

# Speaking In A Distinctive Voice

*An interview with novelist and M.F.A. alum Samina Ali*

BY PAUL MARTONE

Samina Ali was born in Hyderabad, India and raised both there and in the United States. Her debut novel, *Madras on Rainy Days* (Farrar Straus Giroux), chronicles a young Muslim American woman's journey to freedom and was awarded the Prix Premier Roman Etranger 2005 Award (Best First Novel in Translation of the Year) by France and was also chosen as the finalist for both the PEN/Hemingway Award in Fiction as well as the California Book Reviewers Award. *Poets & Writers* named *Madras* as one of the Top 5 Best Debut Novels of the Year. The novel has been translated into many different languages and released around the world. Ms Ali has been invited to lecture on the book extensively, from University of California, Berkeley on the West Coast to Harvard and Yale Universities on the East. She is the recipient of the Rona Jaffe Foundation and Barbara Deming Memorial awards for fiction. Most recently, her essays have

been included in *The May Queen* and *Living Islam Out Loud* anthologies. She has also written for publications as diverse as *Self* and *Child* magazines, *The New York Times* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*. She resides in California with her son.

**Paul Martone:** How has your life as a writer been shaped by your experiences in both Western and Muslim cultures?

**Samina Ali:** I was born in Hyderabad, India then raised both there and in the United States. By that, I mean: My parents immigrated to the U.S. when I was about six months old, after which my father sent my two brothers and me back to India every summer. I went to school in both places and had friends in both places, grew up entirely bicultural and bilingual. Looking back, it was a tremendously valuable experience. I was able to fully participate in each culture and understand from the inside how each works. Hyderabad is now the Silicone Valley of India and Bill Gates returns more often than I do. However, when I was growing up, it was really a "small town" that no one outside of India seemed to have heard of. Hyderabad is also a city with one of the largest Muslim populations in India. Remember, in India, Hinduism is the dominant religion; Muslims make up about 9 or 10% of the population and are centered, for the most part, in a few cities, Hyderabad being one of them. Historically, Hyderabad was founded in the 16th century by Muslim kings and then went on to become part of the Muslim Moghul



Samina Ali

empire, then was run by the Muslim Nizams, who became the richest men in the world because of the local diamond mining. When the British came to India, Hyderabad remained under the local rule and the Nizam of Hyderabad even struck up an agreement with the British that Hyderabad would become an independent Muslim state after Independence. Of course, when you look at the map, that's impossible. Hyderabad is in the center of India and it wouldn't have been able to stay independent of the larger Hindu rule, which it didn't. Still, the history of the city really speaks to the rich Muslim customs and culture than dominated and mixed with the Hindu customs. During my stay in Hyderabad, I went about in

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# M.F.A. Graduate News

**Eugene Gloria** ('92) was named the 2006-2008 Richard W. Peck Chair in Creative Writing at DePauw University. In April, Gloria's book of poems *Hoodlum Birds* (Penguin 2006) was reviewed in "Poet's Choice," Robert Pinsky's column in *The Washington Post*. His poem, "Honor Loam," is published below.



**Eugene Gloria**

**Major Jackson** ('99) has been selected as a 2006-2007 Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. *Hoops*, his new collection of poetry, was reviewed in the April 17th issue of *The New Yorker*. Major Jackson has joined the low-residency core faculty of the Bennington Writing Seminars.

**Phillip Memmer** ('95) and his wife Michelle welcomed a new addition to the

family, Delia Celeste, born on February 24th. Phil has new poems appearing in current or forthcoming issues of *Poetry Northwest*, *Mid-American Review*, *Kestrel* and *Tar River Poetry*.

**Sarah Seybold** ('04) is currently an English Instructor at Clark College and at Clackamas Community College. Her recent publications include a poem in *Gulf Stream* and book reviews in *Calyx Journal*.

**Brian Simoneau** ('02) is moving to Boston in June and will be entering Boston University's Graduate Program in English and American Literature. In the spring, his poems appeared in *Blueline* and *The Fourth River*.

Attention M.F.A. graduates: We want to hear about new jobs you've taken, awards you've won, and work that has been published or is forthcoming. Send updates to: [pmartone@uoregon.edu](mailto:pmartone@uoregon.edu). ■

## Faculty News

**David Bradley** has an essay appearing in the forthcoming issue of *The Nation*.

**Laurie Lynn Drummond** gave readings at St. Edward's University (Austin) and Lamar University (Beaumont) in March. She also chaired two panels, presenting papers for each, at the AWP Conference: "You Gotta Teach This Story" and "You Gotta Teach This Essay." She is co-editor of a new teaching blog, "You Gotta Teach This Essay" <http://teach-essay.blogspot.com/> with Dinty W. Moore (Penn-Altone). Work continues (and continues and continues) on her novel.

**Dorianne Laux** read at Columbia Basin College in Pasco, Washington with Joseph Millar in May. In June, *continued on page 5*

## Literary Reference

*Literary Reference*, the newsletter of the Creative Writing Program, is published quarterly in conjunction with the University of Oregon Office of Publications.

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## Honor Loam

No rain in sight,  
just this notion of flourish.  
I am building an ark driven by voices.

I sink my nails and fingers in the dirt,  
plant this package of marl, brine,  
coffee grounds and egg shells,

my peace offering  
to the first lieutenant of worms  
beneath this hairy soil.

I am thinking  
about Pacifico Severino, the saint  
who took no more than bread, soup, and  
water,

wore a hair shirt made of iron.  
So much beauty in this garden that I  
grow  
distrustful of all its mystery and trouble.

And saints I distrust as well—  
the otherworldly statutes they abide by.  
Holiness by earthly standards is slight  
madness.

There are days when silence floods over  
me  
the way early May's heat reports the  
death of lilacs.  
Today I honor loam, the birds and lilacs  
still in bloom.

In The Conference of the Birds,  
the poet Attar says the soul is the body of  
desire,  
and King Solomon spoke the language of  
birds.

I will forget what is immediate  
like my father who tells me  
the same story as if for the first time.

I will forget and maybe I will be spared.  
I have this address, this house  
and everything that proves my existence,

this soil in my fingernails,  
this human business of finding love.  
If the soul is the body of desire,

--Eugene Gloria

# Erika Mueller Selected for Miriam Starlin Award

Erika Mueller is the recipient of this year's Miriam McFall Starlin Poetry Award. The award is designed to honor a promising female graduate student of poetry in the University of Oregon's Creative Writing Program. Professor Dorianne Laux has announced Mueller as the winner. The Starlin Award was established in 1997 by the late Glenn Starlin, professor emeritus in theater and telecommunications, as a surprise gift to his wife Miriam on her 80th birthday. Each year,



Erika Mueller

Miriam attends a luncheon with the winning poet and is presented with a bound manuscript of her work in progress. This year, Miriam's first book of poetry, *Wait a Minute*, will be published by Resource Publications in Eugene, OR. Erika met with Miriam and interviewed her for *Literary Reference* on May 5, 2006.

**Erika Mueller:** *I've heard that the creation of the Miriam McFall Starlin Award was a gift from your husband, Glenn, for your 80th birthday. Were you surprised?*

**Miriam Starlin:** No. In fact, he asked me what I wanted. I said there was not really any thing I wanted, except that I would like him to hang around. So I asked if we had enough savings so we could start something in poetry, some kind of award. He loved the idea. So we went to see David, who was in charge of university outreach of that type at the time, and he was very enthusiastic.

It's interesting that just as we were leaving his office I said, "David, you know the award is for a woman." He kind of sat back in his chair. He told us they could not have done that a few years ago, but they could do it now. Apparently you couldn't discriminate against one sex or the other before, but now that women were becoming more vocal, you could specify that an

award should be for a woman.

He asked why I wanted a woman to receive the award. I told him that he ought to know I really have always loved men and have been very fortunate with every man that has been in my life, from my grandfather down to my sons and grandsons. But, I said, I still don't think women get as much recognition as men. I think it's a little harder for women to be published. And once they are published, it seems a little harder for them to get good reviews and so forth. He didn't take convincing. He was just curious.

**Mueller:** *Miriam, is it true that your first book of poetry, *Wait A Minute*, will be available soon?*

**Starlin:** It will be off the local press on May 25th. It's a little press. I wanted to stay as local as possible. I think it's good for the community.

**Mueller:** *You must be so excited at this stage.*

**Starlin:** Yes. That's what I have been doing this afternoon, checking the final corrections. It's pretty clean. But I also have the "Emperor has no clothes on" sort of feeling.

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--Miriam Starlin

**Mueller:** *Are you nervous?*

**Starlin:** Oh yes. Although, it has certainly enlivened me. You see, in my generation there was a stigma about any kind of



Glenn and Miriam Starlin

mental illness, even postpartum depression. It was seen as a sort of disgrace. It is only now that I feel comfortable sharing these poems. There are several in the section "Out of Body, Out of Mind."

**Mueller:** *I'm glad that you have chosen to share them. I noticed that you often write about the natural world as well. You have a beautiful poem about Priest Lake.*

**Starlin:** I have a whole section on Priest Lake. The panhandle of Idaho has one of the largest collections of freshwater lakes in the country, after the Great Lakes. But I'm really a dilettante. I don't think there is much I'm not interested in. Everything about the natural world fascinates me. I have a little family of raccoons that have been coming around for I don't know how many generations of them. Four of them were looking in the back window at me last night.

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# Samina Ali

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a chador, not because I was forced to by my parents, but because it was simply easier for my mobility to be veiled. In the U.S., I drove around in my car wearing mini skirts. So it's a huge cultural divide and hard to navigate. I think, however, that learning the ins and outs of both cultures has merely placed me in a wonderfully valuable place in the current socio-political environment.

**Martone:** You have described *Madras On Rainy Days* as “a young woman’s journey from possession to self-possession” and “a universal search for freedom.” Did these themes emerge through the process of writing, or did you know all along what the novel would be about?

**Ali:** I’m not a writer who can go to the page with an idea in mind and bring it to life. Ideas and themes come to me only



**Samina Ali**

during the stage of writing. If I’d gone with that in mind, the book would have been too staged for me. The process of Layla’s journey is organic to who she is. She begins the book in a place where she knows nothing about herself. She’s nineteen and has been controlled by a very strict Muslim culture, Indian culture, parents, and has allegiances to ideas and things outside of herself. Her entire life in controlled, including who she will marry and give her virginity to. As she

says in the prologue, “They wanted to control me in the only way they can: through my body.” Through the novel, as she learns about Islam through her mother-in-law, she’s able to understand for herself what is truly part of her faith and what is simply patriarchy. When she has that understanding, that education, she can make the choice she does at the end. The book isn’t about arranged marriage, and when people go into the story with that stereotype in mind -- oh, an Indian writer writing about arranged marriage -- they are always disappointed. The story is about a young woman learning for herself what her rights are within Islam. Many Muslim women talk about needing a feminist approach to their religion but are not interested in trying on Western feminism for good reason. The book is saying: the first step to taking control of our bodies and lives is first learning what the religion says about those issues. All too often, Muslim women in many areas of the world are controlled by men who are supposedly experts on Islam and tell these women they have no rights. Women may not know because they may not be reading the texts for themselves. The book is

bylaws for how women must be treated with equality and justice in mosques across the United States. Now that’s what my book is about: change. Creating positive change. Not simply writing about significantly important issues but then bringing them to the people.

**Martone:** It strikes me that your characters in *Madras* are complex individuals misunderstood in their own communities. Rather than glorifying or demonizing these characters, you find ways to reveal the depths of their humanity. Sameer, for example, is a man readers might easily despise—and rightfully so—for his abusive, and inexcusable, treatment of Layla; yet his need to hide his sexuality and his true self from the world—particularly from his own mother—make him sympathetic. How difficult was it for you to access characters, like Sameer, and reveal lucidly, and honestly, their motivations, needs, and desires?

**Ali:** As a Muslim woman, it’s important to me to give depth to my characters rather than continue, even accidentally, to perpetuate stereotypes. One of the most difficult things the Western audi-

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“The most difficult part of writing for me is when the characters don’t talk or don’t reveal themselves. That’s when I spend an entire day at the computer begging them to reveal themselves, tell me what’s going on, share.”

--Samina Ali

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saying: read the Qur’an, know for yourself your own history, know what your faith says, and then you’ll have what you need to fight for your Islamic rights to equality and justice. After the book came out, I took it to the streets, as I like to say, by co-founding an American Muslim woman’s organization called Daughters of Hajar. Our first act was to march into a mosque in Morgantown, W. Virginia to reclaim our god-given rights. That march, made by seven of us, was featured across the world, from *Time Magazine* to *The New York Times* to PBS and BBC. We made such a huge ripple that a year later, the largest Muslim organization in America implemented

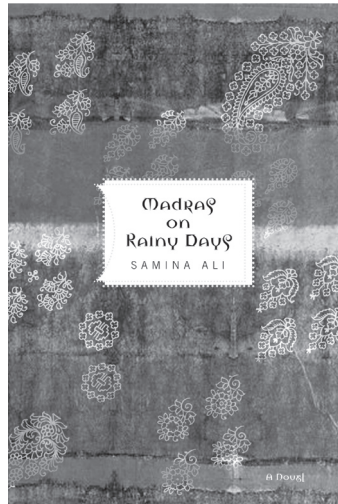
ence faced with this book is in getting a true account of “life behind the chador,” as people like to say. If I didn’t make Sameer sympathetic, it would have simply fed into the demonic Muslim male image that’s already out there. Of course, artistically, every author must develop his/her characters. All I am saying is there is extra pressure on me simply because of the people I’m writing about. The main character for my next novel is a Pakistani Muslim male. I write from his perspective. Imagine what it’s going to be like for readers to actually be in the mind of the kind of man we’ve condemned as a terrorist in this country! As an artist, when you’re in touch with the characters, they

reveal themselves, the writing comes out by itself. The most difficult part of writing for me is when the characters don't talk or don't reveal themselves. That's when I spend an entire day at the computer begging them to reveal themselves, tell me what's going on, share. Sameer never hid himself from me. I think he was so busy hiding himself from everyone else that he was glad to share. I don't think of him as abusive to Layla. I think of him as being as trapped as Layla. Many people always assume that it's just women who are trapped by the culture or by Islam. I wanted to show that men are just as trapped by the expectations placed on them. Sameer is a true example of that: he simply can't live up to what others want of him. He married Layla not to ruin her life but because he honestly believed he could love her and be with her. It's only after the marriage that he discovered he couldn't. Remember, in the end, he's the one who tells her to go, he's the one who enables Layla's freedom. Again, I'm saying that if Muslim women (speaking in the broadest terms) are to have any type of freedom and equality, then Muslim men have to join in that fight. And they are. I've been invited to be a member of a powerful, international Muslim organization led by Imam Feisal of New York and Queen Noor in which both men and women are equally involved in enabling change.

**Martone:** Tell me about your decision to pursue an MFA in fiction. How did the desire arise? Why did you choose the UO?

**Ali:** When I was still an undergraduate in Minneapolis, I entered a contest for The Loft, a local literary organization, with a story I'd written and been chosen to work with a writer name David Mura. Part of that meant that we, at the end of the class, gave a public reading. I read a story called, "Daddy, Sabana and The Shits," which I'd written during that class. Garrett Hongo happened to be at the reading and he was impressed with

my work and approached me afterwards about the UO program. I was still two years away from graduating and didn't really think much of it. However, two years later, I got a call from him. Now that was impressive! I flew out and met Garrett and Chang-rae and was really impressed by what I saw.



**Martone:** What were the first few years of post-MFA life like for you? Who were you as a writer? What kept you focused on your work?

**Ali:** I think most everyone went off in different directions with the idea of teaching someplace and writing. I'm not sure how many continued. I went to San Francisco and didn't

write for a long time. Every time I sat at the computer, I could hear some classmate or professor saying, "Are you making that same mistake again, no no no!" It took about a year to exorcise myself of the workshop demons. Once I did that, I started to really get what people were saying, the advice, and it started to flow. The summer after I graduated, I got my fabulous agent and went on from there.

**Martone:** What advice do you have for MFA students who are just starting out?

**Ali:** Keep writing. People always think it's so glamorous to be a writer. My photo was in *Vogue Magazine*, I was on national NPR, was featured on the cover of several magazines. Believe it or not, I still travel every month for MADRAS, though it's been two years since it was published. I do gala events and Harvard and Yale lectures, I'll be going to Europe this summer. But none of that celebration happens if the writing doesn't happen first. The writing is a lonely time. You sit for hours with the same work, day after day. The characters become more your companions than real people. You "hear voices" and are glad not to be thrown into some loony bin. You have horrible days when everything you thought was brilliant suddenly looks like trash and very well may be. Yet you have to keep rowing. Once you leave the shore, don't turn back, just keep rowing. ■

## Faculty News

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she'll spend a week at the Nebraska Summer Writer's Conference followed in July by the Foothills Writers Conference in Los Altos, California. Near the end of July she will travel to Umbria, Italy to teach at the Spoleto Writer's Workshop and in August will make her yearly trek to Big Sur where she'll join Ellen Bass and Joseph Millar to teach at the Esalen Workshops. She has new work coming out in *Sacred Fire, Night-sun, River Styx, Parthenon West Review, Prairie Schooner, Cutthroat, Blue Fifth Review* and *Bat City Review*. Her poem, "Cher," as well as her poem "Pearl," from *Smoke*, will be included in a Rock and Roll Anthology published by MTV.

**Robert Hill Long's** poem 'Barry Carolina' is online at *Del Sol Review*; two flash-fiction collaborations with Bruce Holland Rogers, 'The Smallest Things' and 'Paper Boats,' are online at *VerbSap*; his poem 'Walking Wounded' has been taken by *South Carolina Review*; two poems, 'Dead Run' and 'Cape



Perpetua' will appear in *Deer Drink the Moon*, an Ooligan Press anthology of Oregon poets; his poem 'The White Ibis' (most recently anthologized in "Birds in the Hand," Knopf) will be reprinted in *Between Heaven and Earth: A Literary Field Guide to the Poetry of Birds* (Paul Dry Books, Philadelphia). He gave a National Poetry Month reading at the Springfield Public Library in April, and provided prelude/interlude solo guitar for an April Eugene Public Library publication-party reading from a chapbook of peace poems by Oregon poets. In a matter of weeks he will depart this accursed Vale of Rain for the vales of snow and humidity where David Bradley and Joe Millar spent their childhoods. ■

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## Menstruation

I call my mother, say, I have a period that would kill a horse. What the hell am I losing? It's been raining for a month. Today the clouds opened into clear cold brightness.

The neighbors have their dogs out and I can't leave my couch. There's pain tearing at my waistline. Think of prisoners caught and chain-linked in some mud hole grave and it's their fingers pulling at my insides. I'd let them out. Undo every steel loop, set them free in a minute. I won't judge who's wrong or bad. Although last week I wanted to rail against my students, shame them into silence. For three days I stayed up nights, thinking of how best to get them.

Then I let it go. Their faces were so small the next day. And there's my mother who'd give anyone the shirt off her back just to complain about it, my father who'd write a book and put you in it. I've done something else. Last night I sliced chicken livers, a whole pulpy bagful, seasoned and spread them onto hot oil in my cheap pan, cooked them slow to let the bitter out. I ate them all knowing blood was going to leave me. It woke me from sleep. As much as I could hate it, there's something beautiful and slick about this dark I leak, the same bruising red of those delicate bulbs of monthly flesh.

--Erika Mueller

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## Miriam Starlin

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I rescued an opossum many years ago. I came home one evening and I saw this funny looking little thing huddled against the shrubbery and took a closer look. It was a baby possum. I was not going to leave it for the cats and dogs, which weren't on leashes in those days. So I got the dustpan, stuck it under the little thing and put it in a broom closet outside. When I went to look for it in the morning, I couldn't find it until I looked up. There it was clinging to the top, to one of the beams. I had to take it, walk it up the hill and put it in a tree, hoping its mother would find it again. A great big possum is still coming by here. I pretend it's the one I rescued.

**Mueller:** *You wrote your first poem at eight years old. How did you discover poetry at such a young age?*

**Starlin:** My mother was a very accomplished woman. She graduated from the University of Idaho when not very many women did that. She had a degree in English and acted in the theater. She loved British writers. I was brought up

hearing them all my life. She would read every night to us, so I was surrounded by poetry and I read avidly. In fact, when we finally got little flashlights, I would sneak one into bed and read under the quilt so that if my mother went by she wouldn't come I and say it was time to sleep.

**Mueller:** *So you have been reading and writing poetry for many years.*

**Starlin:** Yes, and I have tried practically every art form you can think of; sculp-

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“...I have tried practically every art form you can think of; sculpture, collage, watercolor, and oil.

I never tried etching. I tried metal work and I didn't like it. I didn't like blowtorches.”

--Miriam Starlin

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ture, collage, watercolor, and oil. I never tried etching. I tried metal work and I didn't like it. I didn't like blowtorches.

**Mueller:** *So you come back to writing poetry?*

**Starlin:** Always. I always come back to it. I have been a part of writing groups

for years. People would always say, if you want to cut down your poem, give it to Miriam. I was stern about deleting. I had my red pen out. I am into free verse, although I don't like narrative poems that go on too long.

**Mueller:** *Who are some of your favorite poets?*

**Starlin:** The strongest influences, when I started getting more serious about writing, would have been Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. I have not found too many modern poets that excite me. I was strongly moved by Sylvia Plath and her plight. And William Stafford's poetry. I really do like Dorianne's [Laux] work. I think she is a very strong, important poet. The other local poet whose work I really respect is Ingrid Wendt.

**Mueller:** *Do you have a favorite poem that you have*

*written?*

**Starlin:** “Chiaroscuro.” I don't know why I like this one.

**Mueller:** *It's beautiful. I can see from it that you miss Glenn.*

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# Meet the Incoming First Years

**Dea Brown** is originally from St. Louis (yes, it's in Missouri). She still maintains her accent and "show me" state convictions (okay, some of them). Since her narrow escape eight years ago, she's left ink stains in Virginia, Africa, Vermont, Cuba, and nearly starved peddling poems in the streets of Los Angeles. After a few forced years of a rice and avocado diet, she moved to Oakland, gained a couple of pounds and continues to write ferociously, leaving blue and black trails across the Bay Area where she coordinates a youth program for sixty high school students who she loves and will miss dearly. She looks forward to a little space and solace in Oregon.

**Tobey Ward** has lived most of her life in the tiny town of Ashfield, MA. She graduated from Brandeis University in 2004 with a BA in Creative Writing. Since then, she has worked two awful jobs and traveled in Central and South America. She is writing this bio from an internet cafe in a dusty Ecuadorian pueblito. Tobey writes fiction, speaks Spanish, and is not a vegetarian. She is a little sad to leave the full-blown seasons of the East coast, but she can't think of anything better than spending the next two years writing.

**Jennifer Kepka** is tired of being the only vegetarian Democrat in the state of Kansas. She holds a B.A. in political science and creative writing from the University of Kansas, though most of the first degree (and many hours of print journalism experience) was earned at American University in Washington, D.C. She is currently working to bring wedding hats, semicolons, and letter writing back into vogue. The album she can't stop listening to is Rufus Wainwright's *Want*, both discs of which she looks forward to playing for anyone who will sit still when she finally (finally!) makes it up to Oregon in September, a week after her 27th birthday.

**Sam Biederman** graduated from Vassar ('95) where he studied creative writing and medieval literature. After a couple months in Europe, he returned to his hometown of Chicago in August to start work in the public relations department

of an ad agency. When not advertising, he goes to parties where he pretends to be interested in the White Sox.

**Sara Johnson** is heading out to Oregon from Ithaca, NY, where she studied English at Cornell University. Cowboys, desert wildflowers, mustangs, Bob Dylan, canyons, salt flats, summer, the Grateful Dead and open fields are a few of her favorite things. She hikes, tries very hard to play the guitar, and writes most of her poems at night. She doesn't like sub-zero winter temperatures, and looks forward to leaving the Ithaca cold for the green and rain of Eugene.

**Matt Rader** is a poet and fiction writer from Vancouver, British Columbia. His poems and stories have been published widely in journals and anthologies across Canada. He has recently been nominated for National and Western magazine awards for short-fiction, and his first book of poetry, *Miraculous Hours* (Nightwood, 2005), has been short-listed for the Gerald Lampert Award recognizing the best first book of poetry in Canada. Rader is the co-director of the Robson Reading Series at the University of British Columbia and a graduate of the University of Victoria's Creative Writing Department. He lives with his wife Melanie Willson and their daughter Neela on Vancouver's east side.

**J. Flibbons:** Feel free to talk to me about my zine, BOOGER!, Even if you're not a punk. Writing is the best thing ever. Reading is second. I'm soiling myself with joy at the prospect of writing, reading, talking about writing and reading, one hundred percent of the time, except when my mouth is full, or when I'm sleeping, which, come to think of it, is also one of the best things to do on Earth. And, of course there's video games too. Yeah. Things that will seem contradictory: I'm a rude person, preoccupied with diplomacy. I'm a charming, friendly hermit. I believe fervently in human beings' right to do anything that does not in any way harm other human beings, yet I believe that the only way for the world to be harmonious is for me to become absolute monarch over it.

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## What Are You Reading Now?

In a new addition to Literary Reference, I asked faculty members and graduate students to report on what they're reading currently or plan to be reading over the summer. Hope something here peaks your interest!

**Cindy Berger** – The last book of poetry I read for my own enjoyment was *Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions* by Maurice Manning. Here's the last stanza of a poem entitled "Envoy": "Eccentric (?) gentleman (negotiable)-tinker/farmer searching the heavens for the true spark of love (breast-size unimportant). Please."

**J.T. Bushnell** - After three terms of intensive academic reading, I'll take on something a little lighter this summer. I figure 850 pages of 19th-century Russian literature fits that bill nicely, so I'm going to pull from my bookshelf the cinder block that says *Anna Karenina*. Next year I'll understand Ehud when he makes reference to it. That's my hope, in any case. I've read as far as the first line. It's a great first line. It's this: "All happy families are alike but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion." A sentence like that must have a great story behind it.

**Roby Connor** - *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* by Haruki Murakami. Passage: To know one's own state is not a simple matter. One cannot look directly at one's own face with one's own eyes, for example. One has no choice but to look at one's reflection in the mirror. Throughout experience, we come to believe that the image is correct, but that is all.

**Mike Copperman** – *The Power of Glory* by Graham Greene. The book is about God, and not God. And Mexico, and wanting to give, and running from everything, and some Catholic guilt in-between. I'm only sixty pages in, so more I won't say...

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# First Years

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**Will Fleming** is a native of Baltimore, Maryland. With the exception of two years spent in Vermont getting his BA, Will has been living in Brooklyn, New York for the last thirteen years. He recently completed an MA in creative writing and literature at the City College of New York, where he's also been teaching English composition for the last two years. Will is primarily a fiction writer, though he also dabbles in non-fiction from time to time. He has recently completed a draft of his first novel and has begun a new novel and a memoir, both of which he is looking forward to work-

ing on at the University of Oregon. Will and his wife Sarah, their first child (due in December), and their dog and three cats are all very excited about moving to Oregon.

**Brian Young** is from Onalaska, Wisconsin, on the Mississippi River. He graduated from UT-Austin with an M.A. in English two years back, and since then, he has worked as a housekeeper at a hospital and as a teacher. He is looking to play some competitive soccer in Eugene, having played in college and in other city-wide leagues (Austin, TX; Madison, WI); if you are on a city-league team, he would appreciate a run-out. Other than books and soccer, motorcycles are it for him.

**Chloe Garcia Roberts** is moving to Eugene from Boston where she has spent the last three years writing, working as a Spanish translator and most recently as the reviews editor for Zoland Poetry in Cambridge. She received her BA from Wesleyan University with a dual concentration in East Asian Studies and Fine Arts. Apart from writing her own poetry, her studies of Mandarin and her own Mexican heritage have sparked an interest in translation which she has been pursuing professionally and artistically. This summer when she isn't packing, she plans on keeping herself sane by writing as much as possible and working on a slowly developing translation project of several women poets from Vera Cruz, Mexico. ■

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# Reading Now

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except that the book is prosaically gorgeous.

**Tim Dalton** - *Empire Falls*, Richard Russo. It rawks my sawks.

**Laurie Lynn Drummond** - *Plainsong* by Kent Haruf. My sixth reading of this book, and I'm still learning from it--and swooning. Third person, multiple perspectives, simple prose, stunning story about community and the ties that bind.

**Andrew Frost** - I'm reading the *Cascade Alpine Guide: Climbing and High Routes, Columbia River to Stevens Pass*, Third Edition, by Fred Beckey. Here's an excerpt from the Introduction: "The striking characteristic of the Cascades in

Washington State is the vivid contrasts and diversity of ecological zones. The peaks are often majestically alpine, with compact groupings, immense local relief, dazzling snowfields, and crevassed glaciers. Their contrasts can be sublime, with a range of subtle and strong earth colors emanating from the great variety of vegetation, the dark forest shadow, and the formerly ice-protected alp slopes." p. 13

**Elyse Fenton** - I've been reading Anna Akhmatova, *Poems of Akhmatova*, and I'll probably read Mayakovsky next. I'd like to read the *Divine Comedia* this summer... I guess I'm reading both Dante and Akhmatova to see different poetic approaches to the act of bearing witness to atrocity.

**Ehud Havazelet** - Mavis Gallant, because she's better than I am. Lawrence Langer's *Admitting the Holocaust*, because he's smarter than I am. Re-reading James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom*, because everyone needs a fetish.

**Keetje Kuipers** - *Gathering Ground*, "a reader celebrating Cave Canem's first decade." Edited by Toi Derricotte and Cornelius Eady, this collection of poems from Cave Canem is dedicated to "the discovery and cultivation of new voices in African American poetry."

**Robert Hill Long** - I'm rereading the great Patrick O'Brian novels of the Napoleonic wars--the <soi-disant> 'Aubrey-Maturin'

novels--and considering how to transpose it to this program/now: Would David Bradley be the bluff laughing captain capable of firing a broadside every minute or two into the hostile frigate, then adjusting the staysails to outrun an ice field, while I was the ship's Irish surgeon/naturalist/unpaid spy into Continental affairs? Other way round? Who cares? In a perfect world we circumnavigate the world and sink/burn/destroy the enemy and it doesn't matter whose hair is long and yellow (or what the hell color it is) and slashes right and left with the saber or who gathers precise damaging intelligence while balancing Aristotle and Aquinas: the epic is about friendship and love, and those are the only epics that matter. Commander--oh my captain--the enemy is destroyed, and the ocean and the evening are clear.

**Dorianne Laux** - *Wind in a Box* by Terrence Hayes. It begins, "This ink. This name. This blood. This blunder... This blood / in the body. This wind in the blood."

**Eliza Ling** - *Rose* by Li-Young Lee. From "From Blossoms":  
O, to take what we love inside,  
to carry within us an orchard, to eat  
not only the skin, but the shade,  
not only the sugar, but the days, to hold  
the fruit in our hands, adore it, then bit  
into the round jubilation of peach.

**Paul Martone** - *Revolutionary Road* by Richard Yates. If being "a writer's writer" means you crafted one of the best Ameri-

## Commencement Schedule for 2006

**Friday, June 9:** Second year M.F.A. candidate reading (part one) at Tsunami Books at 5:00 p.m.

**Saturday, June 10:** Second year M.F.A. candidate reading (part two) at 2 p.m. followed by Commencement Ceremony (location TBA).



can novels of the twentieth century, I guess it's fair to stick Yates with that label. His writing shows life clearly, no gimmicks or tricks, no pretentious language; deep, deep, characterization. If you're willing to be terrified and strengthened by art, give this neglected work of genius a chance this summer. Passage: Then the fight went out of control. It quivered their arms and legs and wrenched their faces into shapes of hatred, it urged them harder and deeper into each other's weakest points, showing them cunning ways around each other's strongholds and quick chances to switch tactics, feint, and strike again. In the space of a gasp for breath it sent their memories racing back over the years for old weapons to rip the scabs off old wounds; it went on and on.

**Rachel Mehl** - A few nights ago I was reading *The Last Nostalgia* by Joe Bolton in bed and I pulled the covers up and they came up to under his chin on his photograph on the cover. Why do I love him? It is not because he turned in his master's thesis and then shot himself in the head; it is because he uses real images and makes me love the people he writes about "In the huge and forever-unfinished mosaic / Of all that is lost."

**Jessica Murakami** - *Running with Scissors: A Memoir* by Augusten Burroughs. I read this book a couple of years ago and I still am disturbed by it, so I plan to read it again this summer. It's the true story about a boy whose mother loses touch with reality and gives her son away to her psychiatrist, who is 100x crazier than she is. This is a dark, disturbing, and humorous book about survival, pedophilia, coming of age, love, and reality testing.

**Leslie Rutberg** - *Ada* by Vladimir Nabokov. Very funny so far. And every page makes me feel sorely unread.

**Heather Ryan** - *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion. Passage: "I remember despising the book Dylan Thomas's widow Caitlin wrote after her husband's death, *Leftover Life to Kill*. I remember being dismissive of, even censorious about, her "self-pity," her "whining," her "dwelling on it." *Leftover Life to Kill* was published in 1957. I was twenty-two years old. Time is the school in which we learn." ■

## Seifert Named New Kidd Fellow/ Publicity Coordinator for 2006-07

**A**mber Seifert, newly appointed Kidd Fellow, received her B.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Minnesota. She worked as the



**Amber Seifert**

House Manager for the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis and has taught courses within the Creative Writing and Composition programs at the University of Oregon. She was a Kidd Tutor for the 2004-2005 school year and looks forward to working in the Kidd Tutorial again in the 2006-2007 academic year. Robert Hill

Long, current Kidd Program Director, remarks that "Amber will be the sort of Kidd Fellow who will probably more than once save the bacon of her Kidd Director, because not only is she intimately acquainted with the Kidd Tutorials from the ground up--the best way to know anything, I say--but she also takes notes better than anyone, apports her time and schedule with rational calm, and maintains cheer under duress. Her Kidd section 2005-2006 was intensely loyal to her, and I suspect her incoming Kidd tutors will find her a rock strong enough to build a one-year church of Kidd on." Seifert replaces Kidd Fellow Paul Martone who will graduate at the end of the summer. ■

## Miriam Starlin

*continued from page 6*

**Starlin:** Everyday. We had an unusual marriage. Unusually good marriage. I couldn't have been more fortunate because we had almost no interest that we didn't share. Of course he had to be more interested in television than I was, while he was involved in it. [Glenn established the State's first educational television broadcast facility as well as helped launch what is now known as PBS.]

Each of the jobs that Glenn had, had different demands on him socially, which always included me, and we entertained a lot. And I enjoyed it. I think it's hard for people in your generation to think back to my generation because women didn't have full time, out of home careers. But particularly in the academic world, if you enjoyed being in the academic world which I certainly did, you wanted to be as involved as you could be with everything that was happening on campus. I don't think there was ever a weekend that wasn't full of something that probably had to with the campus. We'd be going to plays, or to musicals or we'd be going

to something at the music school. It was mostly something with the arts, although I've had a long and passionate interest in the sciences.

The university also gives a yearly stipend to someone in Theater Arts and Communications, the Glenn Starlin Fellowship. The courtyard outside the Museum of Natural History is also named for him. I suppose, the money could have gone to those places too, but I like the idea that there is something in my name.

**Mueller:** *And we do too.*

Miriam Starlin's first book, *Wait a Minute*, will be released from Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf & Stock Publishers, in May of 2006.

Erika Mueller holds a B.A. in Women's Studies from UW-Milwaukee and an M.A. in English from Iowa State University. She will graduate this spring with an M.F.A. from the UO's Creative Writing Program. Past Starlin Award winners include: Kate Lyn Hibbard, Sonya Posmentier, Jude Nutter, Alison Dubinsky, Marie J. Carvalho, Lora Vahlsing, Becca Barniskis, Kate Westhaver, Laura Passin, and Sarah Seybold. ■

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# 2006 Summer Writing Courses at the University of Oregon

## **CRWR 199 Special Studies Character and Point of View**

*June 26-29, MUWH, 6:00-8:20p.m., 1 credit, Instructor: Paul Martone*

Whose story is it, which character should tell the story, what does your character yearn for, how do you create “real” characters the reader can care about, and more.

## **CRWR 199 Special Studies Plot, Narrative Drive, and Structure**

*July 10-13, MUWH, 6:00-8:20p.m., 1 credit, Instructor: Paul Martone*

Plot, Narrative Drive, and Structure are separate, yet interdependent, elements in fiction, and they present many options—and potholes—for the writer.

## **CRWR 199 Special Studies Time, Scenes, and Flashbacks**

*July 24-27, MUWH, 6:00-8:20p.m., 1 credit, Instructor: Paul Martone*

Scene, summary, flashbacks, back story, and transitions are some of the elements that will be covered in this module.

## **CRWR 199 Special Studies**

## **Style, Detail, and Dialogue**

*August 7-10, MUWH, 6:00-8:20p.m., 1 credit, Instructor: Paul Martone*

Style—the words you choose, the sentences you craft. Detail—much more than showing versus telling. Dialogue—it is character.

## **CRWR 199 Special Studies: Fiction Workshop**

*June 26-August 18, 6:00-8:20p.m., TR, 4 credits, Instructor: Michael Copperman*

Concentration on student fiction writing in a workshop setting.

## **CRWR 199 Special Studies: Poetry Workshop**

*June 26-July 21, 3:00-5:20p.m., MTWR, 4 credits, Instructor: Keetje Kuipers*

Concentration on student poems in a workshop setting.

## **CRWR 199 Special Studies: Writing Children's Literature**

*July 24-August 16, 3:00-5:20p.m., MTWH, 4 credits, Instructor: Amber Seifert*

Reading and discussion of the genre. Workshopping of student exercises.

## **CRWR 244 Introduction to Literary Nonfiction**

*June 19-23, 8:00a.m.-4:50p.m., MTWTF, 4 credits, Instructor: Laurie Lynn Drummond*

Techniques of writing creative nonfiction (the literary essay). Development of a critical appreciation of the art of writing.

**Register online at [www.uoregon.edu](http://www.uoregon.edu).**

Registration opens May 8, 2006. Tuition and fees for one credit course are \$251 for non-matriculated students and \$324 for matriculated students. Four credit courses are \$560 for non-matriculated students; \$633 for matriculated students. For more information about the University of Oregon's summer writing courses, please contact the Creative Writing Program.

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