



# VOICE 4

œ VOLUME 17 œ SPRING 2010 œ DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH & THEATRE œ ACADIA œ

## ***Estuary Creative Arts Magazine: A Habitat for Student Creativity since 1999***

*By Rebecca Dobson*

This year, *estuary*, Acadia's creative arts magazine celebrates its tenth year in publication, a milestone in our art community as the creative arts magazines at Acadia have had a tumultuous history. As this year's editor in chief of *estuary* I feel that the magazine has finally found firm ground and the past "bad luck," due to lack of finances and multiple transitions in editors, has been broken. As a testament to this, this year *estuary* released an anniversary print edition alongside its annual print edition. This special edition features a selection of creative pieces from each year the magazine was in publication, as well as past editor biographies and a short history of the creative magazines at Acadia. *Estuary* accepts post-card stories, poetry, photographs and artwork.

To officially celebrate the 10th anniversary, *estuary* held a launch for its print editions on March 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Beveridge Arts Centre Art Gallery. The launch had a successful turnout, as approximately 50 students, professors, and Wolfville community members came to support the magazine's efforts. A few students who were selected to appear in the annual print edition had a chance to share their poetry with the audience, as well as showcase their musical talents. This year *estuary* accepted an original music piece, entitled "Take Two," submitted by student Charlie Grant which appears in this year's first semester online edition. Grant performed this piece as well as another self-composed song and surprised the audience with his fantastic voice and guitar skills. A special appearance was also made by past *estuary* editor and founder of the magazine, Christine McNair who provided some insight into the ideas behind the magazine confirming that its purpose is to provide a habitat for young artists and writers to flourish. Dr. Patricia Rigg, professor and chair of the English and Theatre department, and Dr. Wanda Campbell, English professor and faculty advisor for *estuary*, also offered accounts of their experience with the magazine. The launch also marked the last day of the Annual Acadia Art Exhibit, which showcases Acadia students' artwork. Guests were invited to browse the artwork while munching on delicious pizza and fruit punch after the launch. This year's print edition and special anniversary edition are still available by visiting Christine Reed, the administrative assistant of the English and Theatre department, or the Information Desk in the Students' Union Building. This year's and previous years' online editions can be found at [www.acadiau.ca/estuary](http://www.acadiau.ca/estuary).



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## Theatre Reviews

### The Wonderful World of Dissocia

*By Rebecca Jackson*

Theatre presents an opportunity to transcend one's lived reality through the creative vehicles of convincing actors and actresses, fantastical sets, twisting plotlines and, most importantly, the imagination. This November, Acadia's Theatre Company did just that as they invited audiences to employ their imaginations and enter the inner, wonderful world of Lisa Jones, a young woman with dissociative disorder. Written by Anthony Neilson and directed by Robert Seale, the play provides insight into the mental space of

then juxtaposing this to her monotonous institutional existence. The play highlights the complexity of living with a dissociative disorder by showing both the excitement and confusion that Lisa feels as she enters the realm of "Dissocia" where she obsesses about and begins her quest for this lost hour that she believes will allow her to regain the control she senses slipping from her grasp. The play also depicts the tentative balance between caring concerns and condescending control that Lisa's sister, husband, and health-care practitioners struggle with as they attempt to deal with her disorder. Overall, this production encourages its audience to partake in the pleasure of a rich, imaginative journey and prompts it to consider the complex nature of mental health issues in perhaps a new light.



*Sarah Jean Begin and Stephanie Sommerville, photo by Colin Viertelhausen*

those experiencing such disorders by taking the audience through a dizzying and disorienting journey into the depths of Lisa's mind and

The actors and actresses of this play deserve congratulations for so convincingly immersing the audience in both of Lisa Jones'

worlds. I found Sarah-Jean Begin's portrayal of Lisa showed a great range in her acting. She garnered my sympathy with her distress over this lost hour, and she had me both groaning in frustration over her husband's parental attitude and cheering her on as she rebelliously danced on the hospital bed (one of my favourite moments).

I also thought that the dynamic duo of comic relief, Guard 1 and Guard 2 of *insecurity*, played by Jean-Paul Magnan and Jacob Sampson did a fantastic job and I appreciated their use of physical humour (a humour also later employed in Jacob's role as Laughter). Robert Ramsay had a commanding stage presence as the Oath-taker and then as Dr. Clark (and looks very good in a coconut-bra, I might add). Gabriel House was captivating as Victor Hess and gets my special commendations for exposing his buttocks later in the play as Inhibitions. I thought that Michael Sampson was excellent as a (scape)Goat (as well as the many other roles he took on in the play), as he brought sex and violence to Dissocia. Caroline Roy was wonderful as both the singing bear (another one of my favourite scenes of the play) and the hot dog vendor, Britney. Stephanie Sommerville was superb in her role as she portrayed an empowered "professional victim," Jane, as well as her roles as Accordionist and Dot. All cast members figured as over the top and engaging characters in Lisa's trip to Dissocia as well as



Lindsay Joseph and Courtney Harris, Photo by Colin Viertelhausen

playing sombre and serious medical professionals in the second half of the play. Kudos to the cast for providing compelling performances in both settings.

As my first ATC production, I was most impressed with the company's use of the small stage in the Lower Denton Theatre. The company deserves great credit for their effective manipulation of the space through smoke machines, lights, and props as they created multiple worlds and the effect of travel. Most notably, they pulled off an amazing scene with the flying car and explosions. I also thought that the costumes were very well put together and the cast looked fantastic. The costumes allowed the multiple cast members to pull off multiple roles within the play rather seamlessly (pun intended).

All in all, an entertaining and thought-provoking piece that impressed this audience member.

## A Short History of the Blues

By Alexandra Gilbert

*"The blues ain't nothing' but a good man feelin' bad."*

~ Leon Redbone

Last night I attended the opening of Michael Devine's play *A Short History of the Blues* at the Lower Denton Theatre. This provocative play explores the social contexts of blues music in America through several decades. The history of blues music is told through scenes representing various aspects of the development of the blues and the music that evolved from it, which ranges from slave work songs to rock & roll to punk. In two scenes entitled "Sometimes Singers" and "Workhouse Boys," Devine ingeniously transposes work songs into contemporary work environments. In

“Candy Pie,” both country and urban blues as well as Janis Joplin’s “One Good Man” combine in a poignant representation of characters who feel trapped in a small town and crave a life beyond it. Lindsay Joseph owned the stage as Candy with Memphis Minnie’s “I’m Sellin’ My Pork Chops,” which was just as gritty and suggestive as it sounds.

Devine certainly accomplished what he says he sets out to do when he writes and directs a play. He writes in the Director’s Note in the program that he is “here to trouble you.” He continues, “I want to trouble you because I believe that humans who detest surprise are already half-dead. I want to disturb you by delighting you, and there is no contradiction in that.” I was both surprised and a little troubled by Candy who suddenly ripped off her café uniform to reveal a stars-and-stripes halter and garters. None of this was gratuitous, of course. It was provocative, but as Devine says, the blues have always been that way. One of the challenges, he says, is how to handle politically incorrect material so that it is not offensive to the audience. However, to “clean up” the blues in a theatrical production such as this one would be an act of self-censorship. I would much rather experience the blues uncensored.

In an interview, Devine said that as a playwright of productions at a university level, it is expected that he will “push

theatre forward” because it is his discipline. I would expect, therefore, that he would write something provocative which might even make the audience uncomfortable. We had an interesting discussion about the purpose of attending a theatrical performance, and how it is not simply about being entertained. As audience members, we are meant to experience the play and try to understand our responses to it. We are meant to get out of our comfort zone and be challenged. Then it occurred to me that in the English Department we do the same thing everyday in class. The classroom is safe, but not comfortable, and we value the potential for intellectual growth through class discussions about challenging, provocative literary texts. Why should we expect anything less out of attending the theatre? A powerful, well-crafted novel or poem will challenge me in ways I did not expect. *A Short History of the Blues* did the same. I hope Devine’s next production is as delightfully provocative as this one.

## Minifest 2010

By Alexandra Gilbert

This year’s *Minifest* is a collection of five very different short plays chosen from about fifty submissions of original work from across the country.

*Just Between Friends* is about the importance of friendship to get through in the

unpredictable world of (imaginary) undergraduate boyfriends.

*The Guest* is a contemporary feminist rewriting of a classic fairy tale in which a young maiden has to spin nettles into flax to lift a curse laid on her twelve brothers who have been turned into swans.

*Thicker Than Water* is a representation of those moments of crisis that test a relationship, but reward it later with new knowledge and understanding of ourselves and others.

*For Play Little Play* is about ... well I’m not sure that an explanation of the content would be appropriate for a newsletter that is available to the greater community without a warning beforehand of sexual content and profane language. Although individual actors gave convincing performances, I do not go for gratuitous content of this kind. But it elicited quite a few laughs from the audience and was therefore something of a success.

*Clunk* stole the show for me. There were several gripping moments when I really did not know what would happen next or how the play would end, which made for intensely satisfying theatre. I will remember that short peek into the world of young gay men for quite some time.



## Authors@Acadia

### SEPTEMBER

Poets Brent MacLaine  
Christina McRae and  
John Wall Barger

By Corey Liu

Writing poetry is difficult; understanding poetry is a nightmare. Such were my thoughts when I was asked to cover the Poetry Reading, held on September 30, 2009. Three Canadian poets arrived on campus to read from their newly published books. Readings were done in the K.C. Irving Center's auditorium. Students, professors, and members of the Wolfville community came to enjoy poetry, ask questions, and, of course, munch on free biscotti in the Garden Room.

Creative Writing Professor Wanda Campbell gave a brief biography of the three poets. There was Brent MacLaine, an English professor from the University of P.E.I. Next was Christina McRae, who was an Honours English student at Acadia. The last poet was John Wall Barger: once a citizen of Wolfville, now a New Yorker. Once the introductions were made, Brent MacLaine was the first to step up. The room's silence was humming with anticipation. The audience was ready to hear the poems: that is, everyone in the audience but me.

Two years of being an English major has conditioned me to shy away from poetry. In poetry, the language is vague.

The allusions elude me. It is difficult enough to understand poetry when the text is right in front of you, and twice as difficult to understand poetry when it is being read to you. I was surprised, then, by how accessible I found MacLaine's poems. I was even more surprised by how much I enjoyed them. MacLaine recited two pieces from his collection *Athena Becomes a Swallow*. Both "The Muse Speaks Up" and "Postscript from Iros the Beggar" share a common theme: giving a voice to the underdog in Greek myths. Never mind Odysseus; for MacLaine, the good stories lie in the characters we tend to ignore – the beggars, the fishermen, the farmers, the Muse. MacLaine insists that his sympathies for the "little guy" derive from his childhood experience in the Maritimes. "In many ways," MacLaine comments, "the poems are inspired by the fisherman and farmers [from P.E.I.]"

Christina McRae's *Next to Nothing* is also based on her



experiences in the Maritimes. More specifically, her poems deal with a ten-year period of her life. McRae writes honestly and lyrically about motherhood and her life in Wolfville. Several audience members were left teary-eyed, particularly fourth-year English major Shawna Stone, who in the question-answer period described McRae's poetry as "powerfully emotional and personal."

Last to read from his work, *Pain-Proof Men*, was John Wall Barger. The title refers to the Arabic word *fakir*, or "torture king," who in carnivals would demonstrate his endurance to pain. True, the various Speakers of Barger's poems do not sit on a bed of nails or smash sledgehammers over their heads; their pain is of another kind. In "Corner of Creighton and Falkland," for instance, the Speaker is tormented by unrequited love, as shown by his hilarious attempt to draw his love-interest Alice out of her house on a rainy day. Barger writes mostly on pains of the heart – love, love-lost, divorce – themes anyone can identify with.

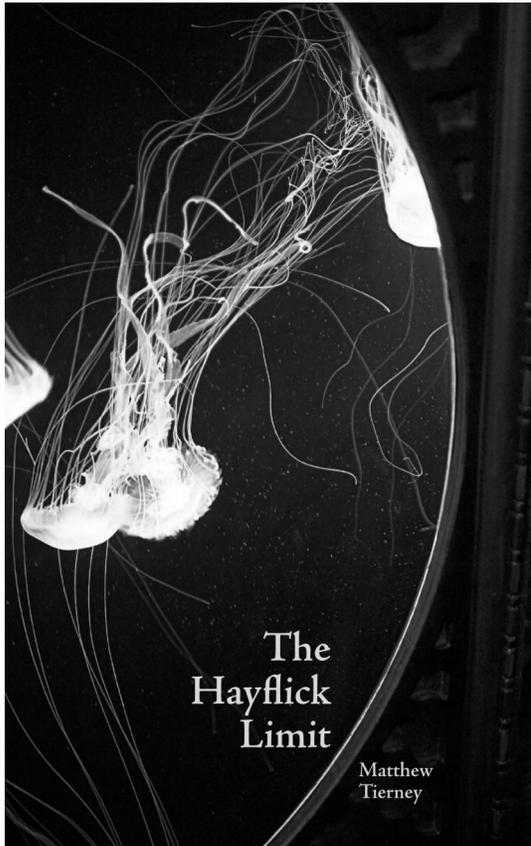
The poetry reading was not daunting, after all. The poems were fun, quirky and accessible; the audience's enthusiasm was infectious. After a brief period of questions-and-answers, the group reconvened in the Garden Room to buy copies of the poets' works, to talk with the poets, themselves, or just to sit quietly at one of the tables and listen to the noise. The biscotti was delicious.

## OCTOBER

### Poetry Reading Matthew Tierney & Kevin Connolly

By Tima Coke

Toronto poets Matthew Tierney and Kevin Connolly read to an enthusiastic audience at the Acadia University Art Gallery, on October 6<sup>th</sup>. Tierney read first, from his



new collection *The Hayflick Limit* (Coach House 2009). Surprisingly, his poems contained a mixture of lyrical language and a heavy dose of

scientific references, which helped along his defamiliarizing vision of reality.

Accounting for this blurring of discourses, Tierney explained that he began university studying the sciences before being corrupted by the arts. Tierney was a compelling reader, and afterwards a member of the audience asked him about the relationship between the poet's voice and the text.

Challenging a cherished idol of modern theorists, he argued that the author often captured the essence of a poem best when reading. He added, perhaps toying with us, that poets sometimes hired actors to read their works and that said actors inevitably made mistakes or got the text wrong somehow.

Next up, Kevin Connolly read from, among other things, *Revolver* (House of Anansi Press 2008). His work was both surreal and accessible, playing with odd forms, but with mundane subjects. His reading was very disarming and entertaining. At the end, answering a question from the audience, Connolly stressed

the importance of keeping current with contemporary writing and ideas if you want to write relevant poems. After an insightful post reading question period, Tierney and Connolly rushed off to the Blomidon Inn to watch their beloved Leafs sink even deeper into NHL oblivion.

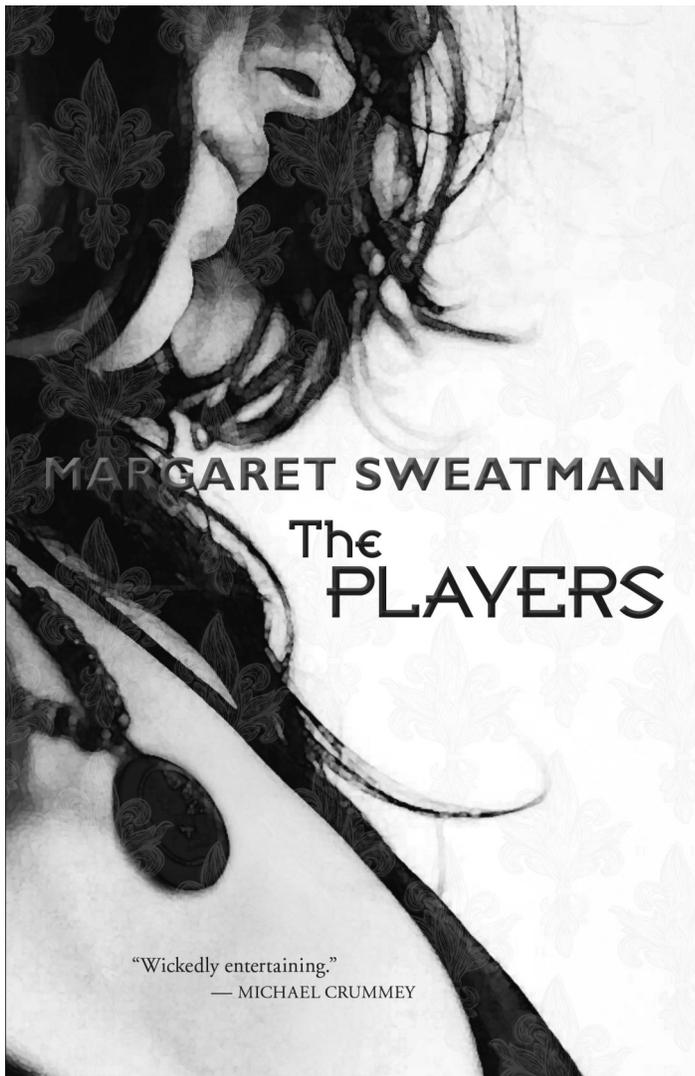
## FEBRUARY

### Fiction Reading Margaret Sweatman

By Alexandra Gilbert

Margaret Sweatman read several selections from her historical novel *The Players* in the Quiet Room at The Vaughan Library on Wednesday evening, February 10<sup>th</sup>. She said the title refers to actors; they were called "players" during the Restoration when this novel takes place. In the novel, Lilly Cole is a seventeenth-century player who leaves the court of Charles II to go to Canada with two French fur traders, Radisson and des Groselliers. Lilly chooses her own fate and defies the king by not marrying. Instead, she has a dubious kind of freedom in early Canada among the fur traders and Cree.

Of particular interest was the way Sweatman read the different voices in the



novel. She performed each part as she read, giving each character a unique voice. After the reading, we had a short discussion about visual and aural writing. Much of this novel is aural, in that the characters' voices are meant to be heard, and the story is told through dialogue rather than description. Sweatman described how she actually feels each character's voice and thinks about how each character would breathe and laugh as well as speak as she is constructing them.

I especially like the "stories within the story." Her characters, especially the French fur traders, are utterly believable as they spin tales for their own captivated audience within the narrative.

Sweatman is from Winnipeg. She has also written *Fox*, which is set during the Winnipeg general strike, and *When Alice Lay Down With Peter*, which includes the Métis Uprising in Manitoba. She is also a playwright, musician and lyricist. *The Players* is published by Goose Lane Editions,(2009).



## English Society Event: Halloween Pub Night

*By Brad Wilkinson*

This past Halloween 2009, students and faculty were invited to a pub night at Paddy's Pub. The theme of the event was for attendees to bring a scary (or funny) Halloween themed story or poem to share with the group, and to just generally relax and meet fellow English students and faculty, while enjoying the food and drink at the pub. The evening started off a bit slowly, but soon enough students and several faculty members began to show up. It was a fluctuating group, but at its height there were multiple scary stories shared among the group. Several people had to leave early due to the sheer terror inspired by the tales, though over-all it was a friendly and relaxed atmosphere where new acquaintances were made and some delicious food and ale was shared.



# ∞ ATLANTIC UNDERGRADUATE ∞ ENGLISH CONFERENCE

## Conference Recap with Conference Coordinator Beck Jackson

*By Kim Wallace*

With the excitement following the success of the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Atlantic Undergraduate English Conference still lingering in the air, I had a chance to meet with student conference coordinator Becky Jackson to discuss her experience and thoughts about the weekend.

**K:** What made you volunteer as the conference coordinator?

**B:** It all started as a joke really. I went to last year's conference, and had a few suggestions for the conference. On the ride home it was mentioned that Acadia would be hosting the next conference and maybe I should take on the challenge. The more I thought about it, the more I thought it sounded like a project I could really sink my teeth into. I figured it was a chance to abandon apathy and actually make those changes.

**K:** What type of work was involved?

**B:** Basically, it began with logistical work. Early on, I started collaborating with my sister on the AAUEC website. We needed to have dates,

with department heads, and finally putting together the sessions. The sessions were really important because they would bring all the papers together.

Essentially I worked increasingly from 2-3 hours a week, to at least 2-3 hours a day as the conference approached. The hands-on approach made trouble-shooting easier, but also made for more stress!

**K:** What types of changes did you make to the conference?

**B:** I wanted to create a professional setting that encouraged interaction. To me, this came down to even the smallest of details— for example, we didn't want to have a profusion of materials to give to

the attendees, but rather a small amount of necessary and quality information. The weekend was also reorganized to suit the financial reality of the undergraduate students



*Becky Dobson and Becky Jackson*

times, background information, and so on, for all the schools interested in the conference. Then the work increased to communications between schools, meetings

attending the conference, and was shortened from a three-day event to a two-day event. Not only was it financially viable, but also worked with school schedules. We didn't want students to have to compromise coursework for the conference, so we inserted an optional registration on Friday, in addition to the mandatory registration on Saturday morning. Essentially, you could make the weekend what you wanted. As well, we opened the conference with a keynote speaker. The keynote speaker kicks off the conference, helps to set the tone for the weekend, and gets people engaged from the start – which Dr. Andrew Biro did beautifully. As a member of the Political Science department and coordinator of the new MA program in Social and Political Thought here at Acadia, Dr. Biro's keynote address also tied into the theme of the weekend which was "interdisciplinarity." We encouraged the submission of essays that responded to media, film, anything, from any discipline, and we also didn't limit the number of creative submissions allowed per school. Finally, at the dinner we chose a buffet and non-specific seating to encourage participants to make a choice of where they were sitting, what they were eating, and how long they were staying. Like the weekend it was structured, but structured

around choice. I think that's what led to such a great post-dinner sit down that allowed everyone to relax and get to know one another—an excellent opportunity for early academic networking.

K: To what do you attribute the amount of diversity among the speakers, as well as the overall high quality of papers that were presented?

B: Kudos of course being first and foremost to the attendees themselves, and to the participating departments for selecting such excellent papers. There was also our own challenge of creating sessions that would link the papers, so I guess this was another strategic move on our part—grouping papers based on theme, rather than by timeline or genre. And there was the setting of the sessions – small intimate atmospheres that encouraged interaction and mimicked the classroom experience at Acadia.

K: So, overall a success? Yay or Nay?

B: Complete and utter success. Conference win. I have high expectations and this was one of those rare moments because it exceeded my expectations completely. Rarely do your efforts directly equate to the product. It was a three tier effort from all those involved in organizing

the conference: from the friendly face greeting and helping attendees, to the administration and running around behind the scenes, to finally attending the sessions fully engaged and familiar with all of the speakers. A happy success.

K: Any changes you would make?

B: I would not have a thesis due at the same time, and more sleep would have helped!

K: Would you recommend getting involved in something like this to other students?

B: It's given me and everyone involved a total sense of accomplishment. The more people, the more it spreads, so most definitely get involved!

K: Any last thanks?

B: So many. Chris Reed, Kerry Vincent, Patricia Rigg, Dean of Arts Bob Perrins, Andrew Biro, Becky Dobson for co-organizing, and yourself for being the volunteer coordinator, the faculty members on the other side, the faculty members on this side, the speakers! Everyone – thanks so much!



## GRADUATE STUDENTS



**Alexandra Gilbert**

L: Where are you from?

G: *I'm from Toronto originally. I went to Trent for undergraduate.*

L: Why did you choose Acadia?

G: *It was to study Canadian literature*

L: What's your thesis about?

G: *It's about contemporary Atlantic Canadian poetry in the context of eco-criticism; specifically, it's about landscape and place in nature.*

L: Interesting. So what is it about eco-criticism that interests you?

G: *I'm interested in how authors perceive nature, and how individuals relate to the natural world: really, just their perceptions of nature. It's an important issue in contemporary society.*

L: So did your interest in eco-criticism begin at Trent?

G: *Yes. I took an English class called Canadian Literary Landscapes.*

L: What do you like most about Wolfville?

G: *It's nice; I like being in a*

*small town and I like having access to natural areas. I like the woods behind KCIC, too.*

L: Do you ever miss Toronto?

G: *Sometimes I like the pace and energy of a big city, but it's nice to live in a quiet place.*

L: Do you have a favourite book?

G: *Walden by Thoreau.*

L: How about a Canadian writer?

G: *(laughs) Well, I can't think of a favourite Canadian one. I like the poet I'm working on, John Steffler.*

L: What are your plans after Acadia?

G: *I'd like to get a PhD [in English] and continue focusing on the environment and nature in literature at Memorial U.*

L: Did you always know you wanted to pursue a PhD in English?

G: *No. In high school I wanted to study history. But then once I graduated in history I went back and got a degree in English.*

L: Why the change?

G: *Well, I find studying English more personally rewarding.*

L: What's your experience been like, writing the thesis?

G: *It's been really good so far. I've really enjoyed the process of being in charge of the project. I like having that kind of control.*

L: So what was it that you liked most about being a Masters student at Acadia?

G: *The faculty is really supportive. And it's so small, so I really liked getting to know everyone. Actually, I loved teaching the*

*most. I like how sometimes the students have really interesting perspectives on texts that I had not thought of.*



**Sara Saddington**

L: Where are you from?

S: *I'm from Chatham, Ontario. I did my undergrad at Dalhousie.*

L: Why did you choose Acadia?

S: *I liked the idea of small program. And I liked the small town. I just really wanted to stay out East. I like to think of myself as an honorary East Coaster.*

L: What's your thesis about?

S: *My thesis examines social Canadian fiction from the inter-war-years. I'm interested in examining how politics and aesthetics intersect: how they interact.*

L: What do you do when you're not busy ploughing away at that thesis?

S: *I do coursework. I work with John Eustace as a teacher's assistant, which also takes up a chunk of my time. Sometimes I play the guitar, take a walk in the woods. But otherwise being a Masters student is pretty much a full-time job.*

L: What do you like most about Wolfville?

S: *I really love the school here, the department. I think the professors here have been very passionate about creating a community – to help students make that transition from undergraduate to Masters student. I also really like the second-hand book store on Front Street, The Odd Book. It's fantastic.*

L: What's your favourite book?

S: *Well, my favourite novel... it really changes day to day. Yeah, I think of books a lot like I think about music. I don't have a favourite band but I have bands that I like to listen to when I'm sad, and ones that I like listening to when I'm happy. It's the same with books.*

L: So a professor told me that if you really love a book, you shouldn't write a thesis on it; that'll pretty much suck any love you once had for the book right out of it. Do you agree?

S: *To some degree, absolutely. I probably won't finish with the book that I'm working on again any time soon but I will pick it up again in a couple of years. Once you get into realizing the nitty-gritty of something, you just need a break from it before you can rediscover it.*

L: What did you want to be when you were a kid?

S: *I wanted to be a writer. Or a librarian. Because librarians are relatively cool.*

L: What are your plans after Acadia?

S: *I'm going to applying for a PhD. Later. But first I'm going*

*to take a year off. There are a couple of fantastic literacy organizations in Halifax, and there's volunteer work, and a friend of mine is starting up a theater company so I think I might help out with that. I'll just be hanging bells and waiting to see about PhDs. I'd like to get a job related to what I do here, but I just want to go some place.*

L: What are your top PhD choices?

S: *In a perfect world? McGill would be fantastic. UVic would be good, too. Even Dal or Toronto. That's four. I cheated. Ha.*

L: So other than a PhD, what else does your future hold for you?

S: *Well, I hope lots of time and energy spent bringing books into the world. Writing. I do write poetry and fiction now and then. I just want to keep that going. I'm very interested in helping communities of artists, which is why I want to move to Halifax next year and help my friend with her theater group.*

L: Any advice for future masters students?

S: *Hmm. I would say to make sure you still make time for yourself. The program is busy. Very busy. But everyone needs some time to do what they want to do. If I could redo it, I would dedicate some time to read something unrelated to my thesis, some time to cook a big dinner, to go for a walk, have a bottle of wine – just make sure you schedule those things into your daily life because otherwise you won't really find the*

*time to. Also, get a really good coffee maker.*



**Jesse Brillinger**

L: Where are you from?

B: *I'm from Edmonton, and I spent some of my former years in Ontario. And I've been here ever since.*

L: Where did you do your undergraduate degree?

B: *I did my undergrad at Acadia. I majored in English, and minored in Classics.*

L: What made you decide to return to Acadia for your masters?

B: *Actually, I took a year off, went to Europe – did some things there. Then I decided that I wanted to come back and do a Masters degree in English. Acadia has a great program. And Dr. Whetter, my supervisor for my undergrad, was available for my Masters. That was a pretty big motivating factor. Essentially, what brought me to Acadia was Acadia: the town, the faculty.*

L: If you could describe your thesis in three words, what would they be?

*B: English knighthood rocks! I'm examining Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur. I'm examining his portrayal of Sir Launcelot. I'm examining how well Launcelot performs as a knight in the context of chivalry.*

L: Why are you interested in Medieval literature?

*B: I just think that it's a period that unfortunately we often overlook. In the department we have just one Medievalist while we have two people working on Postcolonial. Plus, the material is really engaging. And I like the sort of digging that's required in Medieval studies where you have to look at other historical texts. Discoveries are always being made about the literature and the history.*

L: What do you do when you're not writing that thesis?

*B: Coursework. Or just try to relax.*

L: Do you have a favourite place in Wolfville?

*B: The Library Pub. That's sort of my favourite haunt. And I love the valley, you know? It's great to be able to look out and see the water and Blomidon in the distance. It's a whole, different culture. It's a great place. The people are always welcoming.*

L: Do you have a favourite book?

*B: Oh, that's a toughie. Le Morte D'Arthur.*

L: What did you want to become when you were a kid?

*B: I always enjoyed English in high school, but I never really*

*considered going into that until I came to Acadia. Everyone here's been so encouraging about studying English. I think it was then that I started to seriously consider Academia.*

L: What are your top three PhD choices?

*B: Probably a whole bunch in the UK. The University of York has a really good program. In Canada, probably Western. And Acadia, if they ever get a PhD program.*

L: And I guess you plan on continuing with Medieval studies?

*B: Oh yeah, definitely. But I'd also like to branch out into some interdisciplinary areas, like gender studies.*

L: Other than a PhD, what else does the future hold for you?

*B: I'm not sure. Just whatever comes, I guess.*

L: Any advice for future Masters students?

*B: Yeah. In those dark hours when it seems like there's nothing but work there is light. The dawn will rise again.*



**Karen Jackson**

L: Where are you from?

*J: I'm from the great city of Toronto.*

L: And where did you do your undergrad?

*J: I went to Queen's.*

L: What brought you to Acadia?

*J: I came here to experience the East coast at a small university, because I came from a large university. I've really enjoyed the atmosphere here.*

L: What's the upside of coming to a small university?

*J: I've enjoyed the community in the department. I feel so welcomed here by the students and the professors as a colleague and as a friend.*

L: Do you have a favourite haunt in Wolfville?

*J: My favourite place is Paddy's. They have their own brews here, which I think is charming. I like beer (laughs). And I also like to support local production.*

*Wolfville is really the ideal environment to study in because there aren't a lot of social distractions. I mean, you've got a few pals and you're all working at the same time so you're all pretty much off friendship at the same time. And you're just surrounded by natural beauty, which is a great place to work in. You don't get the same distractions as in the city.*

L: Describe your thesis in three words.

*J: Annie Dillard Sucks.*

L: Annie Dillard Sucks.

Interesting. How about in two sentences?

*J: Two sentences? Well, that's a new challenge. Let me see. The commodification of nature in the*

work of Annie Dillard. And finding productive literary relationships with the environment.

L: What advice would you give to future MA students?

J: I guess my instinct is to say, Don't procrastinate. But I don't know. Some people thrive on procrastination. What I should say is, if you DO procrastinate, be prepared to be completely burnt out at the end. (laughs)

L: So what is it about procrastination that you thrive on?

J: I need the pressure. I need the stress to get my brain firing. I need to take serious breaks from work. I just get these gaps where I work, and then I work really hard. Then I take a break, then I work really hard again.

L: What do you do when you're not thesis-ing?

J: I like to do a lot of work with my hands. I like to do manual activities like sewing and quilting and making bizarre crafts. I also like to spray paint junk. I found this one hub cap the other day that I spray-painted gold. (laugh)

L: What do you plan on doing after the Masters program?

J: I suppose I'll just continue to live until I die. I mean, I don't really plan my life more than six months in advance. I try to keep it open – to allow for the possibility of change. I don't know, maybe, maybe, maybe I might do a PhD. I do say that, though, with hesitation. Only because I'm wary of calling my shots before I make them.

L: Do you have a top three for your PhD choices? I'm guessing you haven't thought that far ahead?

J: No, I haven't thought it through. I do think it's important to research where you want to go and not to go to whatever place has a great name. Research things like, their library, how much money they can give you, and also who you plan on working with. Really, just find whatever complements your studies – not the institution that 'kind of' fits your studies.

L: Do you have a favourite book?

J: I suppose my stock answer is Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction by J.D. Salinger.

I love his Glass family stories.

When I was young, I loved Holden, but I suppose I was young and filled with angst too.

Then I got in to the Glass family.

I spent a lot of time reading criticism about Salinger and the Glass family stories because I wanted to know why Seymour Glass killed himself. It just didn't make any sense to me, and I wanted answers. It was actually that process that made me realize how much I was interested in literary research and criticism.

L: So if you felt so invested in this character then why didn't you do your thesis on the Glass family stories? Why did you instead choose to dedicate a year of your life to write on an author you don't even like?

J: Well, I think that a lot of people say that you ruin your experience with an author, a book, when you study it too intensely. I think you sort of grow to hate your thesis, in a way. Not necessarily the ideas in the thesis, but the thesis represents to you

hours of labour and frustration... so to associate that with something that you love will inevitably make you hate that thing that you love. In a way, I like to keep some mystery in those books that I like, and leave them open to further interpretation. Because with your thesis, you have to believe in what you say in your thesis, you literally have to defend your ideas. So the argument you make becomes a matter of personal pride, which makes it hard to retract in the future because then you're admitting you might have been wrong. But if you have no pride, then that's fine. To write your thesis on texts you don't necessarily love can be more enjoyable, because you're less invested in text and more open to the progress of interpretation. It's always fun to be critical too. I often disagree with everything at first, because it makes you really interrogate the logic and reasoning behind what is being said.

L: So now that your thesis is almost done and summer is around the corner, is there any movie that you want to watch?

J: (Jumps in seat) I want to watch Alice in Wonderland. I'm not really a follower of Tim Burton's work, but I'm pretty excited to watch Alice.

Interviews by Corey Liu

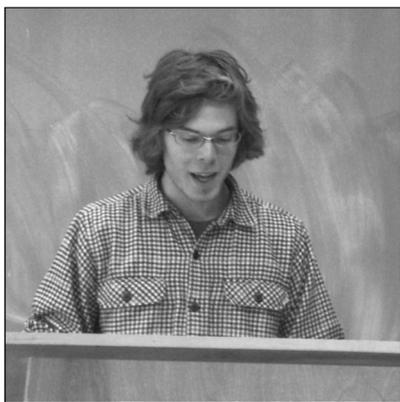


## To Thesis or Not to Thesis: That is Next Year's Question

By Rebecca Jackson

Next year, Acadia's English and Theatre department is making an English Honours thesis optional. Students will now have the choice of graduating with Honours either via the traditional route of a thesis project and coursework combination or strictly coursework. Personally, I am always pro-choice. However, I decided to hit the halls of the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the BAC and see what a couple other Honours students had to say about thesis-ing, life, and Wolfville. Here are the results of my interrogations, I mean interviews.

First, I interviewed Tyler Boucher to get the dirt (ha) on writing a creative thesis.



B: Hi Tyler. Thanks for putting up with my onslaught of questions and sharing your experience. To get things rolling let's start with an easy question. Where are you from?

T: No problem, Becky. I am from Freeport, a suburb of Portland, Maine.

B: As an American, what brought you to Canada and to Acadia?

T: It was different from the East Coast- New England scene of my friends. I like the Nova Scotia rough-edge cold sloped by the sea. The "rough, chopping-wood -in-the-backyard vibe" reminds me of where I grew up.

B: Besides the edge and chilly temperatures, what is your favourite thing about the Village of Wolves? What is your least favourite aspect of Wolfville?

T: My favourite things about Wolfville are hanging out at Paddy's and the Deep Roots festival. I dislike the fact that there is no more beat the clock, but actually I am not a fan of the fact that the cops get mad at wiffle ball past 12am on Main Street for no legitimate reason.

B: Speaking of no fooling around...let's get into the thesis questions. Describe your thesis in three words. Go!

T: Down. On. The. Farm. Oops, let me try again. From. The. Ground. Up. Oh, that's four again. Poems. About. Farming. OR Roughly. Hewn. Stone. OR Soundbite. Soundbite. Soundbite. OR Yes. We. Can.

B: Well, I think you officially have become the most enthusiastic respondent to that question. At this stage in the game (one week before complete rough draft is due), does this enthusiasm still carry over to your thesis?

T: I definitely still enjoy it, for what that's worth. Also, I think I should win the best thesis prize... Ok ok, I picked something that I wanted to do, which has been the secret to my maintained enthusiasm. Although don't get me wrong, it has been a lot of work!

B: I definitely think it is worth something. This is a crucial stage in the project where many of us are quite frazzled and you are still smiling and enjoying your experience. So your secret has been this ownership and passion? Can you speak more to this?

T: Well, I have liked that it is self-directed and I have to take responsibility for what I am capable of. The project has remained fun for me because it combines a lot of my outside AND academic interests. This has been something I didn't know much about before, so there has been a lot to learn and that has really held my interest.

B: It seems that you have tapped into this passion and invested in the project, which has allowed you to maintain a positive relationship with your thesis for the duration of the project. Given that you had an exemplary process, what would you recommend to future Honours students?

T: I would say that not everyone should do it, and that you shouldn't just do it for the degree. Don't just trudge through to say you did it because that is a waste of time—especially yours! Basically, you have to do it on your own terms or it's going to suck.

B: Well put. Now that the thesis is optional, what advice do you have for those embarking on the thesis journey?

T: Take up a sport that allows you to hit things, or get a voodoo doll. It doesn't stress me but it still took a focused effort and I had to learn a lot about my working style. The creative

*project worked better for me because it allowed me to be happy and consistent, rather than face the pressure of cranking out a big- a\$\$ paper. However, I did initially still face the burden of creativity and trying to force that process.*

B: For those who haven't attempted a larger-scale creative project, how did you tap into that creativity and what was your process?

*T: Well, I front-loaded my process. I spent 6 months over the summer thinking about what I wanted to do and writing the bulk of the project. Then, with supervisor intervention the good bits were called out and a slow process of refinement began.*

B: Alright, now onto my favourite English nerd question...what is your favourite book?

*T: Lazy Sundays (with Calvin and Hobbs) by Bill Waterson.*

B: Nice (the standard response to veil that I haven't read it). So what do you want to do when you "grow up"?

*T: I'm not going to get any taller but it has been my dream to be the center at the next summer Olympics. I wanted to play with Lebron. It seems like on paper they'd have no competition.*

B: Besides your Olympic aspirations, what will you do when you're unleashed on the "real world"?

*T: I'm going hiking for four-months and living in the woods. I've been inside a lot with school and I've had enough of*

*being inside.*

B: Which woods?

*T: From Georgia to Maine.*

B: When you return from your adventure do you think you will ever return to academia, an M.A.?

*T: When I come back inside, I would like to put my full effort into school at some point.*

B: With your diverse interests, will it be an M.A. in English?

*T: Probably English with a twist. I'm in English because I like to read, and I'm going to go into whatever lets me read the most of what I like.*

Then, I interviewed Kim Wallace to see if writing an academic thesis made the process any less enjoyable.



B: Hello lovely Kim Wallace. Thanks for subjecting yourself to my rigorous interviewing process (\*note to readers: it involves suffering through small-talk and coffee with yours truly. Painful, but it squeezes out the hard truths). To give the readers a sense of who you are, where are you from?

*K: Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, aka the hood.*

B: Representing as one of Nova Scotia's finest, what made you choose to pursue your undergrad at Acadia?

*K: Well, Becky J., way back when (in high school), I was really involved with the soccer community and was considering pursuing a career in soccer. At that time, soccer was my life and I was being recruited by Division I programs in the US. However, my inner nerd took over and I decided that I didn't want a degree in soccer, so I started to look for schools that would allow me to balance my sporting life and academic life. Acadia has allowed me to do that. For the first four years of my undergrad I was captain of the soccer team and was able to develop my nerdy side.*

B: Sadly, I didn't know you were such an athletic stud, Kim. It is great to hear we have such multifaceted individuals in our program. OK, so now into the thesis business. Describe your thesis in three words. Go!

*K: The. Villain. Fallacy. OR Fairytale. Gender. Subversion.*

B: I take this moment to shamelessly promote you and make it known to the loyal readership of Voice4 and the world at large, that for any of you as intrigued by these descriptions as I am, the Honours theses are available online through our library. Alright Kim, at this point in your project (it has gone to an external reader and is almost complete) and as an Honours conversion student, I ask the million dollar question...to the thesis or not to thesis?

*K: Absolutely. I think the choice is important; before, it was thesis or die. Now students can get a B.A. with an 'Honours edge' without necessarily doing a thesis. To write a thesis is to get into a subject you are passionate about. You need to have the passion or you won't get through it. If I hadn't been so interested in my project, it wouldn't have evolved. I think it has to be something you believe in, or it is a self-defeating process. For me, I found it liberating to take on something that I created and found this exciting. I was clearly passionate about this project from the outset, given that I came back to Acadia to convert to an Honours degree.*

B: I think from everyone I have spoken to that passion is what is necessary to push through what is quite an academically gruelling (although a rare case of equally fulfilling, in my opinion) process. That said, to show readers that pursuing an Honours degree still allows students to have a life, let me ask what you do when you aren't thesis-ing?

*K: As you have heard from my happy roommates, I do a lot of baking and cooking in my spare time. I also volunteer with S.M.I.L.E. where I work with a deaf child because in my year away from Acadia I learned sign language. I enjoy running, painting, bike rides, going on adventures, and going to the city.*

B: See, we English kids don't just sit and read books and write angst poetry in our spare time. As a Wolfville veteran, I have to ask what you consider the best and worst aspects of Wolfville.

*K: I'd say the best thing about Wolfville is the pace. Nothing is moving so quickly that you can't*

*keep up. In terms of the worst, I am enjoying Wolfville a lot more this year because I am slightly external from the student "bubble," which I find to be the worst. Getting trapped in the bubble is hazardous. Living as a resident versus as a student is easier and better than getting consumed with only life on Prospect.*

B: Alright Kim, here is my obligatory English question (and I want to know if it corresponds with your thesis research)...what is your favourite book?

*K: That's always a tough one, Becky, but as of today I would have to say my standby book is Princess Bride. I also have re-read Lord of the Rings every year since grade 7.*

B: Should I be ashamed to admit I have only seen the movie version of your favourite book? I will add that to my summer reading list. Speaking of the future, what do you want to be when you "grow up"?

*K: As long as I follow what I am passionate about, it will take me somewhere. For now it is this "English thing," so I am doing my M.A. next year.*

B: Congrats! That leads beautifully into my next question. What are your top 3 M.A. choices?

*K: Wilfred Laurier, Acadia, and UBC.*

B: Those all sounds like excellent options. As we conclude this interview, do you have any advice for

other English students?

*K: Read your books! Also, as a student coming back I had a chance to do some things differently. Before, I didn't speak up, so I would encourage other students to engage in the conversation because you get so much more out of it. To sum it up, I would tell them to show up and be there in every way.*



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