980s" was recently published in *The Literary History of Saskatchewan, Vol. 2* (Coteau Books), Ed. David Carpenter. She was one of three featured readers at the Sweetwater 905 Festival in Rolla, British Columbia in June 2013, and will be a featured reader at the Edmonton Poetry Festival in April 2014. Jeanette continues to serve on the Board of Directors at the Sage Hill Writing Experience. She has just completed her seventh collection of poetry, *School of Flowers: The John Clare Poems* and is into the fourth draft of her second, as-yet-untitled novel.



CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FIRST GRADUATING CLASS OF THE MFA IN WRITING!

(FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)

LEANNE BELLAMY, JEANETTE LYNES, ADAM
HAWBOLDT, ANDREA LEDDING

(NOT PICTURED)

LORELIE GERWING-SARAUER

(cover photography and layout by Sara-Jane Gloutnez)