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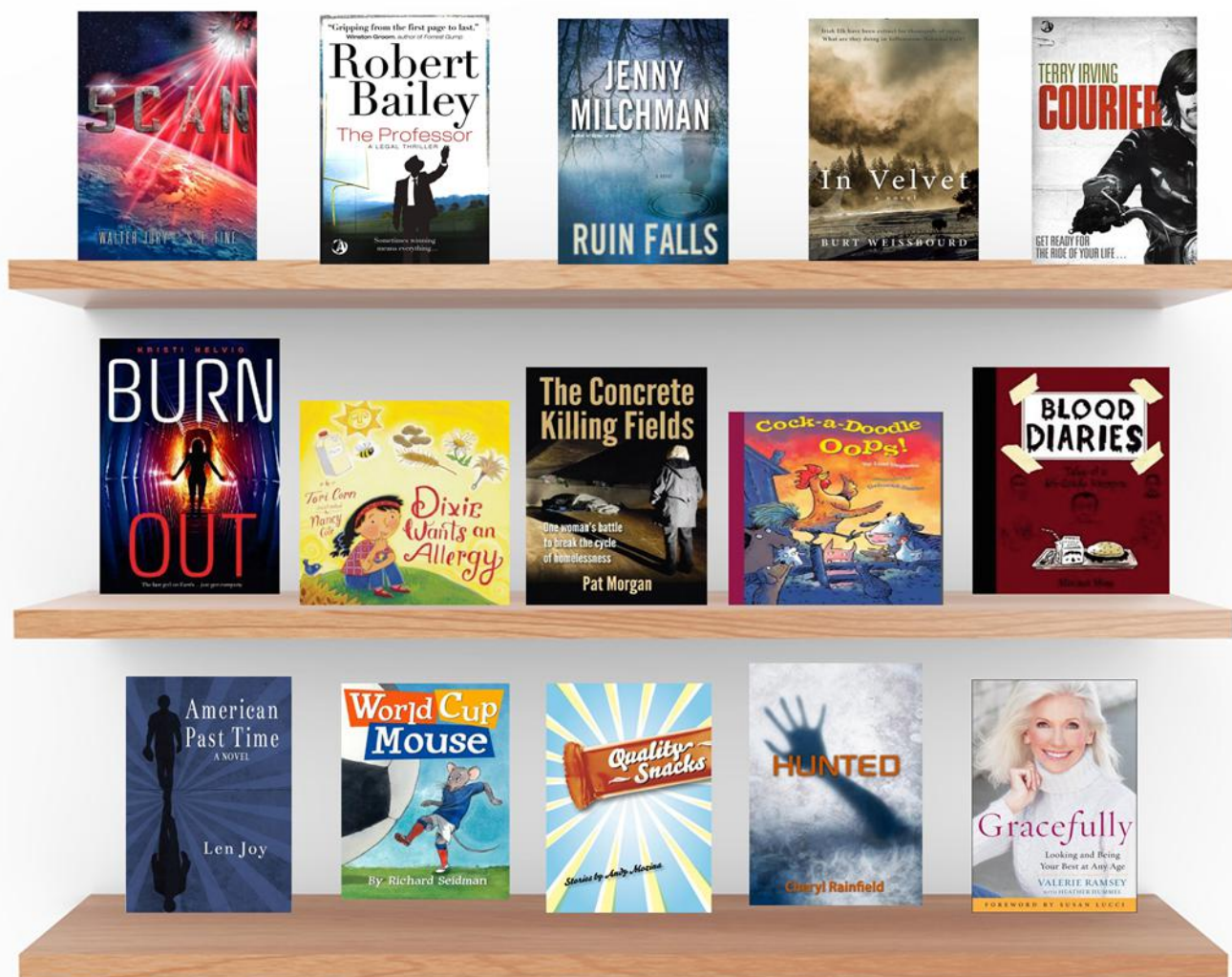


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Our goal is to be inclusive of many different types of writers and writing: creative nonfiction, technical writing, literary fiction, W4C, poetry, translation, and commercial fiction.

2nd & Church explores the creative writing life. What does it mean for a writer or reader to live a life of fine arts? Where do writers and readers gather? What do they choose to write and read about? Which experiences make it from their lives to the pages? How are writers engaged, entertained, and provoked? And in turn, how do those writers engage, entertain, and provoke readers? These are some of the questions we seek to answer.

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And in general, we don't publish essays on craft.

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A Word From the Editor ...

Land of the Littles

I come from the Land of the Littles: Little Paul, Little Marvin, Little Norman, Little Ronnie, Little Dennis, and—of course—Oscar. And the smallest of them all, me: Little Roy, or as my no-good sister would say, L'il Roy Lee. All of we unsupervised mongrels, running amuck and terrorizing one another throughout Bullitt County and into Louisville year after year—frustrating our namesakes along the way.

Now, I revisit our rural misadventures and Saturday night sleepovers on greasy garage floors as I roller-coaster along I-65 on my journey north between my Nashville home and River City—headed toward the business end of a homecoming. And while my brain knows that memory is an untrustworthy hitchhiker, my melancholy nature forces me to think of so much:

Of my namesake's first Louisville arrival. He never knew or saw his mother; she died when he was less than a year old. After the funeral, his dad—Dewey—sold the family farm in Grayson County and moved the kids to Louisville, where he became a blacksmith. The older kids evacuated to the military, and my father danced on tables in bars for coins.

Of my time spent ping-ponging with my cousins (all those littles!) between our namesakes' businesses.

After my Uncle Jim returned home from the United States Army, he opened a shoe store at the corner of 3rd & Woodlawn; it was in the basement under a barber shop. He operated that store for forty years until he retired and returned home to Grayson County, where he's buried today. The Beechmont Bombshells are cutting hair in that same barber shop today, but I'm sure that there's no shoe store in the basement.

My Aunt Caroline's pizza place on Bardstown Road and my Uncle Cornell's carpet store on Watterson Trail were sources of steady employment for we littles throughout the 1980s. While we sort-of knew that we would never be fired for cause, we also knew—for certain—that our uncles and aunts would call our parents on us whenever we screwed around too much, which we sort of did on a continual basis.

And my Uncle Frank's gas station was the pivot point for all the littles' crappy cars, none of which belonged on any road being shared by any other driver in Louisville.

Of 2nd & Church. After a lifetime of literary pursuits and years spent living and working around the world, the irony that I'm sort of a business owner living in a small Southern city within three hours of my hometown forces a smile. If I would have started this journal in Louisville, I wonder if I would have named it 3rd & Woodlawn? Maybe. It's not a bad name.

And—of course—of my time studying at Spalding University's Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program.

Of those wonderful writing workshops—safe institutions of learning in which mentors would never tolerate abuse or allow literary bigfoots to go on unimpeded; of the moments spent anticipating the next semester's mentor assignments; of being read to by accomplished writers and poets; of all those informal after-hour events, many of which providing as much value as the official activities; of...; of...

Of sitting at the various events in the Brown Hotel, just down from Spalding with my mind drifting. Back in the day, my granddad's brother Marvin worked downstairs in the hotel's coffee shop when he was a young man. While there, I always looked on the walls for photos, wondering if I'd see a glimpse of Marvin through time, but it never happened.

Now, heading north, all of these experiences, these people make up the fragments of my memory that rest upon the many overpasses along my ride. A posted sign warns that there is EMERGENCY STOPPING ONLY, and there are advertised fines of up to \$500 for all sorts of behavior. So, I dare not stop to interact with these mirages and apparitions.

In anticipation of my return journey home, none of my thoughts will be stronger than those of my little girl. First, I'll pass elementary schools, and I'll see vegetable stands selling turnips and pumpkins. Then I'll see her as I pull into our cul-de-sac and coast down the driveway. She'll come running out from under the rising garage door, asking, "You bring me something, dah?"

And I'll say what I always say: "Just my love darlin', just my love."

But she'll know that I'm fibbing, and she'll search my pockets, or at least the ones that she can reach.

And I'll pick her up, and we'll both greet her brother who will run out of the garage a little later, and we'll go inside to smile at their mother and sit down to dinner.

And I'll do all of this willingly with full intent of casting my whole vote.

But that is what I anticipate happening each evening. Sometimes the scene unfolds as I have foretold. But other times, there are stains on the carpets and children banished to rooms at the far ends of the house. And some nights, I know better than to expect a hot meal, or even a cold one. Regardless of what awaits me at the day's end, I am happy to be navigating through the speed traps and school zones and just beyond the endless construction, moving toward the future, toward the unexpected, toward home. ☐

Gallery of Poems

Selected works from poets in Tennessee and beyond

Questions on the Curve of Light

By Kate Gale

The kitchen looks out on the storied glass of morning.
Our flowers with their backs against the wall.
They're observers as we spin straw into words.

We raised three sons here and a daughter.
The house boiled over onto the stove, caught fire.
That too became a myth, the fire walking.

Flames hanging in air. Even asleep there was noise.
Even asleep, I come to you, lie down in circle.
Even asleep, they talked, whispered secrets.

We talk about sky and forget spoons and forks.
Mostly we like questions on the curve of the light.
We miss little things. But they happen anyway.

The frame of a story, the sticky beginnings, stuffy middle,
should we unstuff it? The ending drooling in its porridge.
Did he get lost or was he on walkabout? That story.

We liked stories that fell off the earth like it was a table.
All flat, then riding hard over the edge.
We liked stories with too much plot. Not enough craft.

A whale of hips, limbs, cascade of the un-belongings.
One eyelash blinking morning light. Kitchen astir and dreaming.
Our daughter slept in the kitchen cupboard, broke dishes.

That too was a story. Light falling through the palms.
The cat climbing onto the roof. The tiny bird's nest empty.
In the yard, there are seeds, broken eggs. In the sky, wings.

I Am Not Good with Costumes, or, One-Woman Show with a Tragic Flaw

By Susan Martinello

*If this were played upon a stage now, I
would condemn it as an improbable fiction.*
Hamlet

*If only bankers could share a stage with salmon-suited girls
glinting their honest silver. No shades of mannered camel
or knife-edged slate bring round the girl I see in the mirror
from committing wardrobe sin. Yet the commandment is
imprinted on my soul: wear hippie to Harvard and thou
shalt be written out of scenes by men and women in well-
behaved attire. I learn to fear and revere clothes young,
with my mother wilting beside me in fitting rooms where
nothing fits. The grown-up day I dare to pull the drape
across a fitting room door, I emerge salmon-hot. No more
waistless schoolgirl dresses or Sunday Mass wools, my
mother in miniature. *The salmon suit appears for my job
interview at a Boston bank and does all the talking.* My
full-length, antique cape once delivered its own monologue
sweeping along the streets of Rome. On the daily stage
costumes can whisper or shout, but must never speak in
tongues. *The hands on the banker's watch clutch for
numerals to end the act.* Under a New Hampshire moon,
pond ripples will chuckle over me in the role of wool-
skirted Italian matron. Early on, Mother tried to take
clothing me into her own hands – smoothed fabric across
my body, pinched seams, folded hems, her lips prickly with
pins. I bear such love for elegance. But clothes itch on my
body like a foreign skin.*

The Dance, in Two Acts

By Susan Martinello

Lights dim for the last dance, always a slow dance, when
the cross-eyed boy asks me. The eyes that I search to meet
are brown, brown hair glances his face. He doesn't smile
when he asks, nor do I when I say yes to my first dance
with a boy all evening. He holds me with the flush of
success, and his arm feels good around my waist. I crook
my arm, light on the shoulder of his sports jacket, and peer
out, scan as we turn for who's looking. His hand clasps
mine, warm. I don't want "She Wore Blue Velvet" to come
to its final sigh. The lights come up too bright as they do at
a high school dance, and divide us without a word.

In typing class, I sit next to a guitar player in a band that
plays Friday nights at the "Y," and feel electric. We never
date, but on graduation night, we neck in his pickup. He
drops by to see me when he hears I am home from college.
I come down to the kitchen where a faded guy in jeans sits
at the table, a guy who has been to Vietnam and back, who
has long hair and a receding hairline, whose teeth were
never good. He reads me like a clock and is out the door
within minutes. Now we know how to cut and run.

Liquid is only liquid—evaporating as it does without a shape to contain it, to shore it up.

By Kate Buckley

What is a river without banks? Streams
would bury themselves back into soil.
Rain pulls itself away, falls back in the clouds.
Vapor is only visible against skin.
Even wine runs dark on the cellar floor
without a cask to give it form,
and our blood must be contained by veins.
I was your vessel, and you poured yourself
into me as the rain fills a willing basin.
Filled me till I was choking—my neck, my neck.
And yet, I was willing. Else, we'd have dissipated,
faded away leaving no mark, no trace.
But the bottle's tipped over, the ink's run out,
and everything's stained, everything ruined.

Consider the Lilies

By Kate Gale

Sit quietly while others eat.
Understand. This is not personal.

Walk the gutter.
Note sunlight on street. Not for you.

You were born without arms and legs.
You were born without face.

Without money in your pockets.
You have no pockets.

You were sowed on rocky ground.
Your parents had no land.

They are landless. Will never have land.
They are not an island. Or water.

They are not. You are not. Of this earth.
Nothing on earth conspires to sustain you.

Chalk it up to bad genes. And no lamp.
No meadow. Wood. Glade. Dappled sunlight.

Make the best of your red checkered tablecloth.
Of your corn. Canned fish.

Crackers. Tomato soup. Onions. Garlic.
You have eggs. There will be more of you.

Pray without ceasing. Imagine writing.
Or painting. Imagine music. Or don't.

You don't have time. You don't have eyes.
Or ears. Your hands work furiously.

But produce nothing. You can't reach
the sill of the well.

Consider the lilies.

Somewhere In West Glover

By Kevin McLellan

The windows: the tied curtains: the backs
of girl's heads with pigtails: these twins

unaware of the pine knot eyes in the paneling

that come alive at night nor the half buried
half propped up wagon wheel outdoors: it rests

against their cabin: these agoraphobic sisters

with eyes in the back of their heads look through
one another and into the tree line (interruption:

the blinking moths): clouds at dusk not predictably

moving and the 100's of bullfrogs warming up
for another final performance:

Want to See Your Poetry Here? Submit Your Work for Review

What We Print: What does it mean for a poet or reader to live a life of fine arts in the United States, especially in the 21st century? Where can poets and readers go, either alone or in groups? What do they choose to write and read about? Which experiences make it from their lives to the pages? How are poets engaged, entertained, and provoked? And in turn, how do those poets engage, entertain, and provoke via their words and phrases? These are some of the questions our editors seek to answer when selecting poetry for *2nd & Church*. We welcome unsolicited manuscripts. Send up to six poems.

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A Conversation With Sena Jeter Naslund

By Michael Morris

Michael Morris: Your characters are always so fully drawn. In your latest novel, *The Fountain of St. James Court; or, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman*, you manage to create two rich characters in different time periods – Kathryn, a writer in a contemporary Louisville, Kentucky and Elisabeth, an artist in France and a survivor of the French Revolution. How did you go about crafting these characters? Do you write a backstory on your characters before you begin writing the novel?

Sena Jeter Naslund: Creating complex characters, with depth and doubts, pride and regret, hopes and fears, creatures both active and passive (as real people are) is one of the major challenges to any serious novelist. When I was a student, back at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, I realized that if I couldn't create characters of this sort, I should give up trying to write fiction. After three months, almost a whole summer, of trying and failing (a real struggle), I hit upon a technique that has stood me in good stead to this day.

The long story or novella I wrote then (I think I was 26) was titled "The Death of Julius Geissler," and readers can find it in my much later short story collection *The Disobedience of Water*.

I begin by finding a part of myself that I can give the character. This characteristic is like a wormhole that lets me burrow into the depth of the fictional character. With Julius Geissler, what we had in common was a profound love of classical music, though he was a violinist, and I was a cellist. In my most recent novel, *Fountain/Portrait*, what I had in common with the painter was her profound love and appreciation of the intelligence and originality of her daughter. Of course there are other things I have in common with her, but this was the wormhole, the point of identification and of entry into this 18th century artist. I knew about Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun's relationship to her daughter by reading her memoir *Souvenirs*.

With the contemporary writer, Kathryn, the most important thing I had in common with her is her love of her neighborhood and her home. I let her live in my house, in fact, and gave her some of my furniture and paintings.

The next important step, back in Iowa days and now, after making common cause with the created character, was to recognize or create space between me and that character; it's this space that opens up imagination. With Julius Geissler, I made him male when I was female, old when I was young, German when I was American, a virtuoso performer when I had limited musical talent. With Elisabeth, my painter, I made her a realist, temperamentally, while I am something of a romantic. Elisabeth had a husband who was a gambler, a womanizer, and a spendthrift; she accepted his shortcomings, treated him with courtesy and friendship when in his presence, and poured her most intimate self into the art of painting. Given 18th century Catholic strictures against divorce this was the sensible course for her to take. I could never have endured such a man; I knew I had to imagine and come to understand in a realistic way Elisabeth's 18th century situation, and not only to respect her for her compromise but also to admire her for it.



Photo by Ronald K. Schildknecht

Sena Jeter Naslund enjoying some down time during the Rome summer residency.



Photo by Luke Seward

Sena Jeter Naslund hangs out with the St. James Court Lamplighter, Rob Peterson's 2013 carving of a Victorian lamplighter and gas lamp from a 100-year-old oak stump. Learn more at robpetersoncarving.com

To create distance (and room for imagination) in inventing Kathryn, the writer, I gave her a close friend who was also another writer (Leslie), who has just moved in across St. James Court; these two women shared a background rooted in Montgomery, Alabama, an antebellum city. I don't have such a friend, and I'm from Birmingham, a post-Civil War city with a different engagement with the Civil Rights Movement than that of Montgomery. Leslie is a kind of composite of many women friends who have been supportive of me and/or my work. Kathryn's and Leslie's friendship is an important part of the structure of the book: we follow Kathryn through a 24-hour period, and her mid-afternoon conversation with Leslie about their writing and their lives is a quiet, but pivotal, scene.

So I sketch out a major character in terms of things I *know thoroughly, identify with, and completely understand* about him or her, and then I turn to characteristics and situations that separate me from the character, but interest and challenge me.

I also ask myself what is of sustaining value to my characters and what are their psychological needs or shortcomings that make them open to error—their strengths and weaknesses. One of the things I've always admired about Tolstoy's characters is how their strengths and weaknesses *are related* to each other. For example, Anna is a warm and wise character about the feelings of others, but it is her own need for warmth and understanding, for congeniality, that leads her into a disastrous extra-marital affair. Each of us is needy and flawed, and fiction needs to encompass that truth. But I do like courage and conviction, of one sort or another, and I'd find it hard to work with a major character whom I despise.

I don't have the characters completely outlined. They do things that surprise me. I give them as much freedom as I can. I never write out their backstories, but their backstories occur to me as they're needed, and the various backstories grow as the book progresses.

For example, in *Portrait/Fountain* I wanted to include a loving and successful marriage in my treatment of Kathryn's friends and neighbors, Daisy and Daniel. In a good marriage, both partners not only take

care of the other but also need being taken care of, usually, to a certain extent. After two or three complete drafts of the novels, I realized that Daniel would have had some remnants of post-traumatic stress disorder, and that he might have a special sensitivity to the presence of danger: so I wrote a new section about Daniel and Daisy in Part I, "Midnight: Crossing the Court," in which Daisy is taking care of Daniel's psychological needs. I had already shown his love and ready willingness to shepherd and care for his wife.

Aesthetically, it's important for me to commit myself to the inner lives of all the major characters: we're each the center of our own universe.

MM: I've read where you first discovered the artist, Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun, while researching your bestselling novel *Abundance, A Novel of Marie Antoinette*. What drew you to come back to her, and while writing *Abundance* did you know that you would one day tell Elisabeth's story?

SIN: Through my research in the 18th century in preparing to write *Abundance, A Novel of Marie Antoinette*, I met a number of historical characters I wanted to know more about: the kings, old Louis XV and his fifteen-year-old grandson, the future Louis XVI, of course, Antoinette's mother, Maria Theresa the Empress of Austria, Antoinette's friend and possible lover the Swedish Count Axel von Fersen (internationally known for being especially handsome and referred to by the English as "The Picture"), Antoinette's true friend the Princess de Lamballe (who died refusing to testify against the queen and king), and others. I thought of writing four or five more "surround" novels, with *Abundance* as the centerpiece.

I wanted to enter the 18th century world as thoroughly as I could—the places, if not the time, but I listened to the music of the period and studied its architecture and visited its gardens. I traveled to France several times and lived for a month in the town of Versailles in an 18th century building. "Body research," I call it.

Of course I looked at many portraits of Antoinette and discovered the ones I admired most, aesthetically, were all painted by Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun, and then I found out she was Antoinette's favorite portraitist and her friend as well, though a commoner.



Photo by Luke Seward

That Elisabeth established her identity through her talent and joyful hard work very much appealed to me. Detouring from the Antoinette narrative, I read everything I could find on the painter, including her memoir *Souvenirs*. What attracted me most to the painter, rather than the other figures I've mentioned, was her amazing success as a woman artist, against huge odds; that she was happy in the act of creating; that she was devoted to painting till she died in her mid eighties; that as she aged she established a lovely seasonal rhythm to her life, living in the city of Paris in winter and living in the country at Louveciennes in spring and summer. I admired the life she created for herself and her vitality in old age. That she was able to escape France with her daughter in order to survive the French Revolution of 1789 also spoke to my own sense of urgency about survival. (All my life I've had survival nightmares.) Elisabeth's interest and courage about engaging in extensive travel also spoke to my own impulse to travel and know the world. She was invested in music and literature as well as art, and she was a skilled conversationalist and *salonnière*. While Elisabeth was a professional success, she also loved and valued her family—first, her mother and father and brother and later her daughter—and her friends, many of whom were artists of various kinds, or who loved the arts. She did not let her disappointing marriage erode her joy in her life or work.

I knew I would like to tell her story, if I could find the right approach to doing so.

MM: So you were attracted to the painter's successful and rather amazing life, but what else factors into making a firm decision about a subject for a project that will take you several years to complete?

SJN: Before I decide on a subject for a novel, I ask myself if the novel *needs* to be written. Is there a gap in the literary landscape that needs to be filled? I also ask myself what do I know or what have I felt that has been *very important to me* but that has not been treated exhaustively (if at all) in fiction.

I wrote *Ahab's Wife* partly because I felt there was no big American novel focusing on a woman's quest story or her radical questions about the nature of the universe.

We had an important woman protagonist in *The Scarlet Letter*, but it was written more than a century ago, and it is less bold in its overt philosophical questioning and questing than I felt was needed now. Also I wanted such a quest novel with a strong woman protagonist to exist for my own daughter and for other young women.

I chose to write a Civil Rights novel, *Four Spirits*, partly because I felt that the subject had been treated extensively with documentary material, but there was no big Civil Rights novel. Here was a subject of huge importance in American history (and to me personally) that had scarcely awakened the imagination of fiction writers.

I had written a number of contemporary short stories that dealt with the way art and creativity fill spiritual needs and confirm a sense of both selfhood and community, (for example, "The Disobedience of Water" in my story collection of the same title), but I felt the subject and its importance had not been written about convincingly enough nor did it have a large enough place in contemporary American fiction.



Photo by Ronald K. Schildknecht

Sena Jeter Naslund in front of the Fountain of St. James Court.



Photo by Ronald K. Schildknecht

Sena Jeter Naslund (L) and Marilyn Moss Rockefeller (R) in Buenos Aires: 2010 Summer Residency.

Non-artists depend a lot on artists for entertainment and insight, as interpreters and shapers of reality, as companions. Shouldn't people know more about who artists are, what their thought processes are, what influences them, how they live day to day? On book tours, curious readers often ask how I come by the ideas or stories central to my books.

I've especially enjoyed reading works that deal with artists of one type or another; for example, Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, Mann's "Death in Venice," James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*—English, German, and Irish contexts. That Joyce title especially caught my attention, being a good feminist-humanist. And what about the bias toward youth as a time of special interest? Actually in Joyce's novel, his Stephen is merely ambitious; he has accomplished next to nothing by the end of the book. The light-bulb realization was that the narrative of Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun's life could be a 21st century feminist, non-ageist answer to Joyce's book. Who is an artist? Not just a young man full of rebellion, but a woman, an old one, very successful and content, still-active, a person of actual accomplishment.

Actually, this last time, I was torn between two subjects: I wanted to deal again with contemporary life, as I have in my short stories, and I also wanted to ease my sense of being haunted by the Vigée-Le Brun's historical narrative.

And then I thought of a novel-within-a-novel (a new form for me) which could engage the idea of how art speaks across time. The form would allow me to explore in depth the question about how a writer relates to her subject matter.

When focusing on a new big novel project, besides considering subject matter as carefully as I can -- whether such a book is needed to fill a gap in the literary landscape, whether the ideas are *important to me* -- technique plays a big part in my preliminary thinking. I couldn't envision repeating myself technically by again using a form that was structured like my Marie Antoinette novel: a simple, forward march in time, written in present tense--no framework. Because the fate of Antoinette is well known, it's a huge hook that pulls a reader through the days and years leading up to the guillotine. The absence of a highly dramatic and known conclusion to Elisabeth's life meant I needed to create some other kind of tension, a different structure. I needed to show the relevance of her life to that of a contemporary person.

It began to seem to me that from the two contending impulses—to write about contemporary life and to tell the story of Antoinette's favorite portrait painter—came the notion of combing the two.

MM: As a graduate of the MFA in Creative Writing program at Spalding University where you are the program director, I've heard you discuss the importance of the inter-relatedness of the arts. In this new novel you vividly capture the life of a portrait artist and the process of creating a painting. What other art forms inspire your creative process?

SJN: I'm a sort of failed musician. While I was offered a college scholarship to study cello and play in the University of Alabama orchestra, I knew that if I practiced very hard, I could improve some—but not enough to play with the kind of freedom that I admire in top-notch performers. I turned down the scholarship, though I had very little money, and I chose to live at home and attend an excellent small liberal arts college—Birmingham Southern College. I felt that kind of education would let me explore my own mind and discover new possible directions.

My mother was a wonderful pianist (and had been a professional violinist), and from as early as I can remember I heard her play classical music throughout the day at home. I passionately loved hearing her play a wide range of composers—Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Scarlatti, Liszt, Debussy, Bartok, many others. I especially liked Chopin's "Revolutionary Etude," and whenever I was sick, she played it for me, and I immediately felt lifted from illness. (I also played piano, but again, I didn't have the right nervous system, much as I loved the music.) But I've always drawn inspiration from hearing live performances and recordings as well. When I had my breakthrough at Iowa, resulting in a complex character and narrative—the Julius Geissler narrative—I had just heard an inspiring performance of the Mozart *Sinfonia Concertante* for violin and viola. I came home from the concert and, encouraged by my husband, stayed up all night getting started on my musical tale.



Photo courtesy of Spalding University's MFA in Creative Writing Program

In 2011, Spalding University's MFA in Creative Writing Program celebrated its tenth anniversary. Pictured (L-R) are Spalding University President (and Spalding MFA alumna) Tori Murden McClure; Sena Jeter Naslund, Program Director; Karen J. Mann, Administrative Director; and Kathleen Driskell, Associate Program Director.

Because of my own experience, I believe in the interrelatedness of all the arts, and their inspiring ability. The arts fulfill something in us that can never express itself in other ways. My novel *Adam & Eve* presents the impulse to create as one of the earliest characteristics of what makes human beings human, and I believe it is the antidote to our other innate inclination toward violence and destruction. To better understand what it means to be human, my characters of the future (the book is set in 2020) go back to view prehistoric cave paintings. My own interest in the visual arts began at Birmingham-Southern when I took a wonderful course in art history taught by Professor Virginia Rembert. And the amazing work of fellow students who gave eye-opening senior gallery talks—Patricia Ellisor (Gaines) and Ron Countryman—made me realize artistic achievement could begin in the here and now. Likewise, at BSC, I saw splendid student acting and developed an interest in live theatre and in the profound fun of musicals.

In designing the brief-residency MFA in Writing at Spalding University, I wanted to include in the curriculum—at least in an introductory way—some experiences with the sister arts, which had meant so much to me.

In creating my portrait painter, I studied her work, what critics said about her, and the context provided by the aesthetic of the time available to me in 18th century furniture, fashion, gardens, public and private buildings, and music. I drew on my own slight experimentation in watercolor, drawing, and photography and on conversations with artists and lecturers.

My interest in Elisabeth was enhanced because she was interested in music and literature as well as in painting, and it was important to me that her contemporary shadow, the writer Kathryn Callaghan, have her own interest in musical performance, theatre, her son's sculpture, and the poetry of her friends and former students.

I wanted my novel about living the life of an artist to be as inclusive as possible. Because many great artists have a profound interest in more than one art, I wanted the Spalding MFA experience to reflect that truth. In Louisville, we attend performances at Actors Theatre, the Kentucky Opera, the Moscow Symphony and Riverdance, when they came to town, the Speed Art Museum, Jazz clubs, etc. During the summer our residency is always at different international locations:

we've visited Gaudi's architecture in Barcelona, ballet at L'Opera and the Louvre in Paris, theatre in London, the Vatican museum and forum in Rome, flamenco dancing in Buenos Aires, the Uffizi museum in Florence, etc.

MM: In the novel at one point Kathryn seems to have trepidation over the quality of the manuscript she has just completed while Elisabeth expresses inner satisfaction – ecstasy to some degree – in presenting one of her paintings to her father. Can you elaborate on the complexities involved in being a writer or an artist – the tension between delight in the creation and turmoil over bringing the work before the public? What advice do you have for writers who face such feelings?

SJM: I think most artists experience moments of ecstasy and moments of doubt about their own achievement. To allay her doubts and to get help, even though it's midnight, Kathryn takes her work to a trusted friend and writer. I do that, too, but in spades. Besides my agent and my editor, before I seek their help, my books are read by ten or so people, and they go through many partial and complete revisions. A few very generous friends and my brother John Sims Jeter read my evolving manuscripts more than once, but mostly I show the revisions, as they are "finished," to new readers. I am extremely grateful to my readers, and I treasure their judgment, though of course I'm selective about the advice that I implement. Many of my manuscript readers are former students who have become published writers themselves. I am happy to read their manuscripts in return, if asked.

I try to use doubt as a tool to improve my work, a helpful tool. I enjoy revision—so necessary in my case, and so much easier than getting that first draft. I love returning to the work and refining it, developing it, or making it more powerful: it's a job I relish. It's the time of greatest pleasure in the creative process for me.

After I've done my best, after the last revision, I generally feel confident about my work. Of course it's not going to please everyone, but I've learned from some of my reviewers in terms of possible future directions and leanings. It helps me a lot to know what they see as positive about my writing. Some of the criticism is inspired; some is stupid, and I dismiss it. By nature, I'm pretty critical myself, so I feel turn about is fair play.

Becoming a successful writer was a long process for me, but like the painter Elisabeth, at this point I rejoice in what I've done and continue to try to do. Sometimes writing is very difficult, but I have faith that I can find my way. I expect a degree of frustration and doubt along the way. When I'm writing well (or think I am), I feel full of power and joy. Sometimes that feeling comes in the act of new writing; sometimes during the revising; sometimes in re-reading what is in published form. At such moments, it's a great pleasure to be a creative artist. Well worth the agony, discipline, public and private criticism, disappointment, and hard work that one must embrace.

MM: I enjoyed how the novel alternates between Kathryn's modern day story and Elisabeth's story set during the time just of the French Revolution. Was it difficult to alternate back and forth between the stories? Did you first write Kathryn's story and then weave in Elisabeth's narrative?

SJN: No, I composed them as intertwining. Something in one narrative would send me back to the other. It was refreshing to work this way, to change horses according to some unconscious nudge. Part of my thematic was the interrelatedness of life and art, how life sends us to art; how art returns us to life.

Kathryn's contemporary story takes place all in one autumn day, and she's living it with an awareness of Woolf's treatment of Clarissa Dalloway's day in *Mrs. Dalloway* (a day in June). There's a mounting angst: Kathryn dreads a possible visitation by her son's abusive ex-lover. Elisabeth's story starts out as a reminiscence of an old woman while at her country home, springtime, waiting for guests to arrive that evening—a dinner party. In the first three drafts, the backstories were told free-associatively, as they occurred to me. But in the last draft, with my book contract deadline only a month away, I felt Elisabeth's life needed a core chronology, one that takes her from her childhood to the marriage in Russia of her daughter; then it does drop back to an earlier time, Elisabeth's and a younger Julie's companionable experience in Italy. So I had quite a scramble making this revision and meeting my deadline. But it was a needed improvement. The book was too disorderly and confusing for the reader when I let both backstories be told so free-associatively.

The Elisabeth story exists partly as pages printed out and left by Kathryn at her friend Leslie's door; partly as Kathryn memory; partly as having an independent ontological being. *The Fountain of St. James Court* is just a draft, and at the very end (to capture something of the creative process of the writer), Kathryn realizes (as I did) that she's left out an important scene: the heart-breaking death of Julie.

MM: Kathryn and Elisabeth are not only from different time periods but also at different points in their lives. However, there seems to be a parallel, not only as artists but also as women seeking to forge new paths. How do you see the characters as similar and different?



Photo by Barry Drudge

Sena Jeter Naslund speaks at the Ireland summer residency.

SJN: Early in the novel, Kathryn says that she wrote the novel *Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman* partly to create a sort of mirror, or looking glass, by which, or through which, she might come to a better understanding of herself. Kathryn does feel a kinship with Elisabeth: they are both successful artists, though in different fields, living in eras (then and now) when many women of talent have lived unfulfilled lives, in terms of actual achievement. Both women very much love their children; both have been disappointed in marriage; both lost their fathers before adulthood. Both love music as well as their own art form. Friendship is important to both, and both are travelers.

But they have important differences as well. Kathryn's growth as an artist has been much more tentative, while Elisabeth's father recognized her particular talent at an early age and always encouraged her. Elisabeth's innate talent is a greater force for her than is Kathryn's desire to write, and being a productive and well-recognized artist is probably more central to Elisabeth's happiness than writing is to Kathryn, though she cares deeply about her work and identifies herself as a writer.

Kathryn suffers much more from her multiple failed marriages than Elisabeth does from her single, less than ideal marriage, even though the painter's husband profits greatly, financially, while Elisabeth sees next to nothing of the vast sums she's earned, until she flees France. (Her art-dealer husband, much less associated with the aristocracy, stays behind to try to protect his inventory.)

Kathryn has a more lasting and loving relationship with her gay son that Elisabeth does with her daughter.

Elisabeth has a closer spiritual relationship to nature than Kathryn, and Elisabeth also has a traditional orientation to the Catholic Church. Elisabeth accepts the social and po-

litical order into which she was born: she's a monarchist, but Kathryn and her friend Leslie form an early alliance against the social order of racial segregation in the American South.

While friendship is valued by both women, it's essential to Kathryn's happiness in a way that far exceeds Elisabeth's need for a kindred spirit in the form of a woman friend. In her memoir, *Souvenirs*, Elisabeth writes more about society than friendship. Elisabeth enjoys parties, while Kathryn focuses more on private conversations with just one or two people. To Kathryn, friendship and the arts are of sustaining spiritual value, while Elisabeth's spiritual life is church-oriented. Neighborhood and home as a physical place are of elevated importance to Kathryn—they cradle her—but are somewhat less defining to Elisabeth. However, she does love Louveciennes because living in the country brings her closer to nature and to a sense of God manifested in creation; Louveciennes also provides a simple and refreshing alternative to the culture of the busy city.

Both of these women artists are aging, and in some sense, the book as a whole provides a double portrait of aging women artists. Kathryn is entering her seventies, and she worries about Alzheimer's and mental impairment; in a tentative way, she still hopes for a romantic relationship with a man; her need for emotional connection causes her to appreciate special animals in an intense, imaginative way. Kathryn wants to experience a glorious autumn as her life begins to close, a time full of rich color and the warmth of hot chocolate. Elisabeth has arrived now at contentment: art continues to sustain her as it has throughout her life, back to her earliest memories. The seasonal rhythm to her life gives it a steady beat. Without anxiety, she rejoices once again in the renewal of spring.

MM: I've heard you say that you allowed the character Kathryn to borrow details of your life – she's a writer who lives in the same neighborhood as you in Louisville, Kentucky. Was there any hesitation to allow the character to take on aspects of your life or was it a liberating process? How did you come about this idea of letting Kathryn borrow details from your own identity?

SJN: I've always liked to tease the boundary between fact and fiction. It's an enticing liminal space. To borrow some from my things and from places I know well and to place them in an imaginary context was both fun and satisfying. And it saved research time. In some ways, I felt I was making the real more real, by giving it a place in fiction. I wanted to honor the places and things that have cradled me, like the twirly gray chair in my living room, by letting an imagined character enjoy them.

A friend and colleague at Spalding, Julie Brickman, once said to me that as soon as we write the word "I," even in writing nonfiction, we have created an entity apart from the self. I feel that *Ahab's Wife* is as autobiographical as *The Fountain of St. James Court*. Which is another way of saying that *Fountain*, despite trappings taken directly from my own life, is best understood as fiction.

On the other hand, all creations are about their authors or are revelatory about aspects of their authors. I think that truth adds to the pleasure, for me, when I read books by people I know: I'm getting to know them better and more intimately than ever before.

Nonetheless, I did want to establish distance between myself and Kathryn, so her part of the novel is written in the third person: *she*. On the other hand, I wanted to cultivate intimacy and immediacy with my 18th century character, so her section of the novel is written in first person.

MM: You are an encourager and mentor to many writers. I can still hear you say that as aspiring writers our competition is not with one another, our competition is in the library and bookstores. Who are some of the writers who have been your mentors and how have they helped shape your work?

SJN: Various teachers have been important mentors to me. One of the most important was a high school English teacher, Leslie Moss (Ainsworth), and I've named Kathryn's friend Leslie in honor of her. At Birmingham-Southern I started writing short stories under the tutelage of Richbourg Gaillard McWilliams and a full-length play with Arnold Powell. My most important fiction-writing teachers at Iowa were Angus Wilson, Richard Yates, and William Price Fox.

Just as important, maybe more so in some cases, as those who were my teachers were the authors whose works I've loved: Charles Dickens; the Bronte sisters, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf; Tolstoy; Shakespeare; William Faulkner, Katherine Ann Porter, Flannery O'Connor; Wordsworth, Keats, Thomas Hardy, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens. It's too dangerous to name contemporary writers: there are so many from whom I've drawn inspiration and insight. But I must mention childhood favorite novelists: Laura Ingalls Wilder, Louisa Mae Alcott, Lucy Maude Montgomery.

MM: What are you currently working on?

SJN: Although I've only just begun the research for a big novel about the American Civil War, what seemed a clear vision of the opening suddenly presented itself, and I sat down to begin the writing: two hours, four typed pages. Of course they will have to be revised many times.

MM: You lived in Birmingham during the Civil Rights Movement. You've written about that time period in your novel *Four Spirits* and most recently a monument was erected in Birmingham memorializing the four young girls killed in the 16th Street Church bombing. The monument is called *Four Spirits*. How did it feel to have your work inspire the title of the monument and to be present during the unveiling?

SJN: I felt and feel deeply honored. Overwhelmed. The feeling engendered by that fact is beyond the power of my words to express. ☐

Review: *The Fountain of St. James Court; or, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman*

Naslund Turns the Tables on a Classic With an Endearing Tale of Two Women

By Diana McQuady

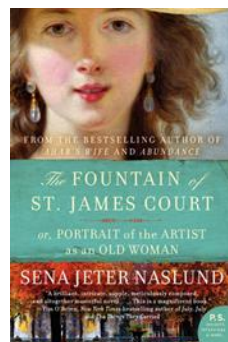
A hundred years ago, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* burst onto the literary scene and became the prevailing concept of the artist's life. James Joyce's novel portrayed a young man, hungry and excited to start his writing career. But how does an artist sustain the work for decades? What does an artist's career look like when viewed from the later years of the artist's life? And would a female version be different than the male one? All of these questions are at the heart of Sena Jeter Naslund's new novel, *The Fountain of St. James Court; or, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman*, which features two creative women who are "sustaining joyful work."

Kathryn Callaghan is a teacher and writer who lives in modern-day Louisville, Kentucky—specifically in Old Louisville on the very real St. James Court where there is a beautiful and well-known fountain. As she faces a third divorce and nears her seventieth birthday, Kathryn finishes writing her ninth novel. This work in particular becomes personal to her as she has written "a book about a woman who loved her art more than herself, whose life was her art."

The artist at the center of Kathryn's novel-within-the-novel is Élisabeth Vigée-Le Brun. Fans of Naslund's 2007, *Abundance, A Novel of Marie Antoinette* might remember Élisabeth as a minor character, a French painter who became admired for her portraits of nobility and royalty, including several of Queen Marie Antoinette herself. In Kathryn's prose, Élisabeth pursues art from an early age when she is introduced to the creative and thinking people of her time by a supportive father. Sheer talent and an instinct for the humanity of her subjects provide a thriving career at a time when work was not fashionable for a woman. Élisabeth comes face to face with royalty and notable members of French society, offering the reader a luscious background of lovely gardens and palaces, elegant gowns, chic food and wine, and an insider's view of life during late eighteenth-century Paris and the French Revolution.

The Fountain of St. James Court; or, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman alternates between the characters of Kathryn and Élisabeth. While the women live centuries and continents apart, they have much in common (children, divorce, careers), and their stories link and intertwine in such a way as to make the novel a delightful read. It is, however, as artists where the lives of the two women most conjoin. It is in their learning to be and becoming artists—finding themselves at the height of their careers, especially as women of a certain age in their later reflections about what it means to live the artistic life—that Kathryn and Élisabeth find that the art to which they have made certain sacrifices and given themselves fully and without regret has a central place in their quests for self. And the reader who goes along on the novel's journey will find, through Kathryn and Élisabeth, answers not found in Joyce's work, answers to questions that a younger artist could not even ask, answers important to those who create or enjoy art in any form.

Readers of *The Fountain of St. James Court; or, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman* will revel in the author's richly-layered story. Long after closing the book's covers, they will remain immersed in the meticulous prose, remember both protagonists for their depth and desires, and wish to revisit the enchantment of Paris and Old Louisville. But it is the art through the lives and thoughts of the two artists and Naslund's vivid descriptions that takes center stage, bringing an enlightenment to readers whether themselves artistic or simply wanting a peek inside the artist's creative world. ☐



Peeking In: Invoking the Senses at an MFA Residency

By Diana McQuady

In the summer of 2013, I attended my fourth of five residencies as a student in Spalding University's low-residency Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Program. Residencies last for ten days and are a whirlwind of assignments, readings, lectures, workshops, interactions, food, excitement, exhaustion, and (for writers like me) bliss. Every residency is different from the one before, both in the requirements, which are based upon a student's current status, and in the schedule.

And there are always surprises.

Now, I'm working on my graduation lecture and reading, and in a week or so I will be doing a test run of it all with friends...I think. We're still solidifying the date and time for our practice runs. Workbooks come out this Friday, and my last MFA residency appears to be about to happen. As I prepare for my return trip to Louisville, Kentucky, I pause to think about my experiences there last summer:



Photo by Luke Seward

Welcome home. It's Friday night, and I've had dinner with the group of people I'll workshop with over the next eight days. This is our first face-to-face meeting, but we're not strangers—I've met them on Facebook and have read their work. The tables are cleared of dishes, and the meeting room becomes hushed when Program Director Sena Jeter Naslund steps to the podium and speaks the words that begin every residency: "Welcome home." Raucous cheers follow. The people in this room have a deep common bond in writing. We are, indeed, home.

This is the best dorm ever. I overhear a student saying these words while waiting for an elevator, and I agree. During the residency, most students and faculty stay at the Brown Hotel, a short walk to Spalding University's campus in downtown Louisville. Our hotel was built in 1923 with great character and a beautiful, ornate lobby. I settle in without hesitation. For nine nights, we students will have our writing family under the same roof, food nearby, rooms cleaned, and will be immersed in learning the craft we adore. Is the Brown Hotel the best dorm ever? It has to be close.

Excuse me. Will you watch my cello? It's late morning on Saturday, and I'm sitting in the hotel's lobby. Our assignment: to write the beginning of a story, and I've rushed to this particular spot because words want to flow out of me. The page I will write will be set in Egypt, a place I've wanted to revisit in prose since a November 2011 trip. I am lost to my surroundings as my hand flies across the page, and then a man asks if I will watch his cello for a few minutes. I'm amused and say, "Sure." My writer's mind travels throughout the man's possible story. When he returns, we nod, and I go back to my assignment, but when I leave to meet friends for lunch, I ask if the musician is performing at a wedding that afternoon in the hotel. He considers my question and says, "That would make sense." Then he reveals that the cello and its musician are in Louisville to play for someone for whom they often play, the Dalai Lama, who is speaking at the Yum! Center. The man's name is Michael, and we become Facebook friends.

Where is the narrative heart of the story? I'm asking this on Sunday morning at 8:00 a.m. while leading a small group, a requirement for students entering the final semester. Weeks before the residency, I sent a story, "Silver Water" by Amy Bloom, to three other students—Brandi, Elizabeth, and Patrick. We discuss the story for about forty minutes, digging deep into the prose, and too soon we have to leave for a lecture titled, "The Dream Element in Writing."

Public passages. I'm sliding my fingers over a lemon verbena plant, touching ginseng, sniffing lavender and mint, learning about mandrake, and handing out sprigs of rosemary. My hands smell of things fresh and green. My friend, Shannon, is giving her graduation lecture on the use of herbs in literature and how we might incorporate them into our own writing. During the week there are many other lectures given by graduating students, each on topics they've chosen, including Jacob on werewolves in literature, Alice on memory in writing, Nicholas on magical realism, Joshua on choosing the right word, Renee on flashbacks... Graduating students also give a reading from their theses. There is a passage happening throughout the week for these people, a passage from student to graduate. It must be witnessed.

I'm called a Senior. This is the first residency in Louisville for Elizabeth, who is in my small group, and Kathryn, who is in my workshop. They ask lots of questions and call those of us who have been around for a few residencies, *Seniors*. This reflects a natural pattern in life: Constantly, we start over, gain experience, settle in for a time, and then graduate or become experts and go on with our lives—until it's time once more to start over. In this MFA program, we're people of all ages from all over the world. When new students apologize for asking so many questions, I tell them I'm glad to help. I remember those who helped me: Lora, April, Bob, Larry, Tom, many others. They've graduated and are gone, but I can still reach them with a few keystrokes.

I'll read that. Each semester arrives with a new mentor pairing, and that is fraught with equal parts excitement and tension. My new mentor, Robin, has agreed to read my entire novel manuscript, and then we'll decide which sections will be my thesis. I want to narrow in on a few chapters, to create an excerpt that can stand alone. I want my mentor's guidance in choosing those chapters. At Nancy's Bagel Box,



Photo by Luke Seward

just steps from the Brown, Robin and I plan other components of my final semester: how we'll communicate, my to-be-written graduation lecture, other assignments.

Are you taking a picture of that? It's Thursday already. There have been faculty lectures and meetings, and we are in the last days of my Novel Chapter Workshop. It's my writing's turn in the spotlight. I read a few lines of the excerpt from my novel-in-progress, then for the next forty minutes I'm not allowed to respond, clarify, or even speak at all. I'm to listen. Some get what I'm working toward more than others. They all make excellent points, and our workshop leader, Kirby, makes notes on a whiteboard. When we take a break, I take my phone up to snap a picture. Kirby finds this amusing, but he understands that I want to capture it all. These notes will be invaluable when I revise.

I'm estimating there are a thousand people here. My friend, Vicki, is visiting. She and I met on the first night of our first residency, and we had rooms next to one another. Now she's on break from the program because she is fighting cancer, but she's come to Louisville to see me and to hear Tim O'Brien speak about writing and his book, *The Things They Carried*. While we wait for O'Brien's talk, Vicki and I sit in the Brown lobby near the place where the cello rested in its case on Saturday, and I tell her about lectures, assignments, the workshop, and my new mentor. People stop by to say hello, and it's a sweet time. Finally, we head into the already-buzzing ballroom where O'Brien will speak in a session open to the public. It is Vicki's husband who makes the estimate about the size of the crowd. After O'Brien speaks, I walk Vicki to her car and hug goodbye. Three weeks later, in a Nashville hospital, Vicki dies—suddenly, yet not suddenly. I will later dedicate my thesis to her.

What if you... Several times over the last few days of the residency, I see my mentor from the previous two semesters. Luke has come to Louisville for thesis discussions. I manage to find a few private minutes with him and discuss a particular section of my novel, and he once again teaches me, asking, *What if you...* After two semesters of studying with him, he shouldn't be able to amaze me with his insight, but he does.

My name is called. It's the final Saturday afternoon and the last session of the residency before the graduation ceremony and a farewell dinner. Ten or so students will be called forward to read from their work, but no one knows which students. A faculty member who has led my workshop twice in previous residencies is at the podium, speaking about the piece he's selected. He's saying something about it setting place well and developing mystery, then he calls my name. I'm shocked and shaken, but I go forward. Over the next few minutes I transport the room to the Great Pyramid at Giza with a story that didn't exist a week before.

Day Ten, Sunday morning. All residency work is complete and all goodbyes but one have been said. I go to the sidewalk outside the Brown to the statue of an old man with a little dog. *Until next time*, I tell them. That will be May 2014, when I will make the transition from student to graduate, and what a fabulous residency that will be, full of work and exhaustion and surprises. But then, aren't they all? ☐

Spalding Abroad: A Visit to Ireland

By Drema Drudge



Photo courtesy of psyberartist

Trinity College

“Welcome home” heralds the beginning of every residency at Spalding University’s low-residency Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Program, pronounced with great enthusiasm by Program Director Sena Jeter Naslund. In the summer of 2013, those words were heard at the program’s residency in Dublin and Galway, Ireland.

Even before that so-beloved official greeting that rings in the official beginning of nearly two weeks worth of workshop, lectures, and friendship, there’s always a welcome dinner where the aspiring reunites with classmates and faculty. The opening night on that particular summer was at The Belvedere Hotel in Dublin, where the students were treated to Belvedere Irish Nights, billed as “An Irish Dancing Experience,” a show that featured old style Irish dancing, jigs, reels, and live traditional Irish ballads. This, all after, was a sumptuous three-course meal.

Residency gets underway without delay. Having said hello to friends old and new alike, it’s time to begin workshoping, something that feels the same regardless of the country. In that bubble (the residency’s backbone), students practice their critiquing skills while accepting suggestions for their work with grace. The residency location is a bonus.

I had the honor of being in Sena’s novel workshop, and every workshop session was another opportunity to both absorb her astute critiquing skills and enjoy her unique, gentle perspective on life. While she never hesitated to point out when work was needed on a manuscript, she was just as swift to praise a section she enjoyed. I left Ireland invigorated and ready to make the suggested changes to my novel.

Since we were staying in the dorms of Trinity College (founded in 1592 and Ireland’s oldest university) where the famed *Book of Kells* is housed, a lunchtime visit was merited to see the book created by Celtic monks around 800 A.D. One of the oldest existing collections of the four Gospels, it is considered Ireland’s greatest national treasure. Even without the glimpse of the ornately embellished book, the library is worth a visit, conjuring up scenes from Hogwarts of grand shelves full of ancient volumes and gorgeously-carved wooden stairways.

The program always conducts walking tours abroad, and these are informative historically and, in Dublin's case, literarily. The likes of Swift, Wilde, and Joyce spent much time in Ireland, where Joyce set his *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Our tour led us past many of the novel's locations. We also saw the General Post Office (GPO), site of the Easter Rising of 1916, the rebellion that inspired much poetry.

While in Dublin, we witnessed a bit of a rebellion ourselves: in the wake of recently passed abortion legislation allowing abortion in life-threatening cases, pro-life protestors of all sexes and ages paraded the streets with signs and banners.

Graduation abroad often necessitates improvisation.

The summer's ceremony was held in Trinity College's Swift Theater where the six of us graduating marched in to the spontaneous humming of "Pomp and Circumstance" while tears of joy and happiness flowed as we were hooded.

Spalding summer residencies abroad allow for both the structured time needed for the workshops and lectures and the flex time that allows the attendees to fit in sightseeing and fellowship opportunities. Some trips are optional. My husband and I chose the Swift Satire Festival in Trim. We both are fans of Swift, and when we learned that Ireland's President Michael D. Higgins was giving the inaugural speech at the festival, we went. President Higgins gave a compelling, inspiring talk, and afterwards he shook a few hands—my husband Barry and I were privileged to be among those few.

From the Spartan accommodations of Trinity College (my husband and I had twin dorm beds), our group moved on to Galway, staying a bit outside the city in a delightful little village called Oranmore where our classrooms were held a lovely mile's (or bus ride's) walk from where we all stayed at The Oranmore Hotel. The best feature in our pleasant room was the king-sized bed.

At The Galway Film Fleagh, Ireland's largest film festival, we studied films of all styles and learned of the Irish film industry. One of the films we saw was *Yellow Man, Gray Man*, a biopic about artist Pauline Bewick. Afterwards we were able to interact with the director, and he contacted me on Facebook to let me know when we could buy a copy, the first shipped to the United States.

The residency ended with a farewell dinner at the Oranmore Hotel (complete with dancing by Tim, our jiggng bus driver), at which tearful goodbyes were said, flights checked, and people left to pack, only to meet up outdoors and sing song after song, reluctant to say goodbye. With Spalding, one never has to say goodbye. Spalding has an active, supportive alumni group. While this may have been my last semester as a student, this doesn't have to have been my last trip abroad with Spalding: I am welcome to return as an alumna. But better yet, my husband became so enamored of the program that he has applied. Either way, I'm going to Prague and Berlin with Spalding in 2014. ☐



Dunguaire Castle, Galway

A Conversation with Frank X Walker: 2013–2014 Kentucky Poet Laureate

A Danville, Kentucky native and a graduate of the University of Kentucky and Spalding University, where he earned his Master of Fine Arts in creative writing, Frank X Walker's six collections of poetry have earned him numerous awards, including a Lannan Literary Poetry Fellowship, a Lillian Smith Book Award, and the 2014 NAACP Image Award for Poetry. He is a former executive director of the Kentucky Governor's School for the Arts and a Full Professor of English at the University of Kentucky, where he is the editor of *PLUCK! The Journal of Affrilachian Arts & Culture*. Oh yeah, and he's wrapping up his term as the 2013–2014 Kentucky Poet Laureate. (Discover more about Professor Walker at frankxwalker.com.)

Roy Burkhead: It's been about a year since Governor Steve Beshear appointed you to serve as Kentucky Poet Laureate. With the term lasting a single year, and understanding all of your other life duties and responsibilities, exactly how tired are you right now? You glad it's soon over, or do you wish you could serve for another year?

Frank X Walker: Actually it's a two-year term, but I'm honestly extremely exhausted from the extra opportunities I inherited with the position, as if I needed more to do. I don't imagine being able to keep the pace of the last year, so I'm going to try to figure out how to do it smarter without losing any momentum for this next twelve months and then graciously pass the baton to the next victim.

RB: One of the poet laureate's duties is to promote the arts in Kentucky. Over the year, how have you been able to engage with the community and strengthen literary connections within the Commonwealth?

FXW: Well, most of my previous hosts have invited me in to read from my work exclusively, but I've been trying to teach writing workshops and to have more conversations while at conferences, libraries, community colleges, and public and private school classrooms. I have learned that it's not as impactful to give people an hour of my time and leave, but if we engage in something deeper that impacts their lives directly as writers or as readers then we both leave with something worth having.

RB: Not long ago, you and six past poets laureate (Maureen Morehead, Gurney Norman, Jane Gentry Vance, Sena Jeter Naslund, Joe Survant, and Richard Taylor.) gathered in the Capitol Rotunda for readings and book signings in celebration of Kentucky Writers' Day. Would you share a little bit about that day and the readings? That's not exactly a typical, everyday poetry reading in the round, I suspect.

FXW: That particular line up occurred last year at my induction as PL, but this year because of an accident on I-75, Sena and Maureen didn't make it on time for the program and Jane was too ill to attend, so it was just the guys. It didn't have the same pomp and enthusiasm as the 2013 celebration, and we certainly missed having the women there, but it was still a good turn out and a big deal for all of us. The highlight for me was hearing our special guest, Aline Dolinh, speak and share her poetry. She is Kentucky's and the Southeast Region's representative on the National Student Poet Program. Though only a 15-year-old high school sophomore, she was an amazing presenter and really added some pizzazz to the program.

RB: You are the youngest Kentucky Poet Laureate, as well as the first African American to hold the position. Have you felt any extra responsibilities or expectations because of your age and/or heritage?

FXW: I feel like the youth angle implies that I can travel and present more. I've given over forty readings this year already, five of them in the last week alone. I don't feel any extra responsibilities because of my heritage, but I have recognized what I interpret as a great deal of pride in young people of color around the state, who perhaps see me as a role model. And I do take every opportunity to sing the praises of William Wells Brown, Effie Waller Smith, Gayl Jones, Etheridge Knight, Marvin Gaye, George C. Wolfe, and bell hooks—all of whom are some of the major voices in African American letters and on whose shoulders I stand.

RB: I believe that you're the originator of the term "Affrilachia," which describes Appalachian African Americans and their work and



Photo by Angel Clark

Frank X Walker.

culture, and you're the founder of the Affrilachian Poets, a collective of writers of color with Appalachian ties. Would you talk a little about the Affrilachian Poets and what it's like to have something that you create become a literary movement or category?

FXW: I am the inventor of the term and am proud to know it's actually in the Oxford American Dictionary. I'm very proud to be associated with a "Movement" though when we first started writing and sharing our work as a collective we didn't think of what we were doing in such grand terms. The word by itself has done more than any one person could ever do to challenge the negative stereotypes and caricatures of the region. I'm still baffled at how little people know about the region and its history and how easily they accept the traditional representations which I'm happy to challenge every chance I get it, on and off the page. What is even more interesting is that almost all of the original core members are not only award winning published authors, but many of them teach creative writing at regional and national colleges and universities. Crystal Wilkinson and Ricardo Nazario Colon are at Morehead University. Kelly Norman Ellis is at Chicago State University. Mitchell L. H. Douglas is at IUPUI. Paul Taylor is at Penn State. Nikky Finney is at the University of South Carolina, and I'm back at the University of Kentucky.

RB: It's Kentucky Derby time in Louisville. Could you talk a bit about your poetry collection, *Isaac Murphy: I Dedicate This Ride*? For any of our readers who may not have read it yet, what will s/he discover?

FXW: I'm still waiting to turn on the TV every year and hear Bob Costas reading from Isaac Murphy. I would hope that readers would have the opportunity to be introduced to a Muhammad Ali-sized figure who has long been ignored and left out of the legacy of thoroughbred racing in Kentucky. Lexington should be celebrating this man and the contributions African Americans made to horse racing in a much larger way. Ali has a street and a museum. His image is three stories tall downtown in Louisville. Lexington is still seeking funds to help build a small park in Murphy's honor. Some Kentucky schools have figured it out and use the book in their classroom, but most schools in the Commonwealth don't even teach Kentucky writers, not even Wendell Berry, James Still, or Gayl Jones. We can do better. We can do a whole lot better. □

Kirby Gann Provides Answers for Aspiring Writers

by Molly McCaffrey

If Brad Pitt were a regular person, he would be Kirby Gann.

Gann has long-ish blonde hair, see-into-your-soul ice blue eyes, facial hair that is the perfect cross between beard and scruff, and a soft but clear voice that moves throughout a room of would-be writers as naturally as water.

Brad Pitt all the way.

Gann, a Kentuckian who has a day job as managing editor at Sarabande Books in Louisville, has published three novels—*Ghosting* (Ig, 2012), *Our Napoleon in Rags* (Ig, 2005), and *The Barbarian Parade* (Hill Street Press, 2004)—the most recent of which was a finalist for the Kentucky Literary Award up against Kentucky heavyweight Sena Jeter Naslund.

Last fall, Gann visited the Warren County Public Library in Bowling Green, Kentucky, to talk about the craft of fiction writing. Wearing his signature shoulder-length hair in a ponytail, Gann perched on the back of his chair rather than sit or stand and spoke to a crowd of thirty aspiring writers like a surfer cum prophet who could impart the wisdom they needed to become successful writers.

The crowd was an even mix of students from Western Kentucky University and members of the Bowling Green community, all of them eager to learn Gann's secrets.

Gann started off the morning workshop by talking about the two things he said a story must do: generate interest and add expectation, the latter achieved through a conflict of some kind—not necessarily an explosion of sorts, but rather a question posed or an expectation subverted.

Gann explained, too, that a writer needs to satisfy expectations quickly in a short story to keep the reader interested, and that writers can do this with surprising turns, dramatic action, and emotional resonance. A good opening, he claimed, has to establish a conflict, the characters, a clear voice or style, and an identifiable point of view. He added as well that the word "but" could be used to turn the story in a different direction from where the narrative began. Gann talked passionately about the "point of authority," that is, the point at which the author asserts his or her pull on you, the point at which the reader feels the author has something to say and is confident in the way the writer is saying it. Gann then described a short story as a way to "put a character alone with a rat in a cage," giving the example of two people stuck in a pickup truck on a long drive as metaphorical rats in a metaphorical cage.

Later in the morning, Gann discussed the importance of revision, advising that "Once you've finished a story, set it aside for weeks or months. Work on something else. When you come back to that story, you don't have that same investment or associations to not see what's working. Read it aloud in two different ways; read it out loud to yourself. If it's not easy to read out loud, you know when your prose is troublesome and clunky. If you have the guts, go to someone with infinite patience and read it out loud to them to gauge their response... and you'll know if it's not working."

One of Gann's most important points had to do with reading, not writing. He said that "No matter how many exercises you do, the way you become a good writer is to learn to read closely." To that end, he urged budding writers to re-read their favorite novels and take them apart, thereby learning more about how to cast a spell over readers while also learning what they like and how it's done.

After talking for over an hour, Gann gave the workshop attendees an exercise in which he asked them to write about a dramatic moment and to evoke the emotion of that moment on the page through imagery rather than stating it, an elegant way of re-stating the old creative writing truism, "show don't tell." Gann noted as evidence the famous Flannery O'Connor quote in which the author said, "If you know how it tastes, smells, and feels, then you know it," meaning that writers need to invoke at least three of the senses to capture a character on the page.

After students finished and shared their exercises, there were a few minutes left for questions, and during that time, one of the attendees asked Gann about how he became a writer. Gann explained that: "You start writing before you realize you want to write. Any writer starts as a lover of reading, and that's how I began. My mother, when I was a kid, would take us to the library on the weekend. And it was a big deal when I got my first library card. I wanted to check out the biggest book in the library, and I just loved reading. My mother read to us all the time when we were kids. I would say, as a teenager, I thought very naively to myself, it would be really cool to be a writer."

The irony is that Gann is the epitome of the cool writer... the long hair, the scruffy beard, the intense eyes, the soft voice—making me wonder if sometimes the dreams we have when we're kids really can come true. ☐



Short Story: “The Mommies”

By Flora K. Schildknecht

We are the mommies. We’re all still young, or young enough, and we are hip. We have one child each, so far. Our group meets every Wednesday for baby-centered fun, snacks, and play. We’re expert mothers. If you find yourself in need of parenting advice, feel free to refer to our online posts on OrganicBabyZone.com and SuperNaturalMommy.net. Our screen names are Mommylicious, SweetBaby-Love, Mamaholic, and HotMilk28. You can find our comments under topics such as *Is baby eating enough?* (Probably not.), *Weaning from the breast—is my toddler ready?* (What kind of mother would rush their toddler to stop nursing?), and *Getting rid of stretch marks* (If you’re concerned about superficial things like stretch marks, you shouldn’t be posting on a holistic parenting site.)

Our real names are Kendra, Adrian, Mica, and Ashley. We met at an hour-long attachment parenting class at a breastfeeding support boutique. Now we meet every week at one of our homes, which is great because we can have the entire afternoon to spend with each other and our darling children. Sometimes one of us will invite other mothers to one of our meetings, but they are never as dedicated to natural parenting as we are; many of them aren’t even stay-at-home moms. We’re all relieved when they leave and don’t come back. Of course we never say this aloud—we’re too nice.

We’ve been planning to be perfect mommies for a long time. We all made sure to give our babies the right kind of names. Studies have shown that this matters—a baby’s name affects more than his or her popularity, and choosing the wrong one can have disastrous results. Did you know that almost seventy-five percent of boys named Kevin are convicted of a felony before they turn thirty? The ideal name should be uncommon enough to sound original, but not too weird or overly ethnic. Something in the top 100 but not the top 20 is best. Adrian named her son Oscar, which is currently the 30th most popular name for boys, according to the census bureau. Names with a literary connection have the added bonus of showing off how well-read the parents are; Mica’s little girl is named Harper. Old-lady names for girls are also trending, and for good reason. What better way to announce that you have a timeless sense of style and are not subject to current fads than to name your daughter Agatha, as Ashley did. Kendra’s son is named Noah—the Old Testament is also hot right now.

To an outsider, it might seem that we’re overly focused on our roles as mothers or that we have no interests besides being exceptional, perfect parents. Not so! We have degrees in anthropology, sociology, English literature, and studio art. It is true that we quit our jobs as bank tellers, restaurant general managers, data-entry specialists, and ESL tutors so we can stay home, but this was our choice. After all, even the most liberated woman understands that young children benefit from having one parent at home fulltime. Yes, it’s a sacrifice, but when you see how healthy and well adjusted your free-range, organic baby looks next to the runny-nosed, pre-schooled children of working mothers, you realize it’s all worth it and you’ve made the right decision. Besides, our husbands work. Our husbands are hip, too; Adrian and Mica’s husbands have beards. They love us unconditionally. We love them too, but our babies come first, and our husbands understand that. What our husbands do for work is not important; they have jobs we find boring. They are not invited to our meetings.

We’ve been meeting for about six months, and most of our babies eat solid food now, in addition to nursing. We are committed to feeding them only organic, non-gmo, conflict-free fruits and vegetables. Eating non-organic vegetables can lead to Autism. Mica is the most dedicated—Harper’s food is always made from produce that is both fresh and local. Because of this she is the de-facto group leader. You’ve probably seen Mica shopping at the farmers’ market, 11-month-old Harper swaddled on her hip, howling and kicking. Mica is never embarrassed; public tantrums are a sign that baby is developing a sense of individuality. Every time Harper screams, Mica gives her another gentle

kiss on her forehead and lets her yank out handfuls of her hair while she focuses on picking out the best sugar beets, carrots, and turnips—it’s winter, so root vegetables are about the only local thing available. Mica allots three hours each day to steam and process fresh food for Harper. Fresh is best, so performing the task daily is worth the extra effort.

Adrian, on the other hand, is lazy when it comes to baby food. She buys the little squeezable, single-serve portions of organic baby purees. But then, we expected her to. She stopped letting little Oscar nurse because he got his first tooth—she pumps now. Our lactation consultants have warned us that pumping exclusively can cause low milk production, which can lead to supplementing with formula. And it’s well-known that exclusively-breastfed babies are superior to babies fed with formula in every possible way—they are smarter, healthier, and prettier.

Our babies use cloth diapers. The only time we ever use disposables is for travel, and even then we use the organic, biodegradable kind. Unfortunately, those diapers are so environmentally friendly that they often begin to biodegrade while still on the baby, so this means mommy has to do a diaper change about every thirty-five minutes. Cloth diapering is easy, as long as you don’t mind dedicating a portion of each day to spraying them off with a hose you hook up to your washing machine. It’s not fun, we will admit, but it’s so worth it in the long run. Do you know the difference between cloth-diapered babies and the ones who use disposables? Obviously, their butts are smarter.

Today we are having a birthday party for Mica’s baby, Harper, who is turning one. We are serving homemade lemonade and beer from the local microbrewery and whiskey sours served in Mason jars. We bought a case of Chardonnay from a local winery, even though it tastes awful. We have made cupcakes—both the regular kind and gluten free—Adrian can’t tolerate gluten. All of our childless friends have been invited, so they can worship at the altar of our parental bliss. Everyone in our group loves parties because they give us an excuse to drink and talk about the wonderful journey of motherhood, starting with the birth experience. We all gave birth naturally, sans anesthesia. Except for Kendra. She got an epidural after forty-three hours of natural labor. Each of us thinks, privately, that we would have held out longer. We’ve all read about the bad effects of anesthesia on baby’s brain and suspect that Kendra’s epidural is perhaps the reason her child has yet to say more than three words. We love telling people that our babies were delivered vaginally. We know the V-word makes many people uncomfortable, and we relish having that power. Drinks in hand, we corner Mica’s mother and father.

“You must be so proud that Harper was delivered *vaginally*,” we say.

They smile and nod politely, but we can tell they want the afternoon to be over. We stare down our single friends while we tell our birth stories, daring them to change the subject. They never do.

Our husbands drink the whisky sours from the mason jars and show each other sexy photos of us in our nursing lingerie on their iPhones. They joke with each other about how they never get laid anymore, and they chase the kids across Kendra’s fair-trade organic wool rug, grabbing them by the legs and making them squeal with delight. After awhile we remind them in our best mommy voices, “We are *gentle* with baby.” They sulk but relent, and go into the kitchen to pour more drinks.

Mica opens Harper’s presents—Harper is asleep in the guest bedroom after a long crying jag. The childless guests mostly bring toys. The presents are for Mica and Harper, but we all sit near her and *ooh* and *ahh* over the gifts as if they are for us. Mica’s parents have brought a thoughtful gift; a set of finger-paints made from organic, non-toxic vegetable dye. They’ve made an effort—good for them. But the crown jewel of all the presents is our gift to Mica: the BioButt® starter kit. You use it to compost the contents of baby’s dirty diapers into organic fertilizer for your garden. We all pour another drink to congratulate

ourselves, because we know we've chosen the perfect gift—useful, sustainable and gender-neutral. Mica loves it. The one bad gift is from Mica's friend, Tony, a book titled *Disciplining Your Toddler*. Poor Tony. He doesn't know that Mica practices Empowerment Parenting, which means Harper will never hear the word *no* until she is at least ten years old.

On the drive home, we are flush with wine and motherly pride.

"Wasn't that party the best?" we say to our husbands, as we ride home in our Subaru Foresters, NPR whispering on the radio, so as not to wake our sleeping babies. They only grunt, but we forgive them for being less enthusiastic than we are. We are realizing that being moth-

ers is our purpose, our calling—something we share with each other, and not with our men.

That night we nurse our babies while our husbands snore beside us in our beds, their bourbon-scented breath making the air hot and musky. We should be content, but we become uneasy. We begin to worry that as our little ones grow, they will need us less. All too soon, they will stop nursing. We fret that when they start school, we will be forced to do something besides be mothers. What if we have to go back to our old jobs or get advanced degrees? Then all at once, an answer presents itself. There is a single solution for us all. Soon, it will be time to have more babies. ☑

Reading throughout the Ages

By Janelle Hederman

Several years ago I applied for an Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing at Spalding University. One of the program directors asked if I was interested in the Writing for Children (W4C) program since that's where my application sample seemed to fit. Writing for Children? It had never occurred to me that there was a specific genre for writing for children, outside of picture books, board books, or anything beyond a middle-grade reader. I'm pleased to say that at the end of my studies with an emphasis in W4C, diploma in hand, I had learned a thing or two—or several—about writing for children and more importantly about myself and my fascination with young adult literature.

When I was in elementary school, we headed to the local independent bookseller to pick up our summer reading selections. They were displayed with the school name and grade name, and then as a special bonus we would get to pick out another book or two. Perhaps it was the bookstore's small space that kept me from recognizing and reading the labels of age groups that define the larger bookstores I patron these days. There were simply the required summer reading, the award winners, the learn-to-read books, and then rows of gloriously-illustrated picture books that never aged...even though I did.

And as I began my MFA, those picture books were a staple because I had a preschooler at home. A blessing of the MFA

program was the extensive reading list that included all types of genres and age groups. I found myself re-reading the middle-grade *American Girl Library* series, the copies that I had dogeared from when I had read them two decades ago during the days before the chain stores where you could build a doll to look like you. I reread one of the *Nancy Drew* mysteries which was still as girly to me as an adult as it was when I was turned off as a preteen. But then I began to read the older books, the books we read in junior high and high school English. Books like *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee took on real meaning beyond racism in the South. The symbolism of green and red lights in *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald that I had struggled so hard to understand in high school became as real and evident as another character in my adult eyes. Even Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* alongside Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* became prominent real-life threats and not something that only a sci-fi fiction work could imagine. And now here we are in a brave new century, and J.K.Rowling's *Harry Potter* series has rocked the world as a 'cross-over'genre—one that both kids and adults alike read and enjoy.

At Spalding, our mentors often lectured on the importance of how children will "read up" and for us to not downplay to their emotions or what we as adult writers imagine their responses or emotional capabilities would be. Perhaps that is why we started reading the

classics so early, even though we could not appreciate them to the degree we could today. But isn't that what a story is? A good story is a good story: nothing short of that. And a great story is timeless...one that you keep coming back to over the ages. Perhaps some of the books kids read should be a bit more difficult for them, a bit more challenging, and over time, ones that they will return to, understand more of, and glean ideas and perspectives from as they mature and change.

Willie Morris wrote one of my favorite books of all time—*Good Ol' Boy*. As a sixth grade reader, it encompassed my whole dream world of a tomboy and joining Spit Magee and the boys as they played tricks on the Yankee visitors in town and rolled the back hills of Yazoo City in a Ford as kids. I trembled with excitement at the notion of giant Indians tattooing themselves in haunted houses and how powerful Spit Magee's BB gun had to be. Surely, it was better than the Daisy BB rifle I'd had for years at the time. Despite knowing each of its pages and plot, I reread that book every year with a renewed sense of joy. It is the transportation of place, of time, of memory, even of the memory of the first time I opened its pages on a train in Europe. The suspension of disbelief, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, takes us out of the reality of questions and the requirement of proof and takes us straight into another world. And perhaps sometimes in that other world, we become kids ourselves again. ☑



The Gift of New York

By Richard Goodman



The best thing ever written about New York City is “Here is New York” by E.B. White. It was published in 1949 in a magazine called *Holiday*, now long gone. White more or less disowned the piece when he included it in a collection of his essays published in 1977. He thought New York City had changed too much for his words to stand. Though I think White was the most honest of writers, I feel in this instance he wasn’t being completely sincere. If he had been, he would have excluded the essay altogether. He didn’t. Wisely, I would say. Just as wisely, the publisher Little Bookroom issued this essay in book form in 2000 with an introduction by White’s stepson, Roger Angell. I couldn’t have been happier to see that 58-page beauty appear on the counters of bookstores everywhere. White, his reservations aside, captures the soul of New York in those pages, as well as its mannerisms, eccentricities, and traits, both endearing and maddening. Even if you loathe New York—and there are legions of New York loathers—it’s so well written you’ll be compelled to dispense with your enmity for a few hours at least.

Toward the beginning of the essay, White writes about New York, “It can destroy an individual, or it can fulfill him, depending a good deal on luck. No one should come to New York to live unless he is willing to be lucky.” That’s my cue. I arrived in New York City to live in 1975. I was thirty years old. I didn’t know it at the time, but I was willing to be lucky. And indeed, I *was* lucky. Up until that moment when I walked out of the Port Authority Bus Terminal on a steaming August day, one suitcase in hand, bewildered and overcome by the tidal mass of humanity that greeted me, I’d been a vagabond. I’d felt restless everywhere I’d lived. But after just two weeks in New York City, I knew I’d found my home. We may or may not have had a good home when we were children, but once grown, it’s up to us to find it. I had. I was as certain as I’d been certain of anything. The city paused in its mighty, careless endeavors for the briefest instant, looked down at this eager little soul, and said, “Welcome.”

I moved into an apartment on West Tenth Street between Second and Third Avenues in the East Village. The three-story building had been a hospital during the Civil War. My second-story window faced the street, and I could look easily out on the leafy dappled street with its elegant ochre brownstone apartments one after the other. This was a kind of architectural elegance I hadn’t experienced before. My apartment, which was small, even had a little fireplace. My neighborhood was teeming with discoveries. Second Avenue below Fourteenth Street at that time was a mighty adventure. I would walk by a magnificent Polish butcher shop, creator of the most savory ham this side of Smithfield, Virginia. I’d pass the Second Avenue Deli, with its contrary waiters and pastrami sandwiches that God had made. I walked to the Jewish bakery with its two brothers and their sister, all three of whom had something conflicting to say about anything anyone ordered. I bought real rye bread there for the first time in my life, heavy caraway-infused loaves that sent me to a culinary realm I never knew existed.

New York was my instructor, day after day, in all ways imaginable. And I was an avid, insatiable learner. I walked every street in my neighborhood, then every street in neighborhoods adjacent, then every street in neighborhoods adjacent to those. I was a modern-day Columbus on foot, turning corners and discovering worlds. Just the plaques affixed to nearby buildings declaring who had lived there once—from Allen Ginsberg to Antonín Dvořák—provided romantic surprises. The sharp air of fall was the ideal time to walk, and walk I did on those strong legs I’d been blessed with, hour after hour, falling deeper and deeper in love with the city.

It wasn’t just the scintillating topography that thrilled me. It was the people I met. The range of aspirations, talents, and passions. They were like me! No one describes them better than E.B. White, and when someone says something the best way it can be said, I step aside: “Whether it’s a young girl arriving from a small town in Mississippi to escape the indignity of being observed by her neighbors, or a boy arriving from the Corn Belt with a manuscript in his suitcase and a pain in his heart, it makes no difference: each embraces New York with the intense excitement of first love, each absorbs New York with the fresh eyes of an adventurer, each generates heat and light to dwarf the Consolidated Edison Company.”

I met those kindred spirits in coffee shops, at loft parties, at poetry



Photo by Schuyler Shepherd

readings, at tossed-together dinners, and at that great Manhattan public meeting place: on the stoops of brownstones as the summer twilight eased into evening. I met grown men and women—in their fifties and sixties—who were still pursuing their dreams, who were photographers and painters and writers and designers and actors. Who had never given up, who were themselves, unadorned and free. Poor, maybe. Struggling, maybe. Harried, maybe. Even desperate at times, maybe. But free. New York was the place they could wholeheartedly strive to be the individuals they were meant to be, regardless of age or of anything else.

I wanted that. I wanted that freedom. And, for thirty-five years, that’s what New York City gave me every single day. ☐

Review: *Emma Jean's Bad Behavior*

Complicated Heroine Delivers Joyful Escape

By Gayle Edlin

Emma Jean's Bad Behavior by Charlotte Rains Dixon is a thoughtful romp. If that sounds like inconsistent terminology, it won't after you make Emma Jean's acquaintance...the character is a delicious blend of contradictions, and that makes her all the more lively, relatable, and real.

I wasn't sure I was going to like Emma Jean at first. Sassy, fearless, impulsive, determined...Emma Jean didn't seem like someone with whom I could identify. But something in the back-cover blurb overrode whatever objections were scratching at my subconscious that day, and it's a good thing, too: not only did I like Emma Jean, I remember her and her story quite well, even nearly a year after reading about her.

"Emma Jean was a storyteller, and as she told her students, stories were everywhere; you just had to be open to receive them."

In *Emma Jean's Bad Behavior*, Charlotte Rains Dixon has crafted a deeply flawed character who is also beautifully well-rounded. If you don't identify with Emma Jean at first, it won't take long before you do, "bad behavior" and all. Why? Because the fictional folk with which we can connect the most profoundly are the most human ones, and what, after all, is more human than imperfection? Emma Jean will draw you in to her, whether or not she is superficially similar to you.

Emma Jean has convinced herself that she likes her life the way it is. While there is value in appreciating what you have, Emma Jean has gone above and beyond the call of mere gratitude...in fact, she's worn herself a rut of canyon-esque proportions as she's painted the glowing, imaginary self-portrait of her life. What she discovers in the fallout of her "bad behavior" is that she can want more than what she's told herself she has. Not only that, but she can have more and she can *be* more, too.

It's a testament to Charlotte's excellent story-crafting that Emma Jean is such a robust character: making mistakes and dealing with her consequences without losing her frivolously serious essence. You'll want to comfort her sometimes and chastise her at others; she is written as a dear friend, the person you adore even in full understanding of her flaws.

"I love you to death, Emma Jean, but honestly? The world does not revolve around you."

Emma Jean ignored the dig, a very *friendly* thing to do, she felt.

While Emma Jean does have people in her life who help her as she flounders, she does an admirable job accomplishing her own growth through the trials in which she finds herself involved. Charlotte Rains Dixon keeps you connected to Emma Jean, so you never wonder if this character would actually do the things she is described as doing...you know Emma Jean would do it. Exasperating, hilarious, frustrating, or ferocious, Emma Jean is always believable, and that makes her memorable.

"Dear God, it was quiet in the mountains. It was quiet here in a way she'd never experienced before, like a giant down comforter had been pulled over the world to muffle all sound. You could breathe in the quiet. You could inhabit it. You could *smell* it, and quiet smelled like pine needles, loamy earth, and a cool mountain stream."

"At the moment, the quiet made her want to scream."

When faced with adversity, it's easy to fall into the trap of believing that we are living a cautionary tale, even as we dream of winding up as lauded success stories. We meet Emma Jean when she is in the opposite situation, fully invested in the bill of goods she's sold herself about her "successful" life thus far. When Emma Jean's fairytale is shattered by inconvenient, imperfect, incredible reality, she drives herself beyond her imagination and muddles her way to this delicious truth: life can be so much more—so much better—than what we convince ourselves it is.

Get to know Emma Jean ... you'll be glad you did!

Get to know the talented author of *Emma Jean's Bad Behavior*, Charlotte Rains Dixon, too. Read her blog (www.charlotterainsdixon.com) and follow her on Twitter (@Wordstrumpet).



Photo by Suzanne Peters, Lifewishes Photography

Charlotte Rains Dixon

A Peek Inside

Best-selling novelist Emma Jean Sullivan longed for a baby for years, but after she and her husband Peter were unable to conceive, she staunchly vowed to become the standard bearer for all childless couples.

And she succeeds spectacularly.

At age 48 (43 according to her blog, *Life, Full Tilt*) Emma Jean enjoys a rabid anti-baby fan base and her novels have sold millions. But now she confronts a dilemma larger than any that her heroines have faced: she's pregnant. And the baby's father is not her husband.

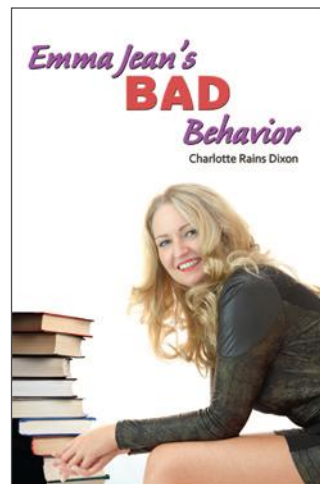
Through no fault of her own (he was just so damned adorable), Emma Jean had begun a passionate affair with Riley, a fetching airplane mechanic she met at a book signing in L.A.

Terrified of losing both her fan base and her identity, she struggles to maintain her sham brand and her marriage. But Peter is busy embezzling Emma Jean's money and is completely uninterested in fatherhood, and Riley has his hands full with problems of his own. Not only that, her latest novel is a miserable failure, and a *Vanity Fair* reporter, who plans to out Emma Jean's pregnancy to her fans, is stalking her.

What's a suddenly broke, failing, middle-aged, pregnant novelist to do?

Why, flee to a glamorous resort town, of course.

There, Emma Jean plots her next move. ☞



Review: *Aimless Love: New and Selected Poems*

Engaging Collection Should Not Be Rushed Into

By Alvin Knox

Once, around some anniversary or another of 9-11, at a poetry reading in an art gallery in Nashville, Tennessee, the readers were asked to say, as they came to the microphone, what they loved most about the USA. and so it went as one poet after another took the stage: "The right to vote," one boomed, another, "Our solidarity," a third, "The freedom to be me," and of course, someone said, "Freedom of speech," for which he was rewarded with tumultuous applause. As the litany of American virtues marched on, I had ample time to consider what I'd share. When at last it was my turn at the lonely podium, I leaned close to the microphone and articulated carefully, "Heated, vibrating nipple clamps." The room became very quiet and an eagle-ruffling gust of disbelief changed smiles to puzzled question marks, my girlfriend attempted to become invisible, and a sole woman in the second row burst into unrepentant giggles. It seemed an explanation was in order. I continued, "Any society with the time, energy, and resources to develop something as frivolous as heated, vibrating nipple clamps must be doing something right." Many people, though not all, seemed relieved of the imaginary burden of interpretation, my girlfriend reappeared from behind her hands, and the woman in the second row kept on giggling. I proceeded to read some poems. The point of this story? Of course: If you are reading this to hear the poetry patriot's voice praise Billy Collins' *Aimless Love: New and Selected Poems*, perhaps you should revise your expectations. After all, what am I going to say in a standard book review that has not already been said?

One of the things I liked best about the book was the way it ended. No, not the last poem (a 9-11 tribute), nor the attributions or author note, not the three blank pages at the very end, though all of those were very nice indeed. The very last printed page in the Advance Reader's Edition (don't be that impressed; I didn't read the collection until well after it was on bookstore shelves) is "About the Type," a brief note on the typeface and its designer. *Filosofia*, it seems, "was designed in 1996 by Zuzana Licko" as a digital rendition of "the sixteenth-century typeface Bodoni." Presumably it was selected for its "strong vertical feeling, softened by rounded droplike serifs." Egad, how beautiful is that? Not the language of the note, though it is well crafted, but the



Photo by Suzannah Gilman

Billy Collins

crafty way it forces one to reopen the book to a random page to examine those serifs, an act that places you right back in the midst of a poem, in the echo of nearly forgotten language recently read.

I cannot say I savored this book the way I would like to have, a poem at a time, two or three or four a day, in such a way that each has time to leave a scar. Whoever said, "You can't put a good book down," was not a reader of poetry. I read the book quite fast, all 142 poems in a few short days, perhaps in just four or five brief sittings. This style

of reading does not suit poetry well. Although I was able to appreciate the craft of Collins' poems, especially his deft use of simile, I hope the sublimity of most went unabsorbed, for if not, they were superficial, which I greatly doubt. I usually judge a book's overall success by the number of pages I've dog-eared as I read, yet only eleven poems are marked and, except for one near the end, all of those are in the first one hundred pages. This is not necessarily a fault of the text but

may, in fact, be a testimony to it. Reading at a fast pace, the images become hypnotic, the experiences flashing one to the next, dreamlike, but this also creates an effect not unlike that of many streams flowing into rivers and then into a still sea, where no single wave stands out as particularly different from any other, yet together they create an almost deafening roar. The voice flattens, and perspective's horizon, initially only inches before your eyes, grows distant. It's very much the effect Collins describes in

the poem "The Music of the Spheres":

*that chord of seven notes,
one for each of the visible planets,*

*which has been sounding
since the beginning of the universe,
and which we can never hear,*

*according to Pythagoras
because we hear it all the time
so it sounds the same as silence.
(5-12)*

Although reading in this manner can allow you to see overarching patterns of theme and content in a collection of poetry, such as Collins' (perhaps tongue-in-cheek) exploration of artistic elitism, it doesn't allow you to access each poem at an intimate level. Consumed slowly, and preferably aloud, poetry can grant us perception of the subtle beauty and insights our world offers, those "little shift[s] / I sensed a while ago / as I walked down in the rain to get the mail" ("Tipping Point" 21-23), or to fall "in love with a wren / and later in the day with a mouse" ("Aimless Love" 2-3). Even poems that present a sense of quiet tranquility, when read with care, are loud, the way the street musician we barely hear draws us to the corner and holds us until the stoplight has turned to hold us longer still, the way a graffiti'd wall before which we linger long enough forces glances each way down the street to remember where we were going.

No, I didn't get to read *Aimless Love* the way I'd have preferred, but I'll return to it, not the way a bird returns in the spring to roost through the hot months, but the way one returns to a very good but overpriced restaurant, occasionally, when the usual forage of fast food cuisine has dulled my palate, and I need to remember what exquisite feels like in my mouth. ☐

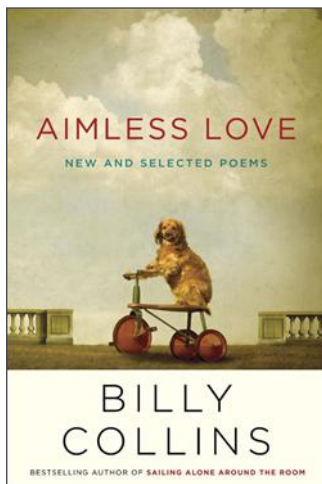




Photo by Karen Redding

Julie Brickman.

A Conversation with author Julie Brickman

By Deidre Woollard

Q: How does the writing process generally begin for you? What sorts of things spark your inspiration?

A: The actual writing usually begins with two things: an anecdote, idea, or subject that grips me and a voice writing or speaking in my head. Once I have these two, I can settle into writing a story or a book. Sometimes, though, it can be a false start— something that doesn't hold me for the big picture or a narrative voice that doesn't quite work. Then I fiddle and experiment and play with different ways to tell until I hit the right one. Plus I love to challenge myself to try new techniques. In *Two Deserts*, almost every story contained some aspect of writing I wanted to test my chops on, a technical challenge. "Message from Ayshah" was epistolary, "An Empty Quarter" second person. "Gear of a Marriage" is a list story, an arc with no narrative. "The Cop, the Hooker and the Ridealong" was associative, a romp for the writing mind. "Supermax" was a story based on something historical that I read that compelled me—the fact that America's worst surviving terrorists were in the same jail, allowed to exercise together, become friends. That and "The Lonely Priest" experimented with omniscience. "Iggies" was for fun, for humor, based on the kinds of work I'd seen in the "Shouts & Murmurs" feature in *The New Yorker*, which I love. "Lust's End" was satire, intended to skewer injustice by making fun of it.

Q: What sort of research do you do for your characters?

A: Often for me, characters come out of some unconscious place, and it's only later that I recognize some aspect of them as belonging to someone I knew or to myself or to a cultural, historical, or fictional figure. Once I see their traits, I do the research. Or I add a trait or two that fascinate me or spice up the story. For specific characters, I may have to do specific research. For the priest, I read a lot about Catholicism, about the internecine fights over celibacy, about the history of the church and rogue priests. For "Supermax," I read biographies, ar-

ticles, and some court records. For the Arabian characters, I read what seems like a gazillion books and articles on the country, the culture, the desert; I read what fiction there was (very little); I visited; I went to the Middle East Studies conference; I joined an organization called the Society for Gulf Arab Studies (SGAS). Truly, I find most of the research I do is about detail.

Q: Your characters often have flaws and make mistakes but are still likeable, how do you craft characters that are well-rounded?

A: I think their roundness comes out of my fascination with interior life. It's so complex and compelling, and I'm just completely unsatisfied if a character has only one emotion or reaction. I mean, part of why we write or read is to explore and discover, and that's what I do, keep pushing further and further into a character to find out what's really going on. I just love that part.

Q: You've written both short stories and novels, what do you think are the unique benefits of each style of writing?

A: Frank O'Connor is the only writer I've ever seen able to articulate the essential difference between the forms. To stay with a novel, the reader (and writer) has to identify with the protagonist, find something about them that is attractive or likable or transformative. But a short story does not have these limits; therefore, a story can really give voice to the voiceless, the really submerged and often unlikeable aspects of people and humanity.

Q: You have a background in psychology, how has that informed your ability to understand motivation and emotion and how does it translate into your writing?

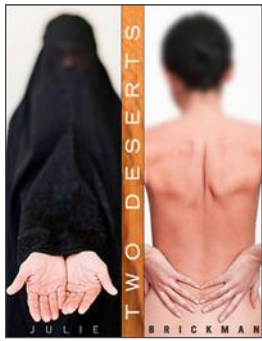
A: I really think it's again about interiors, the love of the interior characterizes both fields. Also, the ability to hear truth when it emerges. It has its own ring, a distinctive tone, and I can always tell the difference. That doesn't mean I can get there, but I know when I don't. And when I do. ☐

Review: *Two Deserts*

Complex Story Unfolds an Engaging Read

By Deidre Woollard

One of the most powerful things about reading fiction is the way it can transport the reader not just to another location but also to another headspace. We don't often get a window into the way another person thinks and feels. A good short story collection is a mind's boutique, delivering up opportunities to explore a world beyond our own consciousness. In *Two Deserts*, Julie Brickman



offers up many characters, some of which dazzle the mind with their heart and intensity. Working with multiple voices and points of view, Brickman centers the stories around two main circles: the world of an American woman working in the Middle East and a writer living in Southern California whose husband is suffering from a terminal illness.

The book begins with two stories, each written in first person, which ground the reader in the worlds the book will explore. Adventure travel agent Emma Solace is in an Arabian souk, trying on an abayah for the first time, seeing herself in foreign dress and wondering if she can truly inhabit this strange new land. The reader is with her behind the veil, peering out at a world that is both foreboding and alluring. Writer Livia Skyer lives in a world stilled by illness and finds herself both looking out the window at her neighborhood and inside at her own past.

In "An Empty Quarter" Brickman uses the second-person voice to bring the reader inside the head and heart of a Muslim mother who is frantic to save her son from involvement with a jihadist movement and sneaks into his bedroom to search his belongings. The longing of a mother to protect her son is universal, but Brickman uses specific details such as the Arabian garments in the drawers to make the experience both familiar and uniquely distant.

By using the third person, Brickman is able to take us through a panoply of worlds, each defined and inhabited to the fullest. One of the pleasurable luxuries of a short story collection as richly thought out as this one is the varying landscapes, from the frozen gray and white tundra of the Yukon Territory to the vivid jewel-like landscape of an Arabian desert. However it is the characters that are the center of each story, drawing and holding the reader's attention.

It's a rare writer who can navigate the complicated worlds of both female and male desire with equal dexterity, but Brickman does this whether exploring the world of a priapic professor battling a sudden loss of interest or that of a prostitute whose own sexual appetite is her greatest skill. The flipside of desire is deprivation and here perhaps is the book's core, the desert of living without love, and how we experience loss, grief, heartbreak, and still manage to continue on, to be of value to ourselves and our community. At its best, fiction offers us not just entertainment, but comfort and the knowledge that in our deepest selves, we are not alone in the world. ☐

Linda Busby Parker reports from Mobile, Ala. ...



Photo by Nancy Hoffman

Roy Hoffman.

Review: *Come Landfall*

Hoffman Again Captures Soul of Characters

By Linda Busby Parker

Fiction isn't spawned totally from the imagination—it's generally hatched from an inkling of truth that is combined with inspiration and a flight of fancy. Such can be said of Roy Hoffman's latest novel, *Come Landfall* (University of Alabama Press, 2014). For Hoffman, the inkling of truth was the loss of his uncle, Major Roy Robinton, U.S. Marine Corps, WWII. Major Robinton was captured and held on a Japanese "Hellship" and disappeared with no record of his final days. The story of this lost uncle (Roy's namesake) has become part of Hoffman family history, and via *Come Landfall*, Roy allows readers to share part of this history.

The novel is set on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in August 2005 when Hurricane Katrina barreled toward the stately antebellum homes (old Mississippi) and upscale casinos (new Mississippi) that lined U.S. 90. Hoffman knows the Alabama/Mississippi Gulf Coast because, as a journalist, he covered this area for many years. His understanding of the place, the people, and the culture is a hallmark of his writing—*Come Landfall* is no exception. Roy Hoffman is at home in this place, amongst these people—his place, his people.

Come Landfall is the story of three disparately different women and the men they love—Nana, an elderly woman who resides in a nursing home, Angela, a young woman who works at the Cotton Gin Casino, and Cam, a sixteen-year-old Vietnamese teenager. These women all fall for men in uniforms (various kinds of uniforms) under varying circumstances. The story is narrowly focused, yet it expands across time and place to encompass three lives, which Hoffman expertly weaves together.

As a fan of Hoffman's writing, I have read his two earlier novels, *Almost Family* and *Chicken Dreaming Corn*, and while those books make for good reading, I find *Come Landfall* to be his strongest work of fiction to date. Roy Hoffman makes the weaving of this complex story appear simple. In this regard, such writers as Ernest Gaines come to mind, and that's good company indeed! *Come Landfall* is rich in both its history and in its story. ☐

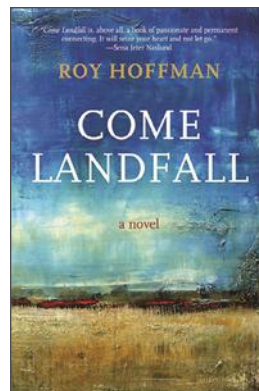




Photo by Franklin and Esther Schmidt

Mary Popham reports from Louisville ...

Review: *Old Louisville: Exuberant, Elegant, and Alive*

A Peek Inside Some of Louisville's Famed Mansions

By Mary Popham

A resident of historic Old Louisville, author David Dominé met with world-famous photographers Franklin and Esther Schmidt, and they began a massive undertaking, having “discovered that no book comprehensively illustrated Old Louisville’s history, architectural elements, streetscapes, and a broad sampling of its homes’ interiors.”

Throughout every season, the partners visited home owners taking photographs and listening to stories; researching libraries, city records and newspapers; perusing old guides and encyclopedias. In the resulting book, *Old Louisville: Exuberant, Elegant, and Alive*, the author names the architects and occupants of more than sixty buildings and tells how the original owners amassed the fortunes which built their mansions. Some current residents did their own restorations, while others contracted for massive updates in wiring, plumbing, and structure. All share a love of artistry as shown in the fine woodwork, stone carvings, stained-glass, and other natural elements of their gracious homes.

Dominé provides a “Louisville Timeline from Settlement to Preservation” and writes of early navigation down the Ohio River in 1778 when George Rogers Clark secured a rough camp on Corn Island, regarded as Louisville’s founding settlement. Thomas Hutchins’s map depicts the river’s treacherous two-mile section where narrow channels and a twenty-six-foot-tall waterfall had impeded passage. The author explains that the 1830 opening of the Louisville and Portland Canal, along with steamboat travel, facilitated the portage business, and the city boomed. Louisville businessmen secured fortunes in logging, furniture, cement, hemp, cottonseed oil, pork, tobacco, bourbon, woolen mills, leather tanneries, and thoroughbred racing. In 1880, the Louisville Board of Trade showcased the city’s development with the Southern Exposition. After the display buildings were dismantled, the wealthy built their prestigious homes.

“Residential designs of every fashionable style reflected the exuberance of its inhabitants and their architects. Elegant mansions featuring turrets and parapets and adorned with gargoyles, stained glass, and filigree competed for attention on the broad avenues and quiet courts of the urban enclave we now call Old Louisville.” Instead of abandoning inner city homes, preservationists formed Restoration, Inc. and in 1975 attained a listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Dominé writes, “These are historic homes, but that is not to say they are museum pieces. True, Old Louisville has often been described as a time capsule of Victorian architecture, but it is a living time cap-

sule. The neighborhood is alive with some 18,000 residents, and they work and play and tend their homes there.”

Within a forty-five-square block are examples of the eclectic design and style used in the heyday of the Victorian era, which Dominé and the Schmidts highlight: “St. James Court was designed to provide an oasis in the city, modeled conceptually on London’s St. James Court. The fountain at its center is a partial replica of the J. L. Mott Iron Works fountain at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876.”

Today, many of the homes near the flowing water have fascinating inhabitants. Celebrated author Sena Jeter Naslund resides in the Madison Cawein House, c. 1901, built by architect William J. Dodd. She writes about the neighborhood in her novel, *The Fountain of St. James Court; or, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Woman*.

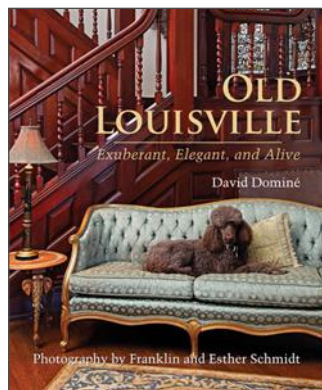
Other stylistic treasures await: Gothic, Tudor, Classical Revival, Second Empire, Queen Anne, and Richardsonian Romanesque. The Spalding Mansion, c. 1871, was built at the height of the Italianate Renaissance Revival for Joseph T. Tompkins, a well-known importer who spared no expense with spacious rooms, oriental carpets, hand-carved furniture, and ornate light fixtures. The home was soon purchased by Rhodes B. Rankin, a distiller, and subsequently bought by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth whose school later became Spalding University. The refined building now hosts students “...

casually lounging on antique settees and davenport, and the teaching body gathers for frequent receptions and department meetings.”

Another lavish home on South Fourth Street is the DuPont Mansion, c. 1879. A fortune from a paper mill, a newspaper, and gunpowder allowed “...towering ceilings, handcrafted moldings, and glossy hardwood floors...and intricate marble fireplace surrounds in every room.” The property is now the DuPont Mansion Bed & Breakfast.

Dominé has compiled a seminal work with a comprehensive look at the prestigious homes in exuberant Old Louisville. His narrative is complemented perfectly by the Schmidts’ stunning photographs and illustrations of the mansions from façade to small interior detail. The public has a chance to see representatives of the exquisite neighborhood for themselves. In October is the famous St. James Court Art Show, and there are several inns and places to visit: the Ferguson Mansion serves as headquarters for the Filson Historical Society; the Brennan House provides group tours; and a must-see is the Conrad-Caldwell House Museum.

Come to Old Louisville and luxuriate in its Victorian Past. □



Charlotte Rains Dixon reports from Oregon ...

AWP 2014: A Weekend Immersed in All Things Writing

By Charlotte Rains Dixon

If you were on Twitter *that* weekend, you may have seen #AWP14 trending. If on Facebook, you may have noticed (no doubt) many photos from Seattle, Washington (the Space Needle, Chihuly Glass, the Pike Place Market) along with people quoting various writers and poets. And if you read my blog from that week (wordstrumpet.com), then you know that I was one of the many attendees at AWP's 2014 Annual Conference & Bookfair in Seattle, which included three full days of panels and readings, as well as an enormous bookfair.

When I say many, I mean *many*. I heard estimates between 11,000 and 13,000. The official AWP website says "over 10,000" and that it was the largest literary conference in North America.

I believe it.

Events were held at the Sheraton Seattle Hotel (the official conference hotel and where I stayed, as well as one of a gazillion hotels that housed the thousands of attendees), at the huge Washington State Convention Center, and at the convention center annex. (*I've never been on so many escalators in my life.*) There were events all day long at these venues, as well as numerous off-site parties, readings, and get-togethers into the evening.

AWP stands for Association of Writers and Writing Programs, and "the organization is comprised of 50,000 writers, 500 college and university programs, and 125 writers' conferences and centers." (I'm quoting from the web site.) Many of these programs and centers exhibit at the conference, along with numerous literary journals and small presses. The bookfair is unbelievably huge, and I've learned over the years not to buy or collect too much, or the tote bag I receive upon picking up my badge will not fit in my luggage for the return trip home.

The schedule features panels, readings, and (if the writer is a big time author) an interview or discussion about her or his published work. But most of the day is taken up by panels of three or four writers plus a moderator. Any AWP member may submit a panel. I've got a group in discussion now about submitting a panel ideal for next year, and I have been on a panel in the past. Anything related to literature might find a home on an AWP panel. The subjects vary wildly from topics on craft and pedagogy, to trends in publishing and information on how to create a winning reading. As a wild guess, I'd say there are upwards of 30 panels and readings at each timeslot during the day, of which there are six, and then there are two timeslots for readings in the evening. The selection is...to be honest...overwhelming. And the quality of any given panel can be a crapshoot as well, which is why there's no



Photo by AWP/Robb Cohen

America's literary world gathers each year at AWP's annual conference and bookfair.

stigma attached to arriving or leaving in the middle of a presentation.

AWP is about as literary a conference as you're going to get. (Some might say that a few panels even lean toward the arcane.) Attendees don't show up expecting to hear the latest bestselling romance author speak, that's for sure. And it is a stronghold of writers from traditional university programs with legacy publishing house contracts, which is why it was so interesting to me to see Amazon all over the place--as sponsor, exhibitor, and host of two panels. Indeed, Jon Fine, director of author and publishing relations at Amazon, joked that he used to feel he should wear a Kevlar Vest to protect himself at such events, though things have changed in the last year or so.

Being around this many people for several days is wonderful—and also a bit much. I think of myself as a balance between introvert and extrovert. I crave time alone spent writing, but at the end of the day, I'm ready for human contact. At this year's AWP conference, I realized that maybe I'm more on the introverted scale than I thought. I'm outgoing, and I strike up conversations with strangers with ease. But, after a couple of panels and a stroll through the bookfair, I needed to go back to my hotel and get some downtime.

A non-writing friend asked me if I was meeting new people: yes and no. I hung out with my dear friend Diana a lot, which was the best treat ever. (She has an amazing new book of poems just out called *Lust*, which I recommend highly.) Diana's son Josh runs

a hip literary journal called *The Newer York Press*, and it was fun to meet him and the people who work with him. I reconnected with old friends from my Spalding University MFA days, and that is always a pleasure. I had some entertaining brief chats with other writers, but the conference is so big and overwhelming that it is not conducive to meeting new folks. (The place where I did meet people was on the train. My seatmate on the way up was also attending the conference, so we chatted happily off and on from Portland to Seattle, and the woman I shared a cab with from the station to the hotel was also from Portland. Turns out we are pretty sure we used to know each other when we were both active with a local writing group.)

To me, attending AWP's yearly conference is acknowledgment that there is a huge like-minded community *out there* that cares about the same things that I do. It's fun to wander around town and see other people with the tell-tale lime-green lanyard attached to their badges and feel a connection. It's thrilling to walk the street from the hotel to the convention center in a throng of writers. It's amazing to return home with my head buzzing from all the information it has just absorbed--and also to feel energized and excited about the possibilities for putting words on the page.

So, if you get the chance, attend an AWP conference sometime. You don't have to be affiliated with any university or writing program; all you have to be is interested in writing. Next year the conference will be in Minneapolis in April.

I'm pretty sure I'll be there! ☑

Meet our Contributors

A look at the writers and poets who contributed to this issue of *2nd & Church*:

Kate Buckley

Kate Buckley's poems have appeared in *Bellingham Review*, *The Cafe Review*, *North American Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Slipstream*, and other literary journals. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University and is the author of *A Wild Region* (Moon Tide Press, 2008) and *Follow Me Down* (Tebot Bach, 2009). A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her awards include a Gabeheart Prize and the *North American Review's* James Hearst Poetry Prize.

Charlotte Rains Dixon

Charlotte Rains Dixon mentors entrepreneurs and creative writers from passionate idea to published and highly profitable. Charlotte is a freelance journalist, ghostwriter, and author. She is Director Emeritus and a current mentor at the Writer's Loft, a certificate writing program at Middle Tennessee State University. She earned her MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University and is the author of a dozen books, including *The Complete Guide to Writing Successful Fundraising Letters* and *Beautiful America's Oregon Coast*. Her fiction has appeared in *The Trunk*, *Santa Fe Writer's Project*, *Nameless Grace*, and *Somerset Studios*, and her articles have been published in *Vogue Knitting*, *the Oregonian*, and *Pology*, to name a few. Her novel, *Emma Jean's Bad Behavior*, was published in February of 2013.

Drema Drudge

Drema Drudge is a recent graduate of Spalding University's MFA in Creative Writing program. She has been published in *The Louisville Review*, *Penumbra*, and in Manchester University's *Spectrum*. She and her husband Barry lived in Nashville for five years nearly a decade ago, and they remember it fondly. In addition, she is a freelance writer and has published regularly with the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series.

Gayle Edlin

Gayle Edlin excelled in undergraduate mathematics and chemistry but floundered in graduate studies in physics. Through an unlikely sequence of employment events, Gayle made her way into technical writing where she flourished...at least on the surface. Technically satiated but creatively starving, Gayle stumbled across a writing group and seized the chance to join it. Sparks flew and before she knew it (i.e., five years later), Gayle finished her first novel, which she is now revising in preparation for seeking a publisher. Gayle also enjoys photography and takes frequent walks to indulge both this interest and her love of nature. She is seldom at a loss for words in the written form, but frequently stumbles over them in speech.

Kate Gale

Kate Gale is Managing Editor of Red Hen Press. She lives and writes in Los Angeles and wherever she can afford to travel.

Richard Goodman

Richard Goodman is the author of *French Dirt: The Story of a Garden in the South of France*. *The San Francisco Chronicle* said *French Dirt* is "one of the most charming, perceptive and subtle books ever written about the French by an American." He is also the author of *The Soul of Creative Writing*, *A New York Memoir*, and *The Bicycle Diaries: One New Yorker's Journey Through 9/11*. He has published articles and essays in *The New York Times*, *Harvard Review*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *River Teeth*, *Chautauqua*, *Commonweal*, *Vanity Fair*, *Grand Tour*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, *Saveur*, *Louisville Review*, *Ascent*, *French Review*, *Pilgrimage*, and *Michigan Quarterly Review*. He is Assistant Professor of Creative Nonfiction Writing at the University of New Orleans.

Janelle Hederman

Janelle Hederman has been published in *AOPA Flight Training magazine*, *poetryrepairs*, *Ellipsis*, *The Trunk*, and several other publications. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University and a BA in Communications and Journalism from Clemson University. She is a writing consultant and freelance writer in Middle Tennessee.

Alvin Knox

Alvin Knox received his MFA in Creative Writing--Poetry from Vermont College in 1999. Currently an Instructor of English at Middle Tennessee State University, he is one of the founding mentors of MTSU's Writer's Loft program. His poems have appeared in various publications, including the *Southern Indiana Review*, *Algonquin*, *Frisk Magazine*, and *Tar Wolf Review*.

Susan Martinello

Susan Martinello lives in Gulf Shores, Alabama. Her poems have appeared in *Grandmother Earth*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *POEM*, the medical journal *CHEST*, Connotation Press, as well as *Whatever Remembers Us: An Anthology of Alabama Poetry*.

Molly McCaffrey

Molly McCaffrey is the author of the short story collection *How to Survive Graduate School & Other Disasters*, the co-editor of *Commutability: Stories about the Journey from Here to There*, and the founder of I Will Not Diet, a blog devoted to healthy living and body acceptance. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Cincinnati and has worked on films with Academy Award winner Barbara Kopple and *World War Z* author, Max Brooks. Nominated for three Pushcart Prizes, an AWP Intro Journals Award, and Scribner's *Best of the Fiction Workshops*, she currently teaches at Western Kentucky University and works for Steel Toe Books in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

Kevin McLellan

Kevin McLellan is the author of the chapbooks *Shoes on a wire* (Split Oak, forthcoming) runner-up for the 2012 Stephen Dunn Prize in Poetry and *Round Trip* (Seven Kitchens, 2010), a collaborative series of poems with numerous women poets. His recent poems have appeared in journals including *American Letters & Commentary*, *Barrow Street*, *Colorado Review*, *Kenyon Review Online*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Witness*, and numerous others. Kevin lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and sometimes teaches poetry workshops at URI.

Diana McQuady

Diana McQuady is a writer who divides her time between Nashville, Tennessee, and Bowling Green, Kentucky. Her writing has won awards and has also appeared in anthologies and various publications. She was the 2007-2008 Western Kentucky University Libraries' Writer-in-Residence. Diana is completing her studies at Spalding University's MFA in Creative Writing Program and will graduate in May 2014.

Michael Morris

Michael Morris is the author of the award winning novel, *A Place Called Wiregrass*, and *Slow Way Home*, which was named one of the best novels of the year by *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. His latest novel, *Man in the Blue Moon*, was named a best book of 2012 by *Publishers Weekly* and was awarded the Best Book of Fiction by the Alabama Library Association. A finalist for the Southern Book Critics Circle Award, Morris lives in Birmingham, Alabama.

Linda Busby Parker

Linda Busby Parker has taught on the faculties of Eastern Michigan University, Iowa State University, and the University of South Alabama. She is the author of two college-level textbooks. Her novel, *Seven Laurels*, won the James Jones First Novel Award and the Langum Prize for Historical Fiction. She has published short pieces in *Writer's Digest*, *Big Muddy*, and *Confluence*. Linda has served as editor and publisher of *Mobile Bay Monthly* and as publisher of Excalibur Press. She has reviewed books for *The Mobile Press Register*, the Alabama Writers Forum, and the *San Diego Union Tribune*. She has been a fellow in fiction at Bread Loaf and a Tennessee Williams Scholar in fiction at the Sewanee Writers Conference.

Mary Popham

Mary Popham's fiction, nonfiction, poetry, essays, and book reviews have appeared in *The Louisville Courier-Journal*, *The Louisville Review*, *ForeWord Reviews*, *New Southerner*, *2nd & Church*, and *Appalachian Heritage*. She has produced short plays and published short stories in anthologies, holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Spalding University, and is an active member in two writers groups. In November 2013, her essay "The Kindnesses We Give Each Other" was published in *This I Believe: Kentucky*, and in October 2013, her novel *Back Home in Landing Run* was published by MotesBooks. She is currently writing a collection of short fiction.

Flora K. Schildknecht

Flora K. Schildknecht is a writer and visual artist living in Louisville, Kentucky, with her husband and son. She is a recent graduate of Spalding University's MFA in Creative Writing program.

Luke Seward

Luke Seward is a Louisville based photographer currently completing a BFA in photography at the Hite Art Institute, University of Louisville. Seward is managing documentation of all public art works within the Louisville Metro Government through the Commission on Public Art. His work is presently on display at Spot5 Art Center in the Clifton area of Louisville, Kentucky. "Finding myself in the midst of a constant concrete jungle drove me to seek refuge behind a lens. While lurking through the streamline of urban environments I found myself stepping outside its systemic nature to observe. I find an appreciation for my surroundings by taking time to slow down, compose, and capture. Pumping the breaks in a fast paced world allows me to soak up the little details we are surrounded by, permitting me to find truth and authenticity within scenes carefully composed."

Deidre Woollard

Deidre Woollard is a writer and social marketing strategist living in Los Angeles. She writes about real estate, luxury, and new media for a variety of websites. A graduate of Spalding University's MFA in Creative Writing Program, she also teaches as part of UC Irvine Extension's Digital Journalism program.







Welcome My Beloved Mountains

By Jan Kasprowicz, translated by Jarek Zawadzki

Welcome my beloved mountains,
Welcome O my river dear!
I used to be so far away,
But now again I am so near.

Crowds of people stood between us,
And the hubbub of the street;
And the patience farcical
That oft in sacrifice we meet.

Those are all remote domains,
Wilderness, and sterile waste;
Ruptured only by the longings
That my soul to you still haste.

My grief has brought me back to you,
So I am standing by your side,
O mountains, and I'm listening to
The waters' murmur deep and wide.

Yes! I am hiking, looking, listening...
How beautifully is all arranged!
And I am seeking to find out
If anything, since then, has changed.

Nothing, only in a roadside cabin
A friend of mine has died of age,
Withered are the willows two
That used to guard the springtide's stage.

Upon our olden ash-trees though
New leaves again have densely grown,
Yellow buttercups are shining
Among the greening grass unmown.

And from the fields I feel now blowing
Eternity's creative breeze
That into life transforms all death,
And puts my thoughts again at ease.

Welcome my beloved mountains,
Welcome O my river dear!
I used to be so far away,
But now again I am so near.

