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COORDINATOR’S REFLECTIONS

The MFA in Writing at the University of Saskatchewan is now in its fourth year and our second class graduated in October 2014. Congratulations to Mika Lafond, Elise Godfrey, Sheila Janzen, Sarah Taggart, James Pepler and Elise Godfrey! The creative theses from this group ran the gamut from experimental poetry, poetry in English and Cree, to young adult fiction, geek fiction, and novels of steamy intrigue on the west coast, to prairie sagas. I’m very proud of the class of 2014! We were also fortunate to welcome, in fall 2015, a new group of students who come from across Canada – literally, Newfoundland to Victoria. It’s so exciting to be part of a fledgling program – so many ‘firsts’ – among our next group of graduating students is the first creative non-fiction thesis. The class of 2016 will include the first graphic novel. The River Volta Reading Series, founded by MFA students Sara-Jane Gloutnez and Chelsea Forbes (class of 2015) continues to thrive. It’s a privilege to work with these talented writers in the vibrant cultural community of Saskatoon. The MFA in Writing is growing; by fall, 2016, the program will have graduated more than twenty students. I’m very grateful to The Interdisciplinary Centre for Culture and Creativity, the Department of English and most of all, my students!

FIRST YEAR COHORT



Meaghan Hackinen is a British Columbia-born bicycle enthusiast and first year student in the Creative Writing MFA program. Her two-wheeled adventures have taken her down the Pacific Coast, across Canada, through the Sierra Cascades and into Baja California and mainland Mexico. Her life mission is to find the ultimate spot to pitch her tent. Meaghan's writing explores relationships, experiences on the road, and encounters with wild places. Meaghan won first place in *Brilliant Flash Fiction's* "Life is Good" contest in January 2015.



Nicole Haldoupis is a writer, editor and designer from Toronto. She received a Graduate Student Recruitment Research Stipend for her entry to the MFA program. She co-created *untethered*, a Toronto-based literary journal that launched its first issue in the summer of 2014, and is preparing launch its second issue this coming February 2015. This past year she has had poetry published in *The Quilliad*, and has flash fiction forthcoming in *(parenthetical)*.



Courtney Loberg is an artist and writer born in Peace River, Alberta. In May she went to her patrilineal homeland (Norway) for the first time. This past year she read poetry at *The Warren Talks: Identity*, got a comic published in Leah Wishnia's *Happiness* anthology and exhibited in the *Happiness* group exhibition at Mailbox Art Space in Melbourne.



Leah Maclean-Evans is from Ottawa and writes mostly short fiction. She will be attempting her first novel this summer for her thesis project. Leah was the first MFA in Writing student at the University to be awarded the Dean's Scholarship. This past year she read at The River Volta, Blue Mondays Reading Series and The Mill Tavern Open Mic. She is one of the new coordinators of The River Volta Reading Series.



Brent McFarlane hails from a mash of Grandora and Langham, SK. This past year, Brent acted in Itamar Moses's Love/Stories for Live Five and starred in Brad Proudlove's short film *All the dollar Bills in My Hometown*. He won second place in the SPC's 24 Hour Playwriting Contest with *Serious Dude*, and realized a minor dream when he was published on his favourite snarky American politics blog, Wonkette (they even gave him twenty American dollars!). Brent owns

two cats whom entertain each other while he writes long hours and can usually be found working retail or cooking in his down time.



This past year, Patrick O'Reilly has published poems with Numero Cinq Magazine (May, 2014), Qwerty (Issue 31), Stuart (Spring 2014), and the most recent issue of *untethered*. He was named to the masthead of Numero Cinq Magazine, and has published one book review with them (on *The Iceland* by Sakutarō Hagiwara, July 2014), with new reviews forthcoming in February (*Two Tragedies in 429 Breaths*, Susan Paddon) and April (*Barely Composed*, Alice Fulton). He also gave readings at Qwerty Reads

(Fredericton NB, April 2014), and at the Writing East Conference (St. John's NL, June 2014). In June Patrick delivered a lecture entitled "What is Spoken Word?" at the Writer's Federation of New Brunswick's annual WordSpring Festival (June, 2014).



Taxis Walkem is from British Columbia and part of the Nlaka'pamux Nation. He enjoys writing and at times tries to trick people by calling himself a writer. He focuses on fiction but is more than willing to dabble in non-fiction, poetry and playwriting. Taxis recently performed as an opening reader for the All People's Collective at Convocation Hall, University of Saskatchewan.

SECOND YEAR COHORT



Danielle Brett Potter is working on a novel about the intricacies and intrigues of relationships, desire and truth. It takes place in modern day Toronto and focuses on three characters –Gemma and Carina (sisters) and Steve (married to Gemma). She decided to write the novel in three perspectives because she wanted the reader to be angry at as well as sympathize with all three characters. Each character has a secret and there are no easy answers. During Danielle’s first critique one of her classmates called it ‘Contemporary Domestic Realism.’ Sandra Birdsell worked with her as a mentor.



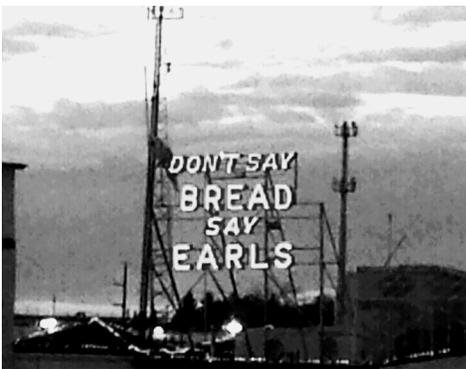
This year Chelsea Forbes worked on her fiction thesis with Saskatoon-based writer Leona Theis. Using a fragmented narrative, the novel explores the affects of murder on a Northern Albertan town. Chelsea’s poem “Home Boys Grown” was published this past September by the Poetry Institute of Canada in an anthology called *Island Magic*. In January another of Chelsea’s poems, “What they found at the dump”, was published in *In/Words* issue 14.2. In the fall Chelsea was awarded a College of Arts and Sciences Graduate Catalyst Award for her work on poetics with Professor Lynes.



Aaron Garrad moved from Brisbane to Saskatoon in 2012. He spent the past year working on his fiction thesis with mentor His favourite author is Cormac McCarthy, although he prefers writing speculative fiction. One day, he might write screenplays.



Sara-Jane Gloutnez was featured as a reader in The River Volta Reading Series this January with her co-founder Chelsea Forbes. This year she worked on her fiction thesis with mentor Rosemary Nixon, and won a University Graduate Research Scholarship for her thesis. Her novel has a lot of narrators.



David Houston is working on a non-fiction thesis, a collection of short essays exploring memory, loss and place. These have evolved from travel to cities across Canada and worldwide. His mentor was Alexandra Popoff. Pictured is an epigraph from the final essay in David's collection.



This year Isa Lausas published a digital chapbook, *Exi[s]t*, at the Vancouver Art/Book Fair through *Poetry is Dead*. She also crafted and published a chapbook in collaboration with her partner Tyson J Atkins through JackPine Press, entitled *I Exi[s]t/Exit I*. In August Isa's photography was shown in an exhibition titled Diffusion2. Her poetry was published with Toronto based (parenthetical), issue2. She also has poems forthcoming in the anthology *Where The Nights Are Twice as Long: Love Letters of Canadian Poets* and the upcoming issue of *untethered*.



Gayle Smith finished the first draft of her novel while working with mentor, Allan Safarik, author of *Swede's Ferry*. Her novel takes place in 1950 and features a daring cowgirl/baseball pitcher who must capture the rogue stallion who killed her first-born foal. Research for this novel included pack trips with horses into the boreal forest and the Royal Community Pasture and several visits to the local archives. Gayle was also featured as a reader at The River Volta and the Slow Food Dinner. One of her non-fiction pieces was accepted for publication in *untethered*.



Chelsea Forbes and Sara-Jane Gloutnez founded The River Volta Reading Series in September 2013 out of pocket, will, and a bare, newcomers' sense of the cityscape.

CHELSEA: These days, I can't remember who first suggested starting a reading series of our own. But the idea got hold of Sara-Jane and I. It germinated. We'd meet at Mulberry's and drink a lot of coffee. We made lists: prospective venues, possible readers and names. We took the wrong bus. We visited a lot of coffee shops until D'lish appeared, a blue box.

But the series still needed a name. We couldn't print the posters Sara-Jane designed on her computer until we had one. Arguably, this was the most important part. It had to be clever, catchy, and also poetic. It had to be a siren. Saskatoon. For the series to be connected to the community, it should reflect its community. The naming process helped us discover the type of reading series we hoped to create.

SARA-JANE: At the beginning we paid for the series out of our pockets, trying to recoup money with donations. We hardly knew anyone in the city, let alone writers. A year and a half later we've featured some of the best writers in the city as well as amazing writers from across Canada. This year we've featured Barbara Langhorst and Elizabeth Greene (September), Ken Fox and T.J. Atkins (October), dee Hobsbawn-Smith and Jane Eaton Hamilton (November), and countless community readings on the open mic.

Towards the end of our first year the ICCC agreed to sponsor our readers. It allowed us to focus on funding the integral costs of the series. The ICCC funding also made us a real part of the MFA in Writing program, not just a fringe association with it. It meant that the series could continue after Chelsea and I graduated. The River Volta had a future.

In January, 2015 both founders performed as featured readers at the first River Volta event in the hands of new organizers.

CHELSEA: The opportunity to read at the River Volta as a founder was fantastic. I was on the other side of the mike! For me the series felt like an "institution" for the first time. I could imagine the River Volta being continued as part of the MFA program even after

Sara-Jane and I graduate. Watching the new coordinators: Leah, Nicole, and Courtney host their first event was letting something go. Sara-Jane and I hugged during the break. Not teary, but feeling strange. We started the River Volta together and that time is over. Under three new coordinators, the series can keep growing.

SARA-JANE: Chelsea and I were honoured to read at the very series we'd started from the ground up. It was a surreal experience. That day we didn't have to pick up sound equipment, make posters, set-up or emcee. That day it was our names on the posters and we weren't just hoping an audience would show up for our readers, but to hear us read.

The River Volta's future is now in the capable hands of Nicole Haldoupis, Courtney Loberg, and Leah Maclean-Evans. Chelsea and I are so proud to see the series growing with new ideas and faces. Next year the series will be passed on to the new cohort. As the founders we only hope that the River Volta Reading Series continues our original mission: to provide a platform for excellent writing, to welcome the talents of Saskatoon writers and the community at large with a friendly, encouraging atmosphere.

Our reading in January was bittersweet. Maybe that's not the right word. Sweet and a little sad, not bitter. We are grateful to see the series growing and to have started something awesome in our adopted city. While we'll miss our baby bird, there's nothing better than seeing it take off.

WHERE I WRITE

MFA STUDENTS SHARE THEIR HAUNTS



ISA LAUSAS: One of the rare old buildings in Saskatoon: the Tees & Persse warehouse.

A second home for a bunch of artists - including me. I'm in a little white box on the fifth floor: brick walls, hardwood floor, a couple of tables, shower curtains hanging as a wall. All white. Peaceful. White helps me to focus: it simply waits.

Next to the window, in the ultimate corner rests a black and white desk. This is where I sit and stare at the rooftops and pigeons outside: think, write and think some more.

I cannot sit, and especially not write, with the feeling that someone is - or could be - behind me. I don't like even a ghost looming over my shoulder and getting its nose in my unfinished business. There is a couple up there, who I won't name for their privacy and security. They sit quietly on the chair in front of my desk and stare at my photographs or read a book until I am done for the day or night. Somedays we might engage in a conversation that usually also involves the building (which has a lot to tell if you speak crick's and crack's) and other human creatures spending time up here in their own little corners, with their own ghosts.



PATRICK

O'REILLY: I'm not a "write in a specific location" kind of person - walking anywhere seems to be conducive - but if I'm editing I can be pretty fussy about conditions. Although I'm generally a messy person, I need a

clean desk facing a wall to get comfortable. I make one stack of loose-leaves (must be loose-leaves) and another of dictionaries, thesauri, grammars and the like. I try to have a growler handy. Eventually any attempt at editing is abandoned in favour of writing something else entirely, or finishing the growler - whichever makes me feel better.



DANIELLE BRETT

POTTER: My favorite place is my kitchen table. Doesn't matter how many desks there are in the house. I always gravitate back there. And it seems no matter what house I'm staying at, I will write at the kitchen table. When I want to write standing up (which is sometimes a good idea to keep awake) I use the island in the kitchen. It is, really, all about the

kitchen. If I'm feeling too distracted by stuff I have to get done at home (my friend calls this productive procrastination) or I need to be around people or I want to write with someone, then there are two places in Saskatoon I like most: Mystic Java (8th street location) and D'lish. Both are low key and have no problem with people setting up to work for the day. They also have excellent food (especially D'lish - I think she just won an award for her soup) and are open from seven to eleven. I also try to carry a notebook of some kind around to jot down ideas no matter where I am.



NICOLE HALDOUPIS: This is where I write. Maybe it's not very exciting. My bed is right beside it. Netflix and blankets become tempting after my bum falls asleep. A crucial aspect of this space is the coffee tin on the corner of my desk. It holds small chocolate bars, lollipops and candy packages. This tin must always have something in it. It keeps me going when the urge to throw my computer out the window starts to kick in. The kitty coaster, beside the tin, reminds me to make a mug of tea or hot chocolate if it's cold outside. Then there's the night. The night out this window is sometimes more tempting than Netflix: the streetlights behind the trees and the stars coming out or not, depending on cloudiness.



CHELSEA FORBES: On most days I write at the kitchen table facing the window (no curtains since there isn't a curtain rod and I'm no MacGyver) and diagonal from a large poster of David Tennent. He's Dr. Who, obviously. He bites his thumb sexily, like he's thinking and sometimes I bite mine. Not a lot happens outside the window since I'm five floors up. Once a window washer floated down on a rope. I write here because of the flat surface and its close proximity to coffee. Something about not being to see the ground is kind of liberating. At night, the facing windows glow and I wonder if other people are looking out.

WHERE THE NIGHTS ARE TWICE AS LONG BOOK LAUNCH



On March 12, Jeanette Lynes and David Eso invited readers, musicians and friends to celebrate the Saskatoon launch of their love-letter anthology, *Where the Nights Are Twice as Long: Love Letters of Canadian Poets*. The launch took place at local, two-story bookstore: McNally Robinson. Over fifty people attended to take in the poetry, letters, music and free wine.

Co-editor David Eso originally used the premise of the book as an alibi to retrieve his own letters from an ex-girlfriend before *Where the Nights* ever existed. Later he decided to make his alibi a reality and called up future co-editor Jeanette Lynes to pitch the idea. Throughout their search for letters, the editors combed the often delicate and sometimes buried personal lives of dead and living Canadian writers.

Poet-contributors Gerald Hill, Katherine Lawrence, Dave Margoshes and David Eso performed at the launch. Some shared stories of their own love lives, while others gave romance-histories on well-known literary figures like Susan Musgrave and Al Purdy. Poetry was performed by all, bringing the collection's fragments to life.

The readings were interspersed with short but lively musical performances. Patrick O'Reilly sang traditional folk songs, Alf Epp rocked a Beatles cover and Goose Lake ended the night with their creep-folk pluckings and bowings.

Contributors Isa Lausas and Tyson Atkings were the final readers of the launch. The pair torqued and culled new voices, using a tablet voice-modulator to perform a series of

early-relationship text messages. CBC Books has said that *Where the Nights Are Twice as Long* captures “a diverse portrait of the life cycle of a romantic relationship”, and the range of poetry and music at the launch enacted just that. Though chronology may have been rearranged, the event threaded together voices young and the old, contemporary and traditional, famous and obscure, living and dead.

ALUMNI NEWS

CLASS OF 2013:

ANDREA LEDDING’S play *Dominion* was chosen for Watermark Theatre’s CANADA 300 theatre series. She performed a section of the play along with some poetry at the IPAA/SNTC women artist’s night. Her poem, “Coffee Cup”, was shortlisted for the Malahat Review’s prize for poetry in translation. From July to November Andrea continued her volunteer work for Walking With Our Sisters. She also continues to work for Anskohk Aboriginal Literature Festival/SAWCI. Andrea contributes regularly to *Green & White* and writes a monthly column for the daily paper.

CLASS OF 2014:

ELISE GODFREY published three poems in the Summer 2014 issue of *Contemporary Verse 2* and two poems in the Summer 2014 issue of *PRISM International*. She also received a Saskatchewan Arts Board Independent Emerging Artists grant this winter for a new manuscript of mixed genre and hybrid writing. Elise was also a finalist for *The Malahat Review's* Far Horizons Award for Poetry in May 2014.

DEE HOBSBAWN-SMITH’S short story collection, *What Can’t Be Undone*, was published this year by ThistleDown Press. Her poetry collection, *Wildness Rushing In* [Hagos Press, 2014] was shortlisted for two Saskatchewan Book Awards: SK Arts Board Best Poetry Book and University of Regina Book of the Year. dee had essays accepted by *untethered* magazine {“Floodplain”}; and *Big Truth* [“Handmade”] for a food essay anthology. One of her poems, “14 ways of looking at a lake”, was shortlisted at *FreeFall* magazine’s Open Poetry contest, and will be published this year. This spring dee created, edited and published *Food Works: Plums in the icebox* through her own imprint, Dogpatch Press. The chapbook was created in support of Slow Food Saskatoon. She also received a 2015 SK Arts Board grant toward working on *The Dryland Diaries*. This year Dee gave readings at Government House, Creative City Centre, Envoi Poetry Festival, Planet Earth and Gabriola Island Poetry Series.

SHEILA JANZEN was nominated for the thesis award in Fall 2015. She holds a sessional position in the College of Education teaching Languages of Knowing: Literacy in Secondary Education and continues working with middle years creative writing students.

JAMES PEPLER currently works as an administrative assistant at The Sage Hill Writing Experience.

SARAH TAGGART works as an intern at *The Walrus Magazine* in Toronto.

COORDINATOR'S NEWS

Jeanette Lynes' poetry collection, *Bedlam Cowslip: The John Clare Poems* has been accepted for publication by Wolsak and Wynn; it will appear in fall, 2015 under Wolsak and Wynn's Buckrider Books imprint. Lynes coedited anthology (with David Eso) *Where the Nights are Twice as Long: Love Letters of Canadian Poets* was just published by Goose Lane Editions (2015). CBC Books noted it among their '15 nonfiction books to watch for in 2015' and *The Toronto Star* included it in their 'Books we can't wait to read' in spring 2015. The book will be launched in Calgary, Toronto, Saskatoon and Kingston. Lynes' essay, "M. Travis Lane, Ecopoet" will appear in a monograph published by Frog Hollow Press (Victoria, BC) in 2015. Her poetry was published in *BafterC* and *The New Wascana Anthology* in 2014. Lynes' won second prize in *Room Magazine's* poetry contest in 2014, and two of her poems were shortlisted in the same competition. She presented a paper at the 'John Clare in Space' conference in Oxford, England, in May 2014 and a talk on writing historical fiction at the Literature Matters series in Saskatoon in April 2014. Lynes gave readings at the Edmonton Poetry Festival in April 2014 and the Tamworth Bookstore in Tamworth, Ontario, in July 2014 and December 2014.