

THE BROADSHEET



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Editor's Note

This issue of *The Broadsheet* spotlights student accomplishments, the vitality and growth of literary and performing arts on our campus, and continued innovation within English offerings. Mostly, though, the issue celebrates the burgeoning of community and culture within our program. English alumna Beth Anne Cooke-Cornell, who was recently promoted to the rank of Professor of English and Humanities at the Wentworth Institute of Technology, helped remind us of these developments when she served last month as guest speaker at the 6th Annual English Awards Ceremony and Reception. A former student of mine, Beth Anne underscored the importance of identifying a supportive community of people that shares one passion and commitment as the cornerstone to living a creative, productive, and challenging life. Her narrative focused on the bumpy and uneven career path she followed, from collegiate women's basketball player and English major (who aspired to become a poet), to waitress, writing tutor, graduate student, mother, lapsed creative writer, and eventually collegiate faculty member. She began her story by recalling that, at Merrimack, her status as a baseball-cap-wearing varsity athlete and insecure writer distanced her from a small group of what she called "rock star" English majors. Surveying the large gathering of students, faculty, staff, and family assembled at the Writers House, she concluded her narrative by marveling at the vibrant community that had congregated for this annual event. Many of us were struck hard by the irony of Beth Anne's presence behind the podium: an erstwhile, self-defined outsider had returned home to welcome a new generation of students to a community of English majors that now welcomed her. Beth Anne's homecoming had been serendipitous. A friend in Salem encouraged her to resume writing poetry (Beth Anne had given it up for 15 years) and also invited her to participate in a local writers' group. Poet and Writers House Associate Director Danielle Jones-Pruett belonged to that group. A door reopened. Professor Schwartzky, hearing about Beth Anne's success, asked her to consider serving as guest speaker at the English Awards Ceremony. She accepted and a circle closed.

Cheers! **Professor Vatalaro**

An official publication of the Merrimack College English Department, The Broadsheet is published four times 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.

HOW EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IS CHANGING THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

BY: CALVIN EVANS

Saturday, April 13, I woke up at 7am, got myself ready, and made the short drive to campus an hour later. There, I met up with classmates and friends, and, by 8:30, we were on the road for a field trip to Cape Cod. We drove for almost 150 minutes and 120 miles to the Salt Pond Visitor's Center in Eastham. From there, Professor Vatalaro led a dozen of us around Coast Guard Beach on the National Seashore, pointing out where Henry Beston's Outermost House sat before the Blizzard of '78 demolished it, and where John Hay made his trek down the beach from Provincetown. We drove around Nauset Lighthouse and surveyed Nauset Marsh from Fort Hill. We saw the sand flats going off into the horizon at First Encounter Beach on the Bay side of the Cape while wind and sand buffeted our faces. We stood atop the cliffs in Wellfleet, the beach over 100 feet below us. We ate lunch together when the fog rolled back in and the rain, which had stopped in the morning, resumed. On the way home, we got stuck in Boston traffic, in part because a hockey game was scheduled that night. By the time we made it back to campus, it had been over seven hours and 250 miles of driving.

It's one thing to read about Celia Thaxter's life on the Isles of Shoals; it's another thing entirely to be able to see that landscape for ourselves.

This was not the first time this semester I'd been on a trip like that, though it was the longest, because I've had the privilege of taking The New England Shore and American Witches: in Salem and On Screen, courses taught by Professors Vatalaro and Pottroff respectively. In The New England Shore class, we read

texts by naturalist writers who spent time living along coastal regions of New England. Henry Beston, John Hay, Robert Finch, and Cynthia Huntington wrote about Cape Cod. William Sargent wrote about Ipswich Marsh, and Celia Thaxter focused on the Isles of Shoals. To contextualize our reading, we took three field trips: Crane Beach in Ipswich; Odiorne Point in Rye, New Hampshire, where you can see the Shoals from the shoreline, and the National Seashore on Cape Cod. For Professor Pottroff's class, we were required to attend a certain number of "Seventeenth-Century Nights"—events outside of class that would help enrich our understanding of the course material. These excursions included a visit to the Philip's Library in Rowley to look at the original court documents from the Salem Witch Trials, an iron-gall ink making seminar, using seventeenth-century ingredients and recipes, and a visit to the Witch Museum in Salem to see how the public gets exposed to the Trials. Both courses incorporated experiential learning in order to further expand on the course material outside of the classroom, but these excursions and events did so much more.

For an English course, the most obvious reason to engage in experiential learning is to bring the texts alive in some way. We often study works written by dead authors or about far-away locations, so the content can seem distant. It's one thing to read about Celia Thaxter's life on the Isles of Shoals; it's another thing entirely to be able to see that landscape for ourselves. And while we were unable to go to the Shoals directly, the opportunity to see their remoteness nine miles off the coast of Odiorne Point gave special meaning to the isolation Thaxter talks about in her narrative. Standing on the rocky coastline, it was hard to hear anything but the wind and the crash of the waves. One of the

questions we keep coming back to in *The New England Shore* involves the issue of why a place draws people to it. While course texts confirm that their authors felt a special connection to the coast, having the opportunity to see the places they are writing about, to smell the same ocean, fight off wind and sand—that experience helps you understand the attachment.

These opportunities also remind us that no one writes in isolation. The texts we encounter are part of a larger conversation, both responding to other writers and drawing responses from them. Seeing the actual court documents and then reading all the different plays, novels, and other works that spawned from the trials

provided insight into the cultural context of derivative works. Each writer saw the trials in a different way based on his or her own historical circumstance. Longfellow saw Giles Corey as the ideal American Man for the late nineteenth century, while Arthur Miller viewed John Proctor as the original scapegoat, perfect for an allegory on McCarthyism. The Salem Witch Museum

in particular reminded us of ways in which the works we read in class create a cultural legacy. In class, we had a lively discussion about Miller's reasons for writing *The Crucible* and we explored interpretations regarding why Miller deviated from the historical record. Our trip to the Witch Museum underscored the power of competing narratives and of literary adaptation.

Moving outside of the classroom, most of our excursions provided a great opportunity to leave campus and explore wider community. Other than the trip to the Cape, no destination was more than about an hour away. When you're on campus most of the time, it can be easy to forget about our surrounding area. We are incredibly lucky to be in a place with so much history,

so much varied geography, and so much to do. One of Merrimack College's strengths is the work it does with the surrounding communities. Programs like Mack Gives Back and the service learning requirement provide opportunities for students to engage in the world beyond the institution. Experiential Learning fills a similar role. Education doesn't just take place in the classroom; it happens wherever there is an opportunity to learn, and field work, whether it involves combing through an archive or the walking the beach, can provide that opportunity. Furthermore, field activity fosters community within classrooms. Excursions and special events allow students to inter-

act with each other outside of a structured environment where they might not typically do so. Classroom discussions become more vibrant and engaging when students believe they are talking to a group of friends instead of judgmental classmates.

Experiential learning also allows English courses to participate in interdisciplinary studies on a more practical level. In many ways, English is inherently interdisciplinary. While inter-

pretation and analysis remain at the core of what we do, we also need to place texts within appropriate contexts, perhaps by researching the sociocultural background of the author, or the wider historical milieu in which the piece was written, or even the area of scientific study with which the text engages. Students can accomplish these tasks in a classroom, but not to the same extent as with experiential learning. In *American Witches*, we spent an afternoon making iron-gall ink, an interesting chemistry lesson that provided historical context. The workshop enabled us to experience for ourselves the arduous process of making ink and the extreme difficulty of writing with a quill. We also took modern shortcuts, such as using a hot plate and a self-stirring beaker, and we could order all the ingredients online; however, it took a good hour or two to



Students visiting the Rebecca Nurse Homestead for the American Witches: in Salem and on Screen experiential learning course.

produce a small amount of ink. As red wine was one of the ingredients, the whole room began to smell like grape juice when the mixture began to heat up. In addition, writing with the quill was very unintuitive, making it difficult to compose even a single line. This process helped us better appreciate why books were so



Education doesn't just take place in the classroom; it happens wherever there is an opportunity to learn.

important to the Puritans and why they had a high rate of literacy, though very few people, women especially, had mastered the art of writing. While we were not analyzing texts at that event, we were receiving the benefit of added context in a way for which some conventional English courses often don't make the time.

The good news is that experiential learning seems to be a direction in which a number of English courses have chosen to move. In addition to the two classes I took this semester, in the fall Professor Vatalaro will add a field trip component to his Road Trips class, which looks at journeys in British Romanticism, and also in the fall Professor Pottroff will pilot her Literary Boston course, a 1000-level offering that explores the literary history of Boston from the 1600s on, and includes trips into the city. These types of classes, especially at the 1000-level, provide exciting opportunities for non-major students to see what it's like to study English.

Does every course in an English Program need an experiential learning component? Probably not, though it

might be beneficial, even if it's just screening a film related to a course text or conducting a science experiment, like making iron-gall ink. Will these additions cost money? Of course, but it's a worthy investment. It shows that the English Department is engaged in wider communities, both academic and social. Experiential courses provide students with important opportunities for engagements other programs might not offer. This initiative demonstrates that we are thriving and innovating at a time when books seem less and less popular to the general public. I would love to see the English Department offer a trip to the United Kingdom. Many of our courses focus on British Literature, and having the opportunity to travel overseas for a semester, a month, or even just a week over break, would prove an incredible experience. To my mind, the excursion would be only open to English majors via application with limited spots, becoming a marquee centerpiece to the program. Experiential learning provides memorable experiences that allow students to better engage with the classroom material while also fostering community.

The English Department would like to thank the Dean of Liberal Arts and the generous donation from Marguerite Kane, Professor Emeritus of Political Science, that helped make field trips for The New England Shore and American Witches possible.

Poetry Contest Submission **Water Colors**

Clouds stretched out
against the dark blue canvas
in light brush strokes.
Like someone had changed their mind,
and painted over the sunny day and decided
to scatter
stars.

Kathryn Martello, 2nd Place

OF MUSES AND DUNES: THE MAGIC OF CYNTHIA HUNTINGTON

BY: DAN ROUSSEL

In Cynthia Huntington's memoir *The Salt House: A Summer on the Dunes of Cape Cod*, she writes, "...the greatest adventure is to find a home in the world, particularly in the natural world, to earn a sense of belonging deeply to a place and to feel the deep response well up within you and become a part of you." This insight emerges from experience. For several summers, Huntington and her husband resided in a dune shack on the back shore of Cape Cod, loaned to them by friend and fellow Provincetown artist, Hazel Hawthorne-Werner. After her time in the dunes, Huntington would go on to write *The Salt House*, in addition to two poetry books, *Terra Nova* and *Fire Muse*, both of which continue to draw from her experiences on the Cape.

Her work has always proved popular—she's been published in the *Harvard Review*, *AGNI*, *Ploughshares*, and more. In 2004, five years after the release

of *The Salt House*, New Hampshire appointed her state Poet Laureate. Awards bestowed on Huntington include the Robert Frost Prize, the Jane Kenyon Award in Poetry, several grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and national and state-level arts councils, in addition to a spot on the jury to select the 2006 Pulitzer Prize-winning poet. Her work has received abundant, consistent acclaim. Despite the accolades, Cynthia Huntington remains one of the most humble poets in our community. This April, she attended meetings of The New England Shore and Professor

Cohen's Creative Writing: Poetry, reflecting on some of her past works while fostering discussion within the classes. Afterwards, she gave a reading at the Writers House.

In the titular poem of *Fire Muse*, the speaker writes, "feel the dunes shift and sigh, their sand finding its weight as stone, / reforming." The mysticalness of the ever-changing dunes arises in their fluid nature; modern encroachments have failed at arresting this quality. The landscape that inspired Huntington's writing wasn't much different from that which inspired others who wrote about the dunes, such as Thoreau, O'Neill,

Pollock, Hay, and Beston. Without a doubt, the shifting nature of the dunes irrevocably changed her writing. Other poems in the collection reveal ways in which the environment shapes her immediate world, such as a bowl of water "...thrown slant in gusts, spilled over chasms, driven over rocks, it moves constantly to level, to return."

She senses the resonance with being. In "Lighthouse," she muses, "I turned without disturbing the arrangement / of a single grain of sand. I breathed / so lightly air replaced each dark cell / buried in my flesh." Huntington's work exhibits a veneration for the land. This relationship becomes entangled with love in poems such as "Cold Dark Matter" and "Cut," comparing love to raw elements of fire and wind. Despite the turbulence, however, her writing remains serene. It often feels as though objects and natural forces are materializing into the speaker, or leading into her.



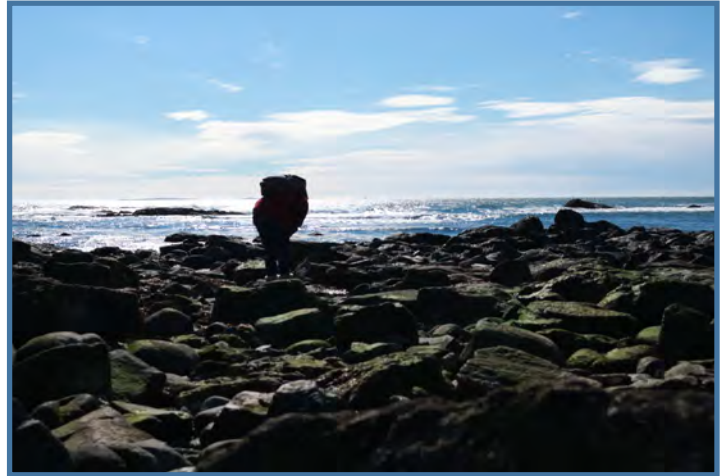
Student at Odiorne Point on a New England Shore class excursion.

In “Path of Ghosts,” her observation of coyote tracks produces musings of what she can’t see, comparing her situation to a lighthouse that “...scans the dunes all night, / sending its guardian beam over breaking waves / and miles of shadow hills. Who’s out there?” she wonders.

She considers several possibilities before settling on her neighboring dune shack residents, “turning restless in our bunks / under the white flash / sweeping the window every thirty seconds.” While other writers might find themselves tempted to lapse into despair, Huntington, remains centered and curious until the very end. Her nature transcends the page.

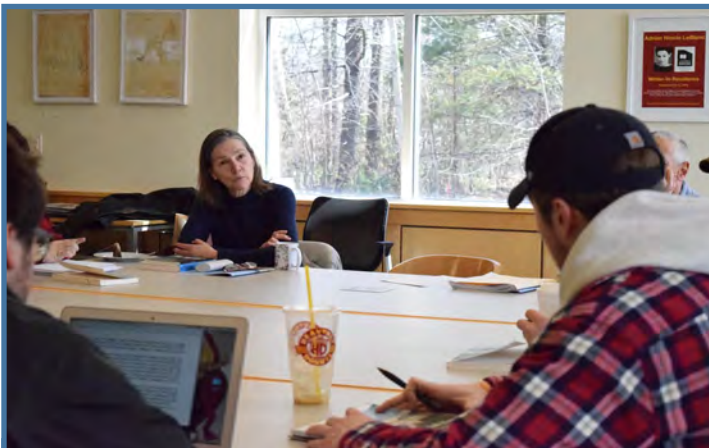
One student enrolled in The New England Shore course described Huntington as “well-spoken, with a great depth of knowledge,” referring to her thoughtful discussion of her work and her life experiences. Indeed, I felt the same way about her—at the Writers House, she read from several collections that encompassed cultural questions, historical laments, and the natural world. In addition to *Fire Muse*, she read from *Terra Nova*. In this book, Huntington goes beyond herself; she becomes North American native Squan-

spoke with a composed style. Few writers seem so at ease with their own work. Cynthia Huntington, to me, seems inherently in tune with herself. Before and after the reading, I was fortunate enough to speak with her, and her demeanor seemed to put everyone at ease. When we discussed her relationship with the Cape, particularly Provincetown, she covered its nuances



with grace, a mixture of community pride and regret over its shrinking year-round population. She and I conferred about my forthcoming internship with the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, for which her son had been selected a few years ago. “You’ll love it,” she told me, adding, “You’ll have the time of your life.” She moved about the room throughout the duration of the event engaging students and community members alike, and even dismissed a formal question-and-answer segment to keep the atmosphere casual and open. By the end of night, long after Cynthia had left the building, we could feel her absence—a longing for the attention and care she brought to everyone and everything she encountered.

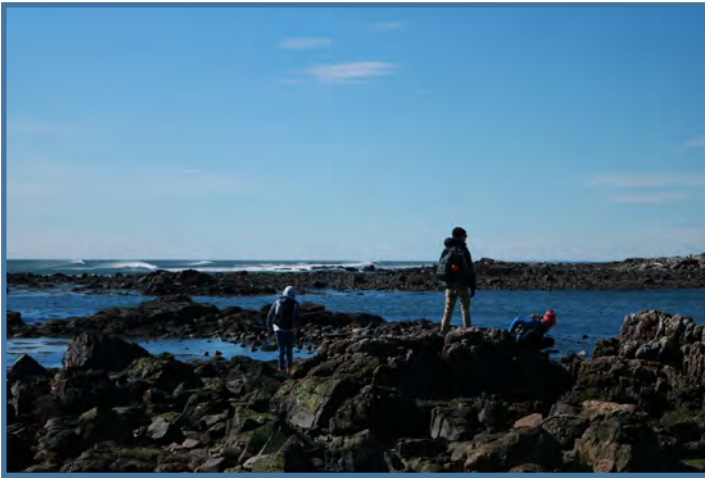
Later that week, encouraged by Professor Vatalaro and Huntington, I joined The New England Shore class on an expedition to the Cape. We ventured to Eastham’s Coast Guard Beach, driving into and through a rainstorm. While Emma Leaden and I took pictures from a high point overlooking the Great Beach, we talked about the conditions—observing not just how cold we were (very), but about our feeling that this venue felt authentic.



[Huntington] spoke with a composed style—few writers seem so at ease with their own work.

tum throughout the book, as he traces the brutal history of colonial settlers’ treatment of native people. Empathy presents itself through every piece of her work. At no point did she seem overwhelmed by her sweeping verse, which, at many points in her reading and in her writing, seems daunting and dense. Rather, she

While we'd like to imagine an eternity of sunny days and warm sand, the temperamental weather had probably been a reality for Huntington and for other writers on the Great Beach. I wondered, how many times had she looked out her windows and felt helpless? While the shacks provided shelter, had she ever felt trapped? Recently, I turned to *The Salt House* for answers. In a chapter titled "Staying In," she describes this very scenario: a multiple-day rainstorm that leaves her and her husband trapped in the shack. She admits being nervous and claustrophobic the first day, in which she "...[falls] asleep in self-defense, a stale, unrestful sleep, visited by dreams of giants." She fears going mad; she yearns for her normal life, in which she could fill stormy days with friends and movies.



The narrative grows comical at points, as she recalls, "we eat an endless bowl of soup...we begin to hate the soup. I make another pot of tea; the crackers are stale and damp. This matters more than either of us could have imagined." I'm sure it seemed grave at the moment, but Huntington leans into the absurdity of it. In a way, it does feel as though the weather has begun to unravel her memoir-self and the answers that self proffers. The tone registers an unsettling change from her customary composure. She expresses abundant freedom at the very end of the chapter, lilting passages of prose leading up to her stepping out for the first time in days. Huntington nearly comes singing off the page as she notices roses in the moonlight.

Their blossoms clenched tight, roots pulling hard to earth, they bury themselves. She, too, has weathered a storm. Despite the clash, her words highlight the duality of the natural world, both serene and unforgiving and she seems at home within it.

*Just looking to the sandy borders of
the horizon filled me with awe.*

We went on to explore other sections of the Great Beach. At one point, we stood at the edge of a dune-cliff in Wellfleet. One person walked along the beach below with her dog, and from my vantage, I couldn't help but think how miniscule someone could look against the scale of that landscape. Just looking to the sandy borders of the horizon filled me with awe. Huntington answers these thoughts in the first poem of *Fire Muse*.

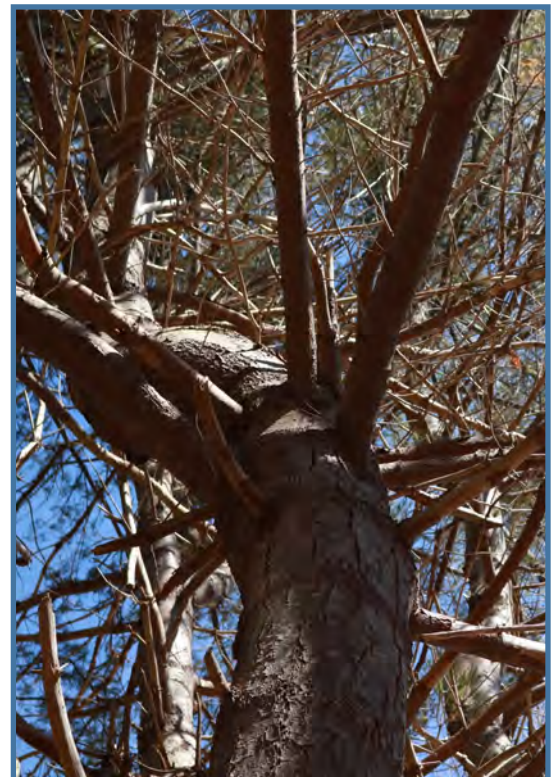
When I first read "From The Dunes," it shocked me to see its first stanza describing a scene similar to my own experience. In it, Huntington records "I am the woman often found alone / —or not found. If you think of me, / in your mind's eye, see no one standing near. / See me filling the space where I am / easily, as an animal does," exhibiting an acute and frank sensitivity to the stature of her being. "Giving way / underfoot, the earth answers back: *I am*," she writes, going on to describe how she could someday vanish into the darkness of the dunes. Her words hang heavy; however, her acute acceptance of the situation, once again, prevents her work from reading as despairing, or hopeless. Rather, her work contains itself—any feelings she might have had about the future are stripped back to acknowledge that life is situational and death inevitable. The description of disappearing rather than dying frames this piece not around Huntington's life, but around the ever-changing, omnipresent dunes.

That, in essence, might be what made Huntington's presence special to me: at times, it seemed like she had become an extension of the Great Beach and its dune-scape. Her existence, expressed both through her discussions and her work, intertwines with the landscapes of the Cape in an almost tactile way; when she speaks of life, it filters through an awareness of history's span, of geological time, and what ultimately remains. The author's note to *Fire Muse* implies that she already understands this: "I returned [to the dunes] again after twenty years," she says. "Nothing here remembered me so I forgot myself once more, in this place where who you are doesn't matter, a place of sand and wind, where only change lasts forever." As she writes about finding her home in *The Salt House*, she expresses how it becomes a part of you—rather

than you becoming part of it. Without a doubt, the dune shacks are part of Huntington—they were for those before her, and will be for those after her. Despite her relatively brief time inhabiting them, they continue to exert a magnetic pull on her thoughts and consciousness. The magic of Cynthia Huntington arises when her words begin to feel like an ocean, relentless and pressing onward. And when that shift occurs (I've seen it myself), no one can help but listen.

The Salt House: A Summer on the Dunes of Cape Cod. Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 1999.

Fire Muse: Poems from the Salt House. Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2016.



PROFESSOR, POET, AND FORMER MERRIMACK ENGLISH MAJOR BETH ANNE COOKE-CORNELL RETURNS HOME

BY: KRISTIN COLE

The Writers House, home to this year's Annual English Awards Ceremony and Reception, welcomes aspiring writers, published poets, fiction writers, and scholars. As a relatively recent addition to Merrimack's writing community, this communal space did not exist during English alumna Beth Anne Cooke-Cornell's career at Merrimack. I had an opportunity after the reception to speak with Cooke-Cornell, this year's guest speaker, about her post-collegiate journey, her vocation as college professor, and her passion for writing poetry. Early in our conversation she ex-



pressed admiration that the college and department had formalized a commitment to creating a space that would nurture a writing community, something the institution lacked during her career at the college. Attending Merrimack supported by a full basketball scholarship, Professor Cooke-Cornell's experience differed from that of the conventional English major. Her training and competition schedule, she recalls, often overrode her course work; however, though most of her English contemporaries perceived her primarily as an athlete rather than a scholar, she nurtured a love for poetry, aspiring someday to become an acclaimed writer.

Conversing with Professor Cooke-Cornell—with Beth Anne—was delightful. She described herself with an impressive blend of humorous sarcasm and honest, light-hearted humility. Members of the English Department faculty who had her in class remem-

ber her as a good, capable, and interested student, despite her current perception that she had been playing the role of impostor. Only in her dorm room, she said, was she comfortable expressing her skills freely. Beth Anne pinned favorite lines, image clusters, and

passages from poems she loved on a corkboard. Her campus living space became a hidden sanctuary, an unusual arrangement, perhaps, for the typical varsity athlete. Though her teammates knew about her passion for writing poetry, Beth Anne found it difficult to express her inclination to fellow English classmates. This double-life

influenced her to regard herself as someone unfit to join the ranks of the “rock star English majors” she observed in her classes. She identified for me one signature achievement, however, that got their attention: the one poem she submitted to the Annual Aherne Poetry Contest earned a tie for third place. Though the award failed to gain her complete acceptance to the circle she admired, she finally secured for herself an honorable mention on the register. By her senior year, she began considering the possibility of graduate school. Though the “impostor mentality” persisted, she stuck to that aspiration, though the route toward her current position at Wentworth Institute turned out to be circuitous.

After graduating from Merrimack in 1995, Beth Anne placed her writing in stasis, putting it on a fifteen-year hiatus while she started a family and pursued her education. Earning a Masters degree in

English from Central Connecticut State University and a Masters in American Studies from the University of Massachusetts (Boston), The Wentworth Institute of Technology, in Boston, hired her to work in the college writing center and eventually teach first-year writing, in addition to topics courses in language and literature. She now offers an array of interesting courses, including one that focuses on stand-up comedy, and another on the history of sex and gender in American culture. I found her Stand-up Comedy course particularly intriguing, as it consists of investigating the dynamics of live comedy performances relative to issues involving gender, race, ethnicity and class status, in addition to analyzing the conventions of the medium. Primarily serving Wentworth's science, engineering, and technology mission, the Humanities Department is far from being a student-favorite. 80% of the student population

Language and creativity are just as important as all the other things that make up your life. You have to find people who tell you [that] you deserve that time and space.

consists of males, all of whom pursue specializations outside the Humanities. Beth Anne uses her experience as a collegiate athlete who, at least initially, did not give top priority to her studies, as the means to connecting with students, most of whom believe subjects apparently outside their specialized fields will prove useless. She explains that many students in her classes struggle, because they claim that writing is “not their thing,” and as an instructor, one must start by acknowledging that they are nervous. She helps them identify certain elements of their writing that might need work in order to demonstrate to them that “writing” in general is not their weakness. They can improve it by refining specific features, making the prospect of improvement far less intimidating. This approach reflects Cooke-Cornell's college experience. She recalls telling herself that school was not “her thing.”

As for dormant aspirations to become a poet, creative

writing finally reemerged in Beth Anne's life. Upon hearing about a creative writing group from a friend, she expressed her passion for poetry and was instantly invited to join the group. She confesses to having experienced getting back into the swing of writing poetry very difficult at first, as it had been over a decade since she had exercised her creativity through writing. Steady support from fellow writers, however, encouraged to submit samples of her poetry for publication and she succeeded. Her work has been featured in literary journals such as *Bird's Thumb* and *Drunk Monkeys*. Nostalgia, Cooke-Cornell claims, remains a theme she likes to explore when she writes. In fact, the

persistence of nostalgia emerges in the poem titled “Wish,” which she read aloud at the Awards Reception, and in “Block Island,” which can be found on the *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily* website. Beth Anne's writing club gathers every few months to discuss poems its members have composed, and she also partici-

pates in “writing sprints,” an activity that involves a group email shared by fellow writers. The activity requires that she devote half-hour-periods of time for nothing but writing. When done, she emails the group to confirm she has completed her assignment. While the activity might seem rigid, it allows Cooke-Cornell to set aside time each week for creative expression. Between work and home life, this activity represents a strategy many of us might consider using—setting aside time to foster our own passions. Through these creative writing groups, Cooke-Cornell was able to discover the community of like-minded writers that she could not find in college, a community which revived her love for poetry and her talent as a creative writer.

Beth Anne said she holds these communities close to her heart, emphasizing that “language and creativity are just as important as all the other things that make up your life. You have to find people who tell you [that] you deserve that time and space.”

In addition to writing poetry, more recently Cooke-Cornell has united her passion for history and creative writing through her current work on a historical fiction novel. While the novel is still in the early stages of development, the story revolves around the 1937 Hindenburg disaster, in which the German airship *Hindenburg* burst into flames upon touching ground in New Jersey, resulting in 36 casualties. Stretching her energy and talent, this project represents a creative experiment, allowing her to explore possibilities illuminated by working in an unfamiliar genre.

Despite the initial struggle to find community in her life, Professor Beth Anne Cooke-Cornell reflects fondly on her journey as an English major. After living a doppelganger existence of playing basketball and “posing” as poet and serious English major, Cooke-Cornell found opportunities and pursued interests that turned into her profession. Her journey came full circle when she met Writers House Associate Director Danielle Jones-Pruett, another Salem, Massachusetts resident. Upon joining Danielle’s writing group and rediscovering her love for poetry, she found her way back to Merrimack, this time standing before the aspiring English majors and underscoring the importance of associating with a group of supportive people who share your passion. “Seek those communities,” she urges; “they make your life richer and more beautiful.”

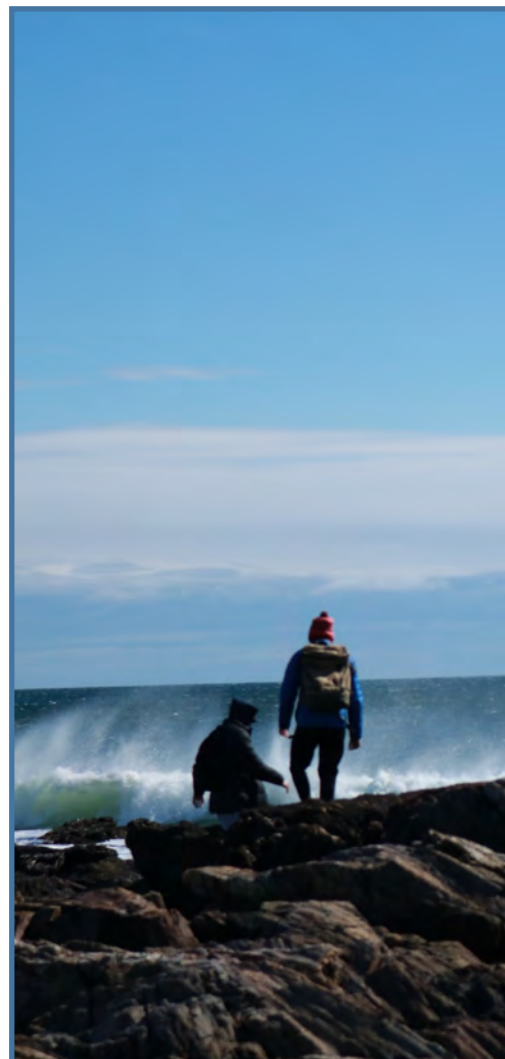
Poetry Contest Submission

I Remember

pulling on the orange snowsuit that zipped up from my waist. Walking down the hill behind our elementary school, through yards and across the road. The map at the trailhead, engraved on wooden planks and filled in with crumbling paint. Laminated animal track guides showing footprints of K-9s and hares. A canopy of ice-covered branches and the cloudless sky between. Wooden footbridges over snowed-in streambeds. Sliding down snowy descents in the path. I remember

going back in the spring –
the green that had been confined to pine trees now spread all around. Sitting on a granite glacial erratic in the middle of a meadow declaring that hard, unripe pears were my favorite. Alex plucking a leaf from a mint bush and telling me to try it. The feel of wax overshadowed by cold as I chewed it. Rock walls built to separate farms now separating trees. The sound of rushing water under the de-iced footbridges. Walking through a field and staring up at grass twice my height. Trees with thin branches and almost-white bark still leafless in May.

Calvin Evans, 1st Place



GROWTH OF PERFORMING ARTS PROGRAMS AT MERRIMACK

BY CASSANDRA KACOYANNAKIS

To understand how the performing arts at Merrimack came to be as strong as it is today, we must travel back in time several years. For starters, I spoke with Father Richard Piatt and Professor Kathleen Skills. Father Rick was hired by Merrimack's Campus Ministry in 2001 and helped out with the performing arts department. His love has always been split between theater and theology. He received a Bachelor of Arts in English from Lafayette College, a Master of Arts in Theater from Villanova University, and a Master of Divinity from the Washington Theological Union. By 2010, he shifted career emphases in order to work extensively with the theater department. For the past four seasons he has held the title of Director of the Rogers Center for the Arts, though he continues to remain active in his role with the Campus Ministry. This coming year he will take sabbatical leave to work on an original piece of theater. In addition, he will be auditioning for shows and writing about his experience.

When asking him about the status of the arts on campus when he joined the scene in 2001, he said the Onstagers were a "force" and doing very well at the time. The Onstagers is the only student-run theater organization at Merrimack College, producing two spectacular shows per year. Professor Sills became the adviser in 2002, when she was hired as an assistant professor of Theater and Visual and Performing Arts.

Professor Sills has always been extremely devoted to the arts, just as Father Rick has. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Theater from Northwestern University, a Master of Arts in Drama Therapy from Lesley University, and earned the Ph.D. in Theater from Tufts University. Last fall she took sabbatical leave in Ireland, doing research on Playback Theater with Orla Mckeagney. Playback Theater is a form of interactive

improvisation in which audience members tell the performers a story from their lives, and the players act out the story on the spot. Professor Sills continues to use this method at True Story Theater in Arlington, MA and trains actors on the method. Approximately every two years she attends different acting or directing training programs. Most recently, she completed the Margolis Method Actor Training Level 1 for University Professors. The official website for the Margolis Method describes the method as "a three-dimensional approach to theatre training that merges the skill sets of acting, directing and playwriting to build what we call the 'Actor Warrior.'"

In their early years at Merrimack, Father Rick and Professor Sills directed many works with the Onstagers and also managed to include the campus ministry in some. Productions such as *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Godspell*, and *The Laramie Project* were put up and did shockingly well, especially when considering the delicate subject matter of *The Laramie Project*, which focuses on the 1998 murder of a gay University of Wyoming student. The students have proven to be extremely dedicated to their work. In 2014, Father Rick directed *Doubt*, written by John Patrick Shanley, and gave one of the students an opportunity to write an original score for the play. Shanley attended one of the shows and enjoyed the addition of Underscoring (which is a musical accompaniment to dialogue or to a visual scene). In 2010, Father Rick and Professor Sills worked with the Onstagers on a production of *Rent*. They both stated that this production was important for the Onstagers, not only because it did well at the box office, but because of the commitment shown from the students. It signified a step up to the next level for the Onstagers,

and served as a further indication that the performing arts department was growing.

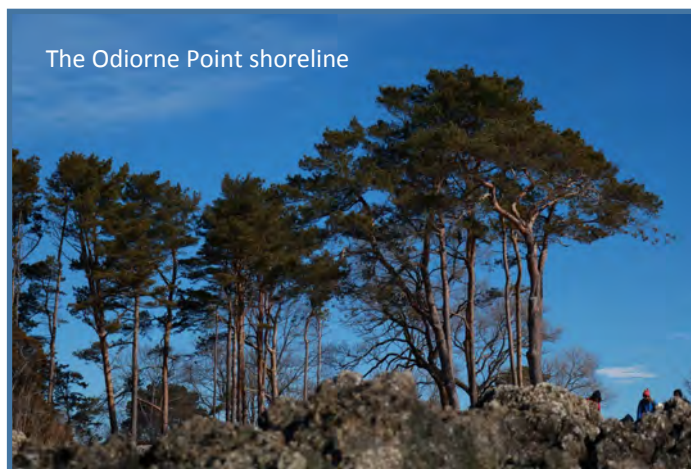
After Father Rick and Professor Sills joined the Merrimack faculty, they had to address some program issues from the ground up. In 2006, Sills created a minor in Theater and in spring 2012, the Theater major gained faculty approval. She envisioned a general degree that involved studying theater history, design, production technology, and acting. Lost would be the opportunity to specialize. In an ideal world, there would be sufficient faculty to create concentrations for stage management, acting, and tech but currently, the Theater program thrives because of hard working students who challenge themselves everyday to do something new. The major is still small, and the number of first-year students varies every year. Typical Theater students adopt a second major. Many take the second major in Education, Sociology, and Psychology. If I had started at Merrimack as a freshman and had the time to double major, I most likely would have added a Theater major onto my English degree.

Looking toward the near future, Father Rick and Professor Sills agree that a dance minor would prove most beneficial. The need is definitely there. With the help of Professor Laura Pruett, Chair of the Visual and Performing Arts Department and also the only full-time music instructor, it might be possible to shape the music minor to accommodate the Theater major. Professor Sills has worked extremely hard to ensure her students receive the best theatrical education. The one missing aspect would be a true dance experience. I am sure many Theater majors would take advantage of it, as well as students on the dance team and dance club. It would be a great opportunity to learn about different types of dance while also getting to know people you

may not have met otherwise.

The Performing Arts program remains vital because of committed faculty and students. The program consistently gains recognition. Most recently, Benjamin Mendonça was publicly lauded for his stage management of *Noises Off* at Merrimack in the fall of 2018 by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. He received a scholarship to attend a one-week training program with the Stagecraft Institute of Las Vegas this coming summer. When Benjamin was a child his aunt had taken him to theatrical showings in Boston, which established an attraction to stagecraft. At the age of ten he began performing at a summer theater camp at Middlesex Community College. He pursued his passion in high school and at Merrimack College. Here he was able to work lights, build sets, work crew, and participate in stage management.

I recently sat down with Emily Burke, the newly elected President of the Onstagers Class of 2020. She has always had a strong devotion to theater and a love for English. When applying to schools, she specifically searched for colleges with a strong Theater program and that “community feel” that brings almost everyone to Merrimack. She met with Professor Sills several times and toured the Rogers Center for the Arts before committing. Similar to most Theater students, Emily knew she wanted to double major. Her freshman year she took Introduction to Literary Studies and by the end of the semester formally committed herself to a double major in English.



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I performed with Emily outside of Merrimack while we were in high school at a community theater. She took the craft so seriously, yet still managed to have fun—an extremely difficult balance that I have tried to master these past four years, and will continue to pursue. She explained that she loved the Onstagers because the student organization ensured everyone learned something. If someone wanted to learn about lights, they could help set and run them for a show. The same goes for any other aspect of production. Currently, Emily has served as assistant-directed, acted, and helped out with costumes, makeup, and crew at Merrimack. She loves that organization gives students artistic freedom to express themselves and solve problems, but continues to provide outstanding faculty guidance. Together with Father Rick and Professor Sills, The Onstagers holds students to a professional standard and prepares them for the world ahead.

But Theater is not the only flourishing component of the Visual and Performing Arts Department. The graphic design program has become robust with very talented students and the music program aspires to create a major in Music. Although the department is relatively small, students enrolled in its programs remain among the most passionate I have ever met, ensuring continued growth. As Father Rick told me, “Creativity is the key to success.” Students of the arts and faculty here are creative and devoted to their department and school and want to make it the best possible place it can be. That commitment extends to non-programmatic initiatives.

The Onstagers has been flourishing for decades, but a lot of the other groups are newer to the program landscape. When speaking with Professor Pruett I learned that the Jazz Ensemble, Pep Band, and Concert Choir were originally a part of OSI (the Office of Student Involvement) and were student-led, but they were officially drawn into the department in 2012. In 2010, the first coed a cappella group, Mackapella, was formed. In 2017, Merrimack’s first all-female a cappella group, Take Note, was born. Finally, in 2018, Measure Up was founded as Merrimack’s second coed a cap-

pella group. The expansion offered students options regarding the kind of group in which they would like to participate. So many amazing singers audition, having multiple groups means that even more students are given the chance to perform with some extraordinary singers. This is why I helped found Measure Up. I have always enjoyed music, but did not realize my potential with it until a friend convinced me to perform in a show almost eight years ago.

I have had a long history with theater. At the age of 14 I started performing with the Greater Boston Stage Company Young Co. (Previously called Stoneham Theatre). I always took part in its Summer and Winter Festivals, in addition to many workshops throughout my middle and high school experience. Regularly, the Winter Festival and my high school show would over-



lap, forcing me to perform in two shows at once. Although I would be exhausted by the second closing night, it was always well worth it. I embraced the opportunity to step onto a stage and either express myself, tell someone’s story, or, in some cases, do both. For my senior year of high school, I auditioned for multiple schools offering programs in Musical Theater and committed to Rhode Island College, which supports a very well-known and thriving program. However, I after a bit of soul-searching, I had a change of heart and considered following a different career path.

I learned during that year that although I am still head over heels in love with the theater, I didn't love acting as much as I used to, and really just wanted to sing.

I transferred to Merrimack with the intention of auditioning for Mackapella. I succeeded and gained acceptance, managing to secure a spot on its Executive Board as a Vice President charged with the task of serving as Music Director. My only job was to teach the group the music. For two years I did just that, but for my senior year I craved more. I love teaching, and I love Mackapella, but I knew there was a group of people on campus (ironically almost all of its members also worked with the Onstagers) that wanted to do more than sing; this group wanted to work on the technical aspects of music. My two best friends, Nicholas Comeau and Samuel Lafreniere, and I created Measure Up. The formation proved an arduous process, but we're standing tall, loud, and proud today. Theater majors wanted more of an opportunity to sing, and the new group offered them a chance. Throughout my time at Merrimack I learned that I really just want to teach music all the time. My ultimate goal is to go full circle and Music-Direct shows for the Greater Boston Stage Company Young Co. Because that theater gave me, one of my governing aspirations involves repaying them for the gifts of mentorship and training with which they provided me.

Though the arts have been under steady assault over the last decade, many Americans would be heartbroken if they were suddenly to find themselves unable to tune into *The Voice*, the Grammy, and the Academy of Motion Picture Award ceremonies, or flock to the latest cinematic installment of the Avengers franchise. Thankfully, at Merrimack a growing number of dedicated students and faculty continue to work hard at changing the conventional perception that the arts remain marginal to our culture and quality of life.

Poetry Contest Submission **Little Wonders Everywhere**

Broken chains.
The smell of grass.
A happy dream of
a woman who burns her house down
with an abusive husband inside,
a Lifetime movie in motion.

We scatter out wonders like dust
over the world because humanity
knows greed like a mother—knows
greed will take and take and take
and that, my dad explains at the
dinner table one night, is why
communism could never work.

And colonialism is a landslide
of stolen spices, ESL, a gold bar
honed from faraway fairytale
homes, and faraway fairytale
people, and like a children's story
those people cease to exist when
the page flips. They're just a dream
of men who only live in documentaries,
lives that only happen on TIME
Magazine, the cover a tattooed woman,
a naked fable, telling a tall tale.

The art of bundling our wonders up
and carrying them home. A dried spring.
A discount shirt made from a factory
fire. A Middle Eastern man with
white skin and blue eyes hung in every
church. A church bombing. Wonders.
Wonder why we make these wonders,
wonder where we've marked our points
of no return, wonder how the Mayans
built calendars for the predictable people
of the predictable future—the stories,
unrepeating, rhyming, a lullaby, a manifest—

a hollow white eye staring out into
the night, gazing upon the wonders
of the magnificent, cruel world.

Daniel Roussel, 3rd Place

ENCOUNTERING SANDY SHORES AND ROCKY COASTLINES

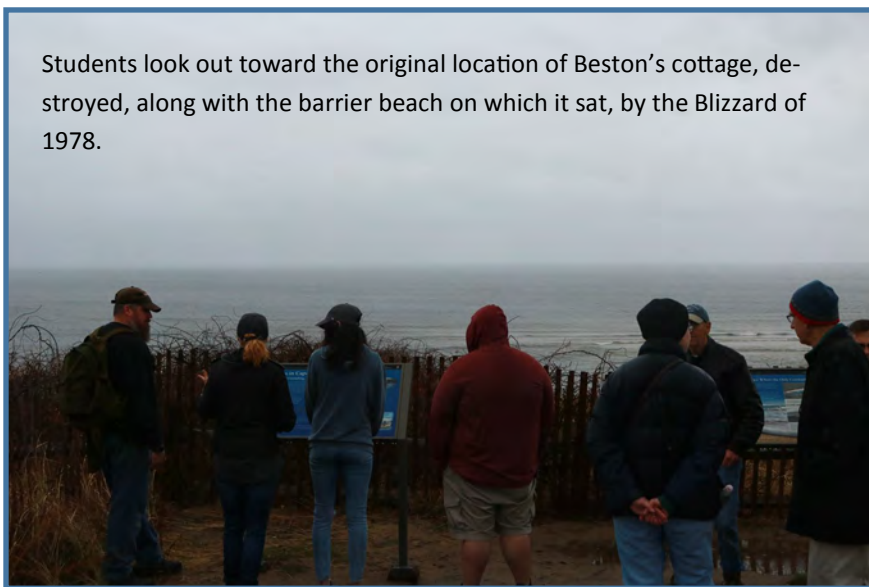
BY EMMA LEADEN



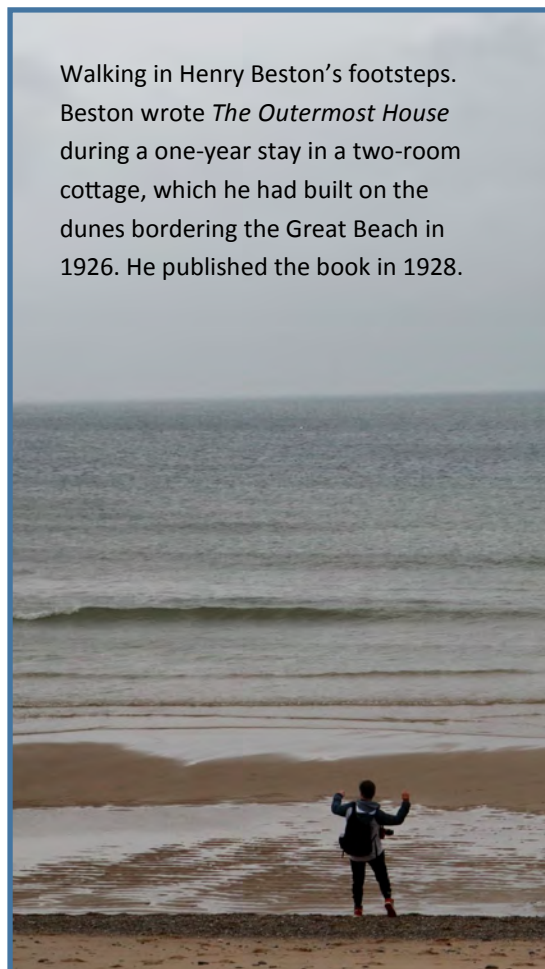
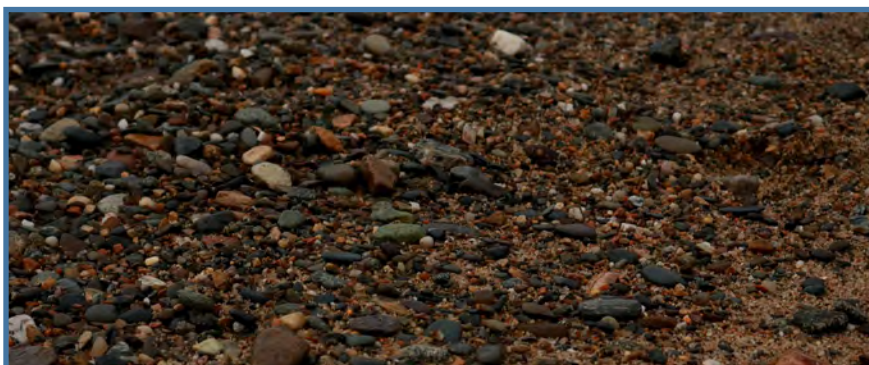
Old Coast Guard Station under repair—Coast Guard Beach in Eastham.

Students in The New England Shore visited The Cape Cod National Seashore in Eastham, MA. and Odiorne Point State Park in Rye, N. H. in March and April 2019.

Students look out toward the original location of Beston's cottage, destroyed, along with the barrier beach on which it sat, by the Blizzard of 1978.



Walking in Henry Beston's footsteps. Beston wrote *The Outermost House* during a one-year stay in a two-room cottage, which he had built on the dunes bordering the Great Beach in 1926. He published the book in 1928.







The Outer Cape's Great Beach, seen here from the dune cliffs of Wellfleet.





Poetry Contest Submission

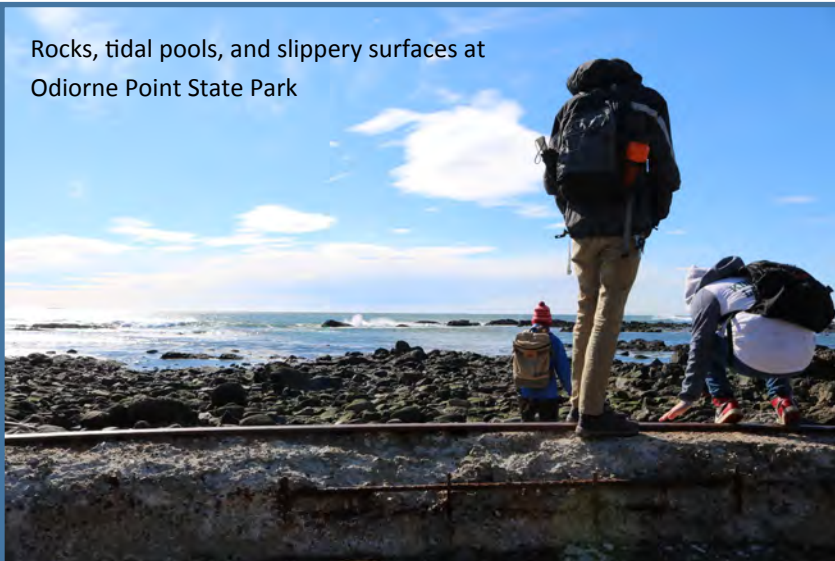
Pulse

From my window
I can see the row of lampposts.
Just from the right of the middle
One of the bulbs keeps going in
and out.
You have to pay attention to catch it.
Every few minutes it will pulse.

When I saw you this morning
I had to actively train myself
to breathe,
inconspicuously.
Pushing the air out of my lungs.
I prayed you wouldn't notice, but I wondered
if you did the same.

Kathryn Martello, 3rd Place

Rocks, tidal pools, and slippery surfaces at
Odiorne Point State Park



NEWS AND NOTES

***Professors Ellen McWhorter and Steven Scherwatzky** inducted the following English majors into the Merrimack chapter of Sigma Tau Delta at the **6th Annual English Awards Ceremony and Reception on April 16, 2019** at the Merrimack College Writers House: **Karly Bowen, Sean Conroy, Alexis Courmoyer, Calvin Evans, Taylor Galusha, Tianna Lawrence, Melissa Lawson, Kathryn Martello, Jessica Melanson, Joshua Noonan, Daniel Roussel, Krista Sbordone, Hannah Schnyder, Sarah Tripp, and Brianna Wickard.**

*The English Awards Ceremony also featured the presentation of graduation cords to **Caroline Bradley, Rochelle Brothers, Melissa Clark, Isabella Connor, Victoria Corr, Calvin Evans, Ryann Gagnon, Emma Leaden, Ashley McLaughlin, and Brianna Wickard.**

***Rev. John R. Aherne 2019 Poetry Contest** winners **Calvin Evans** (1st Place), **Kathryn Martello** (2nd and tie for 3rd place), and **Daniel Roussel** (tie for 3rd place) read their poems at the English Awards Ceremony to a large gathering, consisting of students, faculty, administrators and family. Calvin read “I Remember;” Kathryn read “Water Colors” and “Pulse;” Dan read “Little Wonders Everywhere.”

*Merrimack alumna **Beth Anne Cooke-Cornell** served as guest speaker at the English Awards Reception. A creative writer active in the North Shore community, Beth Anne was recently **promoted to the rank of full professor of English and Humanities at the Wentworth Institute of Technology.**

*The Awards Ceremony program also featured a presentation and slideshow by **Emma Leaden and Ashley McLaughlin.** The presentation focused on their experience as participants and representatives of the Merrimack chapter at the 2019 Sigma Tau Delta Convention, held this year in St. Louis, Missouri.

***Professor Steven Scherwatzky** has accepted the appointment of **Corresponding Secretary to The Johnsonians**, a professional organization dedicated to the life, works, and immortal memory of Samuel Johnson.

***Alumni who would like to receive hard copies of *The Broadsheet* should send by way of electronic mail a current mailing address to Helene Nicotra.**



NEWS AND NOTES

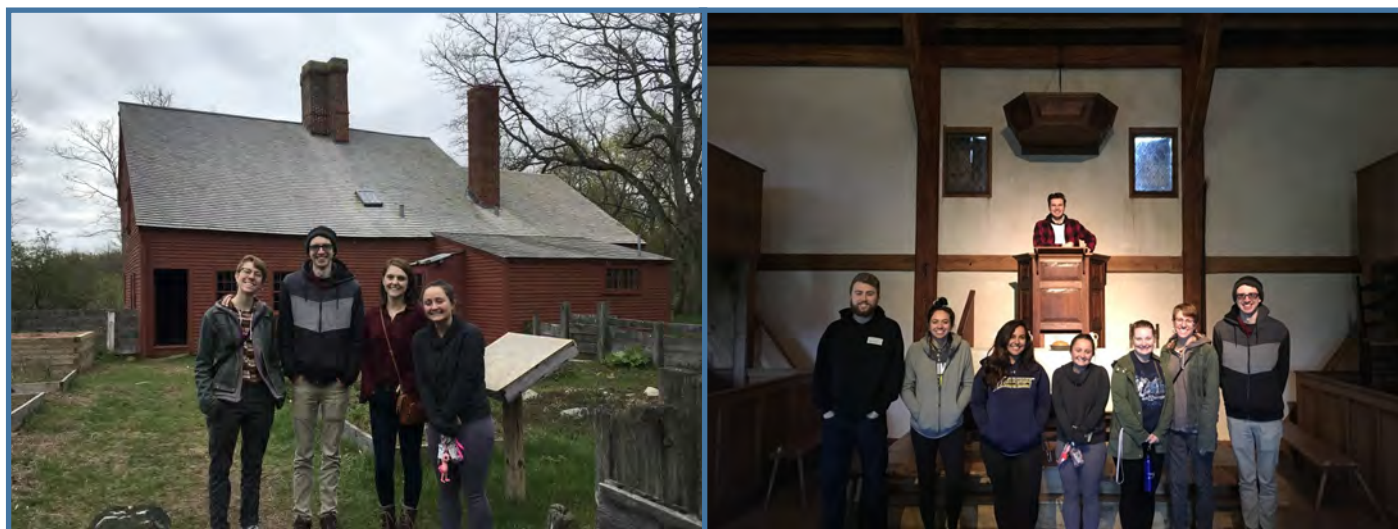
***Professor Christy Pottroff** was one of eight people accepted into **The Seventh Annual First Book Institute Hosted by the Center for American Literary Studies at Pennsylvania State University**. She will travel to State College this summer, where she will workshop her book with established scholars and editors and a cohort of other early career literary scholars. In addition to this achievement, Professor Pottroff has also been selected to be part of the first cohort of Presidential Fellows at the Interdisciplinary Institute at Merrimack during the 2019-20 academic year.

***Professor Joe Vogel** was featured in an April 21, 2019 *New York Times* article titled “Michael Jackson Biographers Face History, and the Mirror.” Professor Vogel is currently preparing the second edition of his book *Man in the Music: The Creative Life and Work of Michael Jackson*.

***Professor Pottroff’s Literary Boston** and **Professor Vatalaro’s Road Trips: Journeys in British Romanticism**, both running this fall, will incorporate field activities into their course curricula.

***Anne Bradstreet App: The Anne Bradstreet Fellows** challenge you to a poetry quest that blends seventeenth-century literary history with twenty-first-century technology. Download the ARIS app, set up an account, and search for the “**Finding Anne Bradstreet**” game. The game uses your iPhone’s GPS to guide you on a journey through North Andover.

***Professors Ellen McWhorter and Christy Pottroff** and students participating in the Anne Bradstreet project received national media coverage on March 27, 2019, the story appearing in numerous local and national dailies, including *The Boston Globe* and *The Washington Post*.



Students visiting the Rebecca Nurse Homestead for the American Witches: in Salem and on Screen experiential learning English course.

Josh Noonan finds the remains of a makeshift shelter at Odiorne Point State Park in Rye, New Hampshire



