

THE BROADSHEET



The Merrimack English Faculty: photo courtesy of Kevin Salemme

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We've all been there. The deadline to register for the next semester is approaching, and you rush to your laptop when your time slot comes around. Scrolling through the options, you try to choose English courses that will fit your needs: earlier or later? longer or shorter? MWF or TR? It's like putting together a puzzle, and it can be stressful. Soon enough, you have a full course load, but do you know what you are actually taking? Sure, a brief catalog description accompanies the title of each course, identifying goals and listing required reading, but what if you had the chance to hear about your upcoming English courses first-hand from the professors who will be teaching them? Here is your chance.

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An official publication of the Merrimack College English Department, The Broadsheet is published monthly during the academic calendar year. Its mission is to celebrate the English Department's role in promoting the literary arts on campus, to acknowledge the accomplishments of faculty and students, to profile students and alumni, and to create a forum in which issues relevant to English studies can be discussed.

Speaking Poetically: An Interview With Andrea Cohen

by Tony Rossetti

Andrea Cohen is the director of the Writers House at Merrimack College and teaches creative writing courses with the English Department. Her poetry, stories, and essays have appeared in the *New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *The Threepenny Review*, *The New Republic*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and elsewhere. Her fourth poetry collection, *Furs Not Mine*, was recently published by Four Way Books.

I recently posed some questions to her about what she loves most: poetry. A truly talented, amiable, and witty personality, Cohen shared some rather enlightening and inspiring insights. I had hoped to conduct an interview in person, but February's unprecedented snowfall kept most New Englanders in their homes for days at a time, so we corresponded via email. Thankfully, Cohen's heartfelt, thoughtful, and candid responses warmed my half frozen soul.

WHY DO YOU BELIEVE
POETRY MATTERS?
"BECAUSE OUR SOULS
MATTER."

What qualities do you think publishers are looking for in poetry/writing today? I think different editors/publishers are searching for different things. Most are looking for poems they love and admire, poems they feel are



Photo courtesy of Kevin Salemme

doing something new. Because editors have varied tastes and aesthetics, what will get published in different venues (journals, small presses, bigger publishing houses, etc.) will differ widely. And some editors of journals are looking to publish poems that convey the breadth of what's being written.

What qualities do you seek in your own writing? I care about the music in the poem. I care about the line. A lot. I care about the meaning of the poem being propelled by the music within the poem. I care about saying something in a way that hasn't been said yet. With as few words as possible. I want to make a poem that stays with you, and one you might go back to, and in returning, find something else.

There are some critics in literary circles that insist poetry currently exists exclusively in the academic world. (I don't believe that, personally). Where would you say poetry "lives" today? That's an old argument. (continued on page 10)

Meet Danielle Jones-Pruett:

For Danielle Jones-Pruett, Writing Is about More than Publishing



Photo courtesy of Kevin Salemme

by Jessica Bruso

Serving as Program Coordinator for Merrimack College's Writers House, Danielle Jones-Pruett is responsible for performing administrative tasks that keep everything running smoothly every day. She schedules events, manages expenses, and organizes student program. On top of this, she is a mother of two and a published poet who has recently received the Rona-Jaffe Foundation award for women writers.

Recipients of the Rona-Jaffe award receive \$30,000, which can be used to support writing and travel. Danielle plans on using this money to go back home to Anniston, Alabama. She describes her hometown as "one of the most

polluted areas in America." When asked about why she decided to write about this area, Danielle said, "I started thinking about this a lot when someone I care very much about got breast cancer. I started to think about just how many people I had known with cancer when I was growing up, and couldn't help wondering how those decades of pollution played a part. And Anniston provides a rich backdrop for many of the political topics that plague America as a whole, but it's important to me that the poems are more than political manifestos. For this reason, I've chosen to tell the story of this town through the voice of a young, female speaker, whose personal story—and the tragedy of her own family—converge gradually and subtly with the history of the town." During her visit, she plans to spend time absorbing her surroundings and talking to the people that live there to get a sense of their voices to work into her poetry.

WRITING IS ABOUT
DISCOVERY, SO WHEN
THAT HAPPENS I FEEL
LIKE IT'S GOOD.

As a writer and working mother, Danielle has many things competing for her time, but says writing is too important to make excuses. She says, "If I'm not writing as much as I feel I should, I schedule four days a week when I'm going to write for 30 minutes. Everyone has an extra thirty minutes in their life, right? It's one episode of *The Big Bang Theory*, or a little less time on Facebook, or waking up a little earlier. And you won't believe the magic that happens if you commit to writing for thirty minutes several times a week; (*continued on page 7*)

Fall Preview Continued from p. 1

This fall 2015, Merrimack's English department is offering its usual eclectic array of courses, but as the full-time faculty will surely tell you, the courses are being offered like never before. "I don't think I've ever taught one course the same way twice, and I bet that goes for all the faculty in our department," said Dr. Vatalaro. "It's good because it keeps things dynamic. We are always examining our approaches to our courses, and looking for better ways to teach them." This is exactly the attitude you would want from your English department faculty, and here at Merrimack, we are lucky enough to have that. Let's take a look at some of the upcoming adventures in literature and writing that are scheduled for next semester.

SEX, SIN, AND
SALVATION: MILTON'S
POETRY HAS IT ALL!

A previous issue of *The Broadsheet* featured an article about Dr. Vatalaro's course *The New England Shore*, outlining the various excursions the group took. Senior Laura Dupre commented on her experience in the course last spring, saying "it was such an interesting class, because we got to think about what it means to be a writer in New England. We looked at works in search of a "New England signature" and questioned how things might be different if the same work had been written in California or New York or Virginia. It was just amazing to think about the impact that our environment has on our writing--stylistically and topically." This fall, however, Dr. Vatalaro will be teaching the same course with a different focus: "After teaching the pilot version of *The New England Shore*, I think the bread and butter of the course is walking in the footsteps of the writers whose

work you've read, I think that is a powerful thing for people. That's what I want the core of the course to be."



A nice picture of the faculty courtesy of Kevin Salemme

Another course you might be interested in is Dr. Scherwatzky's *Milton and the Culture of Revolution*. This promises to be a course unlike any other you will take at Merrimack. When asked in an email to describe what the course will be about, Dr. Scherwatzky responded: "Sex, sin, and salvation: Milton's poetry has it all!

Where else but *Paradise Lost* can you get the low down on what it was like for Adam and Eve to get down both before and after the fall?

Where else can you learn how angels have sex?

But Milton delivers far more than erotic titillation: the poem could be rated V for violence as well. Where else can you read about the war in heaven between angels and demons?

Where else in blank verse can you explore the fiery flames of hell without getting burned?

Add in a touch of heretical theology and radical politics and what do you have? John Milton, and a course you'll never forget!"

If you are a fan of Shakespeare, and you want to gain a new perspective on why his plays include the elements they do, then Dr. Plasse has the perfect course for you this fall.

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ENG 3250 *Body Parts: Pleasure and Pain in Shakespeare's Plays* approaches some of Shakespeare's most famous work by examining presentations of the human body. According to

APPROACHING THE PLAYS
THROUGH...THE BODY MAKES
SHAKESPEARE MORE INTRIGUING
AND LESS INTIMIDATING.

Dr. Plasse, “The body operates in Shakespeare not only as we might expect it to -- as the very medium through which actors bring these works to life onstage—but also as a persistent topic in its own right... It seems that no matter where you look in Shakespeare, you find bodies being used to express the central concerns of each play. As a core feature of Shakespeare's plays, the human body offers a concrete, compelling, and accessible focus that rewards careful reading and opens up many possibilities for investigation of these complex works.”

This is certainly a unique way of looking at Shakespeare, and it sounds like a course that is sure to stir up some fascinating class discussion and debate. In addition to the appeal of this compelling subject matter, the course is taught by a professor who is highly passionate about this topic. When asked what was most exciting to her about teaching this course in the fall, Dr. Plasse said, “What gets me most excited about teaching this course, beyond my perpetual obsession with Shakespeare's bodies, is introducing students to a new way of experiencing Shakespeare. I've found that approaching the plays through attention to the body makes Shakespeare more intriguing and less intimidating, especially for students who

might have reservations about signing up for a Shakespeare course. And since the body generates meaning both on the page and on the stage, focusing on the body is an important way to get students to consider both the literary and theatrical dimensions of Shakespeare's art.”

Though unavailable for interview, because they are on sabbatical leave this semester, Drs. Kevin Plunkett and MaryKay Mahoney will also be offering upper-level courses in their specialty fields. Dr. Plunkett will teach ENG 3790 *Poe, Hawthorne, and the American Short Story*, which the department fall 2015 English course brochure describes as follows: “The concept of the short story as a distinct narrative form develops in the 19th century, shaped significantly by the writings of Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne. This course will study the emergence of the modern short story as exemplified in the writings of these two authors, as well as cultural changes within 19th-century America that contributed to the increased market for this new genre.”

THE BREAD AND BUTTER OF
THE COURSE IS WALKING IN
THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE
WRITERS WHOSE WORK YOU'VE
READ.

The fall brochure description for Dr. Mahoney's ENG 3440 *Victorian Literature* reads: “Time of complacency or time of turmoil? The British Victorian period, usually described as ranging from 1832-1901, is frequently stereotyped as a time of respectability and conventionality, particularly in comparison to the Romantic (*continued on page 10*)

Avid Reader, Active Leader: Ashley Frye

by Emily O'Brien



If there is one thing that Junior Ashley Frye isn't afraid to do, it's speak up for what she believes in. "I'm now so open to giving my opinion as an English major because often that's what you have to do in class. It's just something I do naturally now, and I like that my opinions have the power to spark someone else's ideas through Socratic discussion." According to Ashley, being an English major has strengthened her ability to speak her mind, an asset of the major that many can surely relate to. Ashley believes that the class discussions that come with many English courses at Merrimack have cultivated her own communication skills. She has taken this ability to speak her mind and now applies it in all aspects of her life.

Ashley's creativity and bold spirit make her stand out as a leader. As a Resident Advisor,

Vice President of the GSA (Gay Straight Alliance), and active member of ALANA (Asian, Latino(a), African, Native American Affairs), she is certainly a familiar face around campus. Ashley uses her voice to make positive changes and to stand up for what her organizations represent. "Anything with diversity I really like.... If someone asks, 'Why do we have that on campus?'" even if I'm not in the conversation, I like to jump in and say, 'Well, this is why we do it,' and I can just explain it to them that way."

THE MORE READING YOU DO, THE BETTER YOUR OWN WORK COMES OUT.

After completing her undergraduate degree (Ashley also has a double minor in Spanish and in Women's and Gender Studies), she plans to attend graduate school and start a career as a high school English teacher in an urban setting. She wisely chose a Spanish minor, knowing that she will likely come across many Spanish speaking students in her future, where, undoubtedly, her voice will continue to be heard. Ashley credits her desire to become a high school English teacher to a teacher that she had in high school. "I've had people influence me in my life and I would like to influence people in that same way."

In her free time, when she is not putting together an event for GSA or a floor program for her residents, Ashley enjoys writing, reading and drawing. She considers herself a creative person, and she hopes to work on her writing more in the future during her summers off from teaching. *(continued on page 7)*

Ashley Frye Continued From p. 6

For now, the key ingredient in her life is reading. “The more reading you do, the better your own work comes out,” Ashley says. She believes that reading is helpful to her as a writer because it exposes her to more styles and ideas of writing.

Ashley particularly enjoys reading black poetry and graphic novels. Some of her favorite titles from the latter genre are Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* and Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, both politically charged and personal at the same time. “I like cultural books,” said Ashley, also listing Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s 2013 novel *Americanah* as a favorite read. She recently read a collection of Maya Angelou poems, and identifies her favorites as “No Loser No Weeper,” and “Harlem Hopscotch.” When asked how reading these works influenced her, Ashley said, “The more we read, the better we know ourselves and literature. The better we know ourselves and literature, the better we can express ourselves when we write.”

Meet Danielle Jones-Pruett Interview Continued From p. 3

your brain starts seeing poems or stories everywhere, because you’re training yourself to look and pay attention. I’m not a believer in inspiration striking: I believe you sit down to work and make the magic happen.”

Danielle first started to make the magic happen when she was ten years old. She would sit at her father’s Underwood typewriter and rewrite stories she knew, exploring her understanding of the characters and plot. When she was thirteen, she began to write poetry, and it was in this form that she found her voice. She still writes every day and describes her process saying, “I write something every day, although

sometimes it’s just a sentence or a phrase, or some idea I’m chewing on. I have poems that I’ve written in one draft (although usually when that happens I’ve been turning the subject matter over in my head for a while), and I’ve written poems I’m still revising years later because they’re just not right. My favorite thing is when something happens in my life and I suddenly realize I have an ending to a poem I couldn’t finish... For me, writing is about discovery, so when that happens I feel like it’s good.”

I’M NOT A BELIEVER IN
INSPIRATION STRIKING:
I BELIEVE YOU SIT DOWN
TO WORK TO MAKE THE
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When asked if she would offer any advice to young writers, Danielle emphasized the importance of the work. She says, “It can’t be about being published, or winning awards and fellowships. All that stuff is nice and encouraging and feels great, but it has to be about loving the work. If you love what you’re writing it’s natural to want to work hard, and if you work hard you’ll get better, and if you get better the rest will follow.” She also underscored the importance of belonging to a community of writers, since it will serve as a catalyst. She says, “I also cannot emphasize the importance of community: writing friends who will read your work and tell you what they think, that share your passion and understand your fears and frustrations.” She offers encouraging words saying, “I hope you find fellow wordsmiths that inspire and encourage you here at the Writers House. Having a writing community has made all the difference in my life.”

Finding Our Best Selves: A Review of *Orphan Train*

By Rosemary Morton

Orphan Train

Author: Christian Baker Kline

Publisher: HarperCollins Publishers

Date of Publication: 2013



Orphan Train, by Christian Baker Kline, is a historical fiction novel that centers on a friendship between a ninety-one-year-old woman named Vivian and a sixteen-year-old foster child named Molly. Their friendship begins when Molly steals a novel from a library and is sentenced to serve time in a juvenile hall. Molly is given the choice to perform community service instead, so she agrees to help Vivian clean out her attic. Molly soon learns that she and Vivian have much more in common than they realize. Woven into this story is another narrative involving Niamh Power (Vivian's birth name), an Irish immigrant girl, whose entire family was killed in a fire. Niamh is aboard an orphan train traveling to the Midwest, where she will either be adopted or put to work.

Diversity represents an important element in this book. Molly is of Native American descent and is unique within the white suburban town where she lives. Molly is an outsider in this community, just as Vivian is when, as a girl, she is shipped from one foster care home to the next.



The friendship that develops between Vivian and Molly makes up the bulk of the story. It is written well and all of the dialogue seems natural, despite the generational distance between the two characters. The first interaction that Vivian and Molly had involves her appearance. Molly is a Goth. To illustrate: “‘What?’ ‘Doing that to your hair.’ ‘Oh. It’s not so bad. I’ve been doing it for a while now.’ ‘What’s your natural color, if you don’t mind my asking?’ ‘I don’t mind,’” Molly says. “‘It’s dark brown.’ ‘Well, my natural color is red.’” It takes Molly a moment to realize Vivian is making a little joke about being gray. “‘I like what you’ve done with it,’” she parries. “‘It suits you’”(15). Vivian is one of the first characters in the story who appreciates Molly for who she is. From the first conversation to the end of the story, the reader acknowledges that this friendship is magical, because without it Molly would have never opened up to another human being.

The plot of this novel is fascinating, because many of the people that Vivian knew in the past connect to a character in the present. For
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example, Dina is Molly's foster mother, and Mrs. Scatcherd is the woman who runs the orphan train Vivian is on. What is more, both of these characters are problematical. Though they are fundamentally strong Christians, both seem to have very little regard for the children they swore to protect.

In *Orphan Train*, the narrative goes from Molly's story to Vivian's story. Christian Baker Kline accomplishes these jumps in time seamlessly. Her approach is interesting in the sense that she does not just switch the time period; she changes the narrator altogether. In Vivian's story, for example, the author uses first person while in Molly's story she uses third person narration. This method works, because it helps the reader distinguish between the two main characters. I believe this feature makes the novel very enjoyable to read.

The historical content in this story is based on something of which few people are aware. Orphan trains were commonplace between the years 1854 and 1929. According to the appendix at the back of this edition, over 75 trains were in service. Many of the riders apparently believed there was only one (About the Book 5). The trains were used for "adoption, which turned out to be indentured servitude." (About the Book 8). According to the author, the trains were part of a social experiment, and, though some of the children, mostly babies, were actually adopted by loving families, many of the children who road the orphan trains were not so lucky. Charles Loring Brace, who founded the program, "believed that hard work, education, and firm but compassionate childrearing---not to

mention midwestern Catholic family values---were a way to save these children from a life of depravity." (About the Book 8). All of the time and energy that it took to research this story worked in Christian Baker Kline's favor. Out of her four previous novels, *Orphan Train* is the first to wind up on the *New York Times* Bestseller List.

For me, the book's only shortcoming is that the middle, sandwiched between such a strong beginning and ending, was lacking. It seemed that the story was dragging a little too long and much of the story was told from Vivian's point of view. I did not mind Vivian's story, for I loved her as a character; however I felt that

there needed to be more of Molly's story. I wanted to know what was happening to Molly and her friendship with Vivian. As much as the friendship was important to the story, it was not in the story as much as I

would have liked. The novel would be much stronger had it apportioned equal amounts of time to the two main characters.

My overall reaction to this novel is a positive one. The reader develops a deep personal connection to these characters and inevitably wants to see them overcome their struggles. The novel is enjoyable particularly for those who love historical fiction. *Orphan Train* was a very emotional read and you grow to love these characters. It provides a great journey and I would recommend it to anyone. So hop on the train and enjoy the ride!

"I'VE COME TO THINK
THAT'S WHAT HEAVEN IS ---
A PLACE IN THE MEMORY OF
OTHERS WHERE OUR BEST
SELVES LIVE ON"

Poetically Speaking Continued From p. 2

Poetry's alive and well. I'd say it's living in more places now than ever. In the Boston area, it feels like poetry lives everywhere. You can find readings every night of the week, sometimes several in one night, at bookstores, colleges, coffeehouses, art galleries, churches, you name it. There are venues for new voices and for established writers. If you're a poet, or someone who loves poetry, this is a pretty fabulous place to be.

Our culture is rich with narrative, tracing as far back as the oral traditions of centuries ago. Do you think there is any correlation with oral traditions and poetry?

"Poetry is integral to our oral tradition. A poem is a thing meant to be sung. It lives, among other places, in the mouth, in the ear. In the air between."

Where do you envision poetry is headed?

I'm not sure. Some people say that crossing disciplines is where we're at with poetry, which is where we are with art in general. What I'm interested in, always, is writing that moves me. And surprises. And makes me think.

Why do you believe poetry matters? Because our souls matter.

Fall Preview Continued From p. 5

period immediately preceding it. And while the Romantic period was at least partially shaped by the sense of dramatic political change inherent in the French Revolution, the Victorian era began with a quieter opening: the Reform Bill of 1832, a piece of legislation heralding compromise and change within existing political structures. Yet the Victorian world was in many ways one of incredible change and turmoil. Victorians were forced to grapple with external factors such as rapid industrial expansion and

growth of large industrial centers; in addition, they had to struggle with questions about religious belief and the meaning of human existence, questions sparked by the work of scientists like Charles Darwin."

DO YOU KNOW WHAT
YOU ARE ACTUALLY
TAKING?

There you have it, the perspectives of three English faculty members, giving you the inside scoop on their courses for the fall. So, when registration time comes around this spring, don't just look at times offered and numbers of credits. Instead, consider the inner workings of the courses you are registering for, and don't be afraid to stop by the English department on the second floor of Sullivan for more information. From my experience, the English professors are always enthusiastic about helping their students, and they will surely be able to give you the information you need. So take a deep breath, know your course information, know your professors, and click "add course" without reservation.

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