

# MFA AT EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

## Creative Writing Program

Newsletter...November...2019.....



### What's Inside

- Visiting Writer  
(Page 1)
- 
- Faculty Book  
Release Event &  
Interview  
(page 2 & 3)
- 
- Cheers & Kudos  
Aunties & Events  
(page 4)
- 
- Letter from the Editor  
(page 5)
- 
- Submissions  
(page 6)

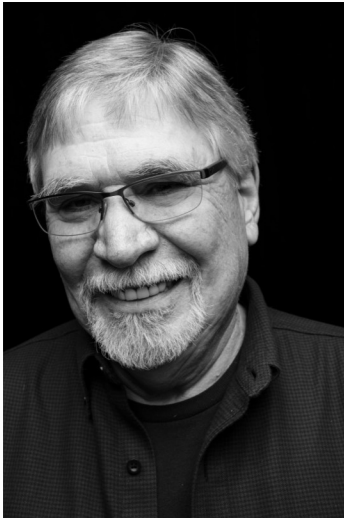
### Get Lit! Programs first Visiting Writer!!!



Christopher Boucher  
Reading at  
Spark Central  
November 15th  
7:30pm

**Christopher Boucher is the author of the novels *How to Keep Your Volkswagen Alive* (2011), *Golden Delicious* (2016) and *Big Giant Floating Head* (2019), all out from Melville House. He's also the editor of Jonathan Lethem's nonfiction collection *More Alive and Less Lonely* (Melville House, 2017) and the Managing Editor of the literary journal *Post Road*. Chris lives in western Massachusetts and teaches writing and literature at Boston**

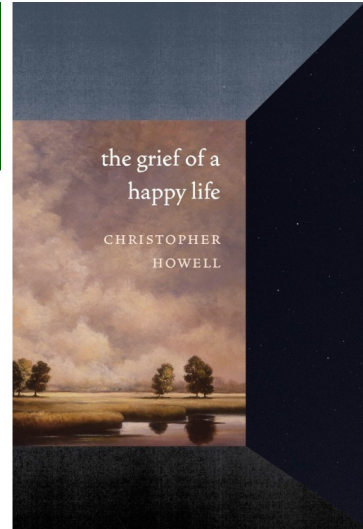




# *The Grief of a Happy Life* by Christopher Howell

Christopher Howell's *The Grief of a Happy Life* feels and reads like a gift. Each healing song takes lyrical twists and turns, and arrives at an abiding truth—a blessed ransom paid to soil and sky, body and soul, to the Earth. These summons spring out of quest and need, going back to Gilgamesh and Heraclitus, traveling on to moments of joy and wonderment, praises and elegies, to vows that seethe into atonement, along with everyday names daring to anchor lives fully lived. Here, in *The Grief of a Happy Life*, every vowel is weighed, every leap earned, and the sway of hope drives the natural music of a worthwhile journey.

- Yusef Komunyakaa, author of *The Emperor of Water Clocks*



In Christopher Howell's twelfth collection of poems, his gifts for elegy, humor, and lyricism are on full display. *The Grief of a Happy Life* explores the interplay between memory and imagination, celebrating the ways that happiness and grief inform one another and give our lives fullness and vitality. Arranged in four sections, Howell's poems feature not only these concerns, but a large and various cast of characters as well. Aeneas, Saint Theresa, Ovid, Kierkegaard, a German submarine, and so much more are woven together with Howell's trademark precision and accessibility into exquisite tableaux, each providing a view of both what we must live with and what we must not live without.

After looking through the promotional materials for Christopher Howell's new book, I was fortunate enough to be able to read the poems in *The Grief of a Happy Life*. I was both moved and surprised by the way his poems affected me. I posed three questions and Christopher Howell generously provided thoughtful and meaningful answers. ~ K. Rutherford

## Christopher Howell Interview

### Rutherford:

In the first section, *Theologia*, poem #3, titled "Knowledge," really drew me in and I read it many times. It brought back memories of my own childhood and those secret experiences that kick-start our personal rituals and the mythology that is patched together from what we hear and see, but is unexplained and never talked about with adults. Your description of "Forgiving the Snakes," contains powerful images and is evocative of that time in childhood. Can you talk about the urge in all of us to create rituals and personal mythologies and how that finds its way into your poems?

### Howell:

I think the urge to create personal mythologies is actually a search for the totality of the Self; or, to put it another way, it is a search born of that indefinable yearning to be more than a physical being. Until we forget it, entirely, our experience is never really done with; it stays with us as surely as our arms and legs but is psychologically based, like dreaming: part of us, and yet insubstantial. We tell stories and mythologize about it to heal this rift between the body and what we suspect is the spirit. Also, of course, poems and stories (myths of a kind) are a source of news from the inner world (the putative totality of Self) "Without which," as Arthur Miller has said, "men go mad with the chaos of their lives." When I write I am courting the unconscious, I want to put together things I remember or imagine with things I did not know I knew. I want that news Miller spoke of. I don't write to express myself but to discover meaning. Poetry that results in such discovery is the only poetry in which I am truly interested, as writer or reader.

### Rutherford:

Near the end of the second section, *Historical Perspective*, is the poem, "Ovid Still." This was another poem that held me for a time as I thought about the way you blended mythological past with current reality. It's like the character and scenes of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* are re-imagined today in a street person writing in a small cafe ("his hair the color of outhouse mold"), begging to be let back into some sort of grace. You have a way of observing the everyday world, either your own past or what you are seeing in the moment, and translating that into larger human truths by way of drawing on your vast knowledge of literature and the historical past. Is it usually the case when you are "out and about," that your mind sees those parallels and that "bigger picture" of the human condition? What else can you say about that?

### Howell:

Well, it is true that I have done a lot of reading, I love it, of course, and that certain things then have stuck with me, simply stand out as significant. One of the historical situations that has continued to fascinate is Ovid's banishment and his long, sad, fruitless search for forgiveness and return. It has always struck me as very close to something most of us feel, right on the edges of consciousness mostly, about ourselves: that we would like to come "home," but that something in our character or circumstance will not permit it. So, invoking Ovid, letting him come into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, did not seem difficult. And once he was there, it felt natural to find and follow his plight, which has about it elements of the ridiculous, as well as sadness, and a social critique connected to the poor and outcast among us who are, in some sense, all of them Ovid. I write every day, sometimes in cafes, and I do encounter things, persons, events somehow suggestive of that "meaning" to which I referred earlier. Usually I can't tell what it might be, that's what the poems are for, to find out. I don't think I am different from other writers in that respect: nearly anyone who writes for long learns to be awake to both imagination and the world through which we move. These are not the only sources, as I said in my answer to your first question, but they cannot be totally cast aside either. Even the Surrealist poets were working with "materials" as well as with the mind. (Continued on the next page)

## Christopher Howell Interview, continued:

### Rutherford:

I noticed the crow appearing in many poems throughout the book. Is there a mythological or personal connection you have with crows or something about them that lends itself to themes in your poems?

### Howell:

Crows, because they are both highly social and frequently solitary, seem to suggest a sort of sentience. It is as though they are at once messengers, harbingers, and fellow pilgrim spirits on the amazing journey that is existence. It isn't just their magnificent blackness, it is their curiosity, their penchant for seeming to listen and sometimes to address you directly and to show up at the oddest times—when you've gone off to be alone, for instance, when you're grieving or are about to give up on something you have wanted to be or to accomplish. When I find them wanting to come into a poem, usually I let them in, regardless of my having allowed it a time or two (or ten, maybe) before. I am certain there is a limit on the usage of virtually any word or concept, but with crows I'm not there yet.

## Christopher Howell & Linda Bierds

Book Release Event, 7:00 pm Saturday, November 16th  
Auntie's Bookstore 402 W. Main Avenue



### *The Hardy Tree* by Linda Bierds

"In this erudite and ever-dexterous 10th collection, Bierds poignantly juxtaposes terror with beauty..."  
—Publishers Weekly



Linda Bierds' tenth book of poetry, *The Hardy Tree*, was published by Copper Canyon Press in 2019. Her poems have appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies, including The Atlantic, The New Yorker, The Smithsonian, and Poetry. In addition to being awarded a MacArthur Foundation fellowship, Bierds has received the PEN/West Poetry Prize, the Washington State Book Award, the Consuelo Ford Award from the Poetry Society of America, four Pushcart Prizes, the Virginia Quarterly Review's Emily Clark Balch Poetry Prize, and fellowships from the Ingram Merrill Foundation, the Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and twice from the National Endowment for the Arts. She is the Grace Pollock Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Washington in Seattle and lives on Bainbridge Island.



# Cheers Kudos & Events

## Monet Patrice Thomas

Congratulations Monet, class of 2012! Monet gets a shout-out in NPR's review of the latest collection of essays she's in, *Burn It Down, Women Writing About Anger*. Monet is quoted in the NPR article, as one of 22 authors included in the book. Look for the interview on NPR.com.

## Brandon Getz

Congratulations Brandon, class of 2010! Brandon's debut novel, *Lars Breaxface: Werewolf in Space*, was published in October by Spaceboy Books.

## Michelle Bonczek

Congratulations Michelle, class of 2004! Michelle has a poem in the new *Water Stone Review*, as well as an interview up on their blog. Her book *The Ghosts of Lost Animals*, winner of the 2018 Barry Spacks Poetry Prize just came out with Gunpowder Press. She has a poem in the upcoming anthology *Science and Poets #resist* being published by Brill next month, and an essay forthcoming in the anthology, *Far Villages: Welcome Essays for New & Beginner Poets* by Black Lawrence Press in January. Michelle was also an Artist in Residence at the UNESCO World Heritage Site SERDE in Latvia this past July.

## Amaris Ketcham

Congratulations Amaris, class of 2010! Amaris's chapbook, *A Poetic Inventory of the Sandia Mountains* was published by Finishing Line Press this year. Also, this year she was awarded tenure at the University of New Mexico and promoted to Associate Professor.

## Laura Citino

Congratulations Laura, class of 2013! Laura has a short story, "Open Waters," forthcoming in the next issue of *Yemassee*. She is also the recipient of the 2019 Geertje Potash-Suhr Prosapreis from TRANS-LIT2, the journal of the Society for Contemporary American Literature in German (SCALG). Her winning essay "Grünwald" will be appearing in their next issue.

## Yvonne Leach

Congratulations Yvonne, class of 1986! Yvonne had poems accepted in *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *Edison Literary Review*, and *Two Cities Review*. Her second manuscript was a finalist in the Wandering Aengus Press 2019 Poetry Book Award contest.

## Karen Maner

Congratulations Karen, class of 2013! Karen's essay "I Want to Believe" was just published in *Sonora Review* issue 76: Doubt.

**Book Release Event:  
Christopher Howell reads from  
his new book  
along with Linda Bierds**

**November 16, 2019 7:00 PM  
Aunties Bookstore**

## Aunties Events

**Saturday Nov 2 - 7:00 p.m.**

Spokane Poet Laureate Event: Chris Cook featuring Mark Anderson

**Wednesday Nov. 6 - 7:00 pm**

*We Leave The Flowers Where They Are: True Stories of Montana Women*

**Thursday Nov. 14 - 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.**

Tiffany Midge: *Bury My Heart at Chuck E. Cheese's*

**Saturday Nov. 16 - 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.**

Christopher Howell and Linda Bierds, book release event & reading

**Wednesday Nov. 20 - 7:00 pm**

Dale W. Jones: *Spokane International Railways*

**Thursday Nov. 21- 7:00 pm**

Michael Gurian: *The Stone Boys*



# Letter from the Editor

Dear MFA People!

After almost two years of editing the MFA Newsletter I'm ready to move on and am so happy to let you know that Mirium Arteaga, first year poet, will be taking over starting with the January, 2020, issue. Since we are only here a short time in December, this November issue will not only be my last one as editor, but will be the last edition for 2019.

There are so many things I am grateful for because of this gig: I learned a bit about using InDesign; I was inspired by all the former and current MFA students who keep submitting their work and then get publishing kudos and awards; I have read new works by, and interviewed, five of our professors over the past two years and it reinforces the knowledge that we are so fortunate to have such accomplished mentors; I grew my creative chops by having the freedom to choose and create new feature articles, like interviewing our MFA "Mom" Pam Russell, and our awesome Career Advisor, Aileen Keown Vaux, and starting the "Voices from Beyond the MFA."

Miriam will be reaching out to you in the coming months for any awards or publishing information for future issues!

Thanks for your support and it's been a blast!

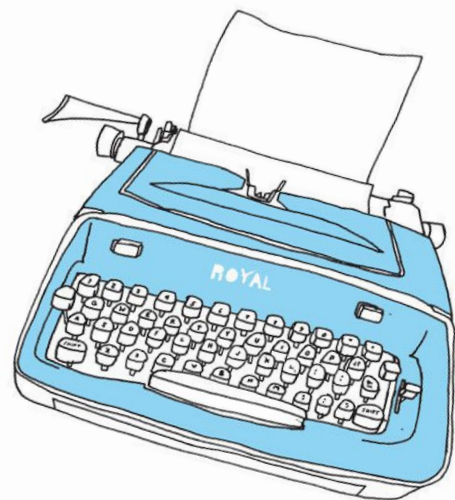
Kerry

Kerry Rutherford

Hello everyone,

I will be taking over for Kerry starting January 2020. I'll try my best to keep it smooth and silky. That's all.

Miriam Arteaga



## Submission Resources

Instead of listing specific journals, this month I am going to offer up a cool resource where you can check out journals that publish in specific genres.

The John Fox website has tons of resources and also John Fox offers services that writers pay for. I have no idea about the pay for service items but the free stuff is great!

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At this URL you can find info on publishing **nonfiction** and if you scroll down there is a list of the top journals publishing nonfiction:

<https://thejohnfox.com/ranking-of-literary-nonfiction/>

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At this URL you can find info on publishing **fiction** and if you scroll down there is a list of the top journals publishing fiction:

<https://thejohnfox.com/ranking-of-literary-journals/>

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At this URL you can find info on publishing **poetry** and if you scroll down there is a list of the top journals publishing poetry:

<https://thejohnfox.com/2016/05/poetry-submissions/>

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This is the main homepage for The John Fox website:

<https://thejohnfox.com/>

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Enjoy!!

