



MFA in Writing & Literature • Stony Brook Southampton • Summer 2010

## Bragging Rights: Major New Works from Faculty & Students

### Making Toast: A Family Story

by Roger Rosenblatt

When his daughter, Amy, died suddenly of a heart condition, Roger Rosenblatt and his wife moved in with their son-in-law and their three young grandchildren. His story, published by Ecco, an imprint of HarperCollins, tells how a family makes the possible out of the impossible.

In *The Washington Post*, Carolyn See writes that: “readers will turn to *Making Toast* for information on how to live a treacherous life with wit, humor, courage and good manners strong enough to hold back the demons of monstrous death and meaningless loss.”

Of *Making Toast*, Cynthia Ozick writes: “Roger Rosenblatt’s piercing account of broken hearts records how love, hurt, and responsibility can, through antic wit and tenderness, turn a shattered household into a luminous new-made family.”



### Bar Book and Otherwise

by Julie Sheehan

In this wholly original work, a barmaid grapples with the irreconcilable tensions in her work and personal life. At work, she’s torn between taking orders and keeping order. At home, she confronts the limits of a service ethos as exemplified by her failed marriage. Molly Peacock calls Sheehan a “dancer of language.”

Philip Schultz writes of *Bar Book* (W.W. Norton): “Now I know what’s been missing in American poetry—persona poems of great verve and visionary passion, a highball of grief and the fearless sublime stirred (not shaken) with wit and no-nonsense truth-telling. A breakthrough impossible not to recognize.”

Julie Sheehan’s honors include a 2008 Whiting Writer’s Award and 2009 New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship.



### Manhattan Story

Jules Feiffer, cartoonist and memoirist, MFA Director Robert Reeves and novelist Meg Wolitzer celebrating in our Manhattan space (401 Park Ave. South) this past Spring. For more info on the Stony Brook Manhattan track: 646.472.2000

Facebook: manhattan track mfa

## **A Mountain of Crumbs: A Memoir**

by Elena Gorokhova

Gorokhova's memoir of Cold War Leningrad, published by Simon & Schuster, recalls her life as a bright, hardworking schoolgirl who gets perfect marks and can recite Party-approved lines of Pushkin and Turgenev from memory. English becomes Gorokhova's ticket out of the Soviet Union, after she meets a young American who is studying Russian in Leningrad. He proposes, less for love than for diplomacy; she accepts, knowing that, however hard it is to leave the motherland, she may never have another chance.

Gorokhova is an alumni of the Southampton Writers Conference.

Frank McCourt wrote: "What is it about *A Mountain of Crumbs* that makes it so damn readable? Is it the setting—the Soviet Union in the second half of the last century on the verge of disintegration? Is it the author's way with the English language? This is a rich experience—a personal journey paralleled by huge national changes and ending in a deeply satisfying portrait of peace in America. Those who have traveled from another place to America will find themselves in this rich memoir."



## **Lies My Mother Never Told Me: A Memoir**

by Kaylie Jones

In her riveting memoir, *Lies My Mother Never Told Me* (William Morrow), Kaylie Jones—the daughter of author James Jones (*From Here to Eternity*) and an acclaimed novelist in her own right (*A Soldier's Daughter Never Cries*; *Celeste Ascending*; *As Soon As It Rains*)—tells the poignant story of her relationship with her famous father and her alcoholic mother, and of her own struggles with the disease.

## **Backing Into Forward: A Memoir**

by Jules Feiffer

The award-winning cartoonist, playwright, and author delivers a witty, illustrated rendition of his life, from his childhood as a wimpy kid in the Bronx to his legendary career in the arts.

Michael Chabon calls *Backing into Forward* (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday) "dark and charming, touching and barbed and crackling with wit. An important book by a critical artist that sheds light on his fascinating life and the most vibrant period in the life of American culture."



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## **Julie Andrews' Collection of Poems, Songs, and Lullabies**

by Julie Andrews and Emma Walton Hamilton. Illustrated by James McMullan

Julie Andrews and her daughter, Emma Walton Hamilton, hand-selected a wonderful mix of their most cherished poems, songs, and lullabies in this rich and diverse poetry collection (Little Brown Books for Young Readers), including favorites from Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, Shel Silverstein, Rodgers & Hammerstein, and more. The book was number one on *The New York Times* Children's Book Bestseller list. Renowned illustrator James McMullan has served on the faculty of our Children's Literature Conference and created our past summer conference poster in which Ishmael is trying valiantly to write his name in the sand.

Julie Andrews and Emma Walton Hamilton also collaborated on *A Very Fairy Princess* (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers), a vibrant fantasy featuring Geraldine, which also hit number one *The New York Times* Children's Book Bestseller list this summer.

# Major Pettigrew's Last Stand

by Helen Simonson

Written with a delightfully dry sense of humor and the wisdom of a born storyteller, *Major Pettigrew's Last Stand* (Random House) explores the risks one takes when pursuing happiness in the face of family obligation and tradition.

Elizabeth Strout writes about *Major Pettigrew*: "In the noisy world of today it is difficult to find a novel that dares to assert itself quietly with a lovely rhythm of Helen Simonson's funny, comforting, and intelligent first novel—a modern-day love story which takes everyone, grown children, villagers, and the main participants, by surprise—as real love stories tend to do."



portfolios by Scott Sandell ("Maritime"), Rex Lau ("Acqua Pazza," or "Crazy Water"), as well as striking photographs of the East End by Anthony Lombardo and extraordinary photographs of hurricanes by Clifford Ross.

Anne Fadiman, former editor of *The American Scholar* has said of *The Southampton Review*: "In the realm of memoir and personal essay, I can think of no journal in America—or, indeed, anywhere—that surpasses TSR."



## Billy Collins Reading to Launch Summer 2010 TSR

To launch the latest issue of TSR: *The Southampton Review*—focused on water—Billy Collins, twice the U.S. Poet Laureate, will be reading on July 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7:30 p.m. in Avram Theatre at Stony Brook Southampton.

Collins will be reading poems featured in TSR, including "Poetry Workshop Held in a Former Cigar Factory in Key West," "Girl," and "Bird." His book, *Horoscopes for the Dead*, will be published by Random House next year.

This issue of TSR features new works by many notable authors, artists, photographers and cartoonists from around the world, both well-known and emerging voices. We're featuring Bruce Jay Friedman's new play *Sardines*, a moving essay by Neal Gabler, entitled "Ted Kennedy's Dark Sea," a personal essay by novelist Martha Cooley, "The Island," as well as poetry from Sag Harbor's Star Black. Some of the illustrator portfolios include work by noted cartoonists Gahan Wilson, Edward Sorel and Arnold Roth. We've also published art

## Important Dates

- Online MFA Orientation •  
Tuesday, August 24th, 7-8pm
- First day of MFA classes •  
Monday, August 30th

## A Bethpage Brouhaha

by Patrick Hanrahan

Little did I think when I prepared and read a paper in Bob Reeves' class that it would lead to a disturbance at the Bethpage Public Library. Encouraged by his positive reaction, I developed my interest in Contemporary Irish Literature and began attending readings at Ireland House, attached to NYU.

Listening to Colum McCann, Joseph O'Connor, Colm Toibin and John Banville talk about their writing increased my interest and before long I was listening to Sebastian Barry, Hugo Hamilton and Roddy Doyle being interviewed on RTE, Ireland's national broadcast service.

I pitched the idea to Bethpage Public Library that it might increase traffic in the library if at least occasionally someone checked out one of the twenty William Trevor books on the shelves. However, during the first of my sessions—not lectures—two ladies (I nearly called them “old dears”) insisted on sitting in the last row, in the two end seats, furthest from the lectern. When they protested they couldn't hear me, the other attendees (twenty or so) started shouting at them to “come on down.” The ladies flounced out in high dudgeon. I'm sure I heard them say something about “never being so insulted in all my life.” Maybe not.

Since then, we have been disturbance free and the Director of the Library has been quoted as saying she is “very impressed at how engaged the attendees are.”

## A Writer's Winter: Florence, Italy

We're proud to announce the creation of our Florence Writers Conference for ten days in early January 2011. Ursula Hegi will teach fiction and Matthew Klam creative nonfiction in the historic Palazzo Doni, steps from Piazza Santa Croce in the Florence University of the Arts. Christian McLean spearheaded the initiative taking us Firenze.

Ursula Hegi is the author of twelve books, including *Stones from the River* and *Sacred Time*. Her awards include an NEA Fellowship, Artist Trust Fellowship, and a PEN/Faulkner Award. She has also served as a juror for the National Book Awards and the

National Book Critics Circle.

Matthew Klam, author of *Sam the Cat and Other Stories*, was named one of the twenty best fiction writers under 40 by *The New Yorker*. He's a recipient of a Robert Bingham/PEN Award, a National Endowment of the Arts, a Whiting Writer's Award, and an O. Henry Award. His work has been featured in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Allure*, *Nerve*, *The Washington Post Magazine*, and *The New York Times Magazine*, where he is a contributing writer.

For more information about joining us in Tuscany, call: 631-632-5007.

## Session II: Triple the Fun

### Playwriting

Two-time Tony Award-winning director Joe Mantello (*Wicked*, *Assassins*, *Love! Valour! Compassion!*) will helm the premiere reading of *Wild Animals You Should Know* by Thomas Higgins, on Saturday, July 30, at 7:30 p.m. Sexual tensions churn in this wickedly funny coming-of-age story about the very young and the very middle aged—who discover “the little beast in us all.” Higgins, a Writer's Conference regular, wrote the piece while taking part in Jon Robin Baitz's MFA Playwriting Workshop.

“Our programs are all about supporting the work of emerging writers,” said novelist and MFA director Robert Reeves, “and it's especially gratifying to see our efforts in playwriting begin to match the success we've had in fiction, poetry, essay, and memoir. Thomas Higgins is an enormously gifted playwright, and I have no doubt he's at the beginning of an impressive career in the theater.”

During Session I there was a reading of playwright-in-residence Nick Jones' *Trevor*, the hilarious and tragic story of a show-biz chimp whose career is on the rocks. On July 19<sup>th</sup>, New York's acclaimed Ensemble Studio Theatre, the resident theatre company of the Southampton Playwriting Conference, presented *White People*, by Neil Cuthbert.

Co-directors: Emma Walton Hamilton and Stephen Hamilton

### Children's Lit

The third annual Children's Literature Conference will feature presentations by the multi-talented Amy Krouse Rosenthal. “Her books radiate fun the way tulips radiate spring; they

are elegant and spirit-lifting,” according to *The New York Times Book Review*. The session will also present Catherine Creedon's much sought-after research talk, Julie Sheehan's lecture on “Meter Making” Prosody as well as electives by Kate and Jim McMullan (*I Stink!*), Arlene Alda and Lisa Desimini.

Director: Emma Walton Hamilton

### Screenwriting

Screenwriting will feature electives by Renée Shafransky (“What Lies Beneath”) and “Writing the Low Budget Film” by director, writer, producer and actor Mitchell Kriegman, formerly of *Saturday Night Live*. Kriegman developed *Clarissa Explains It All*, *The Rugrats* and *Ren and Stimpy* for Nickelodeon. He's a four-time Emmy winner whose fiction has been published in *The New Yorker*.

Oscar winning Writer/Director, Alexander Payne (*Sideways*, *About Schmidt*) will discuss the process of writing and directing his films on Saturday, July 31<sup>st</sup> at 7:30 p.m. in Avram Theatre. This event honors the late director Alan J. Pakula.

Writer-director Alexander Payne's distinctive vision often explores human frailties and foibles in a quirky, serio-comic setting. *Sideways* was nominated for Best Picture, Best Director and Payne and writing partner Jim Taylor took home the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay. Payne recently completed principal photography on *The Descendants*, starring George Clooney.

Director: Annette Handley Chandler

<http://www.stonybrook.edu/writers/writers/schedule>

## Come Join Us In Our Fall Courses:

### Southampton

Writing the Novella — Roger Rosenblatt  
Tuesdays, 2:20-5:10

Short Fiction — Scott Snyder  
Thursdays, 5:20-8:10

Screenwriting — Annette Handley Chandler  
Tuesdays, 5:20-8:10

A Survey of Seriously Funny Contemporary Poetry — Julie Sheehan  
Mondays, 5:20-8:10

Reading and Writing Creative Nonfiction — Roger Rosenblatt  
Mondays, 2:20-5:10

Advanced Writing Workshop: The First Book — Julie Sheehan  
Wednesdays, 3:20-6:10

Practicum in Arts Administration — Christian McLean  
Days and Times TBA

Practicum in Publishing & Editing — Lou Ann Walker  
Days and Times TBA

### Manhattan Intensives & Workshops

Introduction to Graduate Writing — Robert Reeves & Magdalene Brandeis  
Mondays, 5:20-8:10

The Novel (Manhattan Intensive)—Ursula Hegi  
Saturday and Sunday 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.: September 25-26,  
October 30-31, December 4-5

Advanced Writing Workshop — Lou Ann Walker  
Tuesdays, 5:20-8:10

### YAWP

The Young American Writers Project, an important initiative of the MFA in Writing & Literature Program, brings teaching artists into area schools to work with middle and high school students in the areas of: Playwriting, Poetry, Fiction and Personal Essay. Many of these teaching artists are MFA students and graduates of the program. This Spring YAWP programs were part of the curricula in: Bridgehampton, Eastport South Manor, The Ross School, Sag Harbor's Pierson, Shelter Island School, Tuckahoe Middle Schools and Southampton High School. This summer there were programs during the Southampton Writers Conference and for physically challenged students at the Southampton Fresh Air Home. At the end of the sessions students either present a play or publish their work in the YAWP E-zine. Emma Walton Hamilton is the Executive Director of YAWP and Will Chandler is Program Director.

# One Student's Internship Story

by Suzanna Filip

It was Wednesday evening and I was sitting beside, Brigid Hughes and Anne McPeak, the editors of the literary magazine *A Public Space*, listening to Wells Tower, Daniyal Mueenuddin, and Victoria Patterson read from their Story Prize-nominated collections of short stories. My *Public Space* internship had already far exceeded my expectations: I was proofreading essays by Amy Leach and short stories by Yiyun Li; I was researching literary magazines from the 1930s in the archives of The New York City Public Library; I was tweeting in literary conversation with other magazines and publishers; I was reading and evaluating submissions; and I was working on press releases for the upcoming issue. An evening at The Story Prize Awards was icing on an already tall cake.

I began working with Hughes and McPeak in mid-January to fulfill my Practicum requirement. Magdalene Brandeis, my advisor, helped me create a résumé that highlighted what little literary experience I had. As a Manhattan resident, one of my goals was to build my community of established literary professionals as well as explore avenues I find intriguing. I felt that there was a literary world at my fingertips and I wasn't taking advantage of it. My internship has broadened my exposure to the industry and been a surprisingly fun way, although one with a fair amount of work, to fulfill an MFA class requirement.



## Ta Da: Our New Faculty Members



**Jon Robin Baitz's** plays include *The Film Society*, nominated for a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding New Play, *The End of the Day*, *The Substance of Fire*, *Three Hotels*, which was also nominated for a Drama Desk Award. *One Fine Day* was a Pulitzer Prize finalist. Baitz has written for television programs such as *The West Wing* and *Alias* and he was the creator and executive producer of *Brothers & Sisters*. He's now at work on a stage adaptation of Robert Evans' *The Kid Stays in the Picture*.



**Neal Gabler** is a professor, journalist, author and political commentator. He has contributed to *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Esquire*, *New York Magazine*, *American Heritage*, and *The New Republic*, and has appeared on television shows such as *The Today Show*, *The News Hour*, and *Charlie Rose*. He is the author of four books, including *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*, and *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*. He is currently working on a biography of Ted Kennedy.



**David Rakoff:** *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* once described him as "Looking like a pug and sounding like the love child of Dorothy Parker, Oscar Wilde and *All About Eve's* Addison DeWitt. Rakoff is the author of the bestsellers *Fraud* and *Don't Get Too Comfortable*. He's won the Lambda Book Award for Humor twice and often contributes to Public Radio International's *This American Life*.



**Marsha Norman** won the Pulitzer for 'night *Mother*. She wrote the book and lyrics for the Broadway musical *The Secret Garden*, and won a Tony and Drama Desk Award for *The Red Shoes*. She was the librettist for *The Color Purple*.



## News from Current and Former MFA Students & Conference Attendees

**Tricia Rayburn's** *Maggie Bean* series, begun in an MFA children's literature class here on the campus, has done phenomenally well at Simon & Schuster. Recently *Maggie Bean Stays Afloat* was included in 3,000 gift bags First Lady Michelle Obama handed out as part of her new "Let's Read, Let's Move" initiative, designed to keep kids reading and exercising. Rayburn has recently published two other 'tween books, *Maggie Bean in Love*, and *Ruby's Slippers*, which was selected Scholastic Book Club.

*Siren*, with its spooky silver eyes on the cover, is the first of a three-book YA series just published this month. Rights to the trilogy have been sold in eight foreign countries.

**Sande Boritz Berger's** novel, *The Sweetness*, which was her MFA thesis, made the semi-finals of The Amazon Breakthrough Novel Contest, which selected the top 50 out of 5,000 novels. The novel is based on two cousins: Roshia, a skinny young Jewish girl living in Lithuania, circa 1941, and Mira, a gifted teen who lives in Brooklyn. *Publishers Weekly* writes that "the novel is "quite stunning in its simplicity" and that it "is a beautifully crafted portrait of life in its rawest form during a time of great unrest, and stays with the reader long after the final page."

**Simon Van Booy**, a graduate of our MFA program, won the International Frank O'Connor Prize last year for his collection of short stories, *Love Begins in Winter* (HarperCollins), focusing on characters who are on the verge of giving up. They walk the streets of these stark and beautiful stories until chance meetings with strangers force them to face responsibility for lives they thought had continued on without them.



**MFA in Writing  
& Literature**

**STONY BROOK  
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239 Montauk Highway  
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**Upcoming Events**

**Writers Speak**

Join us on Wednesday Evenings in Southampton (and sometimes in Manhattan) at 7 p.m. during Fall semester for this illuminating, entertaining series of talks by leading writers.

**The MFA Program in Writing & Literature**

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