

Revise This - November 2015

Revise This!

WILKES UNIVERSITY CREATIVE WRITING NEWSLETTER

Revise This! | November 2015

As the end of the year approaches, we reflect on many of the accomplishments of the Creative Writing program's faculty, alumni, and current students.

Several significant 2015 events include the anniversary of the program's tenth year, which was celebrated throughout the June residency. In October, alum [Marlon James](#), MA '06 was awarded the Man Booker Prize for his award-winning novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (see alum note). In November we presented the Second Annual Arizona Writer's Conference in Mesa, featuring publisher, editor, and agent panels, screenwriters pitch sessions, workshops, readings, and a poetry slam. We also added eight testimonial videos to our website featuring alums and faculty discussing their impressions of our program.

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Q&A with Jean Klein – Wilkes Playwriting Faculty

Jean Klein has created a new publishing/distribution company called Blue Moon Plays—which focuses on family oriented plays that have a place in schools. A sister website, Once in a Blue Moon Plays, will seek plays that have had their premieres and are now looking for more traction, Jean talks about these two new endeavors as well as other interests for the stage.



What was your mindset in creating Blue Moon Plays?

I had another publishing company for about ten years that sold primarily plays that were appropriate to schools and families. An emphasis on teens and seniors was another one of our bigger sellers. There are a lot of senior groups out there now. I wanted to go in a different direction.

With Blue Moon Plays, I wanted to focus on new plays of two kinds: one was the new play that probably wasn't getting the traction it should—most people don't know that it's harder to get the second or third production of a play than it is the first. They call it first light, second light, third light and so on. And a lot of theaters now are just clamoring to get the premiere or the world premiere and after that, well, we're not so interested in the second one.

For a play to get a second and third light, even after a couple of good runs, like Bonnie Culver's "Sniper" for example—it's been off-Broadway, got good reviews, it was in LA and in a couple of other theaters—I'm looking for plays like hers. New plays that are edgy and that tackle topics that are a little risky. Or that are interesting in terms of the way the writer has used the stage. They're just a little bit unusual or different. Plays that are staged differently, uniquely make different use of the stage, and/or

deal with topics that are currently difficult to deal with that are touchy and edgy.

What got you into playwriting?

Actually, my degrees are in fiction. I have an MA and an MFA from the Writer's Workshop at Iowa. My undergraduate degree was at Carnegie Mellon and I had dabbled a little with radio plays when I was in junior high and high school. Then I went to Carnegie Mellon and of course they have an amazing drama department. Their playwriting department then was not quite as well connected as it is today, but they were cool.

I was at Iowa for two and a half years getting my MA at the writer's workshop and I was taking playwriting at the same time. I found my very real mentor, Howard Stein, who was also oddly, [Wilkes Creative Writing faculty] Greg Fletcher's mentor years later at Columbia. So that's the background between Greg and me. We both had the same mentor. I clicked with him and he kind of stayed my mentor for the rest of my life, actually. And I just stayed a playwright. It just became my love. I'm a little bit of an introvert, and I find writing can be very lonely. What I found in the theater is that I can find a lot of people who were willing—actors and directors—who were willing to sit down and read through my plays with me and make comments and it became much more of a community activity.

The joy in writing for me is not so much seeing something produced. It's fun and nice to see them produced but it doesn't give me that kick. What gives me the kick is sitting at a reading of a play, realizing there's something just not quite right, with the scene or an act, and then suddenly having it all come into focus and saying, "Oh, I know what it is -- I know what to do!" That to me is the joy. That very moment when I say, "I can fix that." And that's the kick I get as a teacher, when I see that happen to somebody else. I think what the basis for my interest in at least getting a forum for new plays that haven't "hit" yet, but that have the merit and should be done.

How do you find the plays?

I tend to rely, especially for Once in a Blue Moon Plays, on playwrights whom I know or know of. For Once in a Blue Moon Plays I'm only looking for full length. One Acts are really hard to sell. Long one acts that run about 90 minutes are fine.

If you are interested in what Jean Klein has to offer, visit BlueMoonPlays.com. Its sister site, Once in a Blue Moon Plays will be up later this month. – Interview by Dale Louise Mervine

Interview with faculty Susan Cartsonis, Producer and President of Storefront Pictures

How did Storefront Pictures come to be?

I'd been a studio exec and I'd built a film company for three highly successful television show creators. When they decided abruptly to close their doors for personal reasons, I thought, I need to start my own company. When I looked at my own body of work and what my creative and business instincts tell me to make, it is always films from a female perspective. It turns out that this demographic, who largely drive the movie business, are grossly underserved.



What were some of the struggles in the beginning? You had a history in filmmaking, so were you able to utilize some of your contacts, or did people sit back and see how you would do?

Being a producer is always a struggle. It's a relationship business so yes, I've leaned heavily and will always lean heavily on relationships. In film, as in raising a child, "It Takes a Village" as Hillary Clinton says. People STILL sit back to see how I will do. Your success serves to pave the way for you for about 30 seconds, and then you have to prove yourself again!

Women in film (all aspects) has been a hot topic of late. I've seen you involved in many conversations, interviews, and panels where the charge for more women in film has been trumpeted. How have changes progressed since Storefront opened or even since you first entered the industry?

There's a consciousness now that didn't exist then. Geena Davis is working tirelessly through her Gender in Media institute to help create that consciousness. But the disparity in opportunity and the ridiculousness of Hollywood leaving money on the table still exists.

Some of the research I've done shows some increases in females working in film, but you're there on the inside—have you seen it yet?

There are, sadly, few increases.

At the same time women are pushing for change in Hollywood, so too are LGBTQ supporters. Do you see these groups working hand in hand to bring about more diversity? Same with women of color, or even men of color—too often films still use “stock” actors to portray diverse characters.

I believe that where women lead, all diversity follows. In general, of course. We are, either by acculturation or genetically more about the good of the whole than individual achievement (part of the reason there are more female producers than directors), more about inclusion, and generally more about diversity—perhaps also because we are a majority yet treated as a minority.

Would these groups working together affect change more rapidly, or do you think there is still enough push-back that “one at a time” makes more sense?

Gender and race rights have always been closely linked. Advances in one area support the other. Everyone has both race and gender. Certainly any artist or filmmaker has a HUGE task in getting a movie made and might have to keep their focus on one cause above others, but anyone with a brain can see that race/gender/diversity inclusion rights are ALL linked. Ideally our work on the screen as well as through activism becomes a reflection of the change that we want to make.

What is the most satisfying part of production? Least satisfying? And what is involved in “prepping” a film?

I say that production (which is physically rigorous) is the punishment for being good at development.

I am so busy prepping two films right now that I seriously don't have time to list all the things entailed in prepping a film.

I saw in an interview that you said you are a very visual person and if you can't visualize the screenplay as you're reading, then you don't think it'll work as a film. Is there one aspect of a screenplay, however, that strikes you when you're reading?

If I'm moved. Either to laugh, cry, or feel something deeply. Even if the material is flawed, if it moves something in me, I believe that it will reach other people and I'm moved to make it happen. Because I do believe we are all linked and if we can find that commonality in moments and themes between us, even in stories that seem incredibly unique, we can reach each other through the creative work that we do.

What is your advice to young screenwriters?

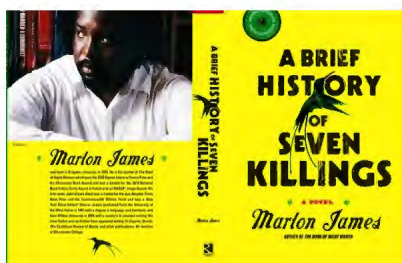
Write something that entertains YOU.

Interview by Dale Louise Mervine. Residing in York, Pennsylvania, Dale Louise is still trying to figure out what she wants to be when she grows up. She's the owner of Semicolon Creative, which only proves there is no vetting process for start-ups.

Marlon James, MA '06, Wins Man Booker Prize for *A Brief History of Seven Killings*

On Tuesday, October 13, 2015, a wave of excitement rippled throughout Wilkes University. The prize had just been announced, and Wilkes alum Marlon James, MA '06, had just won the Man Booker Prize—a prestigious prize awarded each year for the best original novel written in the English language.

James was part of the first Creative Writing cohort and one of the first graduates of the MA class of 2006. His thesis became his second published novel, *The Book of Night Women*, in 2010. That novel was preceded by *John Crow's Devil*, published by



Akashic Books soon after James began the Creative Writing program. Born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1970, James was always interested in the history and people of that country. *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is an epic story told as an oral history in many voices. In December 1976, armed men stormed the home of musician Bob Marley, wounding him, his wife, and several others. This is the starting point of James' look at the dark times in Jamaica through the 1970s, '80s, and into the 1990s. Michael Wood, this year's chair of the Man Booker Prize said, "It's a crime novel that moves beyond the world of crime and takes us deep into a recent history we know far too little about."

Congratulations, Marlon!

Faculty Notes

Program Director Bonnie Culver was re-elected to the Association of Writers and Writing Program ("AWP") Board of Trustees for another 4-year term. She was also elected as Chair of the Board.

Faculty member Beverly Donofrio had an essay, "Riding with the Top Down," published in the anthology, *Shades of Blue: writers on depression, suicide, and feeling blue*, edited by Amy Ferris for Seal Press, October 2015.

Faculty member J. Michael Lennon's review of the new Gore Vidal biography by Scranton native Jay Parini, *Every Time a Friend Succeeds, Something in Me Dies* (Doubleday), appeared in the October 16 issue of the (London) *Times Literary Supplement*. His review of Kevin Oderman's *Cannot Stay: Essays on Travel* (Etruscan Press) appeared in the October issue of Hippocampus Magazine.

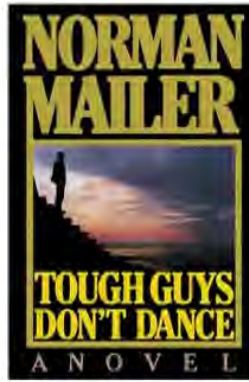
Faculty member and MFA alum Lori A. May's co-edited book, *Creative Composition: Inspiration and Techniques for Writing Instruction*, is now available from Multilingual Matters. She will be at the NonfictionNOW conference in Flagstaff, AZ, this fall, and will be on a panel about book marketing at AWP 2016 in Los Angeles. Lori has recently been awarded a project grant from 4Culture, a Washington state arts organization.

Faculty member David Poyer just found out he was published in Serbo-Croatian in 1981 . . . in a collection which included an unauthorized reprint of his short story, "If You Can Fill the Unforgiving Minute," translated as "Posljednja Utrka" by Aleksandar Gvoić. Pirated in Yugoslavia during the Cold War . . . he says "guess I'll take that as a compliment, all things considered . . . interesting cover for the collection. They never sent me a copy. . . ."

Faculty member David Poyer's forthcoming novel *Tipping Point* (St Martin's, December) was reviewed in *Publisher's Weekly*, *Kirkus*, and *Quarterdeck Magazine*. Reviews below:

- "In Poyer's engrossing 15th Dan Lenson novel (after 2014's *Cruiser*), the skipper of the USS Savo Island faces challenges as old as those confronted by Horatio Hornblower and as new as the latest military sexual harassment charge...this series sets the standard for naval action thrillers." – *Publisher's Weekly*
- "A hair-raising yarn of the sea and a U.S. Navy cruiser on the cusp of war... First-class storytelling by a master of the genre." – *Kirkus Reviews*
- "Crisp prose, punctuated with authentic operational naval details, create a page-flipping thriller. David Poyer continues his run as a master of modern naval fiction." – *Quarterdeck Magazine*

The Wilkes Readers Theatre Group at the Norman Mailer Society



Presented a marathon reading of *Tough Guys Don't Dance* October 1 and 2. The reading lasted 11 hours over two days at locales in Provincetown that served as settings in Mailer's novel. Readers included Creative Writing faculty, alum, and current students: Bonnie Culver, Matthew Hinton, Ross Klavan, Carol Lavelle, Dale Louise Mervine, Jan Quackenbush, Bill Schneider, and Ken Vose.

The Second Annual Arizona Writer's Conference

Was held at the Mesa Center for Higher Education on November 13 and 14. Featuring publisher, editor, and agent panels, screenwriters pitch sessions, workshops, readings, and a poetry slam, several Creative Writing faculty participated, including Phil Brady, Bonnie Culver, Beverly Donofrio, Ross Klavan, Jeff Talarigo, Richard Uhlig, and agent Albert LaFarge.

Student/Alum Notes

MA student Jeremiah Blue was recently asked to do a TEDx Talk on the convergence of slam poetry and social justice. He and his partner in the talk created a multi-media presentation, filming and showing his first official spoken word video, which they mixed with a live lecture on key foundations of advocating for social justice issues through art and performance/spoken word poetry. The presentation took place in Austin, Texas, on Saturday, October 24th and the video can be seen at www.jeremiahblue.com.

Kait Burrier, MFA '14 recently launched Sweet Nothings, a creative writing open mic series co-hosted by Andi Talarico in Manhattan's Lower East Side. In September, Kait served as curator of *The Poetry's Poem of the Week* feature. She also looks forward to returning as a guest editor for the 2015 Winter Issue of *River & South Review*. In November, Kait will feature at The Plunge NYC. More recent readings include Prose in Pubs,

Brooklyn Poets, At the Inkwell, Salon Lucero, Great Weather for Media's Spoken Word Sundays, the Watershed Reading Series, and the NYC Poetry Festival.

Brian Fanelli, MFA '10 successfully defended his PhD dissertation on Monday, November 16. His dissertation included a poetry collection entitled, *Waiting for the Dead to Speak*. Fanelli's new collection will be published by New York Quarterly Books. Congratulations to Dr. Fanelli, who joins former Binghamton PhD alums— Phil Brady, Bonnie Culver, Christine Gelineau, Nancy McKinley, and Robert Mooney. Fanelli's poem, "Trying to Call Forth a Ghost," was published online by *The Kentucky Review*. The poem will also appear in the annual print addition in January. His poem, "What Our Cat Teaches Me in Dreams," was accepted for publication in *Stone Canoe*, and another poem, "Immigrant Names," was a finalist for the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Prize and will appear in *The Paterson Literary Review* in summer 2016. *TheThePoetry* and *[PANK]* recently published book reviews Fanelli authored, and in October, he read as part of a panel entitled "The Next Generation of Italian American Poets" at the Italian American Studies Conference in Washington, D.C.

Patricia Florio, MFA '11 was featured in an article from Rutgers University Continuing Education News Center, "Where were you at 62? Court reporter finds her own words through Rutgers degree earned off campus." bit.ly/1j9nAZq

MA student Jeffrey Ford will have three film critiques published in an upcoming issue of *SCREAM Magazine*. *SCREAM #31* can be purchased at Barnes & Noble or through the publication's official website: www.screemag.com

Tyler Grimm, MFA '13 will be giving two public presentations in the next few months: *Fight Off Your Demons: Creative Writing as Therapy* on November 6 and *True Life: The Working Writer* on February 19, both at Elizabethtown College where he is a faculty member. Tyler also recently published a short story he wrote while at Wilkes, *Green Bean Casserole*, in Vox Magazine.

Monique Antonette Lewis, MFA '12 has expanded her reading series At The Inkwell to San Francisco. The series is now bi-coastal, including New York City. She plans to launch another series in Denver and Seattle by Spring 2016. Founded in 2013, At The Inkwell supports published authors through book reviews, readings, and feature articles.

Donna R. Malies, MA '11 wrote her one act play "Marriage, Men, Menopause – No Laughing Matter" for the Pensacola 24 Hour Theatre on October 17, 2015. As the name implies, the play was written and

produced in the span of 24 hours.

MA student Michael Mortimer wrote, directed, and edited a movie, *In the Dark*, in 2005 that has finally found release. The footage, lost for many years, was recently discovered in an attic somewhere. The ghost story can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfcxCBdp8go>

Linda Minh Chau Nguyen, MFA '14 is a Narrative Development Tester at Ubisoft Montreal, working on Far Cry Primal, an upcoming action-adventure video game set to be released for the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One on February 23, 2016. The trailer can be seen at:

✦ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJ2iH57Fs3M>

✦ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Far_Cry_Primal

Rachel Luann Strayer, MFA '12 will have her full-length play *Drowning Ophelia* produced by Gaslight Theatre Company in Scranton, PA, at the end of January. Rachel has had four of her ten-minute plays produced by Gaslight.

Donna Talarico, MFA '10 presented a 3.5 hour pre-conference intensive workshop called "Words, Words, Words" at the Higher Education Web Professionals annual conference in October, held this year in Milwaukee, WI. This was her fifth consecutive year presenting at this event, this time moving from a 45-minute track session to a more in-depth workshop. Talarico also served on the conference committee this year in a communications role. She presented a shorter version of "Words, Words, Words" at the 2015 Northeast PA Blog Conference (better known as NEPA BlogCon) in September. Additionally, she was part of a nonfiction panel and editor speed-dating session at Philadelphia Stories' 2015 Push to Publish Conference October 10, and presented a session on personal branding at Moore College of Art and Design's Leadership Conference for Women in the Arts on October 17. She loves nothing more than combining words and business.

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