

VOL. 9
WINTER 2020

WINTERTIDE

MFA in Writing Newsletter



UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN



WINTERTIDE

VOL. 9

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MFA in Writing Program Newsletter
University of Saskatchewan

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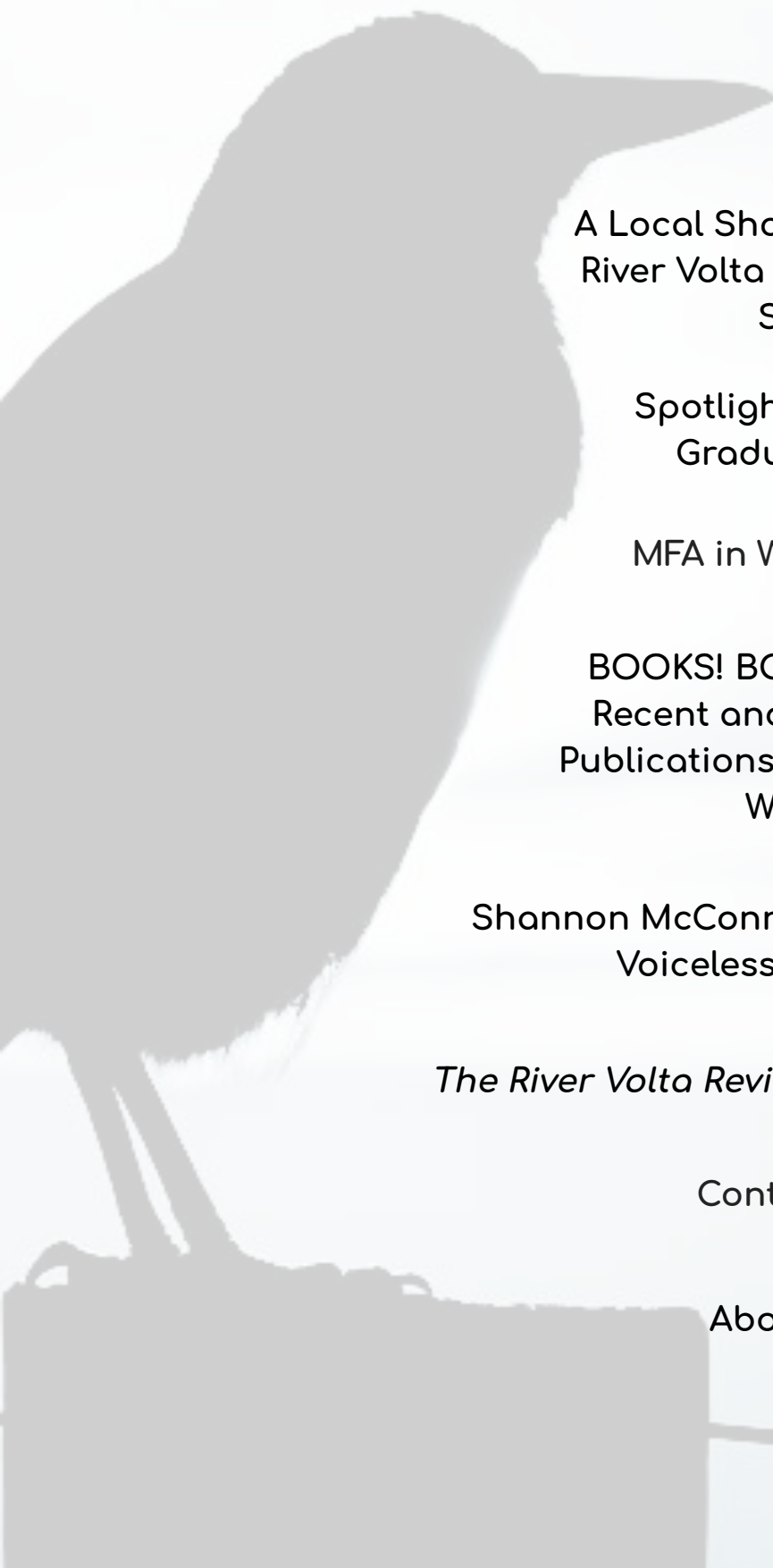
Tea Gerbeza

We acknowledge we are on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. We pay our respects to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this place and reaffirm our relationship with one another.

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TIDINGS FROM MFA IN WRITING DIRECTOR

It's 2020!

DR. JEANETTE LYNES

As the MFA in Writing at University of Saskatchewan enters a new, exciting decade, I continue to marvel at the talent and dedication of our past and current students. I'm very grateful to the editorial team of this year's WinterTide: Tea Gerbeza, Erin Hiebert, Brandon Fick (English Student Intern) and continued design support from Tonia Laird.

The MFA graduated its forty-third student in October 2019. Congratulations to the Class of 2019: Jennifer Wymore, Carolyn Gray, Taidgh Lynch, Barbara Bordelejo, Jaclyn Morken, and Allison McFarland. We are growing!

In 2020, ten more MFA students will defend their theses, and ten new students are slated to enter the program in fall 2020. Our growth could not happen without the stellar teaching, mentoring, and supervision of Dr. Sheri Benning, the support of the Department of English, and the hard work of our fabulous MFA mentors. The 2020 mentorships were a resounding success thanks to: Karen Solie, Elizabeth Philips, Alissa York, Dave Margoshes, Leona Theis, Edward Willet, Arthur Slade, Katherena Vermette, Jacqueline Baker, Laurie D. Graham.



University of Saskatchewan MFA in Writing Program Director Dr. Jeanette Lynes

An additional shout-out goes to Arthur Slade who received the 2019 Cheryl and Henry Kloppenburg Award for Literary Excellence. Thanks to MFA in Writing student Amanda Dawson for covering the award ceremony in September 2019.

There are many accomplishments to report this year!

Congratulations to MFA graduate Carolyn Gray for being appointed Editor of *Prairie Fire*, and also her earlier appointment as an Intern with Brink Literacy Project. Kudos to MFA grad Jaclyn Morken for also being awarded an Internship at Brink Literary Project; Jaclyn continues as a Junior Editor with Brink.

MFA Grads Geoff Pevlin and Nicole Haldoupis launched a new publishing imprint, Applebeard Editions, and released an anthology and a full-length collection under this imprint. Nicole continues in her role as Editor of *Grain Magazine*.

Our MFA students are publishing widely and winning award recognition for their work along with scholarships. Congratulations to Susie Hammond for receiving the Dick and Mary Edney Scholarship for International Understanding through Humanities and Fine Arts, and Hope Houston for receiving a University Graduate Scholarship. Edna Staebler Award winner Sarah Ens knocked it out of the park this year; you can read all about it in “Sarah Ens’ Amazing Year” in the pages that follow.

Forthcoming and recent books by MFA in Writing students and graduates include poetry by Sarah Ens, Shannon McConnell, Taidgh Lynch, Mika Lafond, Katherine Lawrence, Nicole Haldoupis, and Patrick O’Reilly, non-fiction by Meaghan Hackinen, fiction by Allison McFarland and dee Hobsbawn-Smith, and graphic (comic) art by Courtney Loberg. Our students continue to publish in a wide variety of literary magazines as well.

I’m so proud of our entrepreneurial and professionally proactive MFA students. A number of them vet submissions for literary magazines. Susie Hammond and Tea Gerbeza presented their creative work at this year’s Literary Eclectic Graduate Student conference at University of Saskatchewan’s Department of English. Community engagement and partnerships continue to be a strong component of our program

The MFA in Writing, with the Department of English, was delighted to again be a partner host, with the Saskatchewan Writers’ Guild, of 2020 Writing North – ‘Turn West’. The action-packed weekend featured headliners Casey Plett, Louise Halfe, Tim Lilburn, Paul Seesequasis, and Candace Savage. The opening panel was sagely and wittily moderated by MFA mentor David Carpenter. Special thanks to MFA student Tea Gerbeza for all her work on Writing North.

Our students serve on several Boards of Directors. They volunteer at Writing North, Word on the Street, and other literary events. They also engage regularly with Saskatoon Public Library; Hope Houston held a monthly book club for teens in fall, 2019. In February, 2020, Amanda Dawson conducted a workshop on using magic in writing, and in April, 2020, Tea Gerbeza will host a workshop on haiku. I also extend deep thanks to the 2019 River Volta Reading Series organizing team: Zach Kesey, Jameson Lawson, Kathryn Shalley, Sarah Ens, Hope Houston. The team did a wonderful job with a special shout-out to Sarah Ens' haiku fundraiser!

The River Volta Review of Books, wonderful brainchild of Dr. Sheri Benning, will launch its second issue in March 2020. Stay posted, and visit *River Volta Review of Books* on Facebook and Twitter. Even better, support us by boosting the legions of 'likes'. Gratitude, too, to Sarah Ens and Hope Houston for editorial work on *RVRB*.

As for faculty activities, watch for Dr. Sheri Benning's upcoming poetry book with Carcanet Press. Sheri's story "The Blood they Lose," published in *Grain Magazine*, was nominated for a National Magazine Award.

My personal essay, "Bat Reign" received the 2019 Constance Rooke Creative Non-Fiction Prize from *The Malahat Review*. My novel, *The Small Things that End the World* won the Muslims for Peace and Justice Fiction Award at the 2019 Saskatchewan Book Awards. I was also humbled to be awarded the College of Arts and Science 2019 Distinguished Scholar/Artist Research Award.

Here's to the new decade! Next year marks a decade of the MFA in Writing at the University of Saskatchewan. Our new program tagline is '*Stretch Your Imagination*' and a poster campaign went out to English Departments across the country. I continue to work with Advancement staff in the College of Arts and Science; we would like to be able to offer our wonderful students more scholarships, sponsored mentorships, and professional support.

Happy WinterTide!

STUDYING FICTION WRITING WITH GUY VANDERHAEGHE: AN INSIDER'S VIEW

BRANDON FICK

It is rare that one is able to receive direct instruction from a master writer. It is even rarer that a master writer is also a master teacher, but this is the case with Guy Vanderhaeghe. For over twenty-five years, he has taught English 366: Advanced Creative Writing Fiction at St. Thomas More College.



Professor of Fiction,
Guy Vanderhaeghe

Since the inception of the MFA in Writing program in 2011, many students have jumped at the opportunity to take a class from a three-time Governor General's Award winner (*Man Descending*, *The Englishman's Boy*, and *Daddy Lenin and Other Stories*).

In order to get in, students submit an application listing previous writing classes, three writers they admire, why they want to take the class, and what they look for in a short story. Along with this, a portfolio of at least ten pages of writing.

English 366 runs from January to April in the Winter Term. The first month is devoted to the discussion of craft. In these early weeks, students are assigned short writing exercises from the textbook, *The Art and Craft of Fiction*, by Michael Kardos. These exercises, and the discussion of short stories from the text, serve as a "warm-up" for the main workshop portion of the class.

During the workshop, invaluable feedback is provided from one's peers. If the class is at capacity (fifteen), discussing four or five stories a week can be a challenge, but Vanderhaeghe is a sure hand at managing the flow of conversation. From the beginning of the course, he sets out clear guidelines for respectful and constructive criticism.

Vanderhaeghe intuitively knows when to interject and when to stay silent. Like any good teacher, especially one in the arts, he knows that posing a thoughtful question is often more meaningful than imposing a specific view. In saying this, he is never short on wisdom.

Sarah Ens, a senior MFA student, took English 366 last year. She jotted down some of her favourite Vanderhaeghe quotes, which include:

"I don't want to write a story that confuses me as much as life does."

"Be a writer if you enjoy the feeling of running into a wall over and over again."

"The great thing about writing is that anything's possible as long as you commit to the possibility."

Zach Keesey, another senior MFA student in Vanderhaeghe's class last year, has nothing but praise for his instruction: "His openness about his experiences as a writer, mixed with his pedagogical approach to teaching the content made me a better writer. He was always willing to help you out and give you constructive feedback."

The age range of students is wide, from second and third-year Undergrads to retirees. All bring unique perspectives to class, and sharing them enriches everyone. The presence of MFA students is particularly beneficial. From the required workshops for their program, MFA students bring a high level of focus and care to their own work, and provide pointed commentary on others'.

For Keesey, English 366 was a way of further honing his craft.

"After completing the fiction workshop class for the MFA, I felt like I needed a little more focus on the genre. Just something a little extra to really get a handle on it. Vanderhaeghe's class provided that and so much more. He created a very supportive, welcoming atmosphere that made every session enjoyable."

The fact that many MFA students willingly choose this class is testament to the reputation it has built over the years.

I too took it last year, which was surreal considering I have been a fan of Vanderhaeghe's work for a number of years. The quality of teaching was what I expected, and more. One of the most important points I took away is how crucial motivation and causality are to the success of a short story, or any kind of fiction.

It was also just a treat to listen to Vanderhaeghe tell stories that, somehow, always seemed relevant.

Talking about the publication of his first book, *Man Descending*, he emphasized how fortunate he was that a young editor at the publishing house picked his manuscript from the "slush pile." One of the most surprising anecdotes he told was about riding in a taxi with Alice Munro, and her saying her "last book was shit." If a renowned, Nobel Prize Winner can feel this way, that is somewhat reassuring to the young and constantly doubting writer.

On a personal level, I will always remember discussing the novel *Stoner* with Vanderhaeghe. Both of us were shocked to find someone else who'd heard of this masterpiece.

The entire University of Saskatchewan, and especially MFA in Writing students, are incredibly lucky that a class like English 366 exists. It is rigorous and expectations are high, but if you put in the work, if you care about writing and want to improve, this is the class for you.

Ens sells it best: "Guy Vanderhaeghe is an extraordinary teacher of fiction. He has an almost supernatural ability to pin-point what is and isn't working with each workshopped story and his feedback guides everyone in the room, including sometimes the author, to see what it's 'about.'"



GRADUATING CLASS THESIS SPOTLIGHTS

ZACH KEESEY

Zach's thesis is a parallel world, urban fantasy novel centered around Olivia Callivan, a teenager, who moves with her mom to the remote mountain town of Silver Lake. While there, she uncovers a magical world of cautious spirits and evil corruptions; a world that, unbeknownst to her, her family has fought for generations. As Olivia sorts the secrets and lies her family has told her throughout her life, she must also deal with the recent loss of her father: a man who, she soon finds, may be dead, but that doesn't mean he is truly gone.

HOPE HOUSTON

Hope Houston's thesis is a portal fantasy novel for middle-grade readers that explores our processing of loss and our multicultural responses to mourning. The novel uses grief's lived experience as its formal structure through the personification of the novel's antagonist and through the spatialization of grief in the novel's setting. Her novel's synopsis: In the last one hundred and seventy-six days, ten-year-old Demetrius Johnson has lost a lot: his school, his home, his imagination, and even his Mama. Demetrius and his Daddy are picking up the pieces of their life, moving in with Daddy's mother, Granny, far away from the city, and trying their hardest to recover from their colossal loss. But before Demetrius can even unpack his bags, a smooth-talking mechanist named Meraux the Magic Man promises Demetrius he can help him find what everyone says he can't: his mother. Through the Magic Man's gadget-filled caravan, Demetrius hurtles into the twilight of the World In Between, where he discovers a wasteland desperately in need of his help, a lantern-wielding woman with a robe of magic colors working to save it, and a grief-eating machine ready to destroy the world as he knows it. Lost in this wasteland of hurt, Demetrius learns that sometimes our greatest battles rage in the trenches hidden in our own hearts.

SARAH ENS

Flyway explores ideas of home within the contemporary Canadian landscape through the lens of forced migration of both humans and birds. Tracing the trajectory of the Russian Mennonite diaspora, this long poem examines how intergenerational upheaval generates anxieties of place, which are mirrored in human-disrupted migratory patterns of the natural world. The poem's two threads—the semi-mythologized autobiography of Sarah Ens's Oma, a refugee from Ukraine who fled to a Mennonite village in Manitoba during WWII, and the pivotal meeting between one of the last remaining sections of tallgrass prairie in southern Manitoba and a human visitor—weave together to mourn declining community and environmental health and to track the far-reaching effects of trauma. *Flyway* migrates along geographical, psychological, and emotional routes to suggest ways we might use story to reclaim identity, cultivate community, and reconnect to land.

TONIA LAIRD

Lament is a tale of revenge and redemption: to protect the one she loves most, the halvesoul, T'Rayles, has been in hiding on the edge of her mother's ancestral homeland for almost seventeen years. When that peaceful existence is shattered by betrayal and greed, she vows to hunt down those responsible, returning to the city where she was raised and the life she left behind. Haunted by devastating memories, deadly enemies, and a god intent on taking her power as his own, T'Rayles is forced to come to terms not only with her grief, but her heritage, her past, and the slow but undeniable encroachment of another society forcing its way deeper and deeper into the homeland of her human ancestors.

KATHRYN SHALLEY

When Harry Met Sally except Harry is a serial killer and there is a whole lot more menstruation. At the heart of this domestic-noir novel is a mother-daughter pairing and an exploration of how their intimate connection to a serial killer affects the minutia of their daily lives. The grounding principle of this work has been Kathryn's rejection of romanticised serial-killer narratives that play up the charisma of the killer and remove focus from the predominantly female victims. Writing back against the established — and booming — serial killer genre has meant creating a space where women retain bodily autonomy, the serial killer is not permitted to voice his justifications, and the voices of female characters are central to the story. Kathryn Shalley's untitled thesis takes an embodied approach to the lives of women as they move through menstruation, motherhood, and murder.

KATE O'GORMAN

Kate O'Gorman's thesis is a collection of short prose fictions, portraying ordinary people within the domestic sphere as they wrestle with the intricacies and rhythms of day to day life. Structured as a series of linked stories, this thesis explores themes related to aging including: late-life marriage and infidelity, parenthood and caregiving, sex and sexuality, faith and God, depression and anxiety—ultimately asking the question: What does it mean to grow older?



SUSIE HAMMOND

Susie Hammond is a Seattle-based Canadian poet. Her poetry thesis collection, *Contours*, explores prehistoric cave art's legacy for contemporary humanity. The collection evolved from visiting French painted caves and researching the archaeological record. It includes poetic reflections on Upper Palaeolithic art and artefacts and reflections on contemporary subjects related by theme or motif to the Palaeolithic. The collection draws on literary traditions in ecopoetry, etymology, and the visual and verbal aesthetic equivalence of image. Susie thinks of the poems as connection points in time and space on Earth, for possible wayfinding through the terra incognita of our human journey. The collection asks: What can we learn from deep time about bioliteracy, gender egalitarian culture, and communication, to guide us in the Anthropocene?

CAMERON MUIR

The stories that make up Cameron Muir's thesis work are diverse in style, craft, and theme. Muir did not write them to be considered a collection in the conventional sense. Instead, Muir wrote the stories to explore the craft of story writing: to try out the writer's toolbox of dialogue, narration, description, exposition and interiority. Feel their heft in his hands, and to experiment with the elements of fiction, such as character, point of view, and voice. Muir did not write towards any theme, yet a recurring element was emotional distance between people who should be intimates. In the stories, the disconnect often arises from differences in gender or generation. And a recurring craft choice emerged: Muir often use a third person point of view that is both close and yet restrained. Muir is deliberately mean with the amount of interiority that he offers to the reader.



JAMESON LAWSON

all the little shards of white is a collection of poems about place, examining the speaker's move from rural Ontario and stagnation to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. A search for cultural identity through lineage and location run throughout the collection while the speaker struggles with clinical depression, self-medication with alcohol, social anxiety and social ineptitude, as well as a fervent loneliness which broaches cabin fever. Isolation and a defamiliarization of place and vernacular permeate the collection, and as the narrative progresses, the speaker grapples with personal and objective issues, attempting to overcome or embrace a different mentality of place. The use of formal styles of poetry and a flâneur motif help locate the speaker and his thoughts while fragmented free-form pieces bring in the questions that change the speaker's perspective. The collection is bookended by the speaker's uncertainty towards the future and a looming move away from the norm (both new and old). This uncertainty about what was before and what comes after is confronted by the aforementioned questions as places become fluid, and the speaker's changed perspective creates a personal dissonance and new appreciation, mostly for Saskatchewan.


#MFAWRITINGADVICE



"Write like your life depends on it."
- Amanda Dawson


DOREEN STUMBORG

In 1905 England, Lena is a young, single woman who must rely solely on her merits as a school teacher. Grief stricken from the death of her fiancé, and only months later her mother, and bereft from being fired, Lena boards a ship with her few possessions and her cat secreted under her cloak. During a meal conversation at sea, Lena meets a carpenter named Hank who shows interest in her but she resists romance because her goal is to be a teacher in an era where married women were not allowed to maintain a career—and because she cannot bear the thought of losing another lover. Lena experiences increasing inner conflict between the drives of career and love. While Lena travels to her brother's new-found homestead on the Canadian prairie—further than she ever imagined—her heart must make an even more formidable trip.



“Be confident in your writing.”
- Tea Gerbeza

#MFAWRITINGADVICE



“If you're working another job at the same time, make sure you carve out and plan as much time to read and write as possible (or it'll bite you in the ass!)”
- Richelle Gaudet

MEET THE CLASS OF 2021

AMANDA DAWSON

Amanda Dawson is originally from rural central Alberta and has a Bachelor of Education from the University of Alberta. In elementary school, she was more than once caught reading *The Lord of the Rings* behind a textbook. Her writing projects focus primarily on the genre of speculative fiction, with an emphasis on fantasy and science fiction. She chose to become a part of the MFA in writing program in order to develop her craft and take her writing to a more serious level. She hopes to one day publish her fiction full time.



RICHELLE GAUDET

Richelle Gaudet is in the first year of her MFA in Writing. She moved from her hometown of Raymore, SK to Muenster, SK, where she began studies at St. Peter's College. There she acquired a two-year writing diploma after which she moved to Saskatoon to finish her Undergraduate Degree in English Honours. She has two poems published in St. Peter's College's *The Society* (2013-14, 2014-15 ed.) and intends to put together a collection of poetry as her Master's thesis.

JON AYLWARD

A native of St. John's, Newfoundland, Jon arrived in Saskatoon last Fall by car – a story he never gets tired of telling but will eventually have to write about. A long time writer and academic, he earned a BA in German Studies from Memorial University in 2005, in addition to diplomas in Creative Writing, Professional Writing, and Performance & Communications Media. He is also a playwright and regular contributor to the St. John's Shorts, with his most recent dramatic piece produced back in September. His performance in *The Maltese*



Bodkin, produced by St. John's Players, earned him the Walter C. Chambers scholarship at last year's Provincial Drama Festival. He is indebted to all of his new professors and peers for making him feel welcome and looks forward to another fantastic term.

ERIN HIEBERT

Erin Hiebert is a poet and MFA in Writing student at the University of Saskatchewan. Her first chapbook, *Save Our Crowns*, was published by Anstruther Press in 2018. Her work has appeared online in *Forget Magazine* and *The Maynard*. She holds a BA in Creative Writing from UBC Okanagan. She lives in Saskatoon.



TEA GERBEZA

Tea Gerbeza is a poet and paper quilling artist. She is in her first year of the MFA in Writing program, and also holds a MA in English & Creative Writing from the University of Regina. Tea has presented her poetry locally and internationally at conferences like Congress, Southwest Popular/American Culture Association Conference, Literary Eclectic, and Trash Talkin'. You can find her poetry in *the Society*, *Spring*, and *Poetry is Dead*, among others. Her poems have won an Honourable Mention in *Grain* magazine's 2019 Short *Grain* Contest. She lives in Saskatoon.



FALL 2019'S WRIT 990 SEMINAR: IN REVIEW

TEA GERBEZA

The WRIT 990 seminar is a professional development series, organized by the program's director, Dr. Jeanette Lynes. WRIT 990 sessions occur throughout the semester and focus on writing-based learning opportunities that bridge between the University program and Saskatoon's and Saskatchewan's greater literary communities. Topics vary but may include author readings, writing craft symposia, and professional tutorials, such as grant writing.

As MFA in Writing freshies, the September Writ 990 on library resources with librarian Candace Dahl was immensely helpful because it made us familiar with the various resources and databases in the USask library. Now in my second term of the MFA, I'm thankful to know how to navigate the treacherous online databases to find articles and books for research for my thesis and for various ongoing term projects.

Later in the term, Dahl gave another life-saving session about researching for our looming Artist's Statements that has me confident in going forward to write it. Additionally, the session gave us tips on how to tailor our research to be as specific as possible when finding resources.

"There is always something out there. You just have to trick the system to find it for you," Dahl said.

With the season of scares upon us, Susan Olding's Writ 990 presentation changed BOO to WOO! Olding gave the writers in the room an essential list of five tips to writing strong creative non-fiction, tips that can be transferred to any genre of writing.

The tips are:

1. Write what matters to you.
2. Follow your curiosity and your research. The research may unlock the material for you, but also know when you have enough research to begin. It's easy to get lost in research, so collect the essentials and go back if something else arises that you must learn.
3. Let your reading lead you. Find a writer that does and says what you want to discuss? Does it the way you'd like to try? Great, use that writer to guide you. Talk to them in your writing, ask yourself what attracted you to that specific work?

Answering this question will help you write what you want to write, will bring forth what is important to your inner life.

4. Experiment! Play with sentences, structure, style, form, subject, framing. Keep experimenting to grow as an artist.

5. Rely on the resonant detail. Ask yourself, "Why do I rely on this certain detail?" From there, write about these details with honesty and care and see what happens. A detail might lead you into a terrain of metaphorical and structural treasures by using the detail as a frame, a recurring metaphor, a way to get out of your pattern to create something new.

Olding ended with a reading of old and new essays and shared with us that she used "Want" Ads as a structuring tool for one of the essays, and readers, if you're anything like me, you'll hop on that train fast and try doing it to see what births on the page.

The Department of English and the MFA in Writing Program present

Susan Olding
Monday October 7
2:00-3:00 pm
ARTS 108

Susan Olding writes essays, poetry, fiction, and less easily classifiable things. Her writing has won a National Magazine Award, the *TNO's* Edna Staebler Essay Award, the *Prairie Fire* Contest, and two *Event Creative Nonfiction* contests, and appears widely in literary journals and anthologies throughout Canada and the US. Her first book, *Pathologies: A Life in Essays*, has become a popular teaching text. A second book of essays is forthcoming from Freehand Books in 2021. Currently, Susan is a PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at Queen's University, where her dissertation project is a hybrid work about transracial adoption.

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WHEN DO YOU WRITE?

- "I usually write in the afternoon between the hours of 2pm and 5pm or at midnight and into the morning."

- Tea Gerbeza

The next Writ 990 of the term was with Barbara Langhorst. Langhorst took us on a journey through her experience of writing her novel, *Want*. “With every story you need to learn how to write it,” Langhorst said.

What Langhorst made clear is that we must recognize that every story is a being that needs a different approach to become what it does in the end. But how do we get to the end? Langhorst answers this question gracefully and with an air of playfulness, “first, when you finish a complete draft, abandon it for a few months. Then, make it strange.”

“Make it strange?”

“Put the plot in a hat and see how that order works. Sometimes, what you have isn’t wrong, it’s just in the wrong order.”

Cue a collective sigh of understanding from the class. The latter half of the presentation, Langhorst advised that whatever feedback we may receive for our stories, we should try the suggestion out and see what happens even if we don’t like the suggestion at first.

This advice has been invaluable to me while I sifted through feedback for my short story from my peers, as suggestions that I didn’t think was going to work for my story about grief and loss actually turned out to be the heart of the story. “Ask yourself, what will you absolutely not give up?” Langhorst said, and reminded us that we are the writers and ultimately we decide what stays and what goes.

A lasting piece of advice from Langhorst’s session was about publisher, editor and writer relationships. “Make sure it works for you,” Langhorst told us. “And remember, the manuscript doesn’t need to be perfect to be sent off to a publisher. Just send the best parts.”

The last Writ 990 of 2019 opens the door to 2020 with confidence and makes the poets in the room excited to reorder their poetry manuscripts. Liz Philips’ talk included tips and tricks about how to put together a poetry manuscript.

For starters poets, look at your favourite collections and how they're structured. Philips moved us from the outside in, "Begin by looking at the first and last poem. How do they invite you in and how do they say goodbye? This is the outside frame." From this entrance, we are lead to the many doors in poetry—each section has a door, an invitation with its own mood to accompany the reader when they enter. Between the frame of the first poem and the last, a journey is taken.

"Poems need to lean into each other, lean on each other, support each other," Philips notes.

Before this friendship between the poems bloom, the poet needs to print the poems and take a step back and hear them from the outside.

"This objectifies the poem and helps draw out the abstractions and what the poems are, how they connect and what theme emerges from within them," Philips said.

You can step back from poems in various ways, some include: hanging them from a clothes line; put them in piles based on a connecting theme, metaphor, image, tone, or voice; get a friend to order the collection for you; or read the collection backwards and see what emerges. Philips ended her talk with a simple reminder: to let the poems breathe life into the sequence. As poets, we are guiding the emotional response of the reader, so we must make the trip exciting and fresh.

TUNES TO WRITE TO:

- "Sometimes, my partner, Matt, talks in his sleep. It's great material for when I'm writing late into the night."
- Tea Gerbeza
- "All Classic Rock."
- Amanda Dawson
- "10 Hours of Music by Adrian von Ziegler on YouTube."
- Richelle Gaudet

MUSINGS OF AN MFA MENTOR: BARBARA LANGHORST

ON INFLUENCES

BRANDON FICK

The authors who've influenced me most are probably poets – especially experimental poets. Leonard Cohen is my mainstay whenever I'm in sorrow, and Robert Kroetsch and Dennis Cooley are there to blow my mind and leave me astonished in celebration. Yes, Kroetsch wrote novels, but for some odd reason the only one I've read is *What the Crow Said* – I adored it. I've never read Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* – the volume that stands out for me is *The Book of Mercy*, contemporary Buddhist-Judaeo-Christian Psalms, if you can call them that. His poem "What is a Saint?" is in his collected, *Stranger Music*, and that is worth reading if you ever find a chance. I love Sylvia Legris' poetry, and Fred Wah, Douglas Barbour, Bert Almon, Susan Howe, Lyn Hejinian, Don McKay, Tim Lilburn, Lorna Crozier, Phyllis Webb, Jane Munroe, Carolyn Smart, and Jann Conn, and so many others – I can't even think of all the poets I've admired.



Writer Barbara Langhorst

Novels are different. I love Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping* – it's the most amazingly heartrending beautiful thing I've ever read. But I also love Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*, and Anne Michael's *Fugitive Pieces*, Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and *Hopeful Monsters*, Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*, Timothy Findley's *The Wars* and *Not Wanted on the Voyage* and *Pilgrim*. I read Jeanette Lynes' *The Small Things That End the World* in one sitting – it's a gorgeous book.

I wish I could write like Guy Vanderhaeghe, long or short fiction – I especially love *The Last Crossing*, *Homesick*, and "Things As They Are?". I read Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* and was blown away. I've liked most of Elizabeth Strout's books, especially *My Name is Lucy Barton* and *Anything is Possible*, and I'll never stop admiring Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, and Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*.

It took me 400 pages to get into M.G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song*, but when I did, I loved it. Then there was Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* – absolutely haunting.

I admire writers who can tell big stories with real verve, and I'm drawn to mysticism, things that add up to more than the sum of the parts. I'm also drawn to stories of mental illness, or life in the margins, as you'll have noticed.

I love Anne McDonald's *To the Edge of the Sea*, especially for its portrait of the boys, their father, and the way that contrasts with the bigger picture – so like my own father at times. Shawna Lemay's *Rumi and the Red Handbag* is amazingly beautiful, and I'm looking forward to the new novel she's writing.

I went through a streak where I read several Penelope Fitzgerald novels and her biography, and I enjoyed all the work. Leona Theis, Gail Bowen, and Méira Cook are other writers I deeply admire, and Seán Virgo. Thomas Wharton. Greg Hollingshead. Fred Stenson. I know I am forgetting dozens and dozens of writers whose books have delighted and devastated me, some of them Victorian writers, but I'll stop here. Okay, one more: Devin Krughoff's *Hummingbird*.

I ADMIRE WRITERS WHO CAN TELL BIG STORIES WITH REAL VERVE

WHAT ARE YOU READING?

- Terry Pratchett's *Discworld Series*
- Amanda Dawson

#MFAWRITINGADVICE

- "If something isn't working, stick with it. You never know what will happen after you have a snack."
- Tea Gerbeza

MFA IN WRITING GRADS LAUNCH PRESS:

GEOFF PEVLIN AND NICOLE HALDOUPIS TURN THEIR DREAM OF BEING PUBLISHERS INTO REALITY WITH APPLEBEARD EDITIONS

JEANETTE LYNES

Applebeard Editions is a small, independent publisher specializing in flash fiction/nonfiction and prose poetry. It was initially formed by two MFA in writing students (Nicole Haldoupis and Geoff Pevlin) in late 2017. Since then, Applebeard has released three books: *Release Any Words Stuck Inside of You* (June 2018), *Release Any Words Stuck Inside of You II* (December 2019), and *U Is for Upside-Down House* (December 2019). The *Release Any Words Stuck Inside of You* series is an annual anthology of Canadian flash (non)fiction and prose poetry while *U Is for Upside-Down House* is a collection of flash fiction by Ottawa writer and comedian Jordan Moffatt.

Jeanette Lynes:

Can you tell a brief anecdote about how you both first got the idea to start Applebeard Editions?

One of them (probably Nicole) said, "We should publish our own." We had the connections, we had the necessary technical skills. All we needed was a name...

Geoff Pevlin & Nicole Haldoupis:

We were sitting in a basement apartment sometime in the latter half of 2017. At the time, Geoff was doing research for his MFA in writing thesis, which was a collection of prose poems. Similarly, Nicole's MFA thesis (completed in 2016) was a collection of flash fiction. They both came to the same conclusion: there is a dangerous shortage of short prose being published in Canada.

THERE IS A DANGEROUS
SHORTAGE OF SHORT PROSE
BEING PUBLISHED IN CANADA

In particular, there was almost a complete dearth of anthologies. While there were a few titles being produced in the States, Nicole and Geoff couldn't find any anthologies dedicated solely to Canadian writers that had come out since the 1980s.

JL:

Who came up with the name and how did you arrive at it?

GP & NH:

Shortly after we'd decided to start a publishing company, we took a road trip from Saskatoon to Calgary to visit Geoff's sister. Since we were quite busy in those days (and still are!), we figured this would be a great opportunity to brainstorm some names. Most of the initial ideas were very "road trip" heavy:

When we hit sections of rumble strips on the road, we came up with "Rumble Strip Press." When we saw pump-jacks on the Prairie, we considered "Pump Jack Books." We saw other things on the road which begot more ideas:

"Crow on a Post Press"

"Road Corpse Press"

"Scavenger Books"

Throughout this brainstorming session, we considered "Brainstorm Books." We were eating potato chips at the time. Geoff is superstitious and only eats chips in increments of five: "Five Chips Press."

One of us had a pimple that day: "Pimple Face Press."

One of us decided to stop giving and receiving gifts at Christmas: "No More Presents Press."

We're both lovers of poetry and revel in the concept of "white space" (the area on the page not occupied by words), and so a leading candidate quickly became "White Space Press." One night, when we'd almost decided definitively on this name, Geoff woke in a cold sweat and wondered if people would misunderstand the name and think that our press only made space for white people. The name was instantly abandoned.

After a week in Calgary, we still hadn't decided on a name. Back in the Saskatoon basement, we sat around eating apples and pondering other options. Geoff had a beard. Nicole looked at him at one point and said, "You have apple in your beard."

Applebeard Editions. BOOM!

JL:

What has your experience of bringing out the two *Release Any Words Stuck Inside of You* volumes been like and how is that different from working with a single author on a single volume?

GP & NH:

Publishing the *Release Any Words Stuck Inside of You* series is, first and foremost, very exciting and fun! It's a unique opportunity to get an inside look at what writers across Canada are working on in these underserved genres of flash (non)fiction and prose poetry. There would simply be no other way for us to come across this work and it's been inspiring to say the least.

It's also been amazing to work with and meet all these writers. There's an incredible sense of community amongst Canadian writers and we're very fortunate to be able to interact with so many of them!

That being said, the anthologies are also a lot of work. We receive hundreds of submissions for these titles, which need to be recorded, read, evaluated, accepted/rejected, and edited. It also takes a lot of coordination: making sure the authors are OK with our edits, sending out contracts, shipping books across the country, etc.

This is stark contrast to a single-author collection. It is far less complicated to deal with one person as opposed to dealing with 30-45 people. A single-author collection is also a great opportunity to engage deeply with an author's work. You have more time to undertake substantive edits and really develop a relationship with that author.

#MFAWRITINGADVICE

- "It's okay not to be flawless at every little thing. Learn from your peers, and remember that for every problem with tense, there is a friend who can help you fix it."

- Tea Gerbeza

JL:

I have attended two of the Applebeard launches and they've had such an energized, enthusiastic vibe. Can you comment on what being a publisher is like with respect to community?

GP & NH:

The community is the only reason we're here. Without our authors, we would have nothing to publish. Without our readers, no one would read what we publish.

We also recognize that people at our launches are choosing to spend their valuable time with us so we strive to inject a healthy dose of energy and enthusiasm into our events. We love to celebrate the work that writers have trusted us with publishing, and enjoy including as many writers (and their families and friends) as possible in these celebrations and making it a fun time for everyone.

JL:

Did your MFA in Writing studies help with becoming a publisher? If so, how?

THE COMMUNITY IS THE ONLY
REASON WE'RE HERE. WITHOUT
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PUBLISH.

GP & NH:

Absolutely! For one, the MFA gave us connections in the writing world. We met writers of all stripes, publishers, editors, mentors, and professors. Listening to these peoples' experiences gave us fresh ideas and confidence in treading this very tenuous path. The MFA also taught us how to be keen editors. The majority of the MFA program is writing, giving feedback, and receiving feedback.

This workshopping experience is essentially the same process we go through when editing our books. Of course, we aren't workshopping our *own* work, but we know how it feels to be on the receiving end and that has made us far more understanding when interacting with writers. It is not an exaggeration whatsoever to say that Applebeard Editions would not exist if it weren't for the MFA in writing program at the University of Saskatchewan. The community and support that this program offers made it all possible.

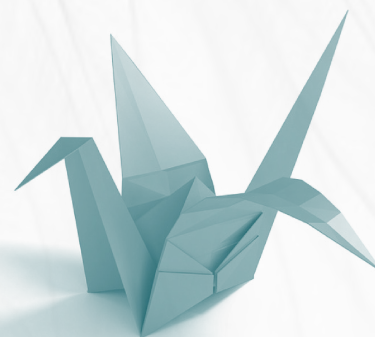
JL:

What do you see as the greatest challenges for those establishing themselves in the publishing business?

GP & NH:

For us, the greatest challenge has been threefold: funding, promotion, and distribution. These essentially all come back to funding. The harsh reality of publishing short fiction/poetry is that the readership is very small, and we are up against a growing list of other forms of entertainment and distraction: Netflix, smartphones, podcasts, etc. Even within the community of rabid readers, there are constantly new books coming out every day.

Our challenge is how to spread the word about *our* books and how to convince people they're worth reading—all on a very minimal budget. Our methods of distribution currently consist of strictly direct-to-consumer strategies: we sell our books at launches and directly on our website. We have so far resisted the temptation to list our titles on Amazon and we've discovered that many Canadian distributors require their publishers to be in operation for a number of years before they'll stock their titles. Not to mention distributors take a large percentage of sales. Since our print runs are relatively small (100-200 copies for each book), our printing costs are relatively high, which means our margins are razor thin. It's the classic catch-22: you need money to run truly effective promotions but you need truly effective promotions to sell books and earn money.



JL:

Do you have tips for writers, either with respect to publishing their work or even entrepreneurial writers like yourselves who decide to take a plunge into the publishing world?

GP & NH:

In terms of getting your work published, you must submit! That sounds obvious, sure, but it's a major hurdle for a lot of us. You need to send out your work everywhere, constantly. Of course, always follow submission guidelines. And it's essential to become accustomed to rejection. We both get rejected all the time.



Looking at my spreadsheet of submissions, it is probably 90% red, 5% green, 5% yellow (where red = rejected, green = accepted, yellow = submitted and pending.) At the end of the day, the only thing a writer controls is the yellows. Keep submitting. Everyone gets rejected. It's not personal. There's a plethora of reasons why your work may not fit a particular publication. If you don't submit, you'll never get published.

In terms of entering the publishing world... don't do it for the money. If we ever sat down and divided the money we've made with Applebeard by the number of hours we've spent working on it... we'd be deep into the negatives! It requires a massive time commitment and very little monetary reward. Do it because you love literature and want to contribute to the community. Anyone can do it, but don't expect it to be easy or lucrative. Please God, don't think either of those things.

LAND OF LOST BORDERS: IN CONVERSATION

WITH KATE HARRIS

KATE O'GORMAN



On Wednesday, March 3rd, readers and booklovers from across the city gathered at the Gordon Snelgrove Art Gallery for the first of two University of Saskatchewan public events. Author Kate Harris' award-winning travel memoir, *Land of Lost Borders: Out of Bounds on the Silk Road*, was chosen for this year's USask Arts and Sciences Book Club. Harris joined Dr. Angela Lieveise, Department Head and Professor of Anthropology and Archeology, and M.F.A. in Writing student, Kate O'Gorman, for a three-way conversation about what it means to be a writer and explorer.

Since childhood, Kate Harris has had a deep desire for exploration and discovery. Inspired by stories of Marco Polo, and of Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon, Harris wanted to be among the first to colonize Mars. The Silk Road came calling first. Armed with a book of poetry by Canadian poet Don Domanski, and travelling alongside her best-friend, Harris rode her bike for ten months from Istanbul to Ladakh, a region in the northern tip of the Indian sub-continent. Harris' writing is strikingly lush. In her book, she describes cycling through grueling climates and across harsh landscapes, while also experiencing the generosity of others. In conversation, Harris described her journey, and the process of writing, as profoundly transformative.

Land of Lost Borders won the RBC Taylor Prize for literary non-fiction in 2019.



SPOTLIGHT ON MFA MENTOR: BARBARA LANGHORST

BRANDON FICK

Brandon Fick:

You recently published your first novel, *Want* (2018). Through the process of writing, rewriting, and publishing the novel, what are the most important things you have learned?

Barbara Langhorst:

It's hard to know where to start. Although I've always loved reading novels, and had studied and taught literature for decades, I was very, very green when I first started writing *Want* with the wonderful Sandra Birdsell in 2013. I didn't experience the same kind of shift when I switched from reading poetry to writing it – I had spent many years with Doug Barbour as my supervisor, reading and studying the way poems were put together, so writing them seemed natural.

I thought the challenge in writing a novel would be coming up with a plot. As Sue Sinclair once told me, poetry dwells in the moment, but narrative asks, "What's next?" I ripped through the first two half-drafts in my seven months with Sandra, and she taught me many crucial skills in those 300 pages, especially about consistency of point of view, causation, and making things "*feel* true," which is not the same as having them "*be* true."

She bore with me as I gave my characters some strange quirks, and she taught me to have those characters drive the plot in unexpected twists and turns.

After my time with Sandra was over, I had to blunder through the last half of the novel on my own. I was far from happy with the third-person point of view I had started with. Then, I remembered that Art Slade said he changed the point of view in one novel from third-person to first-person on the third draft, so that gave me the courage to do so, too. It required a radical revision, since I could no longer jump from head to head to head. I had to toss pieces away and re-invent others. I worked through the manuscript many, many, many times, struggling especially with voice and trying to find the right beginning. I wrote six or seven completely different openings over about three years before I settled on the final one.

I was frustrated with structure, too; I couldn't see if it was working.

The experimental poet in me must have reasserted herself, because the strategy I fell upon (of drawing the plot points out of a hat, and arranging them in that order) didn't work, but the strange chaos that ensued showed me where things felt false: at last the whole plot was defamiliarized, so I could see the pieces more clearly. I reordered the entire manuscript again, this time making deliberate choices to optimize surprise while still striving for coherence.

When it was time to send the manuscript out, I chose Palimpsest Press because I wanted to work with Aimee Parent Dunn as an editor. I knew *Want* needed lots of work, and I had seen a friend have great success with Aimee. The thing that surprised me most about the publication process was how painless it was; almost all the proposed edits made sense to me, and on the few where I disagreed, Aimee accepted my arguments. I was also surprised by the many fine iterations of cover images we went through. There was a real sense of collaboration with the book reps and the designer.

Writing a novel is an incredibly humbling experience, and if there's anything I've learned, it's that it's pretty damned demanding to keep two or three hundred pages of characters who change who they are and what they do in any given draft. I've learned to be grateful to all the writers who give you that knowing look when you say you're writing a novel.

BF:

What are you currently writing? How is it similar or different than what you have done before?

BL:

Given my last comment, you might think that the next manuscript I've written is pure autobiography... because it's about a woman who is having trouble with her memory and fears she has dementia. It is actually fiction: the husband is trying to avoid facing his wife's problems while worrying about his health and his job, and their daughter is a journalist who can't find steady work, so moves home as a place to crash and try to find a way to relaunch her career.

The mother thinks the daughter has been summoned to take care of her in her dotage, and is incensed – she can't believe her husband would be so selfish. What can a young journalist find to do in a one-horse town like theirs? Well, plenty – that gets her into trouble. And of course they never bother to check to see if they are right about one another, because they think they know their own family. It's the story of Boomer parents with a Millennial daughter who experience completely different realities while sharing the same house. All three are so obsessed with their own problems that they have no idea what the others are thinking; they assume they know one another, yet each is facing challenges the others don't know about or understand. The one thing they are unwittingly sharing is the vivid dream world that they only encounter when they're asleep.

This novel has been accepted for publication in 2021, again with Palimpsest, so I'm waiting for edits now. Unlike *Want*, the title hasn't really felt solid to me, so I can't even tell you what it will be called. Aimee tells me that it's completely different from *Want*. Of course it's still based on a bunch of strange characters, and I hope it will be easy for lots of people to identify with.

BF:

How do you balance your time between being a writer, a professor, a mentor in the MFA in Writing program, and the Academic Programs Manager at St. Peter's College, while still having a personal life?

BL:

Ah, a personal life? So that's what you call it! Seriously, I don't compartmentalize much – it's a pretty seamless life, observing, typing, reading, listening, talking. The teaching and mentoring put me in touch with ideas about the world from fresh young minds (and wise ones, when I'm lucky enough to have seniors as students). The writing and reading are the things that feed my spirit, while the administrative work puts me in touch with so many fabulous writers, faculty members, monks, students, and guests. If I had to separate everything out into different spheres, that would be exhausting, but since it's just a matter of doing what needs to be done next, it all seems to flow – sometimes like a flash flood. But teaching, even marking, is a creative act: I am honoured to see things through the eyes of the next generation of readers and writers.

BF:

How has being a mentor in the MFA in Writing program affected your own writing?

BL:

Having the time to work one-to-one with MFA students focusing on one long project is an incredible gift. It's like a time machine: they take me places and times I would never think of going. I love to work on their reading lists and see the boldness they have, the powerful voices they create. They teach me to read things I haven't looked at in years, if ever, and the areas that challenge them force me to think through parts of craft that I may take for granted, or may never have thought about extensively. Then I go back to the books, and see if there are ways I can be helpful. The inspiring thing about working with MFA students is that they pull out all the stops. We both know our time together is short, so I try to guide them the same way my MA supervisor guided me at the U of A. He'd say, "You can have another thirty pages done in two weeks," and I didn't know any better, so I did it. I use that strategy for my own students.

Long story short, working with MFA students has taught me to be humble, to get the work done, to try not to fear looking like an idiot (which I do, regularly), and to just try to take the story places that no one else would ever think of.

WORKING WITH MFA STUDENTS HAS TAUGHT ME TO BE HUMBLE

#MFAWRITINGADVICE

- "Read a lot and read widely."

- Tea Gerbeza

WRITING NORTH: TURN WEST

BRANDON FICK

It was a balmy winter weekend for the tenth annual Writing North writers' festival. One of the few years when the weather didn't live up to the name, but no one was complaining after the bone-chilling week before. Over January 24th and 25th, writers, readers, and literary aficionados from across Canada gathered at St. Andrew's College on the USask campus to be inspired and sharpen their craft.

This year's theme was *Turn West*, a relevant idea to reflect on in this current age, and appropriate for this milestone birthday. What does it mean to live in Western Canada? How does one understand its history and geography? How does one reconcile past injustices? What social responsibility do writers have? These were the important questions being asked.

The writers addressing them were Paul Seesequasis, Louise Bernice Halfe (Sky Dancer), Casey Plett, Tim Lilburn, and Candace Savage.



All presenters and organizers, from left to right: Jeanette Lynes, David Carpenter, Casey Plett, Tim Lilburn, Candace Savage, Louise Bernice Halfe (Sky Dancer), Paul Seesequasis, Sheri Benning, and Yolanda Hanson

Paul Seesequasis is a nîpisîhkopâwiyiniw (Willow Cree) writer, cultural worker, and commentator residing in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. For three years, he curated the Indigenous Archival Photo Project, an online and physical exhibition of archival Indigenous photographs exploring history, identity, and the process of visual reclamation. His photo book, *Blanket Toss Under Midnight Sun*, was published by Penguin Canada in 2019. Seesequasis underscored how “found objects” can stimulate creativity for writers of historical and non-fiction narratives in his workshop, “Snapshots and Old Things.”



Jeanette Lynes Introducing the panelists at Writing North

Louise Bernice Halfe (Sky Dancer) was raised on Saddle Lake Reserve and attended Blue Quills Residential School. She served as Saskatchewan's Poet Laureate, her books *Bear Bones and Feathers*, *Blue Marrow*, *The Crooked Good*, and *Burning In This Midnight Dream* have received numerous accolades, and she has been awarded honorary degrees from Wilfred Laurier University and the University of Saskatchewan.

Her workshop, "Enter a Dialogue and Flush out the Story," encouraged participants to loosen their tongue to find their voice.

Casey Plett wrote the novel *Little Fish*, the short story collection *A Safe Girl to Love*, and co-edited the anthology *Meanwhile, Elsewhere: Science Fiction and Fantasy from Transgender Writers*. She is a winner of the Amazon First Novel Award, the ALA Stonewall Book Award Barbara Gittings Literature Prize, and a two-time winner of the Lambda Literary Award. Based on a Stephen King quote, "Write with the door closed, rewrite with the door open," Plett's workshop explored balancing the initial excitement of writing with outside and self-criticism.

Author of eleven books of poetry, including *Moosewood Sandhills*, *To the River*, *Orphic Politics*, *Assiniboia*, and *The Names*, Tim Lilburn has been nominated for the Governor General's Award in Literature for *Tourist to Ecstasy* and *Kill-site*, which won in 2003.

His most recent poetry book is the masque *The House of Charlemagne*. Lilburn's workshop focused on how to approach the "long poem," a form that makes even seasoned writers pause, but which he has mastered.

Originally from the Peace River Country of Alberta, Candace Savage put down her roots in Saskatoon. Author of more than two dozen books, she has won numerous awards, including the Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction for *A Geography of Blood*. Her latest works are *Strangers in the House: A Prairie Story of Bigotry and Belonging*, and her first picture book, *Hello, Crow!* In Savage's workshop, attendees were shown how the past can be incorporated into nonfiction narratives without neglecting chronology.



MFA in Writing first years, Tea Gerbeza, Richelle Gaudet, and Amanda Dawson, volunteering at book table.

To kick off Writing North, Professor Wendy Roy delivered a special welcome to the panel audience on behalf of the Department of English. Saskatchewan Writers' Guild President, Jack Walton, congratulated Writing North on its tenth anniversary, and thanked the Guild's community partners for helping to make it a "damn good organization" for fifty years.

WHAT ARE YOU READING?



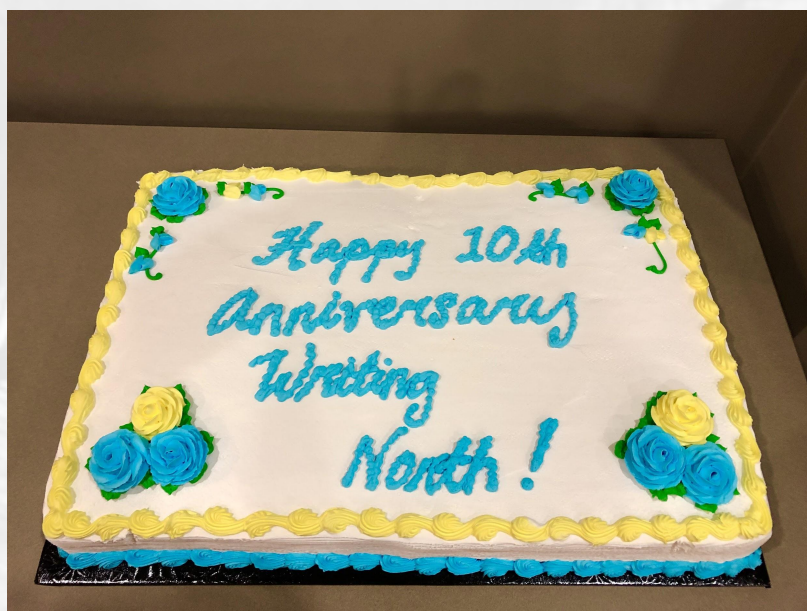
- *PrairyErth: A Deep Map* by William Least Heat-Moon

- Erin Hiebert

Then the reins were handed to Saskatchewan author, David Carpenter, who moderated the panel and introduced each writer one by one, before they turned to the theme of *Turn West*.

Plett introduced herself by talking about the difficulties of being a transgender writer with a Mennonite background, and growing up between Winnipeg and Borden, Manitoba. She highlighted what she sees as positive and negative aspects of being Mennonite, such as passivism and fundamentalism, respectively. Her first novel, *Little Fish*, examines the duality of Mennonite culture by contrasting a thirty-year-old transsexual prostitute with a conservative widow.

In Seesequasis's intro, he described a "love-hate" relationship with Saskatchewan. He was born near the Beardy's and Okemasis Cree Nation, but grew up in Saskatoon and Regina, exposing him to urban Indigenous issues from a young age.



He talked about his mother, a residential school survivor, who emphasized the importance of resilience, resistance, and intergenerational knowledge. In his work, he has been drawn to themes of confinement, status vs. non-status, and the disproportionate imprisonment of Indigenous people.

Savage opened by saying: "For the last twenty years, I've been trying to understand what it means to be a descendant of 'old time settlers.'" To further explain herself, she read passages from her trilogy of books on the West: *Prairie: A Natural History*, *A Geography of Blood*, and *Strangers in the House*. Each book has examined a specific aspect of the West, from the biological makeup of the Plains, to the bloody history of the Cypress Hills, to the presence of the Ku Klux Klan in 1920s Saskatchewan.

When it came time for Halfe to speak, she stressed the need for more Indigenous engagement on campus regarding events like Writing North. The issues that matter most to her are some of the most pressing in society: climate change, reconciliation, and mental health. Living in the West raises the question of how to find balance between the Indigenous and white settler worlds. She tries to make connections by going on walks across the province with people of all backgrounds, saying: "The West isn't a landscape, it's in my blood."

For over thirty years, Lilburn has wondered "how to be here?" Growing up in Regina, he says he was struck by his own ignorance, felt "culturally asphyxiated." He has lived in various parts of Canada and even Africa, and it was only by being away that he developed a deeper appreciation for his home and its landscape. Lilburn currently lives on Vancouver Island, and upon moving there was amazed by the "illegal occupation" of unceded Indigenous land in Northern B.C.

Following their statements, the discussion continued with audience questions.

Plett was asked what it's like living along a border, how artificial barriers can divide people. Reflecting on her time living along the Windsor-Detroit border, she said it's "amazing how much control state apparatuses have over people's lives."

One key question that emerged, eliciting comments from most of the panel, was: How does one, as a writer, bridge the divides between Indigenous and white-settler cultures?

Lilburn related his process of becoming informed about injustice, saying: "I wandered around, stumbled around, became a child." The poet in him came out when describing the relationship between language and landscape: "Language is not a human invention, it is the land itself taking linguistic form."

Having addressed this in her intro, Halfe added that she's taught her white husband how to speak Cree, joking that while he's not fluent, he knows enough "to get in trouble." She highlighted him as an example of cross-cultural understanding, as he's participated in various Sun Dances.

Regarding *A Geography of Blood*, Savage struggled with whether or not she, a product of white-settler culture, should be telling the sensitive history of the Cypress Hills.

Ultimately, she consulted elders for their blessings and information, and did her best to maintain authentic Indigenous voices in the book.

Seesequasis's archive project was a process of reclamation, used to "deconstruct falsehoods" about Indigenous life. He said he takes issue with the word "archive" though, as it suggests the past is dead, which is not the case.

Seesequasis was then asked whether he wished he was living somewhere else when he wrote his most recent book. He said it helped to be working in a rural environment with less distractions than say Toronto. It was appropriate to go on the journey here, where many of the subjects lived.

The last question was fittingly profound: Can this land be healed through writing?

Halfe said, "dialogue is so important to me," and that professional life in "mainstream communities" is often prioritized over personal life. Her walks across the province are designed to foster dialogue between mainstream and marginalized communities.

Savage simply said that telling "true" stories is the foundation of reconciliation.

Plett concluded by saying that once she's done the writing, and it's out in the world, it's not up to her to judge its impact.

By the time the question and answer session wrapped up, everyone was clamouring for, and could smell, the freshly delivered pizza. The supper hour was a great opportunity to mingle amongst the high concentration of acclaimed writers, or buy the panelists' work at a table run by the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild. It was a warm and intelligent atmosphere, and to top it off, there was a delicious cake celebrating Writing North's tenth anniversary.

The evening concluded with readings from the five panelists. They were, by turns, poignant, disturbing, challenging, and hilarious. Anyone who attended the full slate of events on this first day of Writing North would have come away enriched, having a good sense of what it means to live and write in the West.

All those who make Writing North happen year after year – the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild, the Department of English, the MFA in Writing program, especially Professors Jeanette Lynes and Sheri Benning, MFA in Writing students, the panelists, and of course, the attendees – deserve a ton of credit. They have created an outstanding event that the province can be proud of. Looking forward to the next ten years!

MFA IN WRITING STUDENT WORKSHOPS

Adults 

PROGRAM
Guide

authors & writing

saskatoonlibrary.ca | Teens & Adults recommended

HAIKU

Join MFA in Writing student Tea Gerbeza for a workshop to discuss the traditional haiku form.

You will be encouraged to write and share your own haiku.

Alice Turner Branch

Saturday / Apr 25 / 2–4 pm

Register online or by phoning 306.975.8127 at 10:30 am four weeks before the program.

MAGIC SYSTEM

Join MFA in Writing student Amanda Dawson for a workshop that will help provide direction for magic in your writing.

J.S. Wood Branch

Tuesday / Feb 18 / 7–9 pm

Register online or by phoning 306.975.7590 at 10:30 am four weeks before the program.

Programs above in
partnership with



0010 Posters W20 Adults Haiku Magic

A LOCAL SHOWCASING TRADITION: THE RIVER VOLTA READING SERIES BEGINS SEVENTH YEAR

TEA GERBEZA

The MFA in Writing's River Volta Reading Series opened for its seventh season on January 22, 2020 and this year, a golden trio breathes new magic into the Series with a particular focus on emerging writers.

Volta is a student-run, community-based reading series held monthly throughout the semester at d'Lish by Tish Cafè, and it is passed down generationally from one writing cohort to the next. Last year's Volta organizers were Sarah Ens, Kathryn Shalley, Hope Houston, Zach Keesey, and Jameson Lawson. Traditionally, two organizers have run the series over the years, starting with its founders, Chelsea Forbes and Sara-Jane Keith, in 2013.

This year, Volta welcomes a new trio to its ranks: poet Erin Hiebert, fiction writer Amanda Dawson, and poet Tea Gerbeza.



Like their predecessors, the trio decided to divide the duties of running the series. The behind-the-scenes team consists mostly of Tea and Erin. Erin handles the series' financials and uses the power of a jolly Christmas book box to collect the generous donations of our listeners. Tea is the coordinator-extraordinaire, scouting Saskatoon's vibrant literary community for available participants. Tea and Erin tag-team Volta's hype, promoting the series across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Amanda uses her deft artistic hand at creating the colourful promotion posters for the events. The trio split hosting duties and dream big for this season.

A goal for this River Volta season is to apply for grants in order to be able to pay our readers substantially more, to own sound equipment, and to have “Spotlight” Voltas. “Spotlight” Voltas would involve bringing in readers from outside of the province to read their work, and to perhaps give Writ 990s and workshops to the MFA in Writing students. In addition to grants, the trio plans to host more fundraising events inspired by the success of last year’s haiku fundraiser. You can read about the successful haiku fundraiser in the “MFA in Writing News Bulletin” section of the newsletter.

River Volta is grateful to Diana Tegenkamp who has generously donated money to rent sound equipment for the September to March Volta readings, and to Shannon McConnell for who, for years prior, has generously provided the sound equipment.

The trio has a specific interest this season to feature emerging writers, writers who have published debut collections, novels, memoirs, and the like. Graduates of the MFA program are publishing books this year like fire, and the trio wants to showcase the program and its emergent talent among the established talent within the province. The literary community of Saskatchewan is full of fresh life, and the trio wants to team up with local writing communities and lit mags to showcase those works as well.

Starting the 2020 River Volta off with fervor, poets Diana Tegenkamp and Taidgh Lynch read their poetry. Tegenkamp read from her poetry manuscript, *Motherfield*, blowing the room away with her powerful words. Lynch, a recent MFA in Writing graduate, read humorous poems, which made the room erupt in laughter. A joyous and successful evening left the trio with wide grins all the way home.

February hosted memoirist Kaylee Gryba and poet Shannon McConnell. McConnell kicked off the night with poems from her forthcoming collection, *The Burden of Gravity*. Her experience as a stand-up comedian gave her reading a flair that allowed pockets of laughter among poems that were not funny, but rather grave and powerful. Gryba read from her recently published memoir, *Single and Catless*, and connected with the audience over her dating misadventures—tales as old as time and, as an audience member said, “relatable as hell.”

March’s Volta is a showcase of the MFA in Writing graduating class theses. For the first time in River Volta history, there will be ten readers. Yes, *ten*. It will be an event filled with an array of readings from different genres, and the best promotion for the program, as all of these graduates are incredibly talented writers.

During the quiet of the summer, the trio will be working on those grants to bring Volta closer to its financial goals.



Taidgh Lynch Reading his Poems



Kaylee Gryba Reading from her debut memoir, *Single and Catless*

SPOTLIGHT ON MFA IN WRITING GRADUATE MIKA LAFOND

ERIN HIEBERT

Mika Lafond was raised on the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation in Treaty 6 Territory. She has two children, a son and a daughter. Mika graduated from ITEP in 2006, and then taught at her home community until she entered the MFA in Writing program here at USask. She has published a book of poetry, a fiction short story, and has had a script performed by the Indigenous Ensemble. Mika now teaches at ITEP here at USask, and continues to write poetry, fiction, non-fiction and plays.

Erin Hiebert:

What did you find were the strengths of the program or what did you get out of your two years in the MFA in writing?

Mika Lafond:

Prior to being in the MFA in writing, I was not really involved in the author community here in Saskatchewan.

When I entered the MFA program, I was introduced to a whole community of authors that I was able to meet, talk with, and seek advice from about the craft of writing. The most beneficial experiences for me in the program were being able to have a mentor throughout the writing process of my thesis project, and opening up my writing to other genres outside of my comfort zone of poetry.

WHO IS YOUR FAVOURITE LITERARY CHARACTER?

- “Tally Youngblood from the *Uglies* trilogy by Scott Westerfeld” - Richelle Gaudet
- “Cécile in *Bonjour Tristesse*” - Erin Hiebert



One other aspect of my time that I truly appreciate was that Jeanette was always so supportive of my idea to write a bilingual thesis project, and I believe that without her advocating for my project, it would not have been possible to create the manuscript the way that I envisioned it to be.

EH:

How has your writing practice changed since the MFA?

ML:

I used to think that writing just came naturally, and after taking the MFA I realized that this is a craft and I have so much to learn. I will write a poem and let it sit for a few days/weeks, and then come back to it and really read into what I am doing with my writing. I remember comments that were made in workshop about my writing and I look at it from that angle. I really learned a lot about developing my voice in my writing, both through the workshopping in classes and in the mentorship process. Bill Robertson was my mentor through the writing stages of my thesis project.

I can tell you that this is where the most editing happened to the manuscript. He taught me how to say what I could see in my thoughts. He taught me about detail. When I edit a poem or a story now, his words still come to mind. Without the mentorship aspect of the MFA, I don't know that I would have been able to reach that as a writer completely on my own. Someone needed to ask me the right questions about my writing to really make me think about what I was trying to say, and Bill did that for me.

EH:

You were the first MFA graduate to have her book published, congrats! Can you talk a little bit about that process. Did the manuscript change a lot from defense to publication. What was finding a publisher like? How was it working with Thistledown?

ML:

I really wanted a publisher that was close to home, and that would understand the importance of both the Cree and the English as language in the book. I felt that Thistledown was a good fit for me, and I submitted to them. I like that they are a publishing company that has submission guidelines for authors who have never been published before.

I submitted my manuscript and it took about a year to really decide if Thistledown would publish my book. It wasn't a typical 80 page poetry book, rather it was 160 pages because of the use of both languages, and I knew that would be something that would come into consideration. Another issue that we discussed was to find an editor for me to work with who was able and accomplished in his/her writing craft to work in both languages.

When Thistledown accepted my manuscript for publication I was beyond thrilled. I had set out on this path in 2010 to really focus on writing, and in 2016 they accepted my manuscript. And then I found out I would be able to work with Rita Bouvier as the editor. I couldn't believe that I would have that opportunity. She is someone I look up to both as an educator and as a poet.

Working with Rita through the editing process really taught me more about my voice as an Indigenous woman. She found places in my writing that I didn't realize I had mentioned, and asked me to go further with it.

She asked me to reach deeper into what I was really saying in my poetry. She knew the culture and she knew how the language worked. It just really added to what was already there. I took all of the opportunities that I could to learn how to reach that part of my writing. In my culture, this is how we learn to become good storytellers. You're not just born with that as a talent. In order to be able to tell stories, we are taught that we must first learn the skill of listening. We learn from those that are already the esteemed storytellers, and Rita is that person to me.

EH:

Do you see your art practice as an extension of your academic work? Can you speak to how those elements commingle or are disparate?

ML:

Both of my parents are educators. I grew up in a home where I was constantly learning, and I was given the opportunity to use stories to learn from. Gladys has always been my connection to my language and culture. She adopted me as her granddaughter when I was six years old. From that time on she taught me stories, language, and ceremony. This book is about claiming my connection to where I come from.

nêhiyawêwin language does that through simply using the dialect and specific words that are used in certain territories. I didn't know what this book was going to be about until I started writing the poetry, and over a summer of writing, it pieced itself together. When I think about what I want most for myself, it is that I can be who I am. And I think in order to be able to do that, I needed to look at my experiences up to that point in my life, understand what I had lost when I didn't have my language, and find all of the teachings I remembered from Gladys that would bring me back to the identity that I was born into. It's really hard to explain what it feels like to walk around the world, and people tell you you're Cree, but you can't quite figure out what that means because three generations before you were not allowed to be Cree. So what I wanted for myself in this first book of poetry is to just be who I am, unapologetically. I wanted to take my language back, my homeland back, my family relationships back and be able to express how all of that created me as a woman, mother, sister, and daughter.

EH:

Who are your literary parents or icons?

ML:

The first time I read Indigenous literature was Keeper'N'Me by Richard Wagamese. The way that he wrote about the land and relationships in that book really just rang true for me. I had never read a book that I could connect to so deeply. After that I looked for books that made me feel the same way. Authors who understood how I felt about the land. Authors who understood how our relationships and kinship work. I fell in love with Thomas King, Louise Erdrich, Rita Bouvier, Louise Halfe, Drew Hayden-Taylor. When I need inspiration, I will go back and read all or parts of their books. And I remember how to find that place inside me too.

EH:

Do you have any current projects, literary or otherwise you would like to tell us about?

I just finished transcribing an interview from an elder from my home community of Muskeg Lake. I've been asked by my community to write a historical children's book. I'm excited about that project.

Last year, the Indigenous Ensemble here in Saskatoon performed a script that I wrote. I have written a new script for their ensemble performance that they have accepted and may be performed next year.

I'm also working on transcribing a series of interviews that I did with Gladys Wapass-Greyeyes. I'm hoping to have that done by the end of April. She asked me to write down her stories, and I'm hoping that this will become a book that she can share with people.

I have a few other projects on the go, and I'm always doing some editing for academic writing.

I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THIS BOOK WAS GOING TO BE ABOUT UNTIL I STARTED WRITING THE POETRY, AND OVER A SUMMER OF WRITING, IT PIECED ITSELF TOGETHER.



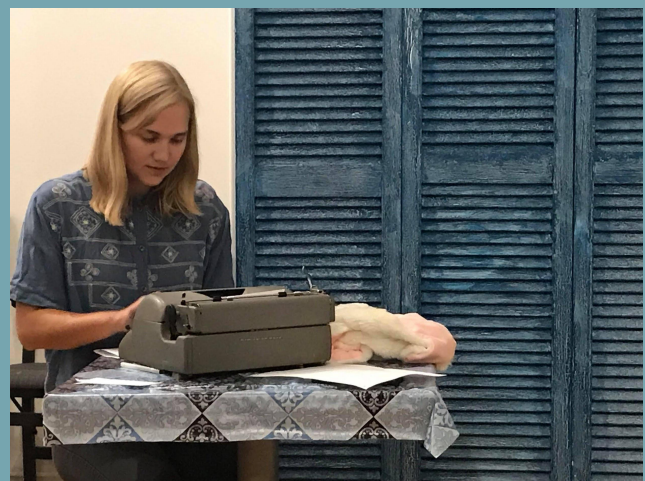
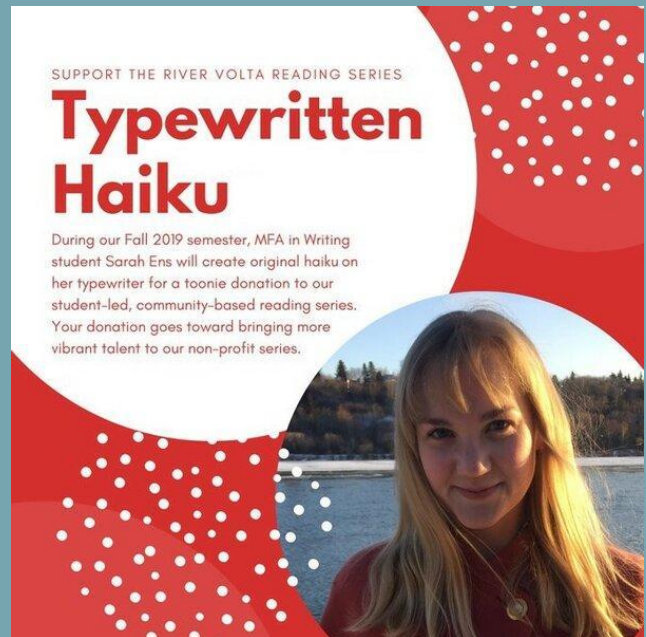
MFA IN WRITING NEWS BULLETIN

SUPPORT THE RIVER VOLTA WITH ORIGINAL TYPEWRITTEN HAIKU BY SARAH ENS

*Typewritten haiku
A unique way to support
MFA students*

Imaging attending a poetry reading and getting to take home a piece of original writing home with you? Sarah Ens will make this dream a reality by writing haiku on her typewriter by donation at the River Volta readings. This fundraising idea first came from former River Volta coordinators Geoff Pevlin (MFA '18) and Simon Böhm (MFA '18).

"Generating tiny poems by request adds excitement to River Volta evening and some incentive to donate", Ens said. "Who knows where those 17 syllables will lead, but I'm more than happy to riff on the donating person's topic of choice".

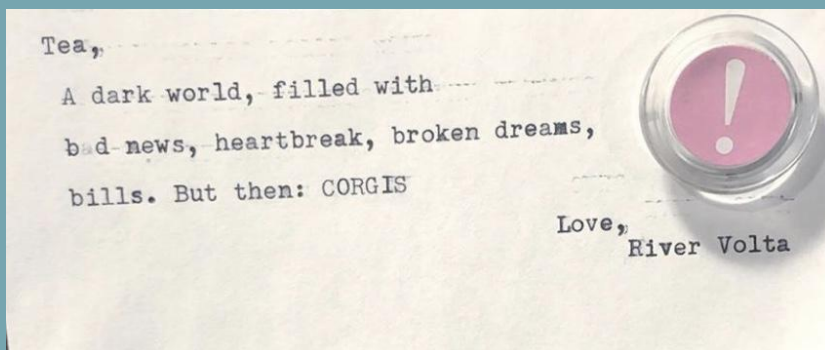


SUPPORT THE RIVER VOLTA WITH ORIGINAL TYPEWRITTEN HAIKU BY SARAH ENS



The first River Volta event will take place on Wednesday September 18 at D'Lish by Tish (702A 14th St E) at 7pm. It will feature readings by Gillian Harding-Russel and James Trettwer. The next one will be at Wednesday October 16, and Sarah will be at both with her typewriter.

The River Volta series is a student-led event that helps to build community within the MFA program as well as within the wider literary scene in Saskatoon. "We are very grateful for all the support that allows us to continue running River Volta and inviting talented local writers to share their work with us," Ens said.



MFA IN WRITING STUDENT AMANDA DAWSON COVERS THE 2019 KLOPPENBURG AWARD CEREMONY

The 2019 Kloppenburg Award for Literary Excellence took place this year on September 10th at the German Cultural Centre in Saskatoon. I arrived, damp from the rain and a bit out of sorts, having initially gone in through the wrong door and feeling keenly aware that I did not know a single soul in the room beyond. Once inside, Yolanda Hansen of the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild invited me to sit at a table near the stage, where I was received by other members of the SWG. I was struck by how friendly and welcoming everyone was, and soon found that my apprehension had given way to a tangible excitement.

The atmosphere in the building was friendly and comfortable, shot through with tendrils of anticipation. Candles glittered on every table, illuminating the faces of guests as they gathered around the tables. The air was thick with laughter and conversation as people greeted old friends and new acquaintances.



Jillian Bell, president of the SWG, approached the podium and introduced patrons of the award, Henry and Cheryl Kloppenburg, as well as renowned Saskatchewan artist Dorothy Knowles, a print of whose work is included as part of the award.

After a break for lunch, Bell again took the stage to begin the event, introducing the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan, His Honor the Honorable Russ Mirasty. Mirasty thanked the SWG for its support of Saskatchewan writers and Henry and Cheryl Kloppenburg for their generous donation in the form of the award. He then extended congratulations to the recipient of the award, and passed the stage to City Councillor Cynthia Block.

Block spoke of Saskatchewan's vibrant writing community and thanked the Kloppenburgs for supporting local writers.

Following this, Bell invited the Kloppenburgs to the stage. Cheryl and Henry Kloppenburg, lawyers by profession, but philanthropists at heart, established their award for literary excellence in 2010. The Cheryl and Henry Kloppenburg Award for Literary Excellence recognizes a Saskatchewan writer who has written a substantial body of literary work. The prize consists of an award of \$10,000 donated by Cheryl and Henry Kloppenburg and a framed print of a work of art by Saskatchewan artist Dorothy Knowles.

This year's award was the tenth of its kind. Speaking to the gathered crowd, the Kloppenburgs described the lack of recognition Saskatchewan writers get as being the main motive for their creation of the award. Henry Kloppenburg also mentioned that this year, they had run out of prints of Knowles' painting, and had decided to purchase twenty more.



A hush descended upon the tables as the much-anticipated moment came, and Cheryl Kloppenburg announced the tenth recipient of the Kloppenburg Award for Literary Excellence: Arthur Slade. The Kloppenburgs acknowledged the popularity and talent of Mr. Slade, who has written twenty-five novels for young readers including *The Hunchback Assignments*, which won the TD Canadian Children's Literature Award and *Dust*, winner of the Governor General's Award for Children's Literature.

Author Arthur Slade mounted the stage amidst a deluge of enthusiastic applause, coming to stand beside the Kloppenburgs next to the podium. Slade was raised on a ranch in the Cypress Hills of Saskatchewan, and now resides in Saskatoon.

He began writing while in high school and had his first short story published in 1989.

Slade thanked the Kloppenburgs for their generosity, and also thanked the SWG for their role in helping Saskatchewan writers, noting that he himself has been a member since he was fifteen years old. Slade went on to acknowledge the support of family members before reading a passage from his young adult novel, *Meggido's Shadow*.

On being a writer in Saskatchewan, Slade had this to say:

"Writers in Saskatchewan have a wonderful set of advantages: we have a strong guild, The Saskatchewan Writers Guild, that has been in our corner for fifty years now. On top of that, Saskatchewan is home to the first arts board in North America and it has been financially supporting writers for many decades. And finally we have so many fine writers like Guy Vanderhaeghe, Yann Martel and Sharon Butala who have shown the rest of us what is possible. So it doesn't seem crazy to choose this as a career."

Watching Arthur Slade receive the 2019 Kloppenburg Award for Literary Excellence was especially encouraging for me. Like Slade, my writing interests lie in genre fiction. Seeing such a significant award being given to someone who writes in a field that is so often overlooked and undervalued suggests to me that the writing community of Saskatchewan is a diverse group, and more significantly, it supports writers of varied backgrounds and genres. Slade is certainly correct in noting that to see other successful writers that come from the same place you do—and maybe even write the kinds of things you do—is inspiring.

Following Slade's reading, Jillian Bell returned to the podium to close the ceremony, giving thanks and congratulations, and bidding everyone farewell. As I made my way out amongst the low murmur of laughter, the handshakes and the goodbye waves, I couldn't help but feel that as a fledgling writer in this province, I was in good company.

MFA IN WRITING PROGRAM HEAD WINS NATIONAL NON-FICTION PRIZE

by Chris Putnam

Dr. Jeanette Lynes (PhD) is the winner of the 2019 Constance Rooke Creative Non-fiction Prize, a literary award presented by *The Malahat Review*. Lynes, a faculty member in the College of Arts and Science's Department of English and head of the University of Saskatchewan's MFA in Writing Program, was awarded the \$1,000 grand prize for her essay "Bat Reign."

The Malahat Review is one of Canada's leading literary journals. The Constance Rooke Prize competition is open to writers across Canada and around the world. Lynes said receiving the Constance Rooke Prize "means a great deal" to her because of a personal connection to the editor for whom the award is named.

"Constance Rooke accepted one of the first pieces of my writing I ever had published when she was editor of *The Malahat Review*," Lynes explained.

Lynes' winning essay tells a true story about a period of time in which bats repeatedly found their way into her Saskatoon apartment.

"And unfortunately I am terrified of bats, so the essay maps a serious phobia at a particular juncture of my life," Lynes said.

In a statement published on *The Malahat Review's* news website, contest judge Yasuko Thanh described the essay as "inventive, creative, playful" and praised its exploration of relatable issues including "how to live while suffering a wild pain."

Lynes has published two novels and seven poetry collections.



Her most recent novel, *The Small Things That End the World*, won the Muslims for Peace and Justice Fiction Award at the 2019 Saskatchewan Book Awards. Her latest collection of poetry, *Bedlam Cowslip: The John Clare Poems*, was awarded the Saskatchewan Arts Board Poetry Award in 2015.

As the winner of the Constance Rooke Creative Non-fiction Prize, Lynes' essay "Bat Reign" will be published in the winter 2019 issue of *The Malahat Review*. An interview with Lynes will also appear in the January 2020 issue of the journal's e-newsletter.

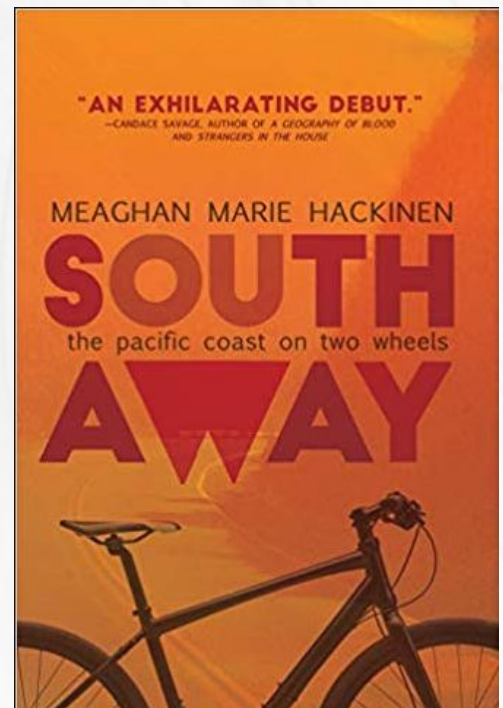
MFA IN WRITING GRAD MEAGHAN HACKINEN SETS WORLD CYCLING RECORD AND LAUNCHES CYCLING MEMOIR

Meaghan Hackinen, MFA in Writing Graduate, has just set a world cycling record, cycling 460.8 miles in 24 hours at the World Time Trial Championships.

Hackinen was in Saskatoon at McNally Robinson on November 21 to launch her new book, *South Away: The Pacific Coast on Two Wheels*. Candace Savage calls Hackinen's book an "exhilarating debut," while Booklist describes it as an "empowering memoir."



Meaghan Hackinen's creative non-fiction thesis has just been published by NewWest Press. Meaghan launched her book on Nov 21 at McNally Robinson bookstore, Saskatoon. She is pictured here with other MFA in Writing grads.



MFA IN WRITING STUDENT HOPE HOUSTON HOSTS MONTHLY BOOK CLUB

How do some Saskatoon teens who are also fantasy buffs spend one Saturday each month? At Alice Turner Branch of Saskatoon Public Library – they’ve signed up for ‘Reading Like a Writer’, a book club designed and delivered by MFA in Writing student Hope Houston.

In August 2018 Houston moved from Washington, D.C., to Saskatoon. She did not know a soul in Saskatoon. Nevertheless, Houston wasted no time immersing in our city’s writing community. She has been a frequent volunteer at literary events in the city. She serves on the organizing committee of the MFA in Writing River Volta Reading Series, and she leads the ‘Reading Like a Writer’ book club for teens as part of Saskatoon Public Library’s programming.

The book club’s participants study one fantasy novel each month and consider its craft, what Houston calls a “look at what writing strategies and choices are made.” She gives the teens writing exercises, a ‘hands-on’ approach which is popular and also why Houston calls her book club a “writing book club.”

Fantasy fiction is close to Houston’s heart; her own MFA thesis, supervised by Dr. Beverly Brenna, is a middle-grade fantasy novel, as yet untitled, about a ten-year old boy who has recently lost his mother to terminal illness. He meets a smooth-talking magic man who promises his mother is not gone – only missing. The boy (Demetrius) is then transported into a wasteland of grief and adventure.

When asked how fantasy novels that deal with tough subjects can help and inspire teen readers, Houston replied, “I think those sorts of books validate them and help them explore those kinds of topics in a way that’s not condescending or talking down to them.”

Houston chose four novels for the book club for teens: *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman, *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness, *Howl’s Moving Castle* by Dianne Wynn-Jones, and *Dust* by Arthur Slade. Slade was Houston’s mentor during her MFA in Writing mentorship.

Houston is impressed with the Saskatoon teens' "level of participation, and with how well-read and eager they are to come in on a weekend and talk about writing." When asked what the main takeaway, for her, of the book club was, she replied that the experience "taught [her] not to underestimate what kids understand; they understand more about grieving and death and other traumatic topics than we give them credit for."

Houston is no stranger to Saskatoon's public library system; in early 2019, before launching her book club, she presented a workshop on fiction writing. The book club is also a form of professional development for Houston, providing teaching experience as well as experiential learning she can take back to her own thesis work. In Houston's words, "It's good from a research perspective, for myself. I get to see what works well in the writing we cover, what the participants find effective (or not so much) and then I can go to my *own* middle-grade fantasy novel and apply what they connect to."



When asked about her experience partnering with Saskatoon Public Library, Houston remarked, partnering with SPL has been "incredible, a very positive experience. They tell you positive feedback that's coming in from kids and parents. They allow you to be creative with whatever sort of programming you'd like to put on – they give you freedom."

For Hope Houston, it's crucial to get out into the writing community and become actively engaged: "it's important to understand where you exist in the community. It's important to make contacts and move out of what is usually a very solitary practice. It's inspirational, if you see other people thriving and doing what they love it makes you want to get out there and do the same."

USASK MFA IN WRITING GRAD NAMED NEW EDITOR OF PRAIRIE FIRE MAGAZINE



Carolyn Gray (MFA '19) has been named editor of the Canadian literary magazine *Prairie Fire*. Published in drama, fiction and non-fiction, Gray is the current Writer-in-Residence for the Winnipeg Public Library. She won the John Hirsch Award for Most Promising Manitoba Writer and the Manitoba Day Award for Excellence in Archival Research for her play, *The Elmwood Visitation*.

Publishing for over 40 years, *Prairie Fire* is one of Canada's oldest literary magazines. They publish an innovative variety of fiction, poetry and creative non-fiction from some of the country's most celebrated writers as well as talented emerging voices.

We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Carolyn on this exciting appointment and wish her luck in continuing to further the upstanding reputation of this award-winning literary journal.

SARAH ENS' AMAZING YEAR

Being a writer is a roller-coaster ride, a life of highs and lows, successes and disappointments. For Sarah Ens, a second-year student in the MFA in Writing, this year has been an ongoing 'high'. Sarah recently received the great news that her poetry collection, *The World Is Mostly Sky*, will be published by Turnstone Press in the coming year. One of her writing assignments, completed for Dr. Sheri Benning's creative non-fiction course, turned into the winning entry in this year's Edna Staebler Personal Essay Contest sponsored by *The New Quarterly*. Says Sarah of her winning essay titled "Entangled," "I would not have written it if not for this class." Sarah's piece "Fan Fiction for the Revolution" received first place in *Room Magazine's* Short Forms Contest and her poems "What She Was Drowning" and "Os Justi" were long-listed in *Room Magazine's* Poetry Contest. Sarah received 2nd place for her poem "Vermiculture" in CV2's 2-Day Poem Contest.

Sarah recently completed her six-month mentorship with poet Laurie D. Graham.

The mentorship is part of her MFA in Writing studies. As a mentor, Sarah states, Laurie was "conscientious, patient, and wise – endlessly encouraging." Sarah's MFA thesis is a long (ie. book-length) poem currently titled *Flyway*. Laurie provided strategies for how to "convey a lot of dense matter in a way that still reads as a poem," adds Sarah.

If all this isn't enough, Sarah served on the organizing team of the MFA in Writing's monthly series, The River Volta Reading Series. To support the series, she launched a haiku fundraiser and typed original haiku for a two-dollar donation. Last year Sarah was a Teaching Assistant for English 120: Introduction to Creative Writing, and this year she is a Teaching Assistant for English 220: Reading Like A Writer, a new hybrid literature/creative writing course.

After moving from Winnipeg to Saskatoon in the fall of 2018, Sarah quickly jumped into the literary and cultural life of her new adopted city and province; she serves on the Board of Directors for JackPine Press and Coteau Books.

Sarah also attended Sandra Ridley's Poetry Workshop at Sage Hill Writing in summer 2019. Being a writer is also a juggling act. When asked how she balances her MFA studies, work as a Teaching Assistant, submitting her writing for publication, and community engagement work, Sarah states, "all these things are contributing to my creative output and sparking ideas. Everything relates to the work of writing, thinking, and creating."

When asked how a course of study like an MFA in Writing enhances her life as writer, Sarah says the MFA "gives me the space to make writing a priority. The space, and the community. You have access to this whole range of mentors and also smart, funny, supportive peers." Sarah's advice for aspiring writers is: "Read as much as you can! Read material that makes you feel interested and excited, that taps into what you yourself are wanting to speak. Also, submit, submit, submit your writing."

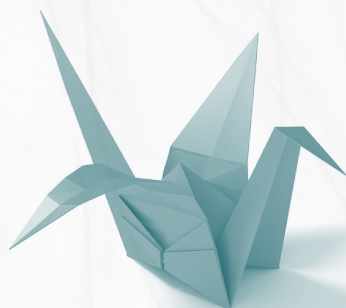
In her spare time, Sarah enjoys spending time with her cat Balto and writing in coffee shops.



#MFAWRITINGADVICE

"Writing is in the editing"

- Erin Hiebert



POETRY AND PALAEOLITHIC CAVE ART: MFA IN WRITING STUDENT, SUSIE HAMMOND, REFLECTS ON PREHISTORIC PRACTICES FOR NAVIGATING THE ANTHROPOCENE

In July 2019, The Masters Trust Committee awarded Susie Hammond the annual Edney Masters Scholarship in support of her poetry thesis research, recognizing her as an outstanding candidate due in part to her overall commitment as a global citizen. The Dick and Mary Edney Masters Scholarship for International Understanding through Humanities and Fine Arts was initiated in 2015 by Professor Emeritus David Edney in honour of his parents, Richard H. Edney (1911-2006) and Mary Edney (1914-2011). The aim of the annual scholarship is to enrich the cultural life of Canada by promoting the study of other cultures. When visiting Victoria in December 2019, Susie was interviewed about the impact of the award by Marianne Goodrich, visual artist and member of the Victoria Arts Council.

Marianne Goodrich:

Susie, how did you come to University of Saskatchewan's MFA in Writing program?

Susie Hammond:

In 2014, I prepared to fulfill a lifelong dream and return to school for an MFA. I was drawn to graduate school at the University of Saskatchewan by the School's receptivity to interdisciplinary work and the strength of its programs in women and gender studies and environmental studies. Also, a major attraction was the MFA in Writing department's commitment to cultivating a diverse writing community including through its mentorship program.

MG:

What does receiving this scholarship mean to you and your writing career?

SH:

It's a wonderful affirmation of my work to have been chosen for this great honour! In addition to the benefit of the financial support, the award endorsed my project's potential relevance and the viability of its interdisciplinary scope. My poetry frequently examines cross-cultural and transnational intersectional eco-feminist themes informed by science, the humanities, and the arts, and the award has encouraged me to continue exploring these themes.

MG:

Tell us about your project and its impetus.

SH:

My project is a collection of poems inspired by the cave paintings of Southern France. In 2017, I visited two of France's Upper Palaeolithic caves including an original still open to the public. I was moved by the paintings' palpable respect for and attention to nature and their relational, organic aesthetic. But there was more. Images in painting and poetry are aesthetic equivalents. I was moved to research what I experienced, drawing on evolutionary theory and feminist methodology, as well as cognition, archaeology, and aesthetics, and to apply findings to poetic craft.

What I was drawn to includes apparent multisensory perception and cognition embracing sequential and lyrical logic, and the prehistoric community's evident social cooperation suggesting gender egalitarian coincidence between what feminist scholar, Cindi Katz, terms "the social relations of power and production," a phenomenon continuing to challenge contemporary transnational society.

Contours is the collection's working title. I borrowed its cartographic use from Katz but in the course of researching and writing the collection, I found the term is used in many disciplines and came to appreciate its dynamic connotations. Etymologically, the root of *contour* references turning and change.

I think of the poems as connection points in time and space on Earth, for possible wayfinding through the terra incognita of our human journey.

MG:

What is the objective of *Contours*?

SH:

Contours asks what we can learn from Upper Palaeolithic deep time, an era extending from around 40,000 to about 10,000 years ago, that might help us navigate the Anthropocene. Though the full relevance of artefacts like the cave paintings may never be known, and other Palaeolithic artefacts are as yet undecipherable, nonetheless they speak eloquently of human communication, cooperation, and bioliteracy.

Contours' goal is to create reflections that might attune us to these messages in service of evolutionary resilience and cultural equality in the Anthropocene.

MG:

What doors is this award opening?

SH:

Receiving the award has presented possibilities I wouldn't otherwise have imagined. For instance, the head of MFA in Writing, Dr. Jeanette Lynes, who was so supportive through the scholarship application process, has encouraged me to apply for fellowships and residencies to continue the research and writing.

The scholarship includes making public presentations of findings, especially to Canadians. To begin, I gave an October 2019 reading of thirteen poems reflecting Upper Palaeolithic culture at University of Saskatchewan's Eclectic conference.

In 2020, I'll present at McGill's English Graduate Studies Excavations conference, and at the Association of Literature, Environment and Culture in Canada conference hosted by University of Saskatchewan.

I've also been invited to participate in a major feminisms conference in Dublin, Ireland, where symbolic expression of deep and contemporary time are among the issues prehistoric scholars and contemporary global activists will address in their keynotes.

MG:

How will the travel component of the scholarship help your research and writing?

SH:

I've been invited to be a visiting researcher in February 2020 at France's Musée National de Préhistoire in the town of Les Eyzies, which is in the same valley as the caves on which *Contours* focuses. I will return to do research and revisit those caves, to be present with and attend to the Upper Palaeolithic art and artefacts again. Being present and paying attention are practices essential to capturing detail and context necessary for creating poetry. I especially appreciated the importance of those practices this past summer writing the first draft of *Contours* while enjoying the singular privilege of being mentored by Canadian poet Karen Solie.

MG:
Any final thoughts?

SH:
I'm grateful to be among a welcoming community of new friends in Saskatoon, and a creatively strong and diverse cohort in the MFA in Writing, which is supported at every turn academically, administratively, financially, and professionally.



Photo of Susie Hammond by Stobbe Photo

WHAT ARE YOU READING?

- "I'm a chaotic reader, so I'm constantly in the middle of a few books. I'm reading *The Starless Sea* by Erin Morgenstern, *Girlwood* by Jennifer Still, *America is Immigrants* by Sara Nović, and *All We Saw* by Anne Michaels."

- Tea Gerbeza

WHERE DO YOU WRITE?

- "In a closed room with a locked door in an alternate dimension."
- Amanda Dawson
- "In my room at my desk, cleared of all other clutter."
- Richelle Gaudet
- "In bed hunched over a laptop."
- Erin Hiebert
- "Sometimes at my desk, other times in a cafe, and other times, on my phone when I can't sleep."

- Tea Gerbeza

ON THE BRINK: LIFE AFTER THE MFA IN WRITING - TWO GRADS LINK WITH INTERNATIONAL LITERACY PROJECT

People often ask what comes after completing an MFA in Writing, what possibilities are there for a graduate who wishes to remain firmly planted in the literary world and build professional skills in, for example, the publishing industry? My answer is, in so many words, “the sky’s the limit.” But by far the best examples of post-MFA possibilities come from our graduates themselves.

Carolyn Gray and Jaclyn Morken graduated from USask’s MFA in Writing in 2019. The ink had barely dried on their thesis projects or, perhaps more accurately, their keyboards had barely cooled, when they accepted internships through the Brink Literacy Project. Launched in 2007, Brink’s mission, as stated on their website is “devoted to utilizing the power of storytelling to positively affect the lives of people on the brink. Through our education, community, and publishing divisions, or non-profit works worldwide to foster a love of literature, increase literacy rates, and use storytelling to empower underserved communities.” Brink’s educational mandate focuses on developing editing skills, writing skills, marketing, and outreach.

The Brink community also offers numerous publishing opportunities for emerging writers.

Carolyn Gray, the first MFA in Writing grad to be awarded an internship with Brink, was in the final semester of her studies when she received notification about this wonderful opportunity. Carolyn’s internship took place from January to April, 2019. What a roll she was on, receiving her MFA in Writing, taking up the position of Writer-in-Residence at Winnipeg Public Library and more recently being appointed Editor of *Prairie Fire Magazine*, one of Canada’s best and most longstanding literary magazines. Recalling her time as an intern with Brink Literacy Project, Carolyn says: “I was interested in the publishing industry, and was drawn to the Brink Internship because it promised intensive training with professionals. As well, Brink has an objective of reaching underserved and diverse communities which made the prospect even more exciting. The Brink experience was fun, challenging, thorough, and a wholly rewarding experience. Now, about eight months later, I’m working full time in the publishing industry.”

Jaclyn Morken began her twelve-week internship with Brink Literacy Project in September 2019. When asked about her typical duties as a Brink intern, Jaclyn states, “just some of my work included interviewing published authors, reviewing an ARC (advance reading copy) of a forthcoming short story collection, managing social media accounts, and editing live submissions to Brink’s magazine *F(r)iction*, as well as its writing contest.”

Brink’s outreach and accessibility mandate is strong. On this topic Jaclyn remarks: “This awareness and respect of others and their ability levels is one reason why I am so proud to be involved with Brink Literacy Project. Brink is committed to opening the publishing industry to those who might not otherwise have access to it, providing resources and platforms for underrepresented and marginalized voices to tell their stories...Now, as a Junior Editor, I’m continuing to evaluate incoming submissions to *F(r)iction*, and I’m also working with my supervisor on university partnership initiatives.”

No one said being a writer is easy, and after the community an MFA in Writing can offer, going it alone can feel isolating, but there are opportunities out there, and professional partnerships to explore. Our creativity as writers extends to being inventive and open about career opportunities, and inventiveness is one skill we can humbly claim to possess. We wish Carolyn all the best in her new editorship at *Prairie Fire*, and Jaclyn in her continued editing work with Brink Literacy Project!



BOOKS! BOOKS! BOOKS!:

RECENT AND FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS FROM THE MFA IN WRITING

TAIDGH LYNCH

First Lift Here and Other Poems (JackPine Press, 2019)

MEAGHAN HACKINEN

South Away: The Pacific Coast on Two Wheels (NeWest Press, 2019)

PATRICK O'REILLY

A Collapsible Newfoundland (Frog Hollow Press, 2020)

ALLISON MCFARLAND

Disappearing in Reverse (University of Calgary Press, Forthcoming)

SHANNON MCCONNELL

The Burden of Gravity (Caitlin Press, Forthcoming)

BOOKS! BOOKS! BOOKS!:

RECENT AND FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS FROM THE MFA IN WRITING

DEE HOBSBAWN-SMITH

Bread & Water (Forthcoming)

SARAH ENS

The World is Mostly Sky (Turnstone Press, Forthcoming)

NICOLE HALDOUPIS

Tiny Ruins (Radiant Press, Forthcoming)

TUNES TO WRITE TO

- "A playlist on Spotify I call, Songs I Stole From Gen Z-ers"
- Erin Hiebert
- "Forever Classic Rock."
- Amanda Dawson

SHANNON MCCONNELL GIVES VOICE TO THE VOICELESS IN NEW BOOK

ERIN HIEBERT

Alumnus, Shannon McConnell's debut book of poetry, *The Burden of Gravity*, will be published by Caitlin Press in Spring 2020. She graduated from the MFA in writing in 2017; this book was her thesis project. The manuscript previously won second place in the 2018 John V Hicks Long Manuscript Award for Poetry.

The Burden of Gravity explores the fraught history of Woodlands School, a former institution in New Westminster, British Columbia, just a short distance from where the poet grew up. Shortly after Woodlands' closure in 1996, public accusations from former residents and their families began to make headlines claiming physical, verbal, sexual, mental and emotional abuse.

The story of Woodlands School has been with McConnell for many years. "It started years ago in one of the writing classes I took at UFV (University of the Fraser Valley). We were given pictures to write off of and one of the pictures that was used given was from Woodlands School... it blew my mind that there was this institution not that far from where I grew up."

After attempting a historical novel while studying at UFV, she came to the MFA program after a friend from high school suggested it. She says the program was "huge in developing [herself] as a writer."

WHO IS YOUR FAVOURITE LITERARY CHARACTER?

"Bilbo Baggins from *The Hobbit*."

- Amanda Dawson

"I love Helena from *Orphan Black*."

- Tea Gerbeza



Writing this work was a matter of right time/right place. During her time in the MFA she wanted to become a more well-rounded writer. Her strategy was to work on “I thought if I’m going to work with a professional writer I should be working on that genre.”

She worked with MFA in Writing mentor, Elizabeth Philips. A process that completely changed her writing. “For the longest time I didn’t even call it a manuscript, I just called it this giant thing I’m writing. Liz kept calling it a manuscript, I couldn’t even wrap my mind around it.”

Caitlin Press was a natural fit for McConnell, suggested to her by Philips. “Caitlin Press is really awesome because they have a feminist spin to their writing but they also do historical, mostly BC historical writing. Because my stuff was completely BC history, they were interested. I mailed off my package to them and they heard the next week, that doesn’t happen. It was wild, I did not expect it.”

The first section of the manuscript is a series of what McConnell calls, witness poems. “It’s very much from the patient perspective... There are instances of abuse but It’s more about the human connection.”

The second section of the manuscript deals with the problem of how to remember Woodlands. Following the close of Woodlands School there were a number of lawsuits and McConnell used archival records of newspapers to create erasure poetry. The question of how to remember this place and its distressing past is especially pertinent now that the ground Woodlands once occupied has been developed into riverside condos.

Residents of British Columbia were unable to sue the government prior to 1974 and so patients admitted before that deadline were left without any recourse or financial compensation for many years. “There were people that were before the cutoff by a couple days. In the last year they’ve overturned that... But the amount of people around to claim that money is less and less.”

Currently Shannon is finishing her MA in History at the University of Saskatchewan, about Woodlands. “The history degree has really helped me in understanding historical context, I have a greater understanding of the context of asylums and this greater theory behind it.”

The context under which Woodlands was able to flourish “I struggle with this daily, for a lot of people this was the best place and a lot of parents were told this was the best place. There was a lot of parent-blaming but doctors were saying, put your child in there.”

In her creative work, McConnell says she is drawn to giving voice to the voiceless. “History is written from an authoritative perspective,” she says, “this [book] is very much pushing back against that.”



WHAT ARE YOU READING?

- *Calm the F*ck Down* by Sarah Knight
- Richelle Gaudet
- *Nature Poem* by Tommy Pico
- Tea Gerbeza

THE RIVER VOLTA REVIEW OF BOOKS ROLLS ON

BRANDON FICK

Another year, another issue of the *River Volta Review of Books* is on its way.

After its inaugural issue last year, RVRB returns with two new student editors, Sarah Ens and Hope Houston. Ens and Houston are in the second year of their MFA in Writing, and with the support of faculty supervisor, Professor Sheri Benning, have been working very hard to take RVRB to another level.

The mandate of the *River Volta Review of Books* is “to further studies in the craft of writing, and... provide a bridge from MFA student writers to larger writing communities.” On its website, rivervoltareview.com, there are four sections: book reviews, interviews conducted by MFA students with established writers, essays analyzing the craft of writing, and updates about the achievements of MFA students and graduates.

Benning believes RVRB is a much needed addition to Canada’s literary scene.

“*River Volta Review of Books* seeks to contribute to literary review culture in Canada. Increasingly there are fewer newspapers and literary journals that publish book reviews and we hope that RVRB will help address this lack.”

Ens echoes this: “I think creating space for critical engagement with literature, particularly current, Canadian literature, is extremely important to the writing ecosystem and it has been wonderful to be able to contribute in this way.”

Last year’s issue featured a review of Marlon James’s novel, *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* (2019), and interviews with Saskatchewan writers Arthur Slade, Barbara Langhorst, and Sylvia Legris.

Allison McFarland, the first student editor, conducted the interview with Langhorst, and contributed a poetry review and essay. She gained editing experience applicable to her own endeavor, The Anti-Languorous Project, which includes the literary journal *antilang*.

Houston says it has been intriguing to be on the other side of the publication process, and that being an editor imparts many useful skills.

“As a fiction writer, my experience with the editorial process of lit mags and reviews has largely been on the submitting side. This certainly demystifies the other side of publication.

“We do it all: craft calls for submissions, set editorial deadlines, administer the website, copy edit submissions, even visit classes in the MFA to raise awareness of the publication. It’s incredible experience to gain, and it all transfers into real world skills needed in today’s job market – be it social media management, communications, publishing, or education.”

Houston believes RVRB lives up to its mandate, saying that beyond writing for your thesis, an MFA is a time “to network, build community with other writers, attempt publication, and build writing-related skills. Working with and/or submitting to RVRB are wonderful ways to check many of those boxes.”

She appreciates being exposed to a range of contemporary literature, and as an American, the interviews with local authors “root me in Saskatoon’s rich literary community.”

To expand the RVRB beyond its website, Ens and Houston created social media profiles on Twitter and Facebook, which are @VoltaReview and @voltareview, respectively. Houston credits Benning with giving her and Ens the confidence to take control.

“Working with Dr. Benning has been a delightful, skill-honing experience. Sheri provides a supportive and open environment for student editors to learn the editorial process and grow the publication as their own.”

Ens also thanks Benning and Houston for the experience.

"I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Sheri and Hope on the RVRB! As co-editor, I've enjoyed reading the work of my peers with an eye towards style, and have learned a lot about the mechanics of putting together an issue for an online magazine."

Benning hopes her brainchild will continue allowing graduate students "to contribute to a larger literary conversation" and "flex their critical muscles."

If the positivity of Ens and Houston are any indication, the *River Volta Review of Books* certainly has a bright future. By the time you are reading this, its second issue should be online at rivervoltareview.com. Go check it out!

RIVER VOLTA REVIEW OF BOOKS

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

BARBARA LANGHORST

Barbara Langhorst's first book, *restless white fields*, won book awards for poetry in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Her first novel, *Want*, was shortlisted for the Regina Public Library Book of the Year Award. She is a mentor in the MFA in Writing program at the University of Saskatchewan and teaches at St. Peter's College in Muenster. She lives and writes near Humboldt, SK, where she shares an acreage with her husband and their many elderly pets.

NICOLE HALDOUPIS

Nicole Haldoupis is a writer, editor, and designer from Toronto. She's editor and co-creator of *untethered*, editor of *Grain*, and co-founder of Applebeard Editions. Her work can be found in *Bad Dog Review*, *The Feathertale Review*, *Bad Nudes*, *(parenthetical)*, *Sewer Lid*, *The Quilliad*, *antilang*, and other places. Her debut book, *Tiny Ruins*, is forthcoming with Radiant Press in Fall 2020.

WHAT ARE YOU READING?

"Sean Johnston's *All This Town Remembers*, and the Princeton *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*."

- Erin Hiebert



GEOFF PEVLIN

Geoff Pevlin is a writer, visual artist, graphic designer, and aspiring coder (GeoffPevlin.com). He is also a publisher/editor (ApplebeardEditions.ca) and an innkeeper (RendellShea.com) from the mauzy shores of St. John's, Newfoundland. His fiction and poetry can be found in *Arc*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Riddle Fence*, and other literary journals across the land.

SHANNON MCCONNELL

Shannon McConnell is a writer, educator and musician originally from Vancouver, British Columbia. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in *untethered*, *Louden Singletree*, *Rat's Ass Review*, and others. She holds degrees in English Literature and Education from UFV and SFU, respectively, and is a graduate of the University of Saskatchewan's MFA in Writing program. In 2018, she won second place for the John V. Hicks Long Manuscript Award for Poetry. She very very close to completing an MA in History at USask.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

TEA GERBEZA

Tea Gerbeza is a poet and MFA in Writing student. She also holds a MA in English & Creative Writing from the University of Regina. You can find Tea's poetry in *the Society*, *Spring*, and *Poetry is Dead*, among others. Her poems have won an Honourable Mention in *Grain* magazine's 2019 Short *Grain* Contest. Tea is incredibly grateful to Dr. Jeanette Lynes for the opportunity to work on this newsletter, and for all of the hard work from her fellow editors.

ERIN HIEBERT

Erin Hiebert is a poet and MFA in Writing student at the University of Saskatchewan. Her first chapbook, *Save Our Crowns*, was published by Anstruther Press in 2018. Her work has appeared online in *Forget Magazine* and *The Maynard*. She holds a BA in Creative Writing from UBC Okanagan. She enjoyed conducting interviews for the newsletter.

BRANDON FICK

Brandon Fick is a fourth-year English Honours student at the University of Saskatchewan. He was grateful to have contributed to this year's MFA in Writing newsletter as an intern. Brandon has helped edit, and been published in St. Peter's College's *The Society*, and St. Thomas More College's *In Medias Res*. He loves reading, particularly American literature, and writing short stories and poems. Brandon is looking forward to (hopefully) being in the USask MFA in Writing program this fall.

