

# allusions\*

CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM NEWSLETTER 2012-2013

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

MARILYN NELSON  
—“A CELEBRATION OF  
A WRITER’S LIFE”

REVIEWS OF READINGS  
BY AETNA VISITING  
WRITERS-IN-  
RESIDENCE,  
MARGOT LIVESEY AND  
G.C. WALDREP

SPOTLIGHT ON  
STUDENT WRITING  
ACHIEVEMENTS

THE CREATION OF  
THE LONG RIVER  
WRITER’S GROUP  
AND UCONN  
WRITER’S RETREAT

A SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO  
SAM PICKERING

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UPDATES

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## SUSAN HOWE

### The 50th Wallace Stevens Poetry Program

Susan Howe read from her work on April 10th as part of the 50th Annual Wallace Stevens Poetry Program. Howe’s poetry is known for its combination of history and lyricism in unique and unconventional patterns.

Susan Howe’s numerous poetry collections include *Singularities*, *The Europe of Trusts: Selected Poems*, *The Nonconformist’s Memorial*, *Frame Structures: Early Poems 1974-1979*, *Kidnapped*, and *The Midnight*. She was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1999, and was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in 2000. She has received two American Book Awards from the Before Columbus Foundation, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Bollingen Prize in American Poetry.

The evening began with a short reading by each of the three Wallace Stevens Poetry Program contest winners. Miller Oberman, a graduate student studying English, read “The Vesputines,” a poem about sibling relations that emphasizes the mythical nature in a child’s imagination. Next, Ryan McClean, a student at UConn’s School of Law, read “Aviary,” a piece that studies an instance of poetry in motion. Lastly, Nicole Rubin, a student at UConn’s School of Medicine, read “Holocaustum,” a poetic prayer for the dead and unremembered.

After Darcie Dennigan’s eloquent introduction, Susan Howe took the stage. Howe began her reading by thanking the Wallace Stevens Program for the invitation. Grateful for the opportunity, Howe stressed the importance of Wallace Stevens to her life as a poet. More than any other writer, Howe has always considered Stevens to be her “companion.” Specifically, Howe connects to Stevens’ poetically articulated thoughts on Connecticut. Indeed, Stevens’ portrayal of the state has led Howe to consider this state her home.

The first poem Howe read was “118 Westerly Terrace,” a piece inspired by her visit to Stevens’ home in West Hartford. Howe was particularly taken by the back of the residence. Though indiscernible from the front, the back of Stevens’ home is arrayed with many windows, filling this part of the house with brilliant light. Howe’s poem about walking through the late poet’s quarters captures the sense of intimidation emanating from Stevens’ spiritual presence.

Howe then read two poems from her most recent book, *That This*. “Disappearance Approach,” a poetic prose piece, deals with the death of her husband, the philosopher Peter Hare. With excruciating simplicity, Howe explores the shock of losing someone unexpected-

edly. The piece begins with Howe’s observance that the house was “too quiet” on the morning of January 8th, 2008. Slowly discovering the signs of his passing, Howe goes to Hare’s bedroom to find the philosopher’s sleep apnea machine running with the fogged mask still over his face. The honesty of Howe’s narration, juxtaposed with haunting vignettes of life in the 1700s, instills this poem with startling power.



Photo by Nina Subin

Howe delved into history with her final selection, “Frolic Architecture.” A wonder to hear, the poem is composed of diary clippings from Jonathan Edwards’ sister. Jonathan Edwards was the central figure of the Great Awakening, the mid-eighteenth century revival of religious intensity in the American colonies. Howe altered these clippings and delivered them in an intriguingly incomplete manner. Cutting words short, muttering others, and repeating some over and over again like a prayer, Howe presented language in its barest and most imperfect form.

Listening to her continuous reading, one gathers the sense that these words constitute a recital of sound, a deconstruction of language to its rudimentary basics. Real words and phrases are also sprinkled among the meaningless sounds, reminding us of the fragility of words and language. Indeed, this is Howe’s attempt to unmask the purpose of poetry: it is the poet’s job to show things not as they appear, but rather as they are. However, the poet can only reach towards understanding life and death; the ultimate truth is forever unattainable. Such an impossible task renders the act of writing poetry tragic in its limitations, yet beautiful in its attempt.

Howe joins a long line of Wallace Stevens Poets that includes Kay Ryan, Charles Simic, Adrienne Rich, June Jordan, and Derek Walcott. As Part of the 50 year celebration of the Wallace Stevens Poetry Program, Howe gave a special lecture on Stevens’ poetry in the Konover Auditorium of the Dodd Center earlier that evening. She also read on Tuesday, April 9th at 10 a.m. at the Greater Hartford Classical Magnet School to a room full of high schools who had been studying her work in class and interested members of the community. Directly following the reading, she gave an interview on Wallace Stevens, her poetry, and her relationship to Stevens’ work at NPR.

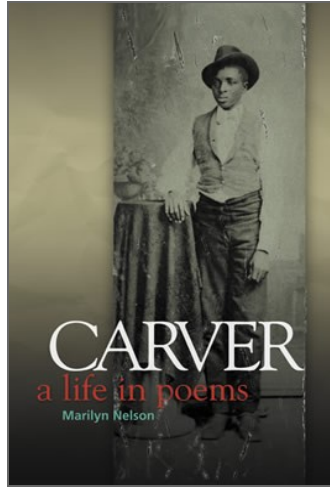
—Review by Christopher De Marchis, *Creative Writing Program Intern*

# Marilyn Nelson

## “Celebration of a Poet’s Life”

Six speakers came to the University of Connecticut's Co-op Friday evening on November 30<sup>th</sup> to join the Creative Writing Program and the English department in celebration for Professor Emerita Marilyn Nelson's most recent honor—the Robert Frost Medal. Nelson was awarded the medal in 2012 by the Poetry Society of America in recognition for her lifetime contribution to American poetry. Nelson is the author of twelve books of poetry, including *The Homeplace* (1990), *The Fields of Praise: New and Selected Poems* (1997), and *Carver: A Life in Poems* (2001). She was the founder and director of Soul Mountain Retreat (2004-2010), a writer's colony in East Hamden, CT, and was also the Connecticut Poet Laureate from 2001-2006.

Past students, old friends, and established poets came from across Connecticut and New England to pay homage to Nelson Friday evening. The celebration opened with numerous introductions, from the UConn Co-op's director, Suzy Staubach, to the Creative Writing Program's Acting Director, Sean Forbes. Forbes' speech was reminiscent of his time as a student of Nelson and the guidance she offered, in both creative and academic functions, of which brought tears of joy to the poet's eyes. From the guest speakers, Emily Cardinali Cormier, Jon Andersen, Bob Tilton,



Denise Abercrombie, Doug Anderson, and Martín Espada, all of them recounted of the times that Nelson has influenced their lives, as either friend, teacher, or colleague. They read poems of Nelson that have either particularly moved or influenced their own lives and work, and demonstrated the kind, gentle spirit that resides in Nelson and her work.

Nelson closed the celebration by addressing all of the introductory and guest speakers—thanking her friends and fans for attending in the celebration of her life's work. Nelson's humble nature became apparent in her closing speech, as despite receiving and sharing an honor with the likes of Allen Ginsberg and Robert Frost himself, an aura of elitism nor snobbery wasn't to be found in her at all. She closed her speech by reading from her new children's book, which according to her, tackles themes that aren't limited to children at all. Those in attendance left with either newfound appreciation for an established poet of our community or either more profound respect and love for a dear friend.

—Review by Timothy R. Williams, *Creative Writing Program Intern*

# Margot Livesey

## Fall Aetna Fiction Writer-in-Residence

On the evening of November 1st, as part of the Aetna-Writer-in-Residence series, Margot Livesey read from her new novel: *The Flight of Gemma Hardy*.

*The Flight of Gemma Hardy* is on *The New York Times Bestseller List*.

Livesey's other novels include: *Homework*, *Criminals*, *The Missing World*, *Eva Moves the Furniture*, *Banishing Verona*, and *The House on Fortune Street*. She has been the recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts and is currently a distinguished writer-in-residence at Emerson College.

*The Flight of Gemma Hardy* is about a girl who faces tremendous tragedy in her life. Both her mother and father die when she is young. Her Uncle then takes her in to live with his family and he ends up dying as well. Ms. Livesey says that the book was “stealing from her own life” and was “partially true and partially not.” She loves the heroic stature that Gemma ends up attaining.

Orphan novels appeal to Livsey, who reportedly ap-

preciates the orphan situation in general. Margot explained that she believes that everyone has this “inner orphan” in them and that when your “family is stripped away” your “true character is revealed.”



Livesey grew up in the Scottish Highlands and spent most of her twenties working in shops and restaurants and learning to write. Livesey wasn't always a writer, though. It wasn't until she traveled on a yearlong trip with her boyfriend at the time that she began to write. She ended up writing a four hundred-page novel and when she reread it, it was awful, in her words. This experience changed Margot because she said that she wanted to be “influenced” by writing. She then spent her twenties waitressing and in-between shifts she would write short stories. The rest is history.

As part of the Aetna Writer-in-Residence series, Livesey spent a few days on campus meeting with students for tutorials on their writing and having informal luncheons with students to talk about craft.

—Review by Steven Feeney, *Undergraduate Student*

# G.C. Waldrep

## Aetna Writer-in-Residence

G.C. Waldrep read from his poetry at the Dodd Research Center on March 12<sup>th</sup> as a part of the Aetna Writer-in-Residence series. After an intriguing introduction by friend and former classmate, Darcie Dennigan, Waldrep commanded the stage with his enthusiastic persona.

Waldrep addressed his religious beliefs, which are discernible by his full beard and wide-brimmed hat. He belongs to the Old Order River Brethren, a small Christian denomination in Pennsylvania often associated with the Amish. His answer to the question “Why don’t you write about your religious beliefs?” is “What makes you think I don’t?” Indeed, the writer stressed that there *is* a connection between his poetry and spiritual life.

Waldrep explained that he writes from his imagination, and that his imagination is deeply affected by his religion. Though perhaps indiscernible to an outsider, for the poet himself, his religious views play an important role in his writing.

An interesting segment was Waldrep’s description of his own writing process. Once he begins a poem, it must be finished in one sitting. As soon as his attention is compromised, the poem has ended. Thus, Waldrep never revises his work; instead, if a poem is not to his liking, he’ll write a new one from scratch. In this way, Waldrep is an improvisational poet. Waldrep compared his method to unraveling a sweater: he can only hope that the entire sweater, or his train of thought, will be unraveled onto the page by the time it is complete. This process compliments his habit of finding inspiration in everyday life. For instance, he may reflect on an overheard cell phone dialogue and latch onto an unusual remark. This phrase sets Waldrep’s imagination ablaze in the search for poetic meaning.

Waldrep’s poetry is based on personal experience and subsequent reflection. He delivered it with unrehearsed and passionate expression, engaging his listeners with his captivating tenor voice. Of particular note was “Poem in Which I Pretend

You Are Still Alive,” written for a fellow writer who was trapped in the Middle East during wartime. After Waldrep lost communication with his friend, he wrote the poem on his way to a writer’s conference. Another exceptional piece, “The Black Pickup Truck of Death is Driving Away,” concerned the power of metaphor in our lives. The poem’s self-reflective aesthetic was intriguing.

Waldrep’s newest collection, *Your Father on the Train of Ghosts* (2011), received particular attention. The 221 page book of poetry is the result of collaboration between Waldrep and John Gallaher. Waldrep described the unique process of writing with another poet: the two developed a back-and-forth strategy in which Gallaher wrote in the morning and sent his poems to Waldrep via email. At night, Waldrep read Gallaher’s poems and wrote his own, sending his to Gallaher to be read the next day. Additionally, Waldrep and Gallaher agreed that one would write the poem for the title the other created, often using nouns from the previous piece.

Waldrep’s advice for writers is to write when you aren’t inspired. Only through the practice of uninspired writing will a writer learn the mechanics of his or her technique. Concerning revision, he believes that advice on what fails in your writing should always be noted. However, Waldrep finds that advice on *how* to fix these problems is never helpful. Indeed, when you suggest changes to another’s piece, you often envision the poem *you* would write. It is thus important to remember that your writing is your own, and that only you can fix it. Lastly, Waldrep advises writers to date mutual funds analysts, not other writers. If you date writers, you may end up in an ex’s published story!

—Review by Christopher De Marchis, *Creative Writing Program Intern*

## Bruce Cohen Reading

A mixture of Bruce Cohen’s students, peers, family, and friends settled into their chairs in the poetry section of the University of Connecticut’s Co-op bookstore on October 11<sup>th</sup> at 6 p.m. to hear him read from his newest book of poetry, *Placebo Junkies Conspiring with the Half-Asleep*.

Suzanne Staubach, the Co-op’s Manager of General Books, introduced Cohen, who immediately began bantering with his audience. “Thanks to those who showed up early...” he said, as few listeners arrived late. Cohen read a number of different works that varied in subject from individual idiosyncrasies in “How To Determine if You Are Me” to grief and loss in “Dead Telegram to a Dead Poet,” but were characterized by the same dry sense of humor that also shows in Cohen’s personality.

Cohen resides nearby in Coventry, and a number of his friends and family members were in attendance, including one of his sons, Sam. While Cohen read a prose poem titled “Kitchen Floor” that portrayed an image of a married couple and their dispute over home improvements, his wife mouthed the words along with him in the audience.

Cohen opened the floor to questions at the end of the evening, and one audience member asked how many poems he generally gets published before putting a book together.

“I like sending poems out ‘cause I like to get mail... It makes you feel like someone likes you,” Cohen said. He added that he prefers every poem in a book be one that has previously been published, which he believes ensures that there is some quality to them.

Cohen is currently teaching Creative Writing at UConn, and several of his students attended the reading. “He’s just hilarious,” said Jessica DeMaio, a freshman Communications major who is currently enrolled in Cohen’s class.

“Well, let them eat cake, I guess,” said Cohen. Refreshments (and cake) were served while Cohen signed copies of *Placebo Junkies Conspiring with the Half-Asleep*.

—Review by Lily Rhodes, *Creative Writing Program Intern*

# Gina Frangello and Rob Roberge

## “Writer’s Who Edit, Editor’s Who Write”

Gina Frangello and Rob Roberge read from their work and discussed the publication process at the UConn Co-op on April 1<sup>st</sup> as part of the Writers Who Edit, Editors Who Write series. Roberge’s newest book is published by Other Voices, the independent fiction press where Frangello works as Executive Editor and co-founder. The camaraderie and collaborative spirit between the editor-writer pair was a delight to watch.

Frangello read an excerpt from her soon to be published novel, *A Life in Men*. In the book, the protagonist lives in London, coping with the death of a friend and struggling with cystic fibrosis. Though Frangello read only a short portion of her work, her strong dialogue and visceral descriptions were effectively shocking. Indeed, her fast pace and use of stream of consciousness technique captured the sheer fright of one character’s asthma attack after passionate sex.

Roberge read from his newly published book, *The Cost of Living*. The novel deals with the sorrows and adventures of a drug addict. Roberge’s reading gave the audience a glimpse of the darkly comical life of the protagonist who seems to be a helpless substance abuser. Through raw language and grotesque imagery, Roberge paints us a picture of lives so desperate for a fix that one character even plans to rob his grandmother’s grave for drug money. Stooping low to get high is a central theme in Roberge’s gripping novel, based on the author’s own harrowing experiences.

Frangello and Roberge’s friendship was discernible within the first few minutes of the discussion portion of the event. Frangello stood behind the one-man podium, and wanted Roberge to stand by her side. Roberge joked that he would only stand behind Frangello to accompany her speech with an expressive dance routine. Indeed, Roberge is familiar with such choreography thanks to a movement course at Emerson College that required him to create and perform a self-reflective “Dance of Myself.” The footage of Roberge’s routine thankfully remains hidden in the archives of Emerson College and has yet to see the light of day. Though he only received a mediocre grade for the dance of his “inner-being,” Frangello joked that it *will* be made public once Roberge achieves the fame his writing deserves. Thus, in this playful way, Frangello’s confidence in her friend’s

ability was revealed.

Frangello then opened up on the process of editing Roberge’s new novel. Initially, the draft of *The Cost of Living* was sent to Frangello informally; however, she was instantly struck by the dark humor and quick wit of the manuscript and accepted it for publication. The book began as a collection of stories, but Frangello desired to connect the various tales to render the book more novelistic. Frangello saw room for expansion in the narrative. For instance, though the editor loved the protagonist’s wild adventures, she desired to know more about his background and family relations. The novel also began in what Frangello termed an “emotional order,” not a chronological one. Together, the editor and writer altered the pieces of the book to follow the traditional “start-to-finish” form. Frangello ended this discussion by stating that she accepted *The Cost of Living* faster than any other book, but that its editorial process took the longest.

When asked about the relationship between editing and writing, Frangello attributed her editing jobs to her continued interest in writing and personal publication. At a time when Frangello was not known as a writer, her work on the writings of others was immensely important. Her job allowed her to feel that she was part of a literary community. In this way, she remained hopeful and inspired.

Roberge’s advice to writers was simple: know the mistakes young writers make, and then don’t make them. Both he and Frangello reminded students that editors have piles of manuscripts to read, and that the quicker they can reject your piece, the easier their workload is for the day. However, Roberge assured the audience that editors are also looking to fall in love with a piece of writing and to discover a new voice. Roberge encouraged future authors to not give up: the first five places that accepted one of Roberge’s stories had previously rejected one. Lastly, Roberge noted that publishers are deeply passionate people who do what they love. Indeed, he has never met anyone “cynical” in the publishing world; this may be, he offered, because there is not a lot of money to be made.

## Dennis Barone and Lewis Turco

### Creative Sustenance

On the night of November 12th, Poets Dennis Barone and Lewis Turco gave a benefit reading for students, faculty and interested members of the community at the UConn Co-op. The event was to raise money for the Covenant Soup Kitchen in neighboring Willimantic.

The community-building event fittingly began with Dennis Barone reading from the Garnet Poets, an anthology comprised of contemporary poets from Connecticut edited by Barone. The anthology has introductions written by Jay Parini and Lee Jacobus, a Professor Emeritus of English at UConn.

Barone, a teacher at St. Joseph’s University in Hartford, read a small sampling from his own work, but really, he wanted the focus to be on Connecticut and the rich writing that has come out of it.

The event ended with a reading by Lewis Turco, a contributor to the Garnet Poets and former UConn graduate affectionately known to many members of the New England community as “Lou.” Turco is the author of *The Book of Forms: A Handbook of Poetics*, an indispensable text to many teachers of creative writing.

Audience members were invited after the reading to make small cash or canned good donations. The event raised approximately \$400 for the Covenant Soup Kitchen and approximately \$200 for the Covenant Soup Kitchen.

--Review by Lori Carriere, Creative Writing Assistant Director

# Rita Garcia-Williams

## Reading and Lecture

Accomplished young adult and children's book author, Rita Williams-Garcia, author of *One Crazy Summer*, gave a talk on November 12<sup>th</sup> in the Stern Lounge for aspiring writers, scholars, and students of children's literature.

*One Crazy Summer* came out in 2010, and won the Coretta Scott King Award, the Newbury Honor Award, and the Scott O'Dell Prize for Historical Fiction. Set in 1968, this grade 4-8 book tells the story of three sisters who one summer go to visit the mother who abandoned them and discover the Black Panthers along the way.

*One Crazy Summer* deals with mature themes in what is her first official children's book, although Garcia-Williams insists all of her stories are for precocious children. She believes that if you write books that are engaging and deal with complex themes, young people would read more and rise to the challenge of reading them. She discovered this when she was tutoring reading skills to high school students, and because she had trouble finding a book they could relate to, decided she needed to write one.

Ultimately, it's the character, more than the concept, that is important to her. While she knew she wanted to write a book about the black arts movement, she also knew she couldn't be too heavy handed and so let the characters dictate what was

possible to happen. "A character," she explains, "should only care as much as is meaningful (to that particular character)."

Garcia-Williams wrapped up the event by reading from her forthcoming book, *P.S. Be Eleven*, the sequel to *One Crazy*. Her reading emphasized the rhythm, voice, and personality of her books. She generously stayed for a Q&A with graduate students currently studying her work in seminar with children's literature scholar Kate Capshaw-Smith. *P.S. Be Eleven* is scheduled to be released by Harper Collins in 2013.

# Alison Hawthorne Deming

## Edwin Way Teale Lecture Series

Alison Hawthorne Deming read from her nonfiction on April 18<sup>th</sup> as part of the Edwin Way Teale Lecture Series. Deming is known for uniquely combining lyricism and scientific research in her poetry and prose.

After a warm welcome by Sydney Plum, Deming took the stage to read from her essay, "The Lost Woods of Childhood" (title inspired by Edwin Way Teale's 1948 publication, *The Lost Woods*). In August of 1990, Deming moved from Avon, Connecticut to Tucson, Arizona where she currently serves as director of the University of Arizona's Creative Writing Program. "The Lost Woods of Childhood" explores the writer's slow integration into this radically different environment. Descended from a long line of naturalists, Deming reflects on her transition from indigenous forest to scorching desert with an eye for nature's extreme variations and subtle similarities.

Deming began her essay with a description of her parents' cross-country trip to California, an adventure that Deming had viewed in a home movie projected onto a taut sheet in the family living room. The never-ending highway, expansive desert, grand sky, and curious locals captured by the video camera instilled an appreciation for beautiful landscapes in the young writer.

The narrative voice of the essay was poetically descriptive. Indeed, Deming's discussion of her father's appearance in an old photograph captured both the external and internal essence of the man. Though a personal story, Deming's lecture remained

relevant to Teale's belief that it is beside wildlife that humans are truly measured.

In Arizona, Deming was a transplant in a strange land. Having previously found peace and solitude in the forests of the Constitution State, Deming needed to discover the same haven in the desert. Deming slowly adapted to her surroundings and learned to know her local "neighbors," the animals and plants. Soon she was transfixed by the desert's beauty and ironically tragic immigration history.

Deming concluded her lecture by defining herself as a poet, naturalist, and writer of tales based on personal experience. She encouraged the audience not to lose faith in humanity and emphasized our adaptability and continuous scientific discoveries.

After her lecture, Deming answered questions from the audience and discussed the importance of the relationship between science and poetics. Data is not enough to truly understand a place: one must reflect on the *spirit* of the region. Thus, only through a poetic and philosophical undertaking can we come to terms with nature. A strong marriage between science and lyricism is also necessary to bring about positive change; indeed, a harrowing metaphor about scientific phenomena is more potent than the mere presentation of data. To be truly effective, scientific research must be presented from the heart.

--Review by Chris De Marchis, *Creative Writing Program Intern*

# Mother-Daughter Writers Honored And Memorialized

## Gerson Irish Reading Series Event

Tuesday evening heralded the annual Gerson Irish Reader event and marked its 15th anniversary. This year the event honored a mother-daughter set of writers, Mary Lavin and Caroline Walsh. Their literary accomplishments aside, these two authors hold a special place in the university's heart, as Mary Lavin was a writer in residence beginning in 1967 and Caroline Walsh attended E.O Smith High School. As important figures in the university history, the Gerson fund, endowed by professor emeritus Louis L. Gerson and the Creative Writing Speaker Fund, felt it only appropriate to honor these women nearly two years after Caroline Walsh's death.

In concordance with the event's history, the program began with associate professor Mary Burke introducing professor Tom Shea, who then presented the Timothy F. Moriarity Award in Irish Literature to a deserving graduate student. The award is intended to assist a student of Irish literature pursue their graduate education and continue their dedication to the field. This year's recipient was Tara Harney-Mahajan who intends to use the award to travel to Belfast this summer and continue her work on her dissertation.

Shea then introduced James Ryan, the husband of the late Caroline Walsh, who gave a small speech and introduced the visiting speakers. "This invitation came at a time when we were struggling with Caroline's sudden death," said Ryan. "But an apt time for us to recall the high points of her life." It was in this spirit of remembrance that the rest of the event followed.

This first writer to give a reading was Anne Enright, a Dublin based novelist, who Ryan introduced as "Not a high ranking Irish author, but the high ranking author in Ireland." Anne who first became acquainted with Walsh after winning a literary prize that Walsh was judging, read an excerpt from her novel,

"The Gathering." The novel discusses the family dynamic of an Irish family, and the passage delivered by Enright captured the mother daughter relationship in tribute to Lavin and Walsh's own relationship. The mother-daughter theme was continued through her next reading, which was of her short story entitled, "Shaft" which told the story of a heavily pregnant woman's interactions with a business man in an elevator. Enright's simplistic, yet poignant and relatable style has garnered her a spot in the highest echelons of modern literature and according to Ryan, "She offers a totally unique world."

Belinda McKeon, a young writer from Dublin, took the stage next and described her relationship with Walsh through a creative piece first broadcasted on Irish Radio around the one year anniversary of Walsh's death in 2012. Entitled "O Whirlwind" the story mourned the loss of Walsh and read like an elegy. McKeon worked with Walsh at The Irish Times, and remarked that "It's a huge honor to be here, I mean that sincerely. Caroline meant so much to me and I had the enormous luck of having Caroline Walsh as an editor."

The remembrances did not end with McKeon's pithy tribute. Colm Toibin, another esteemed Irish author whose play "The Testament of Mary" opens this week on Broadway, paid his respects last with a discussion of his literary evolution and Caroline's role in that process. As a man who knew both Lavin and Walsh, Toibin was able to tell humorous stories of the two women and gave them credit for helping him get on his feet as a writer. As Ryan noted, "Our heartfelt gratitude to these authors and for tonight, this is an event of great import and prestige... Mary Lavin and Caroline Walsh are served well by this."

—Review by Katie McWilliams, *Daily Campus* Staff Writer

## Aetna Celebration of Creative Nonfiction

On April 22<sup>nd</sup>, as part of the Aetna Celebration of Creative Nonfiction, student contest winners, Alyssa Palazzo, Christopher De Marchis, and Lisa Nic An Bhreithimh read from their award-winning pieces at the Benton Museum. They were accompanied by members of the English faculty who read nonfiction works by their favorite authors.

After an introduction by Sydney Plum, Lisa Nic An Bhreithimh, a graduate student and Irish Language TA, read from "Flames on the Page," a sensual piece concerning a passionate romance that continues to serve as inspiration for her writing. Next, Alyssa Palazzo, a senior English major, read from her poignant essay, "End Time," about an abusive relationship and the hope of finding new love. Lastly, Christopher De Marchis, also a senior English major, read from his heartfelt piece, "If I was feeling brave," a memoir dedicated to his mother who simultaneously taught him how to read and take chances in life.

After the student winners read from their work, faculty members were invited to read excerpts from their favorite nonfiction pieces. Regina Barreca read from Margaret Atwood's speech, "Spotty-Handed Villainesses: Problems of Female Bad Behaviour in Literature," a humorous consideration of a woman's role in society as seen through the novel. Next, Ellen Litman read a chapter from MFK Fisher's book, *The Gastronomical Me*, a look at relationships and the food that accompanies them. Sam-

uel Pickering read from his own work in which he discussed learning from history and the pointlessness of athletics and bodybuilding.

The event took a more serious turn when Sean Forbes read from Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, a work concerning the immortal cell line stemmed from her cervical cancer in 1951. Forbes read from a chapter entitled "Night Doctors" that discussed the repulsive experiments conducted on the black community during the 1950s and 60s. Next, Susanne Davis read from *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, a book based on a series of lectures written by Italo Calvino concerning the literary values essential for the future. Next, Lori Carriere read from Justin Torre's debut work, *We the Animals*. This book, concerning the development of three young boys, blurs the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction.

Sydney Plum read Lynn Bloom's selection from Brian Doyle's "Joyas Volardores," about the incredible features of animals and their startling connections to mankind. Lastly, Sydney Plum read her own selection, "The Clan of One-Breasted Women," the epilogue of Terry Tempest Williams's memoir, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*. This selection discusses the author's ancestors' exposure to nuclear testing in the 1950s and 60s as a cause of the high incidence of cancer in her family.

# SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT WRITERS:

## UConn Student Allegra Berndt Chosen for CT Poetry Circuit

UConn junior Allegra Berndt has been selected to represent the University of Connecticut on the Connecticut Poetry Circuit, and is reading her work at participating universities throughout the state.

The circuit, which is directed by Manchester Community College professors James Gentile and Mariana DiRaimo, is an annual contest to identify the “outstanding college poets in Connecticut,” according to a press release. Poets are nominated through submissions to their respective creative writing departments, the best of which are forwarded for review by a Connecticut Poetry Circuit panel of “professional poets” who choose the poet most fit to represent his or her college on the circuit.

Berndt says the circuit is akin to “going on tour.”

“[The tour is] more like a road trip, a traveling tour of poetry,” she says, “like a caravan of gypsies, but with less scarves.”

Berndt, a sixth-semester English and psychology major, has previously been recognized for her work through the UConn English Department. Last year, she came in third place – behind two postgraduates – in the Wallace Stevens Poetry Prize Contest, as well as receiving an Honorable Mention for the University’s Edward R. and Frances S. Collins Literary Prize.

Darcie Dennigan, assistant professor-in-residence in English, says her work is “always an unsettling pleasure to read.” Dennigan says Berndt’s poetry borrows “from obscure psychic texts, scientific articles, folklore, parables, and recipes ... [and

weaves] these elements together to make one, strange, almost mystical whole.”

Berndt emphasizes precise word choice, and experiments with the structure and devices of prose fiction in order to share an emotion or experience with her reader.

“Basically when I started writing I was telling a story,” Berndt says, maintaining that she “didn’t choose” to write poetry. “I was playing around with fiction and it became a narrative poem.”

Berndt cites several influences in her work, notably the “muted glow” aesthetic of her Cambridge, Mass., upbringing. The press release from the circuit also describes Berndt as a collector of “fortune cookie slips in her spare time.”

Berndt is unsure what role poetry will play in her future, but recalls the advice given to her by former U.S. poet laureate Kay Ryan, the featured guest at the Wallace Stevens Poetry Prize Competition.

“She told me that life doesn’t begin until you’re 30, so I figure I’ve got plenty of time.”

Berndt is touring with fellow poets Emma Phillips (Trinity College), Elizabeth Norton Sallee (Wesleyan University), Amanda Schoen (University of Hartford), and Amelia Urry (Yale University) until March 8. The circuit stopped by UConn on Feb. 18.

Review by William Lambert (Reprinted from UConn Today)

## Unveiling of the 2013-2014 Poetic Journeys Series

At the end of Spring Semester, students, faculty, staff and interested members of the community gathered together in the Benton for the unveiling of the 2013-2014 Poetic Journeys Series. Poets read from their award-winning works while a Projection of the accompanying poster was displayed in the background. All posters were designed by Design Center Students taking Edvin Yeger’s class. Speeches were given by Assistant Director Lori Carriere and Project Manager Danielle Riley on the curating and design processes, respectively.

Poetic Journeys is in its 13th year at UConn. The series began in 2000 and was inspired by the NYC MTA’s “Poetry in Motion.” After the unveiling, the posters will go up in UConn buses, elevators, and hallways — spaces traditionally reserved for advertisements. The goal of the series is to bring poetry into the everyday lives of the campus community.

The event began with a reading by undergraduate English major Colby McAdams of her poem, “On Breaking Up for the Second, Third, or Fourth Time,” a work which is com-

posed as a series of directions for the dumpee after a hard breakup. Fittingly, McAdams’s poster, designed by Kristyn Michaud and Sarah Lafferty, shaped McAdam’s poem into a staircase.

McAdam’s was followed by graduate students Jared Demmick who read “On Noisy Love Making” and Chantelle Messier who read from “A Forgetting.” Demmick’s poster, designed by Shane Milan and Alexis Sundara, featured handwritten text that demonstrated a tension between softness and hardness. Messier’s poster, designed by Danielle Nachowitz and Justine Braisted, is an eye-teaser and forces readers to read from bottom to top, instead of top to bottom.

Special child poet, Eleanor Blansett Trimm, the daughter of English Professor Lisa Blansett read her poem “The Moon.” Designers Danielle Riley and Amanda Batula formatted the poem in the shape of the moon. Graduate Student Miller Oberman read her two line poem, “In A Ring Storm,” while her poster, designed by Bryce de Flamand and Amanda Sims was

# Spotlight on Student Writers

displayed. The poster visually echoed the lines of Oberman's poem to simulate water in motion.

Oberman was followed by a reading of Creative Writing Teacher Darcie Dennigan's poem "Atoll." The poem was read by Krisela Karaja. Designers Celia Poirier and Nic Casey wonderfully simulated the feeling of Dennigan's prose poem with their

skillful erasures. The event ended with a reading of Jerome Daly's poem on mental illness, "Yield." The poster, designed by Devin Arch and Taurean Stovall, featured block lettering.

This year's Poetic Journeys series poems were selected from instructor nomination as well as open, unsolicited poems, and speaks to the talent that can be found here at UConn.

## UConn Radio Gets Handsome !!

This spring, Creative Writing Program intern Ryan King combined his interests in radio production and creative writing to write and produce a radio show called "Handsome, Well-Dressed Radio," about the literary arts on campus. His show aired every Thursday morning at 9 a.m. on WHUS, and brightened up many travelers morning commute.

King featured a graduate or undergraduate artist on his show each week. More than merely a reading series with interviews, King's show also highlighted specific aspects of writing craft. King often talked through sophisticated conceptual ideas on writing with his guests.

The radio show was part of King's efforts as the Creative Writing Program Intern to promote the arts on campus and develop the campus creative writing community.

King's editing skills were professional and polished. His show is told from a kind of real-time present tense in which King fades into recordings of his interviews. The effect is an intimacy created between King and his audience, who we are to assume, are the real focus of his conversations. He kept only the crisp, clear parts of his interviews.

Selected episodes include a segment on writing steam punk, a segment on surrealism and poetry, and a segment with the editors of the Long River Review on the editorial selection process.

King also maintained a blog of the same name in which he further explored craft topics that came up in the Long River Writers Group workshops and the radio show.

## Long River LIVE! Gets a Facelift, and the Long River Writer's Groups Gets Created

This year the Creative Writing Program shifted the focus from their performance series to writing workshops. Creative Writing Assistant Director Lori Carriere, assisted by interns Alex LeMire (Fall) and Ryan King (Spring), created a weekly writer's group to give students a chance to engage in multi-genre study of writing craft.

The LRWG engaged in a variety of activities to promote the arts on campus. Creative Writing staff members and special guests gave talks on craft, engaged students in discussions of literature, facilitated workshopping on student's writing, and created writing generation exercises and prompts to provoke inspiration.

Each intern designed a number of workshops under the guidance of Lori Carriere tailored to their individual interests and expertise. Alex LeMire developed workshops on character development, setting, and worldbuilding specific to his interests in science fiction.

Ryan King developed workshops on writing dialogue in fiction and the difference between writing dialogue for stage performance and radio dramas as per his interest in drama and radio.

During the fall semester, The Long River Writer's Group hosted special guest Steve Mollmann, a doctoral candidate in the English department who also happens to be a published science fiction writer, for a panel on science fiction as a genre. Other selected topics for discussion include point of view, flash fiction, persona poems, anti-cliches, and imagery in poetry writing.

A number of promising student works got generated in and workshopped by the Long River Writer's Group.

The Long River Writer's Group also continued to host four Long River LIVE! performance events this year. LRL! provides opportunities for students to hear the works of distinguished undergraduate and graduate writers as well as present their own work during the open mic portion. This year the Creative Writing team also introduced a question and answer segment to the event to generate dialogue between featured performers and attendees. Featured performers included Devin Samuels, Jorge Santos, Em Betts, Chantelle Messier, Alyssa Palazzo, Erick Piller, Jerome Daly, and Zara Rix.



# UConn Writer's Retreat

On March 12th, the Creative Writing Program co-hosted with Poetic Release, a student-run poetry group on campus, the first ever all-day writer's retreat at UConn.

The retreat was designed to help foster alliances between the various writing groups and individual writers on campus.

The retreat featured panels and workshops by outside guests. In the first workshop, storyteller Carolyn Stearns led a workshop on live storytelling and how to compete in story slams. At the end of her workshop, students were given a chance to compete in the CT Campus Slammer. Brendon Fields won first place in the campus slammer for his story with a moral, Fields insists, that he needs better friends. Devin Samuels came second place for a chilling story on domestic violence. Both Fields and Samuels will compete in the regional CT Storytelling Slam competition. As part of their prize, they also received free coaching from Stearns.

After lunch, Poetic Release founder Devin Samuels led a workshop on personification and poetry that was very well received.

Next, the writer's retreat welcomed special guest award-winning slam poet Franny Choi for a writer's workshop on poetry writing and diversity.

The event ended with a reading circle in which participants shared their writing output from the day as well as other works they had written.

## Congratulations to the English Departments 2013 Creative Writing Award Winners!!

### **The Edward R. and Frances Schreiber Collins Literary Prizes**

Poetry Winner/\$2,000: Danilo Machado for "Laundry"  
(Honorable Mentions, David Smith for "A Lone Tree" and  
Ariel Brand for "the classic(al) way of doing birth")  
Prose Winner/\$2,000: Alyssa Palazzo for "Athanasys"  
(Honorable Mention, Christopher De Marchis for "Florida")

### **The Jennie Hackman Memorial Prize for Fiction**

First place/\$1000: Kyle Piscioniere for "Life Breather"  
Second place/\$300: Christopher Viering for "Tally-Marks"  
Third Place/\$200: Samuel Johnston for "Towering"

### **Wallace Stevens Poetry Contest**

First place/\$1000: Nicole Rubin  
Second place/\$500: Ryan McLean  
Third place/\$250: Miller Oberman

### **The Aetna Works in Progress Grant**

Winner/\$250: Brenna Harvey for "Jelson"

### **The Aetna Children's Literature Award**

Winner/\$200: Grace Vasington for "A Cat Called Dorian Grey"

### **The Aetna Creative Nonfiction Awards**

Undergraduate First prize/\$125: Alyssa Palazzo for "End Time"  
Undergraduate Second prize/\$75: Christopher De Marchis for "If I Was Feeling Brave"  
Graduate First Prize/\$250: Lisa Judge for "Flames on the Page"

### **Long River Graduate Writing Award**

Winner/\$250: Miller Oberman for "Supernatural"

## 2013 Long River Review Issue Comes Out

On the evening of April 30th, students, faculty, staff, and interested members of the community joined the staff of the Long River Review to celebrate the release of its 2013 issue.

It was a greatly anticipated and well-attended event. Long River Review is put together by a class of advanced undergraduate English majors. This past spring semester it was taught by Darcie Dennigan. As part of their final project, students were expected to participate in a guerilla marketing project to drum up interest in the magazine. Students performed readings in the campus quad and one group even set up a laundry line to promote contributor Danilo Machado's poem, "Laundry." The efforts of the LRR staff paid off, as the Co-op was standing room only for the reception.

Audience members were treated to a discussion of the selection process by each focus editor. Foreign Literature Editor Krisela Karaja, for instance, discussed the maga-

zine's aesthetic decision to include only the poems in their original language without side-by-side translation. The magazine felt, in an increasingly global world, it was important to make a statement as a staff on the necessity of being able to read and translate other languages.

As part of the celebration, the Creative Writing Award Winners published in the magazine read from their works. Audience members were treated to the poetry of Wallace Stevens Award winners Miller Oberman and Nicki Rubin. Aetna Children's Literature Award Winner Grace Vasung-ton read from "A Cat Called Dorian Gray," a children's adaptation of the novel by Oscar Wilde. Aetna Creative Nonfiction Award winners, Alyssa Palazzo and Chris De Marchis read from their nonfiction.

Through the readings, the staff projected visual art and photography from the magazine as moving image on a slideshow screen. The celebration was a testament to how much work went into the magazine.

### LRR Letter From the Editor Alyssa Palazzo:

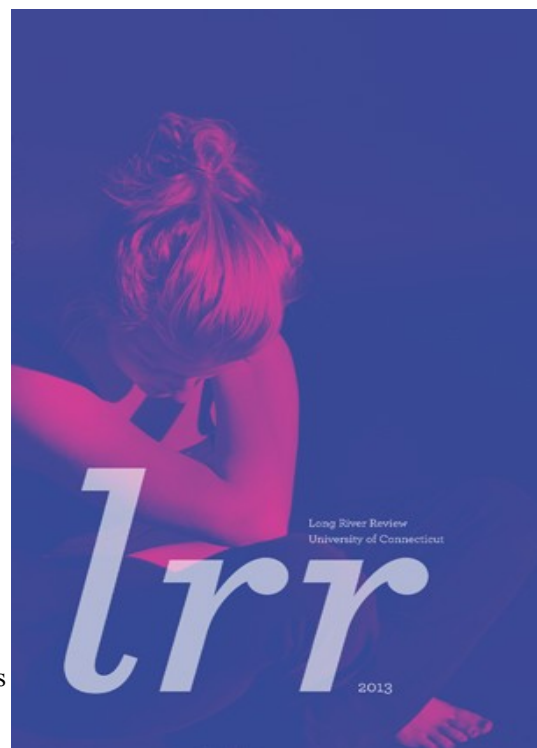
In many of the pieces you are about to read, there are things missing: a beloved wife, a place on a map, a cure for a disease, snowfall in Florida. As readers we will embark on a search for these items, hoping to find them buried between the lines or hidden on the next page. Sometimes we will find these things, but most often, we will not.

For the past three years I have had the privilege of searching for items lost while working on a magazine of which I am exceedingly proud. We at the Long River Review love breathing life into pieces once hidden at the bottom of desk drawers or scrawled on the edges of class notes. We represent a demographic that includes two AM journeys home from the bar, New England winters, stolen diaries, and dormitory living.

In such a niche group of peers, you would expect a certain level of camaraderie. Don't we all celebrate the same completed term papers, twenty-first birthdays, and second loves? Yet we are so quick to write each other off. Within five minutes of meeting another person we decide whether or not we like her. We decide if she will say something worthwhile. We lose so many stories that way. The Long River Review reclaims them, and in this tiny book we allow each story to speak for itself.

While in many of these stories there is something missing, there is also something to be found.

Start your search.



## Faculty & Staff Updates

**Lynn Z. Bloom's** book, *Hot Genres, Alluring Nonfiction*, is under contract with the University of Iowa Press. With compelling examples from contemporary creative nonfiction, this book demonstrates why people love to read and write creative nonfiction essays, memoirs, and works about travel, food, and medicine. She has been appointed as a Fulbright Specialist in creative writing from 2013-2018. Cengage has published the tenth edition of *The Essay Connection, Readings for Writers* in 2013. Her essay, "College English as Icon and Ideal" was published in *College English* in March 2013. Another essay of hers, "Bodies of Knowledge: Ethics and Engagement in an Undergraduate Disability Studies Course" will be published in *Pedagogy* in 2014. She has given two talks, "What Makes a Personal Essay Personal?" at the AWP conference, Boston, March 2013 and "Living to Tell the Tale: Why the Worst Trips are the Best," American Society for Travel Writing at the American Literature Conference, Boston, May 2013.

**Bruce Cohen** published a new book of poems this fall: *Placebo Junkies Conspiring with the Half-Asleep* and was lucky enough to have another manuscript accepted for publication: *No Soap, Radio*. In addition he has published poems this year, or has poems forthcoming in *Cimarron Review*, *Mount Hope Review*, *Witness*, *Alimentum*, *ABZ Poetry Journal*, *Zocalo Public Square*, and the *Academy of American Poets Poem of the Day* series. He has a creative nonfiction essay coming out this summer in *Upstreet* and was a guest blogger for *Superstition Review* and *LitBridge*.

**Darcie Dennigan** has had poems published in *Everyday Genius* and *Bat City Review*, an interview in *Ostrich Review*, and essay on a Brigit Pegeen Kelly poem in *At Length*, and a book review in the *Kenyon Review*. She represented the University of Connecticut on panels at AWP and MLA talking about personae in poetry and Oulipian poetry, respectively.

**Sean Frederick Forbes** will continue to serve as the Acting Director of Creative Writing for 2013-2014. Four of his poems are forthcoming in the October 2013 and July 2014 editions of *Midwest Quarterly*. His book of poetry, *Providencia*, will be published in late fall of 2013 by 2Leaf Press. *Providencia* was a semifinalist in the 2013 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Open Competition. He will also serve as the Assistant Director for Humanities House at UConn from 2013-2014.

**Ellen Litman's** novel *Mannequin Girl* is forthcoming by W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

**Penelope Pelizzon's** next book of poems, *Whose Flesh Is Flame, Whose Bone Is Time*, will be published in 2014. Her recent writing appears in the May 2013 issue of *Poetry*, and she contributed shorter prose pieces on poetry to *At Length* and *Voltage*. She'll be speaking in Krakow, Poland this summer as part of the Poetry Foundation's International Poetry Symposium, and has been recently commissioned to write an essay, "An Elephant for Marianne Moore," about reading Moore's poetry while elephant tracking in Kaokoland, Namibia.

**Sydney Landon Plum** has an essay in the forthcoming *Facing the Change: Personal Encounters with Global Warming*, edited by Steven Pavlos Holmes, published by Torrey House Press (Salt Lake City). Her essay is "Glooscap Makes America Known to the Europeans." Also, along with her friend, Professor Susan Tomlinson (Texas Tech), she gave a workshop at the upcoming conference of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (US) in Lawrence, Kansas in May. The workshop was called "Teaching a Tree." This workshop was the first "flowering" of she and Tomlinson's collaboration on a proposed workbook for nature writers: *Teaching a Tree: A Workbook for Understanding Nature*.



# Events to come in 2013-2014

At present we have plans to have the following authors give readings: novelist Andre Dubus III; poet Eduardo Corral; nonfiction writer Sy Montgomery; the 2014 Wallace Stevens Poetry Program Poet, Paul Muldoon, and others.

Creative Writing plans to host a panel on MFA programs, a one day writing retreat, and a presentation on Writers Who Edit, Editors Who Write.

Please continue to check our website for the 2013-2014 schedule (available later this summer): <http://creativewriting.uconn.edu/events.html>.

## **\* Special Thanks \***      **The Creative Writing Program is grateful to these friends:**

Fall interns Lily Rhodes & Alex LeMire \* Spring interns Christopher De Marchis & Ryan C. King  
\* Our administrative expert Lori Corsini-Nelson \* Assistant Director of Creative Writing Lori Carriere \* English Department staff Doreen Bell, Melanie Hepburn, Claire Reynolds & Inda Watrous \* Suzy Staubach & all the staff of the UConn Co-op \* Aetna Chair of Writing Lynn Bloom \* Steve Mollmann, Laura Wright & the staff of Freshman English \* English Interim Department Head Margaret Breen \* English Department Head Wayne Franklin \* Regina Barreca, Julie Choffel, Bruce Cohen, Susanne Davis, Darcie Dennigan, Ellen Litman, Penelope Pelizzon, & Sydney Landon Plum \* The Hartford Financial Services Group, Inc. \* The UConn Foundation \* The family of David & Emily Collins \* The Hackman family \* Ardian Gill & the family of Gloriana Gill \*

**\* And our heartfelt thanks to Dean Jeremy Teitelbaum for his years of support \***