

VOL. 10
WINTER 2021

WINTERTIDE

MFA in Writing Newsletter



UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

WINTERTIDE



VOL. 10
WINTER 2021

MFA in Writing Program Newsletter
University of Saskatchewan

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

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WEATHERING A PANDEMIC AND HAPPY TENTH BIRTHDAY MFA IN WRITING: DIRECTOR'S REPORT

DR. JEANETTE LYNES

This annual newsletter comes to you, out of deepest respect, from Treaty 6 Territory.

What a Year! Spoiler alert – gratitude figures heavily and rightly so, in what follows. This year, 2021, the MFA in Writing at University of Saskatchewan turns ten. The largest graduating class to date – ten students in total – completed their studies under an adverse set of circumstances: a sudden shift to an on-line environment, cyber-thesis defenses, and virtual convocation. Deepest congratulations to Doreen Stumborg, Susie Hammond, Tonia Laird, Sarah Ens, Kathryn Shalley, Zach Keeseey, Jameson Lawson, Kate O’Gorman, Hope Houston, and Cameron Muir! These graduates didn’t just ‘make it through’; they prevailed with fortitude and grace. Our current graduating cohort undertook their mentorships during the COVID 19 pandemic – well done, Amanda Dawson, Erin Hiebert, Tea Gerbeza, and Jon Aylward! Courageous, too, are the nine MFA students who began the program in fall, 2020, a time of uncertainty and stress in the latter months of a terrible year and again, on-line classes; but huge welcome to Kristine Scarrow, Karen Wood, Özten Shebahkeget, Aliza Prodaniuk, Callum Wilson, Gunnar Ohberg, Ian Cooney, Brandon Fick, and Delane Just!



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

Special thanks to our latest mentors: Sylvia Legris, Jennifer Still, Elizabeth Philips, Jaqueline Baker, and Nicholas Eames. These mentor-authors inspired our students through the difficult summer of 2020. Huge gratitude to my colleague Sheri Benning, whose brilliant concept, ‘The MFA in Writing Variety Show’ cheered us through the dark pandemic months with poetry, music, stories, and more. Thanks to all who contributed!

In other activities, The River Volta Reading Series and *The River Volta Review of Books* both thrive; kudos again to Sheri Benning for overseeing the RVRB. Thanks to the MFA students who organized and ran the reading series: in 2020, Tea Gerbeza, Erin Hiebert, Ian Canon, and Amanda Dawson, and in 2021, Delane Just, Aliza Prodaniuk, Callum Wilson, and Ian Canon. The River Volta Podcasts were brought into being by Ian Canon, Aliza Prodaniuk, Callum Wilson, and Delane Just – deep gratitude to them for initiating this project, another wonderful example of community engagement.

During this year of pandemic, our MFA students didn't just keep 'doing what they were doing'; they innovatively created exciting new projects: virtual writing retreats, virtual writing groups, and, as mentioned, The River Volta Podcasts. I'm in awe of the energy and spirit that characterizes our students, and their endless creativity.

About the MFA in Writing's Decade Birthday – I remember, like it was yesterday, unpacking my boxes in Saskatoon in summer, 2011, when hired to direct the new MFA in Writing at University of Saskatchewan. I hoped I could do a good job. I was nervous. I wondered how it would go. I hoped writers would apply. Now, ten years later, the MFA in Writing has 53 graduates, and they have gone forth bravely into the world with their talent and words.

They are publishing and working in the literary arts, editing literary magazines, serving as writers in residence and comic artists in residence, living creative lives and doing way too many cool things to enumerate – though a snapshot of these activities appears in these pages. I have been so blessed to have the opportunity to work with these writers, and I'm grateful to have received the 2021 Outstanding Graduate Mentor Award from the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. The recognition means a lot to me, but none of it could have happened without my amazing students who inspired me at every turn as well as my supportive colleagues in the Department of English and the brilliant administrative support staff with whom I'm so lucky to work.

It was a tearful – in a happy way – hour when I attended, virtually, the 2021 Writing North Festival, hosted by the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild in partnership with the MFA in Writing, an all-star panel of MFA in Writing graduates who've recently published books: Nicole Haldoupis, Meaghan Hackinen, Sarah Ens, Allison McFarland, and Shannon McConnell. These are only recent publications; our students have been publishing up a blizzard in the past decade. The first MFA thesis to be published was by Mika Lafond – poetry in English and Cree – by Thistledown Press, a significant landmark in the program's history.

And more. This year's newsletter happened thanks to Chelsea Hill, our English Student Intern, Ian Canon, MFA in Writing student and cyber-wizard, and MFA in Writing student Tea Gerbeza whose cover art for this year's newsletter depicts her magnificent paper-quilling work. Thanks, too, to MFA in Writing graduate Tonia Laird who designed a lovely logo for the MFA that features antlers and prairie lilies; Tonia also helped with layout again this year.

It is typical to advise writers, in workshops, to avoid clichés. 'These unprecedented times', describing the COVID 19 pandemic, has entered cliché-land. 'Resilience' hovers not far behind. But these *have* been unprecedented times, filled with stress, uncertainty, isolation, and grief. And we *have* been resilient. To be sure, we miss each other. But we've applied our creative minds. We've put our pens on paper, or our fingers on keyboards. We've been through a lot. But we're still here. And the fall 2021 entry cohort is shaping up nicely; the MFA received the highest number of applications thus far. I'm honoured to have the USask MFA in Writing community in my life. I hope you enjoy the 2021 newsletter!

I hope you enjoy the 2021 newsletter! Some things we've been up to:

- [MFA in Writing Variety Show](#)
- [River Volta Review of Books](#)
- [River Volta Reading Series](#)
- [River Volta Podcasts](#)
- [What Else Is New?](#)



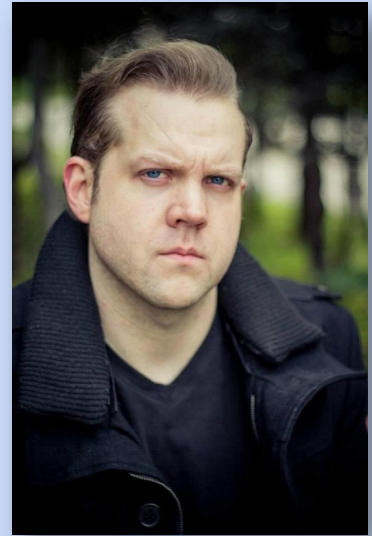
Happy WinterTide!



WHO'S WHO IN THE MFA IN WRITING

JON AYLWARD

Jon Aylward is fast approaching completion of his thesis (and second written novel) for the MFA program. Most recently, he has written a review for Susan Alexander's poetry collection *Nothing You Can Carry* which appeared in *The River Volta Review of Books*. A former actor and playwright, he has also written six plays, four of which were produced in his hometown, St. John's Newfoundland. A lover of all things dark and macabre, he is eager to crack the spine on the new mystery horror *Angel's Inferno*, the long-awaited follow-up to William Hjortsberg's *Falling Angel*.



IAN CANON



Ian Canon is the author of *It's A Long Way Down* (2018) and the poetry collection *Before Oblivion* (2017). His second novel *What We Do On Weekends* is forthcoming. His stories have been featured in *The Creative Cafe*, *Montreal Writes*, *The Junction*, *Public Salon*, *The Sunlight Press*, *The Spadina Literary Review*, and *Found Polaroids*. He's currently working on his thesis, *The Inevitable Act Of Becoming*, which will be a collection of twelve to sixteen absurd short stories. He hosts *The River Volta Podcast*, and helps run the River Volta reading series.

WHO'S WHO IN THE MFA IN WRITING

AMANDA DAWSON

Amanda Dawson is a writer from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, though she grew up in rural Alberta. She's had her fiction published in *The Molotov Cocktail*, *Drunk Monkeys*, and *Reflex Fiction*, among others. She has work forthcoming in two publications from the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild. She is currently working on her MFA thesis, an as-of-yet untitled science fantasy novel. When she isn't writing or tackling her endless to-be-read pile of books, she enjoys gardening, camping, and hiking with her partner.



BRANDON FICK



Brandon Fick was born and raised in Lanigan, Saskatchewan. He writes realistic fiction (along with some poetry), has a particular interest in horror, war, and western novels, and has been published in *Polar Expressions*, *in medias res*, and *The Society*. Brandon received a B.A. Honours in English from the University of Saskatchewan and a Writing Diploma from St. Peter's College. He is grateful to be in the MFA program at the U of S, where he hopes to write a short story collection examining shades of masculinity in contemporary society. Brandon is one of the current editors of *The River Volta Review of Books*, and when he isn't reading or honing his short fiction, he enjoys watching Netflix, the Edmonton Oilers, and various political documentaries.

WHO'S WHO IN THE MFA IN WRITING

TEA GERBEZA

Tea Gerbeza is a second year MFA in Writing student working on her thesis, a book-length long poem about her life with scoliosis-related disabilities entitled *How I Bend Into More*. Tea is a paper quilling artist and her visual work can be found @teaandpaperdesigns. Tea is on the board of directors at JackPine Press, managing editor at *The River Volta Review of Books*, and has hosted a variety of writing workshops with the Saskatoon Public Library, Regina Public Library, and for the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild.

The most recent was a craft and craft-ing workshop for Talking Fresh where participants learn how to make a paper rose from drafts of poems-in-progress and create a new poem from the petals. Tea's poetry has most recently appeared in *Spring, antilang*, and *We Are One: Poems From the Pandemic*.



ERIN HIEBERT



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



WHO'S WHO IN THE MFA IN WRITING

DELANE JUST

Delane Just (she/her) is a first-year graduate student in the MFA in Writing program at the University of Saskatchewan. She has been awarded an SSHRC grant for her thesis project, a collection of short stories relating to the Canadian women and LGBTQ+ millennial experience. She has had work appear in *in medias res* and the *University of Saskatchewan Undergraduate Research Journal (USURJ)*.



She is also the coordinator for The River Volta Reading Series and the current Graduate Editor-in-Chief of *USURJ*. The River Volta Reading Series has also started a podcast in which Delane co-hosts as well as read her own work in Episode 2. Recently, Delane has been especially interested in writing poetry and blurring the lines between poetry and prose and has been reading a lot of post-apocalyptic/dystopian fiction such as *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel, *The Tiger Flu* by Larrisa Lai, and *Brown Girl in The Ring* by Nalo Hopkinson.

GUNNAR OHBERG



Gunnar Ohberg has published poems in *Old Red Kimono* and *Southwest Georgia Living* and has poems forthcoming in other publications. In addition to the occasional short story or poem, Gunnar is currently working on a post-apocalyptic dystopian novel set in the American Southeast. His awards include an Earth Day Award in Fiction from the University of Mississippi and the Warren Akin IV Award for Excellence in English. He is a graduate of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College in Oxford, Mississippi, where he currently resides. Gunnar can still play the bass guitar but not like he used to.

WHO'S WHO IN THE MFA IN WRITING

ALIZA PRODANIUK



Aliza Prodaniuk is a fiction writer in her first year of the MFA in Writing program. Her work dabbles in murder mystery, eco-fiction, and realistic fiction. You can read her most recent work, *Not Alright and Getting Better*, in the *East by Northeast Literary Magazine*. She also has work forthcoming in the SWG pandemic anthology and the *Good Life Literary Review*. When she isn't reading or writing, Aliza can be found volunteering for the Dundas Conservation Authority, horseback riding, playing clarinet, hiking, smooching her cat, drinking coffee (personality trait), and collecting rejection letters. She is also involved with *The River Volta Review of Books* and helps create social media magic for the River Volta Reading Series/Podcast.

KRISTINE SCARROW

Kristine Scarrow is a first-year student in the MFA in Writing program. She is working on a short story collection that examines ethical boundaries and the effects of trauma. She is the author of four young adult novels, all published by Dundurn Press. Kristine is the writer-in-residence at St. Paul's Hospital. She also works as an editor and teaches writing as a healing art with individuals, groups, and community-based organizations in Saskatoon.



WHO'S WHO IN THE MFA IN WRITING

ÖZTEN SHEBAHKEGET

Özten Shebahkeget is a member of Northwest Angle 33 First Nation. She graduated from the University of Winnipeg last spring, where she was awarded the Writers' Circle Prize and Mr. and Mrs. Ong Hoo Hong Emerging Writers Prize. She has made a slow migration to poetry, publishing pieces in *Prairie Fire* and *CV2* during her MFA. She recently attended the Banff Centre's Winter Writers online session and joined *The River Volta Review of Books* as interviews editor. She will be constructing a poetry thesis under the guidance of Katherena Vermette.



CALLUM WILSON



Callum Wilson is a co-host of the River Volta Reading Series and Podcast and is on the editorial board of *Wheat & Laurel Magazine*, found on Instagram @wheatandlaurel and Facebook "Wheat & Laurel", which is a literary magazine for writers in rural Canada ages 11-19. His work has been published in Kiri Xin's *The Zine Who Rejected Me!* and *Augustana Medium*, both can be found on issuu.com. He is currently working on a collection of short works from various points of view, genre and form including fiction, poetry and transcript/screenplay to create a coherent if eclectic picture of place and person.

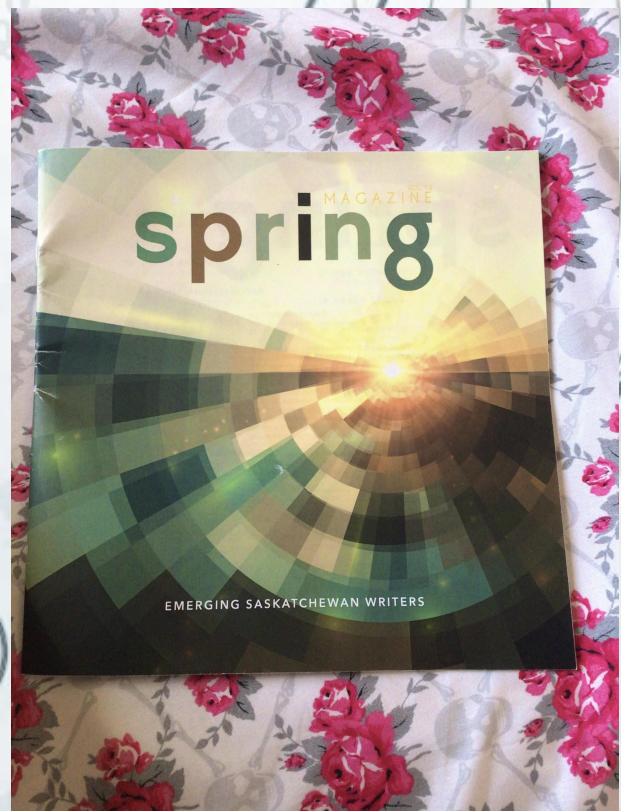
WHO'S WHO IN THE MFA IN WRITING

KAREN WOOD

As she transitions to the intoxicating world of creative writing, Karen Wood is working on her third short story and reading anything she can get her hands on that might help her in this new adventure, including linked-story collections. These days Karen is enjoying George Saunders' book on the craft of short story writing, *A Swim In A Pond In The Rain*.



CONGRATULATIONS TO MFA
IN WRITING GRADUATE
TAIDGH LYNCH AND CURRENT
MFA STUDENTS AMANDA
DAWSON AND TEA GERBEZA
FOR PUBLICATIONS IN *SPRING
MAGAZINE!*



WRITING DURING A PANDEMIC



IAN CANON

I was in the middle of finishing my last draft of my second novel when the pandemic hit, side-tracking my writing and setting off a health scare that was in conjunction with the entire globe. Since my early twenties, after an unfortunate incident while backpacking in Europe, I've dealt with some form of health anxiety, but the pandemic was different. It forced me to take a pause and confront my fears. To do that, I started Cognitive Behavior Therapy, which basically taught me that anxiety is a normal state in life, and it shouldn't be feared or avoided. Since I was moving to Saskatoon for the MFA program in September, confronting my own health anxiety was an important step to take before I left the safety of my hometown—Edmonton. Now my health anxiety is much less relevant to my life, and there are no longer periods where it dominates my thoughts. After a few months of dealing with my own mortality, I was able to return to writing with a clear mind, and I think I'm stronger for it.

AMANDA DAWSON

In the year since the Covid-19 pandemic hit Canada, I have written more consistently than I have thus far in my entire life.

In the beginning, it was probably because my workplace shutdown from mid-March to July coincided with the start of my MFA mentorship. I suddenly had three months to devote entirely to my writing, and I had a (thoroughly awesome) mentor to help me develop my novel-length thesis. Things were not going well outside of my house. It was difficult not to constantly think about that. But I was a spec fic writer, and I had some experience with world building. For those first three months, I constructed the world of my story in my head and stayed there, like Bilbo in his hobbit hole.

Later, when I returned to work, I continued to write as much as humanly possible within my schedule of work and school. It was compulsive. Any time I happened upon news about the pandemic, I wrote. Now, this was probably some kind of deep-seated coping mechanism that had its own problems. But my worlds had magic and aliens and brave heroines, and I much preferred their company to that of a virus.

I think I'll stay there a bit longer.

BRANDON FICK

For writers, a pandemic may be an opportunity to be more productive than ever before. On the other hand, the deluge of dire news, the isolation and anxiety, might be soul-crushing and lead a writer to question the value of their work and themselves to society. Then again, doesn't this happen daily in the best of times? Fortunately, because of the stage I'm at as a writer, the pandemic has had a relatively minimal impact on me.

The biggest change is that instead of living in Saskatoon (in an apartment-style University residence) and attending workshops in a poorly ventilated room in the Arts Tower, I was forced to stay in my hometown of Lanigan and workshop from my parents' basement (I swear, I live upstairs). This is not the ideal way to experience an MFA in Writing (nor is wood panelling a sexy background), but I also feel lucky to have weathered this plague year in the safety of a small town, with the support of my family.

As for my writing, I have been able to write more consistently than before, though this is still a work-in-progress, and I may never be a "morning person." If I sometimes struggle to fire up the laptop, plunk down in my sagging, flower-covered chair, I blame it on Lisa LaFlamme, the Edmonton Oilers, and Netflix.

In all seriousness, the way everyone in the MFA in Writing has adapted is remarkable, and for an introvert from a town best known for its potash mine ten kilometres away, having this program as an outlet for feedback and interaction is a blessing.

DELANE JUST

I wrote in an author feature for the *University of Saskatchewan Undergraduate Research Journal* that "the world still exists beyond our isolation." But that feels like a lie. When you only see four walls, one person, life beyond feels unreal. I've become used to pixelated expressions in Zoom windows and disembodied airwave voices.

It's been a year of compounded trauma, like February snow crushed under boots over and over and over. I wonder sometimes if I can remember the fresh chlorophyll of grass, blades collected between fingers, the smell of the earth. Happiness comes in moments, like seeing a cohort member for the first time, hood up and shielding her face against the assault of snow, noticing that she is shorter than I pictured, and realizing in that moment that yes, these pixel faces are real faces and their hearts beat through the screens.

TEA GERBEZA

Post It after Post It, I've been telling my future self: *You Are Doing A Freaking GREAT Job* or, on another Post It note, *You Don't Need It All Figured Out Right Now! Do What You Can! The Rest Will Come!* If there's ever a gallery exhibit of Tea's Time During a Pandemic, it would be a room filled floor to ceiling of Post It notes or cute corgi stickers. Maybe a soundtrack with my dogs barking playfully in the background. This pandemic has made these little reminders a life-line for me as I went through the process of writing and revising my thesis, a book-length long poem entitled *How I Bend Into More*. Usually I would have done majority of the editing at a coffee shop, but since the pandemic, I've had to do all of my thinking, writing and editing in my small office bedroom. There was a lot of standing and staring at my bookshelves plotting (yes, with Post It notes) or sitting on the floor with papers spread out in a circle around me—with both dogs laying on papers they deemed good pillows—writing ideas down on a white board or large piece of paper. However, when the pandemic first started, it took a while to get into any kind of writing groove.

A year ago, I felt so overwhelmed by the news that I couldn't write for much of March. My attention was directed to not feeling like I was going to throw up at any minute from the dread. Then my mentorship with Jennifer Still began and things started to move along. Jennifer was encouraging, engaged, and as playful with poetry as I am, so our conversations sustained me and fueled my creativity. To my surprise, I was producing work and was excited to share it with her. I looked forward to our bi-weekly—sometimes three hour long—conversations, which made me excited to write to have material to show her. In short, my mentorship saved me during that extremely difficult time. I came out of the summer with a draft of a manuscript I was proud of and (probably) thousands of Post It notes, pandemic be damned.



CHELSEA HILL (EDITOR)

Although 2020 and early 2021 have been writing-intensive years for me, it isn't creative writing that has occupied my time. The final semesters of my English Honours degree require not only a lot of academic writing, but also a lot of reading, researching, and analysis. Throughout my degree, but especially now, I find it almost impossible to dedicate time to creative writing (or any form of self-care).

In mid-March 2021 I was diagnosed with inattentive ADHD. Looking back, I can see that my struggles with organization, attention, and forgetfulness in elementary and high school affected me beyond what was normal. Yet, the ADHD symptoms I was most familiar with were primarily hyperactive, which didn't represent my struggles.

In my first few years of university, I recognized that I had to spend a lot more time on assignments than my peers seemed to, but I thought that this was the result of a personal flaw, that it was somehow my fault that I couldn't focus or stay motivated. As the pandemic forced learning to take place online and at a distance, my inability to focus became increasingly obvious and problematic. I found myself writing numerous substantial assignments in the days or hours before they were due.

Because my diagnosis is so recent, I haven't experienced any changes in my writing or in the way I study. I likely won't for the remainder of this semester. But the knowledge that I am not just lazy is such a comfort. Although I still have a lot of anxiety about what this diagnosis means for me and my future learning, at the end of the day, it has validated my experiences and forced me to recognize that my struggles are not the result of a character flaw.

KRISTINE SCARROW

Writing during the pandemic, for me, has been about riding a wave of uncertainty. There are days where I can't write fast enough and then there are weeks where it's hard to write a word. I'm stretching myself by writing in new genres, exploring new methods of writing, carving out set times that I didn't hold myself to beforehand – all in the name of finding the sweet spot that will allow my mind to spill out onto the page. I had to give up my writing space for months; my husband is a paramedic and his periodic exposure to the virus coupled with my chronic health conditions meant that he needed a separate living space within our home. It felt odd and unnatural to write elsewhere, sure, but it felt excruciating to sleep and “live” apart from my husband even more so. There's been an underlying grief that sometimes rears its head, no matter how positive and upbeat I try to be. I think that feeling of loss and helplessness hampers my ability to be creative and productive. I'm trying to give myself permission to exist in that space without pressure – with the knowledge that the writing will come. It always does.

CALLUM WILSON

While “The Masque of the Red Death” was being invoked, the pandemic found me in a different spooky story, more like “Time Enough at Last.” I had time to write, but after attempting one pandemic themed horror story I thought: “The world is scary enough. Why bother?”

To write during the pandemic is to write in an atmosphere of near constant heartbreak. So as it is with heartbreak I sought not to add to it, but put my focus elsewhere. I watched magpies making war with owls, I looked for stickleback in the local creek, sought all that is creepy and crawly. During the watching and seeking I wrote of them and how they know the world not as we know it. The world was ending, but not for them. To write against heartbreak, write of the heart's mending. I found the same old monsters lurking in the reeds and darkness, waiting for when I'd be ready, and I brought for them a flask of potent anti-despair. I thought of graveyards ringing with the sexton's polka tuba practice, I wrote odes to plastic bird skeletons. During lockdown, the Unknown is as good an escape hatch as any.

KAREN WOOD

The final touches to my home office were completed the day I was to start working from home. Spectacular timing. Writing during a pandemic became for me, a desperately needed deliverance from unwelcome changes. Sitting in my freshly renovated blue – or is it green? – office, I spend an extraordinary amount of time gazing. Mostly at the branches of the green ash outside my window, often well into an evening after having watched a red-orange-purple sunset transform to darkness. As I work at my desk in the morning, I watch out the window for my new friends Bluejay and White-Breasted Nuthatch who frequently stop by for coffee. Frank, my aging border-collie, snuffles at the office door. I suspect he's checking to see if I'm okay. I am. Even on those days when I can do nothing more than curl up in the cozy recliner in a corner of my office and read. I remind myself on those days that reading is an important part of writing. Writing or reading, today as I glance out of the office window, I realize that it is time to give my new feathered friends a name.

'SHELTERING IN PLACE, DWELLING IN WORDS':

Highlights from Writing North 2021 by Chelsea Hill and Jeanette Lynes

Writing North 2021 took place online and was attended by many people from across Canada. We present highlights in what follows.



GRADUATE PANEL!



'WHERE LOVE FINDS US': ANNE MICHAELS'

MEDITATION BY JEANETTE LYNES

January 20, 2021 was a day to remember: the Presidential inauguration took place in the United States and here in Canada, Writing North 11 began on-line, with acclaimed author Anne Michaels' marvellous keynote address, "Mortal Soul, Moral Soul: A Meditation on the Moral Tenacity of Art, what Art makes of Death, and the hope Inherent in Language."

Ms. Michaels is well-known as a novelist, poet, prose writer, and recipient of numerous honours and awards both nationally and internationally. If ever we needed to hear about hope, and the power of words, it is now, in the throes of a global pandemic. We've been isolated, in lockdown, socially distanced for months, and her keynote address inspired us, and connected us, virtually. 141 people attended the virtual keynote, reinforcing our need as writers, readers and, simply, humans, to hang out together.

Michaels' poignant words reminded us why writing matters, why stories matter, why poems matter. Why reading matters. "We write and we read," Michaels said, "in order to hold another human being close." Her readings from her own work, during the keynote, were spellbinding. Trains, moonlight, flowers, loss, art, and much more. Michaels spoke, too, of the forms love takes, asking, what forms might help mend a devastated world? "What places can we find for one's grief?"

Befitting the theme of this year's Writing North – "Sheltering in Place, Dwelling in Words," Michaels spoke of the shelter we can find in language, and the way fiction "sets a broken bone in the hope that it will mend straight." If we distort language, Michaels asserted, or use it as propaganda, or to distort morality, we should be held accountable."

Such a beautiful, poetic keynote: "words are the mirrors that set fire to paper."

"Grief, loss, regret, are not the end of the story," Michaels asserted. "They are the middle of the story." And: "Even the hardest times have led to the right things." Art is where love finds us.

These words, and feeling the virtual presence of writers and readers from across the country, remind us, too, that the days grow longer. The light is returning. Words matter more than ever. "These past months have been a reckoning," Michaels remarked. They've forced us to confront our mortality. Her address inspires us to use our gift of words – really, a form of grace, to face the future. "What does this moment ask of us?" Anne Michaels posed this question. We couldn't have found a better platform on which to bond together, and pay homage to the shelter that words give us.

We're most grateful to Anne Michaels for her beautiful keynote address that launched Writing North 11, a joint project of the USask Department of English, the USask MFA in Writing, and the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild

"Now is the time to make every word matter."

– Anne Michaels, Writing North 11 Keynote Address



SLY AS A HERMIT CRAB: A PRESENTATION BY BARBARA LANGHORST

Day two of Writing North 11 saw acclaimed fiction author and poet, Barbara Langhorst, explore the appeal of nonlinear narrative structures in both short and long fiction in an energetic discussion. Langhorst opened her session by introducing a popular lecture by Kurt Vonnegut on the shapes of stories, referencing three key narrative structures in Western culture. These popular structures include "Man in Hole," "Boy Meets Girl," and "Cinderella," each beginning and continuing with varying forms of happiness and misfortune.

Throughout the session, Langhorst discussed the narrative structures of fictional works by authors such as Barbara Gowdy, Timothy Findley, Hiromi Goto, Thomas King, and Gabriel García Márquez, among others. Above all else, what unites these authors is their willingness to explore nonlinear narrative structures, and therefore each resists categorization into one of Vonnegut's three common narrative structures. Instead, these texts demonstrate the incredible results of a well-developed narrative combining elements of the "Man in Hole," "Boy Meets Girl," and "Cinderella" story types along with modern additions and adaptations.

Langhorst concluded her presentation by offering unique and compelling exercises to explore more ambitious narratives within our own writing. Such exercises included writing a story from one point of view, cutting up the plot, and reconstructing it; writing a story from one character's point of view and then rewriting it from another's; and rewriting an old myth from a modern perspective. With many readers and writers in attendance, these exercises are sure to inspire our writing!

Sheltering
in place

Dwelling
in words

Session Presenter
Barbara Langhorst

Jan. 21, 2021
7:00 p.m.

Writing North 11

SWG
Saskatchewan
Writers Guild

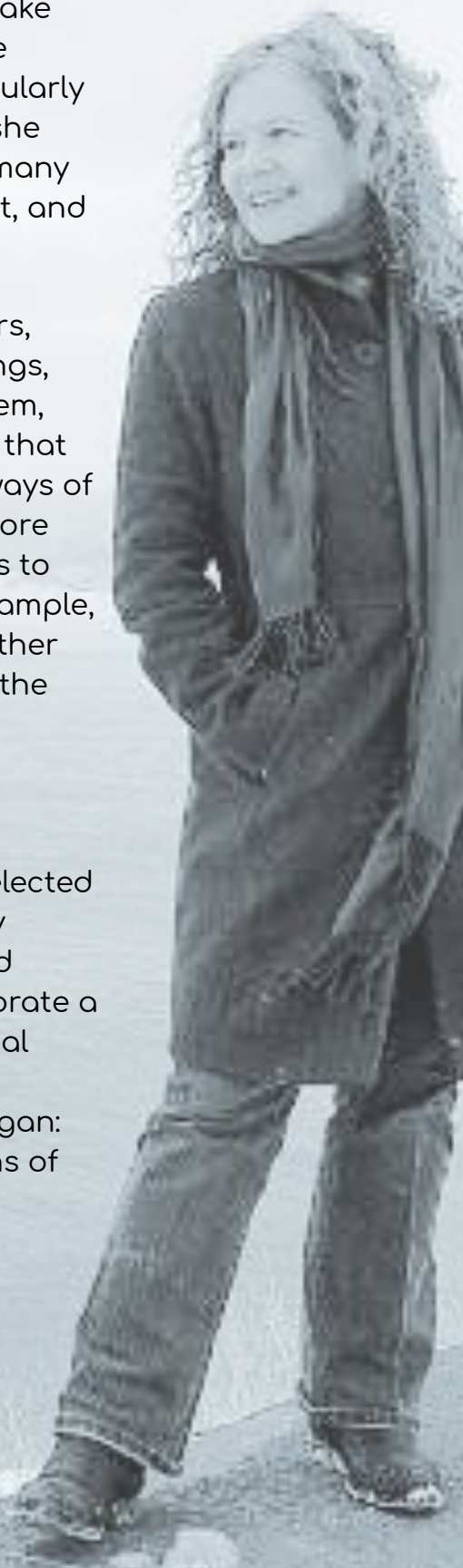
UNIVERSITY OF
SASKATCHEWAN

LISA MOORE ON WRITING STRONG CHARACTERS IN FICTION

On the final day of Writing North 11, a surprisingly warm January day in Saskatchewan, Lisa Moore discussed strategies that make characters three-dimensional and believable. To begin, Moore asserted that interesting narratives must have conflict, particularly conflict between characters and society. It is these conflicts, she explained, that support full characterization. Ultimately, it is many small yet intricate factors, such as characters, society, conflict, and emotions, that weave together a complex narrative.

Moore outlined numerous ways of building complex characters, including physical appearances, environment and surroundings, internal thoughts, physical actions, what others say about them, what the character says about themselves, and the language that the narrator uses to describe the character. Although these ways of establishing a character may seem simple on the surface, Moore elaborated on the ways that we can use the smallest of details to situate a character within their world and experiences. For example, beyond simply describing a character's environment, the weather can become a metaphor that informs the reader's opinion of the character. This leaves the reader deliberating whether the environment is in conflict or in harmony with the character's internal and external realities.

Towards the end of the session, Moore read passages from selected texts to demonstrate how these small and seemingly arbitrary details can come together to form a larger, more complex, and intriguing plot and set of characters. Moore was able to elaborate a little more deeply on the practice of creating three-dimensional characters as well as her writing process when responding to audience questions. Thus, Writing North 11 ended just as it began: with a dynamic and revered author engaging the imaginations of her audience.



COOL THINGS OUR GRADUATES ARE DOING

This is a partial list, a snapshot. The USask MFA has 53 graduates now, and they're doing all kinds of diverse and wonderful literary things.

TAIDGH LYNCH

Taidgh Lynch is an editor for *Windscrip* Vol. 37, the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild magazine for high-school writing. His writing appeared in *Spring Magazine*, Vol. 12, 2021.

GAYLE MARIE SMITH

Gayle Marie Smith is busy writing her second historical novel set in Saskatchewan. She recently worked with the Saskatoon Public Library Writer-in-Residence Edward Willett to polish her first novel. Gayle's new Instagram handle is @gallopayle; it's a poetry project called #LovePoemstoEquus where she explores short-form poetry and uses photography of her horses.

JACLYN MORKEN

Jaclyn Morken's non-fiction writing recently appeared in *f(r)iction* and *Blackflash Magazine*.



COOL THINGS OUR GRADUATES ARE DOING

ZACH KEESEY

Zach Keeseey had a short story published in *The Selkie's Resiliency Anthology*. His poetry is forthcoming in *The Anti-Languorous Project's* upcoming issue on labour.

LEAH MACLEAN-EVANS

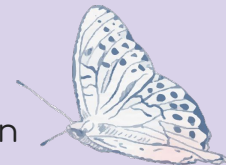
Leah MacLean-Evans is Co-Director of the journal *Canthius: Feminism & Literary Arts*. Her poem, "Change is a Slow Erosion" won *Arc Magazine's* 2020 Poem of the Year Contest.

GEOFF PEVLIN

Geoff Pevlin received a Canada Council for the Arts Grant. His work appeared in *Best Canadian Poetry 2020*.

KATHERINE LAWRENCE

Katherine Lawrence served as a Virtual Writer in Residence at *Writing North 2021*. Her writing appeared in the latest issue of *Grain Magazine*.



COOL THINGS OUR GRADUATES ARE DOING

SARAH ENS

Sarah Ens' second book of poetry, *Flyway* (her MFA in Writing thesis), will be published by Turnstone Press in 2022. Sarah's work was also featured in *The River Volta Review of Books*, 2021. Sarah was a Virtual Writer-in-Residence at *Writing North* 2021.

TONIA LAIRD

Tonia Laird received a Saskatchewan Arts Board grant. Her work is forthcoming, in fall, 2021, in the Indigenous comic book anthology *A Howl: Of Wolves, Werewolves, and Rugarou*. This June, Tonia will facilitate a workshop on writing comic books and collaborating with artists; this is offered through the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild.

MEAGHAN HACKINEN

Meaghan Hackinen's debut memoir, *South Away: The Pacific Coast on Two Wheels* (her MFA thesis), published by NeWest Press in 2019, was a finalist for the 2020 Kobo Emerging Writer Prize (non-fiction), and a 2020 Alberta Book Publishing Award (trade non-fiction). Meaghan was awarded a 2021 Project Assistance for Creative Writers grant from the BC Arts Council; she is currently recording the audiobook version of *South Away*.



COOL THINGS OUR GRADUATES ARE DOING

SARAH TAGGART

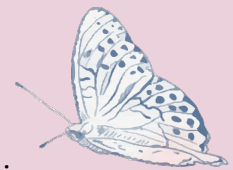
Sarah Taggart is working on her Ph.D. at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

NICOLE HALDOUPIS

Nicole Haldoupis' MFA thesis, *Tiny Ruins*, was published by Radiant Press. Nicole has been busy giving (mostly) virtual readings from her book. Qu'art Ottawa and Sur Place in Montreal hosted a reading, "Naughty Bits: A Valentines' Reading of Queer Sex Scenes" on February 14, 2021 in which Nicole presented her work. Among other activities, her work was featured in *Australia's Curve Magazine* and the *Toronto Guardian*. Jeanette Lynes had the pleasure of interviewing Nicole at the launch of *Tiny Ruins* in 2020.

SHANNON MCCONNELL

Shannon McConnell is working on her Ph.D. at Queen's University, Kingston. She was recently interviewed about her poetry book, *The Burden of Gravity* (her MFA in Writing thesis) in *BC History*.



MIKA LAFOND

Mika Lafond won a USSU Teaching Excellence Award at University of Saskatchewan.

COOL THINGS OUR GRADUATES ARE DOING

DEE HOBSBAWN-SMITH

dee Hobsbawn-Smith's book of essays, *Bread & Water*, is forthcoming from University of Regina Press in fall, 2021. Her poetry is forthcoming in *Grain Magazine*.

C. ISA LAUSAS

C. Isa Lausas' poetry appeared in *Untethered* issue 3.2.

JAMESON LAWSON

Jameson Lawson will begin Ph.D. studies in Creative Writing at the University of Aberdeen in fall, 2021.

ELISE MARCELLA GODFREY

Elise Marcella Godfrey's book of poetry, *Pitchblende*, is forthcoming from University of Regina Press in fall, 2021.



COOL THINGS OUR GRADUATES ARE DOING

HOPE HOUSTON

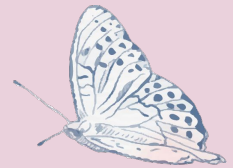
Hope Houston is working on a new novel about Jane Eyre, Byronic heroes, and steampunk mermaids. She has work forthcoming in Issue 47 of NYU's *Washington Square Review*.

DANIELLE RICHARDSON

Danielle Richardson (along with Madison N. Taylor, Kayla McCutcheon, and Natahna Barga-Lema) launched Prairie Girl Collective, writings on girlhood, motherhood, sisterhood, and womanhood.

CAROLYN GRAY

Carolyn Gray edits *Prairie Fire Magazine*. She was featured in an interview with Özten Shebahkeget in *The River Volta Review of Books* in 2021.



COURTNEY LOBERG

Courtney Loberg was interviewed in a podcast at the 2020 Toronto Comic Arts Festival. Her most recent work is *We Don't Go Through the Angelgrass*.

TIDINGS FROM OUR FACULTY

DR. SHERI BENNING

Dr. Sheri Benning's poetry recently appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, and *The Paris Review*. Her film, *Wintersleep*, was also featured on *The Paris Review's* website. Dr. Benning's book of poetry, *Field Requiem*, is forthcoming from Carcanet Press. Dr. Benning also guest-edited an issue of *Prairie Fire* on climate change. This special issue, *Living in a House on Fire*, featured the writing of MFA graduate Sarah Ens and current MFA in Writing student Özten Shebahkeget.

DR. JEANETTE LYNES

Dr. Jeanette Lynes' poetry is forthcoming in the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild's pandemic anthology. Her third novel is forthcoming from HarperCollins Canada in 2022. She continues to work on a collection of personal essays.



RECENT VISITING SPEAKERS IN THE MFA IN WRITING

OR: Everything Or Almost Everything You Wanted To Know About Sound Poetry, Media Careers, Publishing, Fantasy, Thesis Defences, and Revision

Writ 990, The Profession of Writing, is one of the MFA in Writing's required courses. This course features a range of topics and speakers each year. This past year, despite the pandemic, we were fortunate to have some stellar speakers who inspired us in on-line sessions.

IAN CANON, author and MFA in Writing student at USask, gave a presentation on self-publishing.

STEVEN ROSS SMITH, poet and former Executive Director of the Banff Centre, spoke about poetry and inspired us with a crash course on sound poetry and performance poetry. Steven was Banff Poet Laureate from 2018-20. He's well known for his *Fluttertongue* poetry book series. He has performed his work throughout Canada, and internationally.



DON YOUNG, journalist, director, and producer, as well as a veteran of Canadian television and radio including being a field producer for *The Journal* and CBC National News presented a talk on how to get involved in the media field. Don is also a screenplay writer.

SJ SINDU spoke to us on many facets of publishing. Sindu is a Tamil diasporic author and educator. Sindu's novels, such as *Marriage of a Thousand Lies* have received numerous awards. Sindu also writes in hybrid genres. They are an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto.



JES BATTIS, an English professor at University of Regina, engaged in a lively conversation with current MFA in Writing students Amanda Dawson and Tea Gerbeza on mental illness and disability in fantasy writing. Jes' research and teaching focus on the medieval and eighteenth-century periods, as well as the history of sexuality, and the representation of neurodiversity in popular culture. Jes has authored several series of books, including the *Occult Special Investigator* series.

TEA GERBEZA, current MFA student, presented a Writ 990 on Tips for Thesis Defences; Tea has already defended one Masters thesis at the University of Regina so she spoke from first-hand experience. Special thanks to Tea for mobilizing the technology for these sessions as well as organizational work.



The semester's Writ 990 class concluded with MFA Director **JEANETTE LYNES** presenting some thoughts on revision in writing. We are very grateful to our speakers this semester in the Writ 990 course for their generosity and for their patience in navigating the digital waters for on-line sessions.

SPOTLIGHT ON TEA GERBEZA: THINGS TO DO WITH PAPER – INTERVIEWED BY CHELSEA HILL

Chelsea Hill:

First, could you briefly explain what paper quilling is and how you got involved with this art form?

Tea Gerbeza:

Absolutely! Paper quilling is the art of rolling, looping, or pinching paper strips into shapes and then from those individual shapes the quiller creates a larger design. During the summer of 2018, my partner and I were living in Peterborough, Ontario and I wanted to get back into working with paper (I had once—years ago—made some origami roses) and like all craft things, I stumbled on paper quilling on Pinterest and from there became obsessed and immediately went to Michaels and found a slotted tool and began learning! My first ever creation was a Mother's Day gift for my mom that you can see below (along with my baby, Tonks).



CH:

How long have you been paper quilling?

TG:

Gosh it feels like a long time, but only for three years!

CH:

What about paper quilling do you find most interesting or appealing? What do you find most challenging?

TG:

Paper quilling is an art of building—small pieces combined build into a bigger shape and this is what I like best. I love the surprise of imagining how something might take shape, but then feel surprised with how it all comes together in the end. Some designs look so intricate and delicate, but the shapes composing it were some of the easiest shapes to make! I love the intricacy of paper quilling and how forgiving paper is. Sometimes a mistake makes me have to restart, but usually a mistake leads to an exciting discovery. The challenging part of paper quilling is that sometimes, getting a new technique down takes a few tries (like anything) or figuring out why something doesn't look the way I imagined it to or want it to. The strips of paper are typically 3mm, which is quite small, so handling those small strips and shapes can be challenging.

CH: What do you find most surprising about paper quilling?

TG: How these small, simple shapes build a bigger one! In my thesis, I have an image of a paper-quilled scoliotic spine and I was so surprised with how the quilled “S-scrolls” and “C-scrolls” came together to look so spinal. It also surprises me how a simple shape, like a circle, combined with more circles can turn into a landscape, or a part of the body with its own twist on where the lines of the paper fall (for example, if the circle is an open coil, that circle will have a swirl in the middle and if it’s a closed one, it will be a tightly lined circle). Quilling has taught me so much about shapes and I feel like every piece is a study in shapes and how I relate to the shapes around me.

CH: Is there a type of paper quilling you enjoy creating best?

TG: Oh gosh, I love it all! I guess right now, I’m more interested in creating bigger framed pieces because I haven’t had a chance to do that kind of work much because of school and busyness. But the jewellery has been fun, too! I’m currently working on some dangling earrings that I just love that are inspired by the petals in the piece that composes the cover of the newsletter! All of it is fun in its own ways, especially making bouquets for weddings—there is always a personal touch to them!

My thesis work has changed how I think about creating paper quilled pieces because now I’m also experimenting with how quilling relates to my conception of my body and its shape, which is leading to some pretty cool, more abstract, pieces. A project I’m working on—aside from my thesis—is a chapter for a forthcoming book on Health Humanities in application in which I will be discussing my scanner photographs that feature paper quilling and how these images (and my practice as a paper quiller) relate to my conception of my body’s pain. I’ll be discussing how I’ve been working in the consciousness of my body and creating a kinship with the chronic pain that I live with. All still in the early drafting stages!

“QUILLING HAS TAUGHT ME SO MUCH ABOUT SHAPES AND I FEEL LIKE EVERY PIECE IS A STUDY IN SHAPES AND HOW I RELATE TO THE SHAPES AROUND ME.”

CH: Is there a piece you feel especially proud of?

TG: I'm proud of all of the pieces I make in different ways, so instead, I'll mention some that surprised me the most that aren't in my thesis—since those are the ones I've been most delighted by but want to keep secret for now. These following images are of pieces that surprised me in how they came together with the first two being from my first year as a paper quilling artist to those more recent.

CH: What is your workspace like as you work on paper quilling? What do you need to remain focused and inspired?

TG: This is such a fun question—workspaces are so important!

I have two desks kind of beside each other where I can swivel from one desk (my writing desk) to the other (my craft desk). Usually my quilling finds its way on every surface of my office space and if I had my way, I'd have every wall lined with a desk to keep my art works in progress on, lol! One day, hopefully. I'm a two liquids at once kind of person—I'll have my water, my tea and sometimes also coffee surrounding me as I work. There's something about holding a mug of hot tea against my face as I think that helps me focus, which holds true when I'm writing as well. I have a small end table between my two desks that I keep my read books pile on and the articles I've read for my thesis and while these piles are essential to my thesis work right now, they also double as a stage for my laptop when I'm quilling since I like to watch tv shows when I craft...



which is probably how I have made my way through so much tv lately. Sometimes, though, I also listen to audio books which can lead into me writing lines for poems on strips of paper and have to physically move them away so that I don't accidentally quill them into whatever I'm working on. If I'm doing some scanner photography of my paper quilling, then I'll be blasting music and singing along to keep my energy going. So, I guess the common theme here is that I'm constantly listening to something while also listening to the poetry within. Lastly, if I want to be inspired or learn a new technique, I'll look at other paper quilling artists' works and be like "WOW, COOL" and then sketch out something that comes to mind while I look. Similar to how I read poetry before I write. Paper quilling sometimes takes me into the wee hours of the morning because moving my fingers to make shapes and loops keeps me focused and awake until I move from my desk and realize how tired I am.

CH: Have you ever accidentally quilled an important piece of paper by mistake? If so, when did you notice and what did you do about it?

TG: I haven't quilled anything important, but I did almost cut a yet-to-be-deposited pay cheque into strips once. It was hidden in a stack of papers I was about to snip... Luckily I found it before I did! I think if I did do that I would shamefully have to email my employer and explain and then maybe frame that piece for them.

CH: I understand that your MFA thesis explores disability, poetry, and paper quilling. I'd love to know how you navigate between these areas in your work!

TG: They're all connected in some ways and inform each other. My poetics are composed of my relationship with my disability and how that translates to the page—I'm such a visual person that space on the page and formal play are signifiers that it's a Tea poem, haha. My paper quilling has come into my poetics very recently and I'm using scanner photographs of paper-quilled images as visual poems in my work and how the visual and textual interact. What I've found is that the paper quilling informs something about the body that I've yet to discover and speaks new ways of knowing my body. The poems, then, do their poem thing and stretch my ideas beyond the page and quilled line and often fill in the personal experience or the gaps that the visuals leave. To be honest, I'm still working it all out myself and will likely continue learning how all of these things intersect and interact with one another throughout my career. I will say, though, that paper quilling helps me solve problems to my poems and I'll often find myself creating a flower petal and saying to myself, A-HA! That's what the poem was telling me! Something about the way my hands know their movements while I quill helps my brain unearth discoveries.

CH: A big question - what inspires your paper quilling and/or your poetry?

TG: This is a great question and one that I don't think I'll ever have an appropriate answer for, haha! I'm inspired by other artists and writers like Roxanna Bennett, Carla Harris, Daniel Scott Tysdal, Jennifer Still, Laura Ferguson, Jillian Weise, Rasiqra Revulva, Torrin A. Greathouse, Hadieh Shafie, among others—so many others! But I'm also inspired by the body and all it still has to tell me and how paper might help me listen to those teachings.

CH: Finally, where can the readers of the newsletter find you and your work?

TG: I post the majority of my work on Instagram and Facebook @teaandpaperdesigns. I'm in the midst of making my website that will feature a Tea & Paper Designs page, but primarily my work is on Instagram! If in Regina, the local handmade store With These Hands carries some of my framed pieces and The Penny University bookstore carries some paper jewelry and bookmarks.



TWO YEARS WITH THE

RIVER VOLTA REVIEW OF BOOKS

BY CHELSEA HILL

The River Volta Review of Books is an online literary publication started by Dr. Sheri Benning in 2019. The two key goals for this publication are to allow MFA in Writing students to engage with literature in a more critical context than the creatively focused MFA program as well as to create connections within the wider writing community. *The River Volta Review of Books* primarily publishes book reviews, short essays, and interviews conducted by current MFA in Writing students and alumni.

One of the most recent book reviews posted in the Winter 2021 issue is Amanda Dawson's analysis of *The Name of the Wind*, the first book in Patrick Rothfuss' widely loved (and yet unfinished) fantasy series, *The Kingkiller Chronicles*. In this review, Dawson discusses the novel's frame narrative structure as well as the distinct vibrancy of setting, plot, magic system, and characterization. Another recent book review features Jon Aylward's examination of themes such as spirituality, climate change, humour, and introspection in Susan Alexander's recent poetry collection, *Nothing You Can Carry*. To read these book reviews and others like them, visit [here](#).

Özten Shebahkeget's interview with MFA in Writing alumna Carolyn Gray explores playwriting as well as her experience in the University of Saskatchewan's MFA in Writing program. Evidently, the publication's goal to bring together MFA in Writing students and alumni with the wider writing community has been successful as there are numerous exciting and engaging conversations with authors such as Jennifer Still, Catherine Hunter, Barbara Langhorst, and MFA in Writing alumnae Allie McFarland and Nicole Haldoupis, along with many others. To read these interviews, visit [here](#).

Stay up to date with future publications and events from *The River Volta Review of Books* at www.rivervoltareview.com and on Twitter @VoltaReview or Facebook @VoltaReview and @TheRiverVolta. *The River Volta Podcast* can be found on the [River Volta YouTube channel](#).



THE RIVER VOLTA READING SERIES

BY ALIZA PRODANIUK & DELANE JUST

During the past year, the River Volta Reading Series has adapted to a new online format. Although we look forward to a time when we can meet in person, this transition has had its perks. Hosting the Reading Series via Zoom has allowed for the unique opportunity for those not living in the Saskatoon area to participate in the readings and interact with writers and featured guests like Courtney Bates-Hardy, Meaghan Hackinen, Allie McFarland, and more!

Hosting these events was a new and exciting experience for the team, Delane Just, Callum Wilson, Aliza Prodaniuk and Ian Canon. Before each event, the hosts of the night would meet briefly with the guests to break the ice, leading to some great connections forged between the MFA students and writers in Canada.

The Reading Series also hosted two successful events in conjunction with the first year and second-year MFA in Writing cohorts: a Winter Showcase and Graduate reading event, where second-year students read excerpts from their thesis projects. We had a record turnout, and it was great to see family, friends, faculty, and community members out to support the students and program.

These events were particularly important to the River Volta Team to showcase the writing of our first year cohort as well as to share a sneak peak into the work of the MFA graduating class. It was a pleasure to hear a short excerpt from Jon Aylward's project, *The Custodian*, a thrilling horror novel which kept the audience on their toes. Amanda Dawson's fantasy novel project also prompted some great questions during the Q & A section about magic world-building and what other authors have inspired her work (She mentioned she is quite the fan of Patrick Rothfuss). It was also a real treat to hear poetry by Tea Gerbeza from her thesis project, a long poem titled *How I Bend Into More*, which she displayed in conjunction with visuals from her own paper quilling art. Erin Hiebert read a powerful poetic essay which utilized different elements, particularly fire and earth, and tied in horoscopes to discuss topics of family and the self.

Despite the distance, and despite COVID, The River Volta Team believes that the year brought a lot of the writing community together for nights of what we all love—writing!

THE RIVER VOLTA PODCAST SERIES

BY ALIZA PRODANIUK & DELANE JUST

Writing is a solitary experience at the best of times, but it can be utterly isolating during a pandemic.

The 2020/2021 River Volta Team, Delane Just, Aliza Prodaniuk, Callum Wilson, and Ian Canon, has certainly found themselves writing and learning under unique circumstances. However, the first-year MFA in Writing cohort and the River Volta team have been lucky to have created a small writing community online.

But what about the greater writing community? How could River Volta supplement the Reading Series while opening up a space to generate conversation, meet new writers, and bring people together?

Grappling with such ideas, Ian introduced the idea for a podcast, and has taken the lead on the project. He films, edits, and releases the episodes bi-weekly, and his skills have been a great asset in making this idea a success.

Hosting different authors from the Reading Series, the podcast invites authors to read their work and discuss craft. We have also been able to expand our reach, with the option of inviting writers outside of Saskatchewan to guest star on episodes. The podcast will continue throughout the summer months.

In the first two episodes, the four hosts interviewed each other to wrap their heads around the episodes' format and introduce to viewers the conversation-focused tone the project would take. Since then, the podcast has featured Guy Vanderhaeghe and Marina Endicott. Forthcoming episodes will feature Meaghan Hackinen and Jessica Veter. This summer, we hope to interview some of the mentors from the MFA in Writing cohort.

You can find *The River Volta Podcast* on YouTube and stay up-to-date on new episodes on the River Volta Reading Series' social media platforms!



MFA VARIETY SHOW

BROUGHT TO YOU BY UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN'S MFA IN WRITING

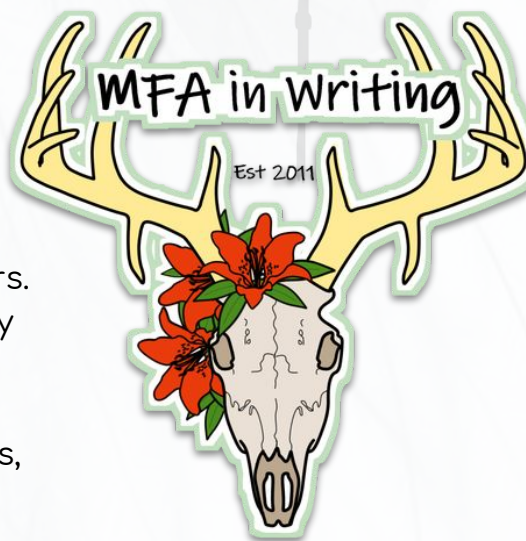
BRING OUT THE BANJOS AND STORIES AND CATS AND POEMS AND PUPPETS AND LOTS OF OTHER GREAT ACTS

Community has always been really important in the USask MFA in Writing. When the pandemic made it impossible for us to gather in person, MFA faculty member Dr. Sheri Benning and two MFA students, Sarah Ens (now graduated) and Tea Gerbeza came up with a creative solution; they launched the MFA Variety Show, a virtual showcase of writing, art, music, and lots of other cool acts!

The call for work and performances was embraced widely and warmly! Writers and artists from far and wide stepped up, including our own MFA in Writing graduates, current students, MFA mentors and authors from Saskatchewan and across the country.

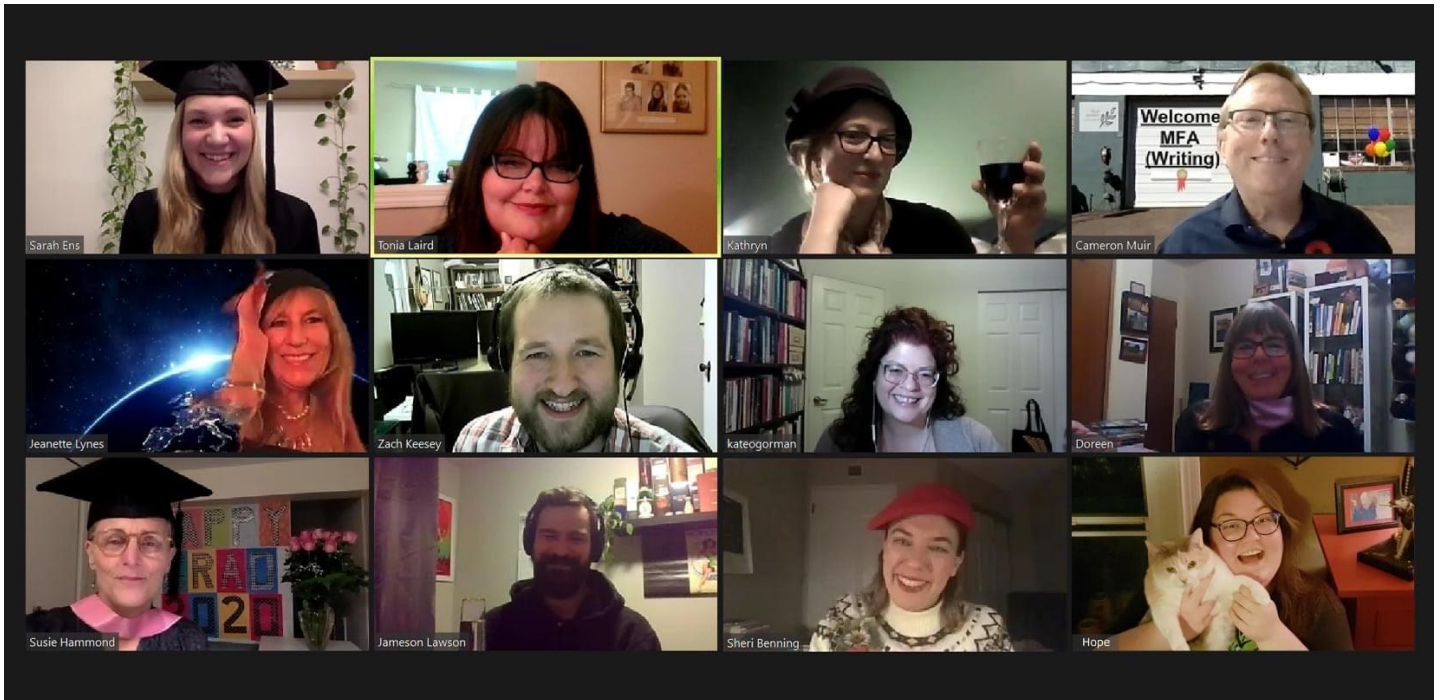
MFA graduates who contributed work include Mika Lafond, Carolyn Gray (life-size puppets), Sarah Ens, Tonia Laird, Taidgh Lynch, Simon Boehm, dee Hobsbawn-Smith, and others. MFA mentors were incredibly generous, and work appeared from Dave Margoshes, Elizabeth Philips, Candace Savage, Leona Theis, Bill Robertson and others. David Carpenter contributed writing and played the banjo!

Authors who offered contributions included Rita Bouvier, Guy Vanderhaeghe, Tim Lilburn, Beverly Brenna, Sandy Bonny, Glen Sorestad, Yann Martel, Connie Gault, Casey Plett, Bruce Rice, Diana Tegenkamp, Tanis MacDonald, Alissa York, Jacqueline Baker, Marina Endicott, Sheri Benning – and many others. English Professor David Parkinson performed a viola sola. Mari-Lou Rowley gave us knitting in action. Jennifer Still contributed a video poem. Jeanette Lynes tried to bake a carrot cake but didn't have the ingredients. Lots of folks have been left out here, only due to space constraints. [Please visit the Variety Show website for the full marquee.](#)



We're so grateful to the contributors; the MFA Variety show cheered us up through the pandemic, especially the early lockdowns. Even though we couldn't gather, the Variety Show helped remind us we were all out there, still being creative. We are grateful to Chris Putnam in USask Communications for covering the Variety Show last winter, and, of course, to the Variety Show's creators: Dr. Sheri Benning, Sarah Ens, and Tea Gerbeza.

CLASS OF 2020 CELEBRATES ON ZOOM



The largest graduating class in the MFA in Writing met virtually to celebrate graduation in summer 2020. With Dr. Sheri Benning and Dr. Jeanette Lynes. With thanks to Sarah Ens for organizing!



THANKS TO THE EDITORS!

CHELSEA HILL

Chelsea Hill helped organize and collect every document in this newsletter. She's a fifth-year English Honours student at the University of Saskatchewan and an associate editor for the Humanities and Fine Arts section of the *University of Saskatchewan Undergraduate Research Journal (USURJ)*. She has also published poetry in St. Thomas More College's literary magazine, *in medias res*. In her free time, Chelsea enjoys copyediting her friends' papers, reading for fun (!), writing, painting, and playing video games.



TEA GERBEZA

Tea put her paper quilling talent to work in order to make our cover. More of her visual work can be found on her Instagram @teaandpaperdesigns.

IAN CANON

Ian Canon, part of the class of 2022, helped put together the look and feel of this newsletter!

TONIA LAIRD

Tonia Laird was part of the MFA in Writing program's class of 2020. She's worked as an animator, a magazine designer, a storyboard artist, and a video game writer. Those skills came in handy when she put together the MFA In Writing's logo (seen on pages 41 and 44).

HAPPY TENTH BIRTHDAY TO THE MFA IN WRITING PROGRAM!

