Interview with Visiting Assistant Professor Sara Jaffe

by Sam Axelrod, MFA Fiction ’18

Sara Jaffe joined the program’s faculty for the 2016 academic year as a visiting professor of fiction. Her first novel, Dryland, was published by Tin House Books in September 2015. Her short fiction and criticism have appeared in Fence, BOMB, NOON, Paul Revere’s Horse, matchbook, and The Los Angeles Review of Books. Drawing on her experience as guitarist for post-punk band Erase Errata, she also co-edited The Art of Touring (Yeti, 2009), an anthology of writing and visual art by musicians.

Sara holds a BA from Wesleyan University and an MFA from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and has received fellowships from the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, RADAR Productions, and the Regional Arts and Culture Council. She is also a co-founding editor of New Herring Press, a publisher of prose chapbooks.

During Spring term, Sara met with Sam Axelrod, a first-year MFA candidate in fiction, to talk about her writing.

Sam Axelrod (SA): Now that it’s a bit behind you, what would you say you learned from writing and publishing Dryland?

Sara Jaffe (SJ): So, to speak first about the publishing experience, and the reception of having a book out in the world—I think it certainly felt very vulnerable at first to open myself up to readers I don’t know, and to being reviewed and stuff, but I think almost across the board when I received unfavorable reviews, it seemed pretty clear to me that they were not my readers. That what they felt I had failed to do was not something I was trying to do anyway. So that was reassuring in a way, and sort of helped to clarify my intent. That was one thing that was useful. Now strangers read my book. That’s a reality, but I also have continued to feel buoyed by the writing community that I’ve built up over the

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years, and a lot of the most valuable feedback I’ve gotten has been from writers I’ve been in conversation with for a long time, and I think that much of the press or blurbs or readings happened through people that I made connections with, through building community, for the last however many years. And that felt really gratifying to me. Of course there was work that Tin House did as my publisher, but I also was able to activate these networks that I’ve cultivated—not in order to have them help me in a publicity sense—but just having those connections becomes really grounding and useful.

SA: It’s as if you’d been working up to this for a while. I know you’re working on a collection of stories now, Hurricane Envy, but did publishing a novel affect your novel-writing-life in terms of wanting to start writing another one? Or perhaps the opposite?

SJ: When I was really ready to sit down and start the next project, I’d been saying it was going to be a collection, and then I felt like, “I don’t want to write a collection of stories. I want to write another novel. I want to dive back into writing something longer-form.” Which surprised me, because while I was writing the novel, I wanted to write stories in order to be able to work on that smaller scale. But since then I really have gotten back into story-mode. I have some ideas for longer-form stuff that I’m really excited to get back to—but it’s also been the right time for me to be trying out different things in a shorter-mode. I’d say [the stories] are quite different from Dryland; it’s more about making experiments in various ways that I can sustain more effectively over shorter work. Obviously, there are the questions and stylistic tics that continue throughout all of one’s work, but to me it feels pretty different.

SA: Would you say you think of yourself as a novelist, or a short story writer, or neither, or both? Is that something that you think about?

SJ: My ideal is to write three pages or 250 pages.

SA: So “both” would be the easy answer.

SJ: Both. But I’ve never been a solid fifteen-page short story writer. That’s never been my thing.

SA: Right. So, let’s go back a little. Before writing, your main artistic outlet was music. Do you feel you were once a “music person” and now you’re a “writing person,” or do you still feel like you’re both? Can you talk a little about how you made that transition, and what your trajectory was like going from music to writing? Was writing always there? And do you miss playing music?

SJ: I always identified as a writer from the time I was really young. And I also played music from a pretty young age, but the difference, I think, when I got really into music—both listening and playing, as a teenager—it defined my social world. So I’d really say that the major shift that happened is that my social world, and my artistic community, is more writing-oriented, as opposed to music-oriented. But also, I have not been playing music very much for the last few years. I just haven’t
Faculty News & Excerpts from Recent Work

Jason Brown
Associate Professor of Fiction

Jason Brown won the Jeffrey E. Smith Editor’s Prize from the Missouri Review ($5,000) for his story “Instructions to the Living from the Condition of the Dead.” He also optioned his book Why the Devil Chose New England for His Work to filmmaker Lance Edmands, who is the writer and director of the film Bluebird and has worked for Lena Dunham. Jason will be a co-writer of the script. Jason also submitted his two new books, the novel Outermark and the story collection The Wreck of the Ipswich Sparrow, to his agent.

From: “Instructions to the Living From the Condition of the Dead”

The door hinges creaked, and the thudding footfalls of his family shook the beams. What were they doing here today, the day before Thanksgiving? Voices, the crackling of grocery bags, firewood clunking in front of the hearth (because they thought he was too old now to carry it from the barn himself). They swarmed into every corner of the parlor and the kitchen with no thought to the most important question, the same this year as every year: who had brought the goddamned cheddar? Indeed. Two years ago he’d put his foot down and said he would no longer provide! So this year would be the same as last year: crackers and hummus from California.

“Dad? Where are you?” called Caroline, his mealy-mouthed granddaughter-in-law, a lawyer from California who always talked about the importance in old age of regular bowel movements. A sharp slap on the stair-case, hen another and another. Nowhere to retreat to except into his bedroom.

He heard no sound for almost a minute, so he opened the door to the bathroom. Five small fingers rested on the top step. The scruffy blond hair. The blue eyes and tanned face of his great-grandson, William Palfry Howland (Will), resident of Ojai, California, a place, he gathered, where people lolled around in the sun like overfed housecats. Having summited the top step, his great-grandson sighed.

“He wants to talk to you,” he said and cocked his head.

“My grand one or the regular one?” John asked.

He heard his wife, Sarah, clucking in the air around him. She didn’t need to tell him to leave the boy be.

His great-grandson frowned and pursed his lips. The smallness of his mouth reminded John of Caroline, the boy’s mother, who measured her words like a butcher adding slices of roast beef on the scale. The more she spoke the more he would have to pay. She’d actually been born in Maine, not California, but she was a Yankee in name only.

Marjorie Celona
Assistant Professor of Fiction

Marjorie Celona published a story, “Counterblast,” in the Spring 2017 issue of The Southern Review. She was also a recipient of research grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and the University of Oregon, and will be in residence at the Mineral School during the summer of 2017.

From: “Counterblast”

I found a beer in the fridge and watched my husband wash Lou. He filled a glass and tipped it over her head. He had found the bottle of baby shampoo I’d packed with our toiletries and was soaping her with it. He shaped her hair into a tiny mohawk. I wanted to tell him to protect her from the hard faucet by wrapping a dish-cloth around it. I wanted to tell him that she was getting cold. He tipped too much water over her head, and she began to cry. I pretended that my feet were glued to the floor and that I couldn’t rescue her from my husband’s rough grasp. She looked at me with her sweet, helpless face, and I watched her little tongue quiver while she cried. Barry told her it was all right. He told her he was almost done. He lifted her out of the sink and looked around desperately for a towel. He was holding her directly under the air vent and she was shivering, and I couldn’t help it, I snatched her out of his arms and ran with her into the bathroom, where I swaddled her in one of Lonnie’s aquamarine bath towels and held her until she stopped crying.

“You make me feel like a horrible father,” Barry yelled from behind the closed bathroom door, “when you do things like that.”

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Lou slept on my chest in the dark of the bedroom while I watched the news on Lonnie’s shitty black-and-white TV. Her chin dug into my collarbone. Barry was in the living room doing angry push-ups. It was a little after two. I’d just fed Lou. I knew I should sleep. I could get maybe two hours before she woke again to nurse. I heard Barry setting up the foldout couch. I thought about what I would tell Lonnie when she got home. He snores? I wanted to watch TV? The truth, which was that he was starting to sense I didn’t want him around?

At that hour, every news story was about child abuse or murder. Some woman had decapitated her newborn in the neighborhood adjacent to Lonnie’s. Men were murdering people all over the state.

From: *The Mirror Diary: Selected Essays*

And so, before long, I invented a book. In secret. At first, I told no one, but I wrote that it was so in a diary of my own dreaming, as if it were a memory, though I knew I had not lived it, that the book did not exist. But I convinced myself that it did. In my diary, I wrote that I found it when I was five or six, rummaging around in the basement garage of my grandfather’s house on Kamehameha Highway on the island of O‘ahu near the town of Hau‘ula. I had been exploring in the shelves alongside the polished green Chevy, careful to climb up on the floorboards, step on the seat, and push quickly with my bare foot from the dashboard and lowered passenger window on up so I could reach the high shelves crowded with things. My grandfather kept boxes full of sparkplugs, rayon lure skirts, seashells, and beach-washed glass up there out of which he fashioned curios for the tourists. A crèche of toy hula girls in the polished half-shell of a coconut. A kind of Joseph Cornell-box with opihi, chips of colored glass, spotted cowries, and a starfish.

Geri Doran
Associate Professor of Poetry

After a yearlong sabbatical that included writing residencies in New York, Connecticut, Provence, and Northern Spain, Geri Doran returned to Eugene last fall with a largely finished manuscript, titled *Blue Marble*, which Tupelo Press has accepted for publication. Geri’s poems were published or are forthcoming in *Southwest Review, The Arkansas International, Yale Review* and *New England Review*.

“Crape Myrtle in Winter” (*Southwest Review, Spring 2017*)

Drawn by the snow-shallow deck of the earth, the iced trees camber down: crescent branches, a glass-red dangle of berries. Snow-caked limbs in the alder and sweetgum sheen, cracking and avalanching. What loss in this great falling is a delicate, bark-bare tangle of crape myrtle?

The willowy, caramel tangle of myrtle, whose blossoming once foretold a grief-cold sky. And this white spilling on the winter terrace, the earth’s heart at its hearthstone, all this muted radiance—snowlight at the midnight hour—arrives like a foregone conclusion, or precipitous sorrow.
Cai Emmons
Instructor of Fiction

Cai Emmons recently placed her third novel, *Weather Woman*, with Red Hen Press. One of her stories appeared in *TriQuarterly* and another was a finalist in the *Missouri Review* editor’s contest for which there were 3,000 applicants. Cai has also been awarded two writing residencies in the US and a third in Europe.

From: “Her Boys”

The thing that bothered Talmadge the most on this visit was the smell of the place. It was as if a bunch of Tim’s friends had been sitting around for days burping beer and pizza, farting, never cracking a door or window. They kept the heat too high—Lila claimed she couldn’t adjust it—cooking the air’s smell into something unbreathable. Lila, sixty-three, and Tim, twenty-four, are living together in the same house Tim and Talmadge grew up in, but it no longer resembles the tidy cozy home of her childhood. The roof leaks and some of the beige siding has come off in front and the small side yard has become a cemetery for a collection of Tim’s dead vehicles. Inside there are things everywhere, unnecessary objects in places they have no business being. Why, for example, is there an axe in the foyer? Who has left a waffle iron on the coffee table? Why can’t Tim trash his empty beer cans and rein in his cast-off sweatshirts? Throughout Talmadge’s childhood the place was neat and clean, mostly due to Lila’s efforts. But now even Lila leaves her own trail of sludge. She’s been unemployed for the last two years and in that time she’s collected unemployment and grown fat. She and Tim have vats of excuses for their sorry state, the difficulty of finding jobs, blah, blah, blah, but Talmadge blames only their overall laziness. It’s unlikely to change, she knows that. And yet, once every six weeks or so she convinces herself otherwise, and bolsters her hope again and makes the visit with another envelope containing a check that her mother squints at as if it’s not nearly enough.

Brian Trapp
Instructor of Fiction

In the Fall of 2017, Brian Trapp will take over as Director of the Kidd Tutorial Program. Brian also serves as the Fiction Editor of *Memorious*. He received his PhD in English and Comparative Literature from the University of Cincinnati, where he was the Associate Editor of the *Cincinnati Review*. Brian’s fiction and essays have been published or are forthcoming in the *Sun*, *Narrative*, *Ninth Letter*, *Gettysburg Review*, *MELUS*, and *Brevity*. He is currently at work on a novel and a memoir.

From: “Twelve Words”


We were in “Cascade Falls,” though there were no falls. It was just what his group home renamed “Unit B” to sound more like a home, more like the nearby, over-priced housing developments in the exurbs of Cleveland. “Cascade Falls” was a wing in a facility for severely disabled children and adults. It was clean and antiseptic, with walls lined in gold-plated donor plaques and elaborate, swirling abstract canvases drawn by the residents with an art therapist’s “assistance.” The art therapists said the residents told them what to draw through their body language and eye motion, that they could infer intent, could tell what the residents were thinking: move left, move right, circle here, square. I doubted this, even for my brother, who was the smartest one. If anyone could divine his intent, it should be me, his twin, the one who stewed with him in the same amniotic fluid, the one who should have a bond with him beyond words, some psychic tether between our brains. But even after 28 years of practice, I had enough trouble knowing what he was thinking. Still, it was a convincing story: At the annual fundraiser, the paintings were auctioned off and “Cascade Falls” raked it in.
Walker to Join Program Faculty Next Fall

During 2015-2016, Karen Thompson Walker taught in the program as a Visiting Assistant Professor and she has recently been appointed as a full-time member of the faculty beginning in Fall 2017.

Karen is the author of the novel The Age of Miracles, which was a New York Times bestseller, an Indies Choice Award, a Goodreads Choice Award, and a finalist for the Barnes & Noble Discover Award. Translated into 27 languages, it was named one of the best books of the year by the Financial Times, Publishers Weekly, People, O., The Oprah Magazine, Kirkus, and Amazon, and has been selected as a community read by several cities and universities. A television series based on The Age of Miracles is being developed for AMC by Shawn Levy (producer of Netflix’s Stranger Things).

Karen previously worked as a book editor at Simon & Schuster and is a graduate of UCLA and Columbia. She is currently at work on her second novel.

Current Student News

Claire Luchette
Fiction ‘17

Claire’s stories have appeared in the Spring/Summer issue of Glimmer Train and the summer issue of Indiana Review, with another forthcoming in the winter 2018 issue of Ploughshares, one of America’s most prestigious literary magazines.

Charlie Schneider
Fiction ‘17

Charlie was recently named a Tin House Scholar, which entails a full scholarship and room and board at their summer workshop. He’ll also attend the Aspen Summer Words Juried Fiction Workshop. In the fall, he has residencies at Elsewhere Studios in Colorado and at Hawthornden Castle in Scotland.

Program Awards

The Miriam McFall Starlin Poetry Prize
Katie Haemmerle
Poetry ‘18

The Logsdon Award for Creative Fiction Writing
Claire Luchette
Fiction ‘17

The Walter and Nancy Kidd Writing Competition in Poetry and Fiction

Poetry Judge: C. Dale Young
1st Place John Mulcare “The Emptiness of Fields”
2nd Place Jessie Box “A Letter to My Skeleton”
3rd Place Samuel Styles “Coyote Nailed to Barn”

Fiction Judge: Chinelo Okparanta
1st Place Emma Saisslin “Old Money”
2nd Place Ciara Gaffney “The Treatment”
3rd Place Stephanie Schillger “Fixin’ & Findin’”
The Kidd Tutorial Program is a unique three-course undergraduate sequence that was created by Professor Garrett Hongo nearly twenty-five years ago in response to a generous bequest from Nancy and Walter Kidd. The original design was derived from both the undergraduate tutorial program at Harvard University and the Watts Writers’ Workshop, a federally-funded program, directed by Dudley Randall, that included adult writers (Quincy Troupe, Lonnie Elder, and Stanley Crouch, among others) teaching middle school and high school students in the “inner city” of Los Angeles during the summer of 1967. Since its inception, the Kidd Program has been an integral part of the UO creative writing community and functioned as a capstone experience for advanced Creative Writing students. The participants enjoy an intense, highly individualized, year of study in a small group setting, as well as access to visitors (at least two each term) in our reading series. Participation in the Kidd Program is by application only (in either poetry or fiction). In keeping with the bequest by Nancy and Walter Kidd, the Kidd Program also offers substantial scholarships to admitted students who demonstrate financial need. In recent years, the awards have ranged from $3,000 (for students with “high” need) to $1,200 (for those with “low” need), with the total amount of scholarship money awarded totaling approximately $50,000 each year.

In Fall 2016 we inaugurated a new chapter in the history of the Kidd Tutorial Program in order to improve the way the Kidd articulates with the minor in creative writing. We want to attract undergraduates in their first and second years to the Program so that they can move on to working with faculty in advanced seminars. We also want the Kidd Tutorial students to have more engagement with the faculty with whom they will work after they have finished the program. Starting last fall, all Kidd students attend fiction and poetry lectures, which are designed to introduce students to both genres and provided by the professorial faculty in Creative Writing. In the Winter and Spring terms, Kidd students work with their tutors to develop creative portfolios and a critical, craft-centered paper called a Line of Inquiry.

After seven years of serving as the Director of Creative Writing, Professor George Rowe will retire this spring. George came to us from the English Department, and has been a great friend of our program and a great support to all those who have taught and studied creative writing at Oregon. He has overseen curriculum changes, new faculty hires, structural changes that allowed us to increase graduate student stipends, and the tenure and promotion of many of us. We owe George a great debt and are sad to see him load up his fishing gear. Happy for him, sad for ourselves.

Wishing you much joy & happiness as you begin a new chapter in your life.

Thank You!

George Rowe
Professor of English
Editor, Comparative Literature
Göknar Publishes New Collection of Poetry

Erdağ Göknar
Poetry ‘94

Nomadologies
Erdağ Göknar

Erdağ Göknar’s Nomadologies, a significant literary and scholarly work of poetry on Turkish diaspora and Turkish-American cultural conflict, will be published in April 2017 by Turtle Point Press (a division of Random House).

Erdağ is the award-winning translator of Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk’s My Name is Red and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpinar’s A Mind at Peace. Nomadologies is his first collection of poetry.

Fenton Publishes Second Collection

Elyse Fenton
Poetry ‘07

Sweet Insurgent
Elyse Fenton

Elyse Fenton’s second collection of poetry, Sweet Insurgent (Saturnalia 2017), is the winner of the Alice Fay di Castagnola Prize. (Her first collection, Clamor—was the winner of the 2010 Dylan Thomas Prize, Cleveland State First Book Award and Bob Bush Memorial Award.) Her work has been published in The New York Times, Best New Poets, American Poetry Review, Pleiades, Brain, Child, and Prairie Schooner, as well as featured on NPR’s All Things Considered and PRI’s The World.

Mak Receives Elizabeth George Foundation Grant

Josh Mak
Fiction ‘15

Mak

Josh Mak was awarded a $20,000 grant from the Elizabeth George Foundation, which provides artistic grants to unpublished fiction writers, poets, emerging playwrights, and organizations benefiting disadvantaged youth.

Bright Wins APS Fellowship

Phoebe Bright
Fiction ‘15

Bright

Phoebe Bright was chosen from more than 1,000 applicants to receive the A Public Space Fellowship, a 6-month award for new writers that includes mentorship from an established author, publication in the magazine, and a contributor’s payment of $1,000. She will work with established writers as Jesmyn Ward, Jamel Brinkley, and Sara Majka.
Schultz Wins National Poetry Series Award

Jeffrey Schultz
Poetry ‘03

Jeffrey Schultz was one of five winners of The National Poetry Series’ 2016 Open Competition for his poem “Civil Twilight” (chosen by David St. John).

A two-time winner of The National Poetry Series (2016 and 2013), Jeffrey is a Visiting Professor of Creative Writing at Pepperdine/Seaver College in Malibu, California.

Reiss Publishes 22nd Book

Bob Reiss
Fiction ’76

Bob Reiss’s 22nd novel, Vector, will be published this July by Berkley under the pen name of James Abel. In March, Newsweek magazine published his coverage of Arctic issues. Bob will be a writer in residence at the Anchorage (Alaska) Museum in June.

Bob’s work has appeared in the Washington Post Magazine, Newsweek, Outside, Rolling Stone, Parade and Smithsonian. His has also advised 60 Minutes and NBC Nightly News on Arctic issues.

Wilson’s New Release Marks 40 Years of Writing

Miles Wilson
Fiction ’68

Miles Wilson’s latest book, Woodwork, New and Selected Stories, 1977-2017, will be published by the University of New Mexico Press. Miles’ literary papers have been acquired by the Southwest Writers Collection at Texas State University, which also holds the papers of Cormac McCarthy, Sandra Cisneros, Sam Shepard, and Larry McMurtry. “On Tour with Max,” one of the stories from his short story collection, Line of Fall, was recently optioned by an Academy Award-winning director. He was also recently named Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English by Texas State University, where he was founding director of the MFA program.

Jacob Berns’ (Fiction ’13) story “Continues” was published in Volume 29 of The Briar Cliff Review.

Ezra Carlsen (Fiction ’15) recently published stories in Fogged Clarity and The Masters Review, and has a story forthcoming in TriQuarterly.

Karen Locke’s (Poetry ’76) poem “About Despair” was included in the anthology The Absence of Something Specified, edited and published by Quinton Halllett, Colette Johnopulos, Laura LeHew, and Cheryl Loetscher.

Josh Nathan (Fiction ’16) received a 2017 Oregon Literary Fellowship for a Writer of Color.

Michelle Peñaloza (Poetry ’11) was awarded residencies at Caldera (Sisters OR) and the Lemon Tree House Residencies (Camporsevoli, Italy).

Susan Rich (Poetry ’96) has new work coming out in Alaska Quarterly, Michigan Quarterly Review, Nasty Women Anthology (Lost Horse Press) and Poetry International’s Best of Anthology (McSweeney’s).
Welcome New Students

Poetry

Anna Ball was born in Washington, DC and raised in the Maryland suburbs. Growing up, she did artistic and acrobatic gymnastics, which she credits for cultivating her creative expression and discipline. She has been interested in language and literature for many years, writing poetry, studying Spanish and Italian, and earning her BA in Linguistics at the University of Maryland. She lived in Rome for two years, where she taught English, and hopes to spend time abroad again in the future. Currently, Anna is living and working at a Zen Buddhist meditation center and farm outside of San Francisco. She’s happy for the chance to continue exploring the West Coast, and to write in a new environment, when she moves to Eugene in the fall.

Amanda Cox grew up in Moscow, Idaho, surrounded by wheat fields and wily coyotes. Dubbed the Heart of the Arts, Moscow allowed her to explore print-making, swing dancing, jazz choral performances – and, of course, an excellent reading series. She earned her BA in creative writing in 2014, and after spending a summer transcribing and editing letters for her mentor’s memoirs, she hopped the Pacific over to her current residence in Nagano, Japan to work as an assistant language teacher at two high schools. On days not spent correcting papers, she enjoys losing marvelously at claw machine games, hiking in the mountains behind her house, and singing her heart out in karaoke booths. She’s looking forward to escaping the humidity and getting back to her roots in the Pacific Northwest.

Jesse Gonzalez is a proud product of New Jersey, though he has spent the last four years suffering through Ithaca winters while studying English and Spanish at Cornell University. In an effort to escape the snow, he spent half of his junior year in Havana, Cuba, reading Borges under the watchful eye of José Martí. While he traces his roots to Puerto Rico, not Cuba, he considers himself a part of the larger Caribbean diaspora, obsessing over the concepts of physical exile and spiritual dislocation. In his poetry, he tries to engage these ideas through juxtapositions and the use of Caribbean images in unexpected places. While he has never been to the Pacific Northwest, he has fond childhood memories of hiking and camping throughout the Northeast and is excited to see if those things are indeed like riding a bicycle or if he has forgotten them completely.

Haley Laningham got her BA’s in Creative Writing and Spanish at Pepperdine University in the Los Angeles area. Her interests include comedy, how the world is kind of ending right now, the investigation of identity politics, what faith is, understanding history through class, the millennial relationship to irony and cliché, and music. Her dad was born in Bakersfield, California, and her mom in Cali, Colombia. She thanks them both for their help moving her belongings across the country in seeming constancy. She refuses to be casual about how excited she feels to be studying poetry at Oregon.
Marcie Alexander grew up in rural Texas. She graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with degrees in English and Biology. After graduation, she worked for a marketing group and an environmental nonprofit, and spent a combined four years living, working, and traveling across 34 countries. She returned to Austin, where she currently teaches English as a Second Language at a nearby high school. She is looking forward to being part of the literary community at the University of Oregon, as well as mountains, beaches, and those rainy days perfect for getting work done.

Alexa Aman is an Afghan-American writer who was raised in Orange County, California. She received her BA in English from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, and has participated in fiction workshops at USC and the Iowa Writer's Workshop. She is immensely grateful to be included in the UO fiction cohort for 2017 and looks forward to further developing her acuity as a reader and writer.

Logan McMillen grew up on a small farm outside of Minneapolis, and later earned his BA in creative writing at Oberlin College. For the past couple years, he’s been studying ethics at the University of Chicago, and working part-time at a bar. He’s an X-Files enthusiast, Snoop Dogg apologist, and a frequent visitor to the Mall of America. His favorite author right now is Laura van den Berg, and his favorite book is None of Your Business. He looks forward to writing, teaching, and perhaps being abducted by Bigfoot while camping in the woods.

Kieran Mundy is from a tiny town in New Hampshire. She graduated from the College of Wooster in 2016 with a BA in English, and has spent the past year working as a wilderness trip leader, volunteering on organic farms, and exploring South America. Her interests include mountains, baking bread, the New York Times Daily Mini, and listening to three-part harmony. She is excited to spend this summer in New Hampshire working as a glorified pack mule for the Appalachian Mountain Club’s backcountry hut system. Eugene will be the largest city Kieran has ever inhabited, and she looks forward to becoming part of University of Oregon’s literary community.

Emma Stockman isn’t sure where she is from. She could be from upstate New York, where she was born, but maybe she’s from the childhood afternoons of California, where she opened her first journal and wrote herself into it. Or she could be from Connecticut, its New England beauty irrevocably lost, because it was also where she turned thirteen. Maybe she’s from New York City, where she graduated from NYU in 2013. Maybe she’s from the cramped space above a bicycle’s handlebars, the crumbling shoulders of roads, where she lived for two months, riding from Maine to Washington after graduation. She might be from Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts, where she has lived the better part of the last four years, learning how to write when no one was watching. Her fiction centers on family and inheritance. She is eager to move to Eugene and to learn more about her writing, her old homes, and her new one.
SOLMAZ SHARIF

Solmaz Sharif was born in Istanbul to Iranian parents. She holds degrees from U.C. Berkeley, where she studied and taught with June Jordan’s Poetry for the People, and New York University. Her work has appeared in *The New Republic, Poetry, The Kenyon Review, jubilat, Gulf Coast, Boston Review, and Witness*. The former managing director of the Asian American Writers’ Workshop, she has been awarded a “Discovery”/Boston Review Poetry Prize, scholarships from NYU and the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference, a winter fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, an NEA fellowship, and a Stegner Fellowship. Most recently, she has been selected to receive a 2014 Rona Jaffe Foundation Writer’s Award as well as a Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship. She is currently a Jones Lecturer at Stanford University. Her first poetry collection, *Look*, was released by Graywolf Press in July 2016.

OCEAN VUONG

Ocean Vuong, born in Saigon, Vietnam, currently lives in New York City. He is the author of *Night Sky With Exit Wounds* (2016), the winner of the 2016 Whiting Award. A Ruth Lilly fellow of the Poetry Foundation, Ocean has also received honors and awards from Poets House, the Elizabeth George Foundation, the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, the Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts, the Academy of American Poets, and a Pushcart Prize. His poetry and fiction have been featured in *Kenyon Review, The Nation, New Republic, The New Yorker, The New York Times, Poetry,* and the *American Poetry Review*, which awarded him the Stanley Kunitz Prize for Younger Poets. His work has been translated into Albanian, Arabic, Bulgarian, Cantonese, French, Italian, Hindi, Spanish, and Ukrainian.

SARA JAFFE

In November, Sara Jaffe (visiting assistant professor of fiction for 2016-2017) read from her novel, *Dryland*. In her Kidd Talk she spoke about the use of first-person point of view in her novel, as well as how she learned from the techniques of film to create convincing and dynamic scenes. (See Sara Jaffe interview in this newsletter.)

RICK BAROT

Rick Barot, a 2016 Guggenheim recipient, has published three books of poetry with Sarabande Books: *The Darker Fall* (2002); *Want* (2008), which was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award and won the 2009 Grub Street Book Prize; and *Chord* (2015), which received the UNT Rilke Prize, the PEN Open Book Award, and the Publishing Triangle’s Thom Gunn Award. It was also a finalist for the LA Times Book Prize. His February Kidd Talk considered the aspect of voice in fiction and poetry as a nexus of three elements: character, circumstance, and craft. Discussing passages from wide range of writers (Flannery O’Connor, Thomas McGuane, Malcolm Gladwell, Yanis Ritsos, Franz Wright), he explored such attendant concerns as the spectrum of credibility, dissonances of tone & personality, and motor mimicry. He ended his talk, titled “What Voice Is,”

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found the right way to really fit it in. I want to play music with other people; it’s not that satisfying to me to play by myself—especially because writing itself is so solitary. So I do miss it. The collaborative aspect, the public aspect. The instant gratification aspect. I miss all those things.

SA: Me too. So you’re a co-founder of New Her- ring Press, where you publish limited edition chap- books by writers such as Eileen Myles, Justin Torres, and Deb Olin Unferth. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

SJ: In 2010, I believe, my friend, the writer Jess Arndt— whose first collection just came out, which is very exciting—she and I were eating Mexican food with Lynne Till- man and talking about not quite knowing our place in the literary world, and Lynne said we should start a magazine. And so we thought about that for a minute, and we decided we didn’t want to start a mag- azine, and decided to start a press instead. We did it with our friends Jason Daniel Schwartz and Sara Marcus— Jason’s a fiction writer, and Sara’s mostly a nonfiction writer. I think in part because we were just friends who wanted to do something crea- tive together, but I think, also, all of us felt some sense of be- ing in between different writ- ing communities, or different modes of writing, and wanted to publish work that could try to sort of bridge some of those gaps. So we did three sets of four prose chapbooks. We decided to do chapbooks because we liked the chapbook as a sort of currency in the poetry community, but it doesn’t happen as much in fiction. (I think this is be- cause of capitalism, but that’s a separate conver- sation, maybe.) So we did these three sets of chapbooks that we saw as curated sets of four that went togeth- er. We always tried to have a balance between more established and less established writers. The most recent thing we put out was a reissue of an early Lynne Tillman story, with illustrations by the painter Amy Sillman, and that was our first perfect-bound book. We’ve been in a period of dormancy for the last couple of years, just based on different people’s life craziness, but I believe we will produce again.

SA: You went to Wesleyan for college and UMass for your MFA. Did you have any writing teachers that were particularly influential on your writing and/or teaching life?

SJ: It’s an amalgam of all of them. I took several work- shops as an undergraduate with Tom Drury, and I just felt it was the first time I was treated as a real writer—that we all were respected and able to guide the conversation in a way that I think was meaningful to me. It’s hard to separate what you’ve learned from someone as a teacher versus what you’ve learned [from that someone] as a writ- er. I also had a really formative workshop with Annie Dillard, who was much more didactic in her teaching—which is really not what my style is like—but I think her attention to the sentence, and her sort of valuing of the sen- tence as a mode of communi- cation is something I really carried with me. In graduate school I worked primarily with Noy Holland. She would often start class by talking for half an hour. Not a lecture, but just musing on what art had in- spired her recently, in a way that was nice in its por- rousness and how it allowed us to think about some- thing other than fiction in the fiction classroom. And when I lived in San Francisco, between undergrad
and grad school, I took a home workshop with Camille Roy, who’s an experimental writer there, and that was super-formative in the ways that she totally pushed me out of *New Yorker*-style truisms, which is really what I had learned in college. To really think about the role of the body in literature, and the role of the political, and how my queerness could make itself felt on the page.

SA: In our workshop this term, you’ve employed some non-traditional aspects, most notably a repeal of the infamous “gag rule.” Did anything particular inspire these choices?

SJ: It’s something I’ve been thinking about doing for a while—more recently because of reading people like Matthew Salesses, whom we discussed last week, and talking about the ways in which the workshop structure can reinforce various existing hierarchies about whose opinion is valued. But there had been something that sort of felt unsettling to me about it even before then—just when you sit back and think about the fact that someone is being silenced during a discussion of their work. And I think it’s useful for beginning writers’ workshops where the impulse to defensiveness is so strong, and I think beginning writers really need to train themselves to listen and to take in critique, and not to immediately jump to any point that’s being made. But I really feel like, by the time writers are in graduate school, hopefully they’ve at least, to some extent, worked through that defensiveness—or at least learned how to hide it—and it can help to orient, in small ways, the conversation toward one that is going to be the most useful for them.

I also just think that, in a program that is as concentrated and immersive as the U of O program is, anything that can be done to make a little breathing room in the workshop, just in terms of how we’re thinking about things, is useful.

SA: You also avoid sitting at the head of the table. You usually sit in the middle, with the rest of us common folk.

SJ: I was honestly surprised to hear that that was an anomaly. Well, I don’t want you guys to look at me when you’re talking—I want you to look at each other. And I think there’s more of a tendency to look at me if I’m at the head of the table. And at least if you’re looking at me and I’m sitting in the middle somewhere, you’re also inevitably crossing eye paths with some other people.

SA: It’s a cool move. And, finally, you’ve been quoted as saying, “I wish my students could call me ‘Teach.’ ” Do you still feel this way? Would you like me and my classmates to start calling you “Teach”?

SJ: I’m very happy with having my graduate students call me “Sara.” However, I think that I said that because, while I don’t want to be called “Professor,” there is sometimes a way with undergraduates, being called by my name, I already feel on shaky ground around my sort of taking up space as an authority figure in the room, so, you know, “Teach” felt like acknowledging my position without needing to go so far as “Professor.” However, I think that, as I’m turning 40 in a few weeks, I’m ready to recognize that I can be an authority figure in the room to the extent that I need to be, regardless of what they’re calling me.

SA: Well, happy birthday.
SJ: Thank you. ■

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Visiting Authors (continued)

with a tantalizing quote from Emily Dickinson: “When I state myself, as the representative of the verse, it does not mean me, but a supposed person.”

C. DALE YOUNG

C. Dale Young is the author of four collections of poetry, most recently *The Halo* (Four Way Books 2016). His recently completed linked short story collection will be also published by Four Way Books in early 2018. A recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment of the Arts, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation, he practices medicine full-time and teaches in the Warren Wilson MFA Program for Writers.

His spring term Kidd Talk, entitled “Doubt and Uncertainty: The Interrogative Gesture as Rhetorical Strategy,” emphasized the importance of questions in both poetry and fiction, with C. Dale providing examples from a wide range of texts by Elizabeth Bishop, Flannery O’Connor, Eudora Welty, and William Butler Yeats.

CHINELO OKPARANTA

Born and raised in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, Chinelo Okparanta received her BS from Pennsylvania State University, her MA from Rutgers University, and her MFA from the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. A Colgate University Olive B. O’Connor Fellow in Fiction, as well as a recipient of the University of Iowa’s Provost’s Postgraduate Fellowship in Fiction, Okparanta was nominated for a US Artists Fellowship in 2012.

She is the winner of a Lambda Literary Award and an O. Henry Prize. Her debut short story collection, *Happiness, Like Water*, was cited as an editors’ choice in the *New York Times Book Review* and was included on the list of *The Guardian’s* Best African Fiction of 2013. The book was nominated for the Nigerian Writers Award (Young Motivational Writer of the Year), longlisted for the 2013 Frank O’Connor International Short Story Award, and a finalist for the 2014 New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award, as well as the Etisalat Prize for Literature. She was also a finalist for the 2013 Caine Prize for African Writing, the 2013 Society of Midland Authors Award, and the 2014 Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative in Literature. Chinelo is currently Assistant Professor of English & Creative Writing at Bucknell University, where she is also C. Graydon and Mary E. Rogers Faculty Research Fellow. She was recently named one of Granta’s Best Young American Novelists.

In May, Chinelo read from her debut novel, *Under the Udala Trees*, the story of a 57-year-old Nigerian woman looking back on her adolescence during the Nigerian Civil War and her first “forbidden” romantic relationship with a Hausa woman named Amina. In her Kidd Talk, she outlined the research methods she used to write the novel, including transforming family history and folklore into art.
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Congratulations 2017 Graduates!

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