

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH NEWSLETTER



THE JOY OF THE KILLJOY:

An Interview with Erin Wunker

By Brittany Kraus

It's been a big year for Erin Wunker.

With the publication of her single-author debut, *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy: Essays on Everyday Life*, the writer, academic, teacher and social activist has earned ongoing critical and public acclaim for her deeply personal and perspicacious examination of the role of the feminist killjoy in contemporary society, “that irreverent figure who lights a match and joyfully flicks it into the dry hull of patriarchal culture.”

Notes from a Feminist Killjoy has garnered multiple awards, including the prestigious Atlantic Book

Awards 2017 Margaret and John Savage First Book Award and the East Coast Literary Awards 2017 Evelyn Richardson Non-Fiction Award. In 2016, *Quill and Quire* named *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy* the Best Book of the Year, praising Erin for her ability to fuse scholarly theory, feminist thinking, personal anecdotes, and pop culture to produce “a text that is well-rounded and informed, but not so academic to

dissuade a broader readership.” More recently, *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy* received *The Coast's* Gold Medal for Best Book of the Year, yet another testament to the book's accessibility, timeliness, and public impact. Honest and insightful, unflinching and unapologetic, *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy* is essential reading in these troubled and politically polarized times. As Erin writes, “The first step to shifting patriarchal culture into something more fair and equitable is to recognize the imperative and urgent need for feminism. Yes, still. Yes, now.”

Erin's commitment to challenging and disrupting the status quo of patriarchal culture, of “giv[ing] the



happiness-seeking stranger the finger,” is not only evidenced by her book, however. In other words, before Erin wrote about being a feminist killjoy, she was already doing the work of a feminist killjoy in her capacity as a teacher, an academic, a writer, and feminist thinker and practitioner. She is the co-founder and co-editor of the feminist academic blog, *Hook & Eye: Fast Feminism, Slow Academe*. She chairs the board of Canadian Women in the Literary Arts (CWILA), a national, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting gender equity and inclusivity in Canadian literary culture. Her scholarly research is contemporary, cross-disciplinary and socially engaged. When I interviewed Erin for this article – a coffee-fuelled conversation that touched on topics as diverse as punk rock to personal essays to dreams laden with water imagery –she half-jokingly described the working title of an upcoming project: Refuse: 150 Years of CanLit F*ckery. Whether the title sticks, the message is clear: as

a scholar, thinker and public intellectual, Erin isn't afraid to light a match and joyfully flick it.

As a fresh undergraduate student at Dalhousie University, I eagerly attended Erin's classes (and I say 'eagerly' in earnest), captivated by her lectures and the intellectual and emotional difficulty of much of the course reading material. One of the biggest compliments I received during my degree occurred after the English Undergraduate Honours Colloquium, when a fellow student described my paper presentation as "Wunker-esque." If I'm sounding like an Erin Wunker fan-girl, well, so be it: I'll join the ranks. I can attest to the impact she has had on my own thinking, and the inspiration she undoubtedly provides her students with on an everyday basis.

On behalf of Dalhousie University, I am pleased to welcome Assistant Professor Erin Wunker to the English Department.

VARMANIA GOTHIC WRITING COMPETITION

Claire Bennett	First Place	As Long as we Both Shall Live
Richard Whyte	Second Place	Apparition
Beatrice Glickman	Third Place	Patient Room E



Nora Adshade (as witch), Claire Bennet, Josepha Cameron, & Payton Chapley, with Dr. Erin Wunker



Dr. Jason Haslam & Dr. Julia Wright

SHAUNTAY GRANT: MEMORY AND STORYTELLING

By Kate Power

Shauntay Grant is the Creative Writing coordinator here at Dalhousie. She is a poet, playwright, performance artist, and author. I spoke with her shortly after she attended a launch of her newest children's picture book, *The Walking Bathroom*.

KP: What sparked your interest in storytelling and creative writing, as you were growing up?

SG: I think my interest in stories came from right around the kitchen table. When I was young, we would spend a lot of time in the community of North Preston with family. Every Sunday evening, we'd end up at my great Aunt and Uncles' house. There was a TV room, and the TV would be on, but most of the action was in the kitchen. Everyone would be in there, listening to stories. It's not that anyone said, 'This is Art, we're creating art', it was just what happened naturally. And when I look at the children's books that I write, the stories that I tell, it just comes from family experiences. My first book is called *Up Home*, and it is a children's picture book memoir about spending time in North Preston as a child. Even my most recent publication, *The Walking Bathroom*, is based on the fact that my mom dressed me up as a walking bathroom for Halloween when I was a kid. So I will often look to my memories for story ideas, whether it's to write a true story, or to create a fictional story inspired by true events.

KP: Do you have any advice to any young writers who are going through Dal and Kings, reflecting on your own time there?



SG: One of the things that really helped me as I was beginning my journey towards being a working artist is that, while I was a university student, I was creating work to share outside of my studies. I remember being in my third or fourth year at Dal, and working on a spoken word radio documentary that aired on CBC. And when I was in journalism school at Kings, I was doing my coursework but I was also pitching stories to CBC. So when I finished my degrees, I already had some professional experience. And I'd urge any student-writer to start seeking out career opportunities that can help to nurture their art.

Shauntay Grant presently has work in two art exhibitions, one of which is called *Abeng*, on display at Pier 21 in Halifax as part of the exhibition Canada: Day 1. The other, called *Grandmother, Teach Me*, is part of a national group exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario called *Every. Now. Then: Reframing Nationhood*. Grant is developing her stage play *The Bridge* as the current Playwright-in-Residence at 2b theatre company. She will also be teaching a class next semester called *Spoken Word, Storytelling, and Literary Performance*, which you can find under the course code CRWR 3200.

MILENA KHAZANAVICIUS, BA (ENGLISH)

and Volunteer Extraordinaire

by Rose Jackson

Milena Khazanavicius graduated from Dalhousie University in 2000. Since then she has been involved in extensive voluntary and advocacy work for the community. Here she is, in her own words:

I applied to Dal after I lost my sight. I was living out west in Alberta and moved here to help my parents for a bit, thinking I was just going to be here for a year. I was a floral designer by trade so when I lost my sight, I thought ‘what the hell am I going to do?’

I applied to go to university and got accepted. I started in Psychology, switched to Sociology and ended up in English Literature!

I’ve always loved English. I’m originally from Lithuania, Eastern Europe and we moved to Canada when I was 7 years old. I started school here when I was almost 8 and didn’t know any English. I had a tutor that stayed with me every recess practising how to say words and what they meant and I really loved it.

Now I volunteer with Frontier College. I help tutor the young kids in the Tuesday homework club and they’re a lot of fun. It’s one of my biggest passions and I’ve been doing it for about 3 years now. We work with a lot of new Canadians.

I think everyone has the right to read and write. Frontier College is one of the oldest not for profit literacy programmes; they’ve been around 117 years and all the programmes are free of charge. It’s basically run by volunteers and it’s for adults and kids.



A lot of the time it’s for lower income families and we help lots of different cultures and ages. I choose to work with the kids because they’re a lot more fun.

I’m involved in a lot of advocacy aspects because of my blindness, to make sure things are equal. One issue I’m working on is all this construction that’s happening now. You know it’s hard enough for a sighted person to get down the sidewalk, never mind someone in a wheelchair or someone who is blind like me. When they’re blocking off streets, they need to make sure they are blocking them off properly and that routes are accessible.

Another passion of mine is my volunteer work with Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). I help to facilitate a lot of new volunteers, particularly one programme called Vision Mate for which I work one on one with someone who is blind or partially sighted. If I hadn’t had volunteers help me through university, I probably wouldn’t be here today. We’re all human beings; we need to help each other.

AN ENGLISH STUDENT TO THE RESCUE!

By Danielle Blais

When English student Erik Nolan saw the crowd that had formed around the dock, and the gull tangled in the water, he knew he had to change the narrative. “It was dark and depressing, all those people just watching this bird struggle. Those people would have gone home and told the story of how they watched a bird die in the harbor,” he explained.

By the time Erik got to the dock the bird had been in the water a while - anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes. If it stopped moving there were two possible outcomes: drowning or being eaten by fish. Erik jumped in. As an open sea diver he knew how cold the water was and knew he had a limited time. I asked him if he ever questioned himself about going into the water.

“I didn’t really question myself per se. I was pulling down my pants and had the thought: wait, we are doing this? Then, yes we are. So I did.” He approached the bird cautiously, attempted to untangle it, but resorted to cutting it out of the net due to the severity of the tangle. “At one point I thought I may have to leave it due to how badly caught it was in the netting. I was, like: if I can’t get it out within the next few minutes, I’m going to have to get out and leave it,” Erik explained. Luckily he and the bird got to land

without any lasting effects. Later he was asked if the bird appeared grateful to him, something that had never crossed his mind. “Without sounding heartless, it was a bird. In attempting to save it, of course I wanted it to live but the opposite could have happened,” Erik said. The same could be said for after the event. At the time Erik was at work, and only afterwards did he think about the liability of his actions. “I went right back and right to my chefs and explained the situation. It was something out of character for sure but it wasn’t something I was going to do again.” Some have painted him as a hero, but Erik disagrees. “I try to do good, be it helping a defenceless bird or helping out a friend.” We spoke about how these days you see fewer and fewer acts like this. Most people are only out there for themselves; sometimes it takes acts like Erik’s to show that even the smallest act of kindness can go a long way. “When you see an injustice, you try to change it, no matter what it is. That bird was trapped due to our negligence and nobody was trying to do anything to help.”

Thinking back, Erik said next time he would have asked the people in the crowd to see if anyone had called animal rescue. However, given a similar situation, Erik said he would still try to do the right thing.

M.A. ENGLI GRADUATE



MA Grads 2017: Sarah Deller, Chris Shalom, Julia Schabas, Grace MacDonald, Rebecca D'Mello

SELECTED ENGLISH DEPARTMENT NEWS

Julia Wright has been elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. Election into the academies is the highest honour a scholar can achieve in the arts, humanities and sciences.

George Elliott Clarke (MA Dalhousie), Canadian Parliamentary Poet Laureate and E.J. Pratt Professor of English at the University of Toronto, received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Dalhousie.

SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow **Rachel Bryant's** book, *The Homing Place*, was published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Shauntay Grant's multi-media installation *Grandmother, Teach Me* -- a collaboration with her late great-grandmother Annie Simmonds and photographer Shyronn Smardon -- is on view at the Art Gallery of Ontario through December 10 as part of the national group exhibition *Every. Now. Then: Reframing Nationhood*.

Jason Haslam was elected co-president (with Justin Edwards of the University of Stirling) of the International Gothic Association.

Lesley Choyce's book *Into the Wasteland*, published by Red Deer Press, won the Ann Connor Brimer Award for Children's Literature.

Julia McMillan (MA Dalhousie) is the new Creative Director and Head of the Eye Level Gallery in Halifax.

Madeline Bassnett (PhD Dalhousie) was awarded tenure at Western University.

Carole Langille's poetry was arranged for music by Alice Ping Yee Ho; her piece, *The Depth of this Quiet*, was performed by the choral group Cantori New York in May 2017.

Leonard Diepeveen's edition of Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* was recently published by Broadview Press.

Christina Luckyj co-edited (with Niamh O'Leary) *The Politics of Female Alliance in Early Modern England*, a volume of essays published by the University of Nebraska Press.

Rebecca Babcock won the \$10,000 first prize in the Atlantic Screenwriter Development competition for her script, *Anew*, a science fiction drama.

Erin Wunker's *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy: Essays on Everyday Life*, published by Bookthug, won the Margaret and John Savage First Book Award (sponsored by Collins Barrow LLP, Weed Man Maritimes and the family of John and Margaret Savage) as well as the Coast Best Book Award.

Rohan Maitzen published an opinion piece, entitled "Study English Lit to acquire 'marketable' skills? That's a bad argument," in the *Los Angeles Times* (October 22, 2017). She argues that the study of literature is "the record of the many stories we have told about ourselves and our world, and of the many ways we have found to use language artfully and beautifully, but also cruelly and obtusely. It both reflects us and shapes us. We don't need any excuses for taking it seriously."

WINTER 2018

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH SPEAKERS SERIES

All events begin at 3:45 in McCain 1198, unless otherwise specified

January 12	Jason Haslam (Dalhousie)	"From the Depths"
January 19	Ann-Barbara Graff (NSCAD)	"Miscegenation in Fin de Siècle Victorian Fiction: a Case Study"
January 26	Creative Writers (Dalhousie):	Shauntay Grant, Carole Langille, Sue Goyette
February 9	Adrian Knapp (SMU)	"Errant Laughter in Ignatius Sancho's Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho: An African."
March 2	Marjorie Stone (Dalhousie)	"Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Unpublished Honeymoon Poem, a Poetics in Transition, and Petrarch's Vaucluse: 'Wilder ever still & wilder!'"
March 9	Creative Writers (Dalhousie)	Jon Tattrie, Charlotte Mendel, Geordie Miller
March 16	Mark Barr (SMU)	"Romanticism and the Rule of Law"
March 23	Diane Piccitto (MSVU)	on William Blake
April 6	Suzannah Showler (Ohio State University)	"Most Dramatic Ever: Writing Pop Culture or How I learned to (sometimes) stop worrying and wrote a book about <i>The Bachelor</i> in Trump's America"

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