

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Newsletter

"A Web of Work: Women Writers through a Digital Lens" By Dr. Susan Brown



Distinguished Alumna Susan Brown Revisits Dalhousie

Susan Brown is a professor of English at the University of Guelph, a visiting professor at the University of Alberta, the Director of the Orlando Project, and the project leader for the Canadian Writing Research Collaboratory (CWRC). She is also a Dalhousie alumna. In November she returned to Dalhousie, this time as the English Department's Distinguished Speaker. Her lecture, "A Web of Work: Women Writers through a Digital Lens," drew on her extensive experience in the digital humanities and her expertise in literary history and Victorian women writers. She explored the questions: How might digital research work for feminist literary history? How do we approach literary history through this new medium?

Digital scholarship has already done impressive work reproducing materials and increasing accessibility to texts. Of course, there are challenges to integrating these two radically different disciplines, but there are benefits as well. Ed Folsom, co-director of the digital project The Walt Whitman Archive, argues that database and narrative exist in "productive tension." Building on this claim, Brown suggested that, just as women scholars criticized narrative literary history and its inade-

quacies, digital scholarship – including semantic mark up, tagging, and database work – can restructure data in new ways and counter the claims of narrative literary history.

Brown focused her talk on Eliza Meteyard, one of the first Victorian women to support herself through writing and journalism. Meteyard is an obscure figure whose name calls up fewer than 17 000 Google results, but Brown argued that digital scholarship can frame Meteyard within a web of female (and male) writers, radicals, intellectuals, and publishers. Specifically, semantic mark up can be used to visualize the networks, connections and relationships that contextualize Meteyard's work and that of other writers. This kind of work is already being performed by The Orlando Project, which describes itself as "an ongoing collaborative experiment in the use of computers to engage in women's literary history."

Using visualizations to illustrate her arguments, Brown gave her audience a sense of the extraordinary potential of digital scholarship. Her lecture was nonetheless critical of current digital practices. Brown called for responsibility amongst digital humanists, reminding us to engage critically

An Editorial Valediction

—Ronald Huebert



When you work in my profession, you get a lot of practice in the art of saying goodbye. When I say goodbye to a group of students I've

particularly enjoyed over a term or an academic year, it's almost as if I'm losing part of my family, and when I attend convocation I often feel a little ripple of the same effect. Call it nostalgia if you like, but it's real.

So it's great when students come back to their *alma mater* after having been away for some time. That was definitely part of the pleasure which arose for me from Susan Brown's visit to Dalhousie, described by Kaarina Mikalson in the article which begins this issue of our newsletter. Sometimes a former student returns as the author of a novel, as Ian Colford has done; *The Crimes of Hector Tomás* published by Freehand Books has recently nominated for an Alberta Publishing Award. For a further account of the novel, see the article on p. 6. I first met Ian Colford when he was an undergraduate student in English at Dalhousie, and again when he went on to his MA. But I had no idea then that he would become a gifted writer of short fiction (see his story collection, *Evidence*) and a novelist. Ian's time in our department predates the invention of the program in Creative Writing, of which Sue Goyette has been an active member in recent years. Her new book of poetry, *Ocean*, is the object of Jessica Chrisholm's attention on p. 5.

To return to my starting point, this is my opportunity to say goodbye to five people I've enjoyed working with in various

ways. The first of these is Carole Poirier, who has made it her task to ensure that the main office of the English department is a helpful place, both for faculty and for students. Trevor Ross, who as Chair of the Department of English has worked closely with Carole over the last two years, says a more detailed word of farewell on the next page. My second (and somewhat premature) goodbye is to Kelly Larkin Conway, without whose expert technical assistance these pages would be much less interesting than they are.

Anthony Stewart has been a member of the Department of English since his arrival here in 1996. I know I speak for his many friends and colleagues when I say that we are sorry to see him leave us for Bucknell University in Pennsylvania, where he will continue his admirable work as a teacher and scholar. While he was at Dalhousie Anthony published *George Orwell, Doubtless and the Value of Decency* (2003) and *You Must Be a Basketball Player: Rethinking Integration in the University* (2009), won the Alumni Award for excellence in teaching, edited *The Dalhousie Review* for a number of years, and served a term as President of the Dalhousie Faculty Association (2011-12). Anthony, we wish you a great joy in your new home, and hope that you will find many opportunities to revisit your old one.

Erin Wunker's time with us was shorter, but just as busy. The article titled "Going Public" (p. 4) gives an account of one of the many projects Erin has given her energies to since she arrived here in 2009. She is a highly respected colleague, a gifted teacher, and a researcher who is already making her mark. She will be leaving us shortly for Mount Allison University, where a better career opportunity awaits

her. Congratulations, Erin; you will be missed.

James Gray was a member of our department until he retired in 1988, having served both as Chair of the department (1972-75) and as Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (1975-80). Many of his former colleagues remember him fondly. Melissa Furrow recalls that "Dr. Gray was my honours advisor. When I graduated and was going off to graduate school at Yale in 1975, Jim was full of helpful advice about New Haven, with which he was very familiar as he was at that time working on his edition of Samuel Johnson's sermons for the Yale Johnson series. Parts of New Haven, including parts intermingled with the university, were decidedly seedy at that time. Jim put me under strict instructions never to cross New Haven Green without being armed with a hat pin. Sadly, I didn't own a hat pin, but I was touched then by his caring." John Baxter recalls Jim's work as President of ACUTE (1982-84), when John was very well placed (as Secretary-Treasurer) to observe him: "the draft program for the ACUTE conference existed for several months as an outline on a blackboard. . . . Jim would come in each morning and scrutinize the blackboard before pronouncing on the promise (and potential folly) of the program shaping up under his quizzical eye. He was an acute ACUTE President because he was interested in all aspects of literature and because it all mattered to him." It is for reasons like these that he will be remembered. He died in November of last year.

James Gray

1923—2012

Farwell to Carole Poirier



Carole Poirier (left) and Mary Beth MacIssac (right)



Carole Poirier at her farewell gathering

This April we bid a happy retirement and a fond farewell to Carole Poirier, who has served our Department as Administrative Assistant since June 2005. The position required her to perform many different tasks, from dealing with inquiries from the public, to managing the department's finances, supervising our student assistant, enrolling students in our Honours seminars, taking care of all the paperwork related to hirings and tenure applications, and maintaining a remarkable composure as she walked the latest Chair through the intricacies of running a department. Carole was ever the conscientious professional, providing unflagging support to faculty, assisting students with characteristic patience and good cheer, and sharing a laugh or a sigh with her office compeer, Mary Beth. Her assistants remember her as the "mom-away-from-mom" -- or, rather, the soft-spoken yet unflappable bridge-playing biker mom who will be riding on down the highways for years to come. Carole has been an invaluable member of the Department and a dear friend. We will miss her.

--Trevor Ross

Distinguished alumna continued from page 1



Dr. Susan Brown

with the semantic web and its implications for race and gender. Digital humanities is yet another form of representation, and as the discipline develops we need to make decisions about common practices. Donna Haraway claims that digital humanities can build vocabularies and create networks that are "tuned to resistance, not dichotomies." Brown acknowledged that this is a daunting task, but reminded us that humanities scholars are experts in interacting with complex material. As humanists become digital humanists, we have the opportunity and the re-

sponsibility to build and critique the web in which we work.

Despite the advanced technical nature of her subject matter, Brown successfully engaged the small audience. The question period addressed many of the challenges of digital humanities, including digital literacy among academics of all levels and the destruction of physical texts in favour of digital material. Brown left students and faculty thinking critically about the digital turn and their own role in it.

—Kaarina Mikalson

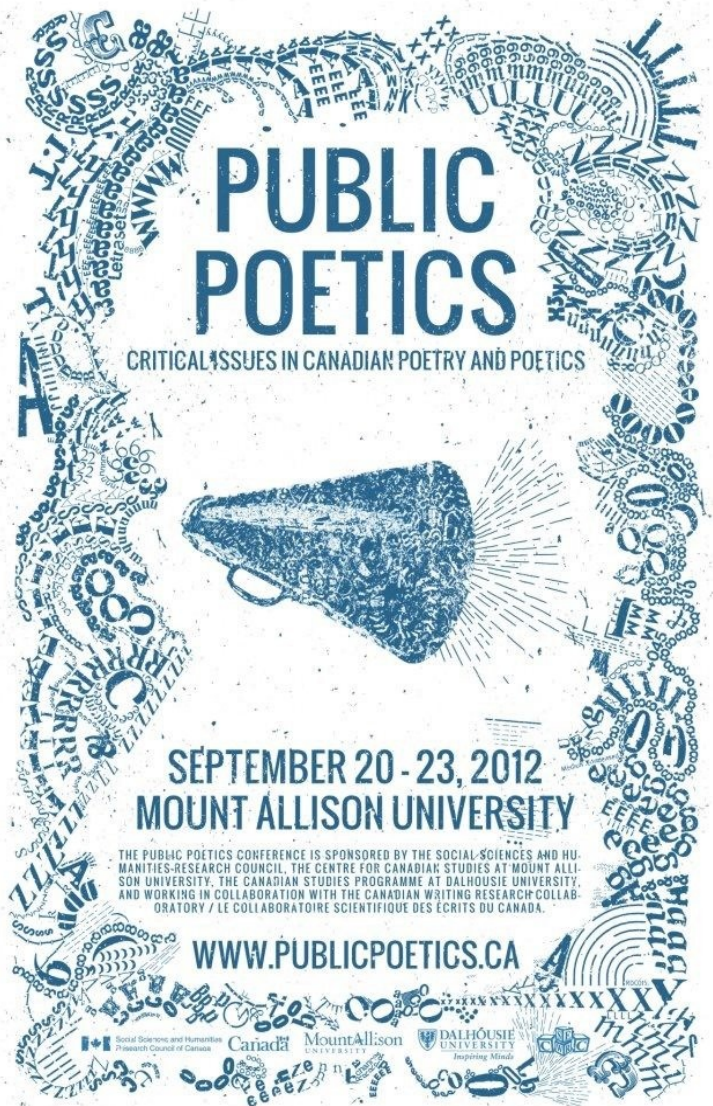
GOING PUBLIC

In late September, we had the pleasure of participating in the Public Poetics conference at Mount Allison University in Sackville, NB. The conference was co-organized by Erin Wunker and Travis Mason, along with Dalhousie alumnus Bart Vautour, and Mount Allison professor Christl Verduyn. It brought together a politicized, engaged group of academics and poets to speak to one another about Canadian poetry's relationship to the public sphere. Collaborating throughout the three-day conference, poets and academics from across the country acknowledged various points of connection and departure on topics such as political commitment, government funding, systemic underemployment, emerging technologies, and audience engagement.

Diana Brydon's opening talk, "Canadian Poetry and Poetics in a Globalizing World" explored Kate Eichorn and Heather Milne's influential concept of "prismatic publics," which she defined as "multi-faceted, partial and overlapping publics." According to Brydon, these publics represent new and multiple groupings that better reflect a heterogeneous, plural nation-state. She also examined poetic engagements with neoliberalism and decolonization, and emphasized how poets' attention to language can help redefine the way we understand reality, both individually and globally.

In the second keynote address, "Public Poet, Private Life: On the Dream of a Communal Self," Sina Queyras described the difficulty of maintaining a private sense of self as a public poet committed to having a strong online presence. She discussed the relationship between her poetic praxis, active twitter presence, and popular blog on Canadian poetics, *Lemon Hound*. Queyras argued that "poetry has to be radically conceived of in terms of form."

The collaborative reading by visual poet Derek Beaulieu and poet-translator Erin Mouré was particularly poignant. They read from each other's work and their own, calling for a brand new performance poetry that fused their ideas and responses to language through an engagement with the space of the library and the medium of translation.



The demand to *go public* with poetry reached a pinnacle on the last two evenings of the conference. Friday night brought a Sappyfest-sponsored concert at the Vogue Cinema. The awe-star lineup featured spoken word performer Ardath Whynacht, word virtuoso and Dalhousie PhD candidate El Jones, and Halifax's then-Poet Laureate Tanya Davis. The next night, the Owens Art Gallery hosted a Mass Poetry Reading where no less than twenty speakers read 1-2 pieces of original poetry. Participants included Dalhousie alum Vanessa Lent, PhD candidate Geordie Miller, co-organizers Erin Wunker and Travis Mason, as well as faculty member Dean Irvine.

We are also excited to announce that a collected edition of essays coming out of the *Public Poetics* conference has been accepted under contract for publication with Wilfrid Laurier University Press in the upcoming year.

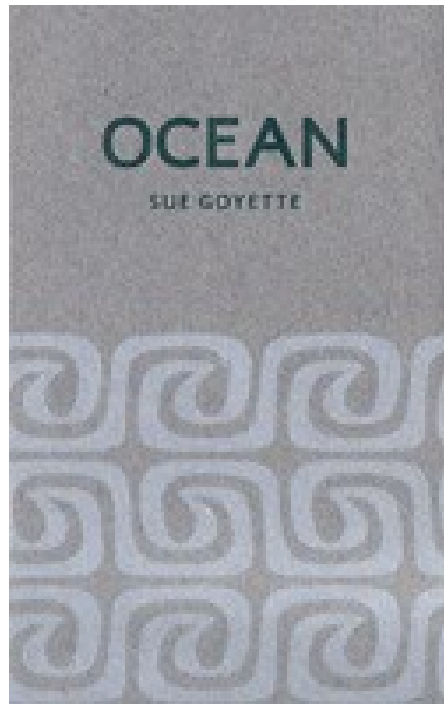
—Emily Ballantyne and Geordie Miller

Ocean Launch

Saturday April 13th was the launch of Sue Goyette's fourth collection of poetry aptly titled *Ocean*. Goyette claims that this is her way of reckoning with the environment she has come to love here at home in Nova Scotia.

The launch was held at the Khyber Centre for the Arts in Downtown Halifax adding to the celebratory atmosphere of community that Sue has injected into her own poems, and more specifically her reading for the night. The launch was preceded by Dalhousie's own creative writing undergraduate journal *Fathom* and created a great opportunity for emerging and established writers to come together in a love of words.

Goyette's launch was not your typical introduction to a new collection of poems however; there was no one giving long introductions of all of her many accomplishments, no one singing her praises, or feeding you their own interpretations of a book no one in the audience has gotten their hands on yet. Rather, it was purely Sue Goyette introducing her audience to her own words by way of a kind of feral performance art. A simple video created by local writer Shandi Mitchell, who was also a reader that night— showcased a silent mi-



rage of various images of ocean and sky on loop as backdrop and lighting for the all white ballroom. Silently all fifteen local writers as well as Goyette's own son and daughter, gathered in a semi circle at the front of the room, as if putting on a stage play. One by one each reader would step forward to the microphone and read by the small light of a headlamp creating what Goyette has deemed her "Ocean Choir". Each reader's voice followed by a pause of silence as the next reader approached the audience echoed like wave after wave of the scenes behind them. While it was easy to get swept up by the stunning video images, Goyette's words are what struck her audience most.

"We wanted pure ocean podcast into our veins but tethered/ while we slept. We wanted death to be a stranger we'd never have to give directions to. We consulted the beekeepers infamous/ for not getting stung but they were in a meeting with the poets. / WE consulted the gamblers but they wanted to see us only to raise us/ ten. Our voices were rarely coming home covered in mud anymore." (Poem 55).

There was a moment of silence after Goyette ended the reading with her own hypnotic voice, allowing the crowd to take in all that they had just witnessed before showing their gratitude with raucous applause. There were mixed reactions when the lights came back on, many faces of happiness, but also many still in their chairs thinking about this unique experience.

The intensity and the truthfulness of Goyette's words, the feeling she evoked in the way the poems were presented made us all look around the room a little differently afterwards, and allowed us to go out into the ocean air with revived love of our city and for that we are truly grateful.

Sue Goyette's new collection published by Gasperau Press is available at your local independent bookstore (\$19.95).

—Jessica Chrisholm

DISSENT: An Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference

AUGUST 16-18 2013

How are current and historic discourses of economics, politics, philosophy and psychology shaped and called into question by dissenting voices? What is the pedagogical role of dissent? How has dissent been changed by social media, including blogs, videos, newspaper commentary and twitterfeeds? How does different work in the academy? Can we engage in dissenting research practices? Email dagse@dal.ca for more information.

Presented by the Dalhousie Association of Graduate Students in English

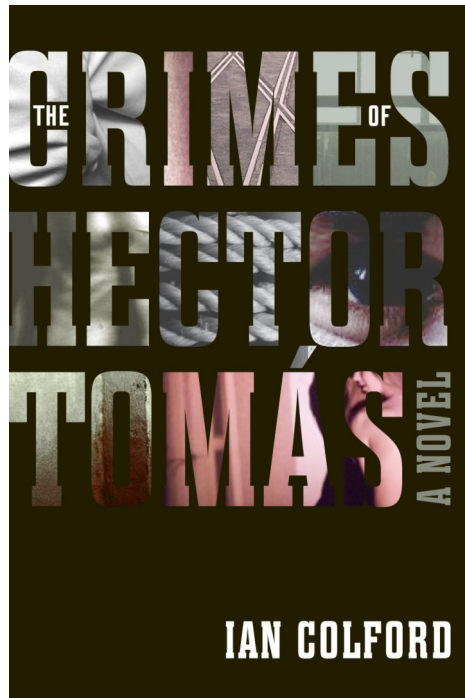
Debut Novel Shows Colford in Fine Form

Ian Colford's first novel, *The Crimes of Hector Tomás*, demonstrates the significant talent of this Haligonian writer and Dalhousie English Department alumnus. *Crimes*, set in an unspecified South American country in the grip of civil unrest, begins by following Hector Tomás through a troubled childhood and adolescence in the provincial capital of B____. The many hardships Hector faces include the abduction of his beloved older brother by a mysterious militant presence, the painful discovery of his father Enrique's extra-marital liaisons with teenage boys, separation from his dear friend and lover Nadia, and an extended period of countryside isolation with his sheltered, elderly aunt and uncle.

Then the bomb goes off.

After Hector is coincidentally implicated in a terrorist-planted explosion at a public bus stop, the plot takes a new turn. What started as an unusual but structurally conventional coming-of-age novel begins to spiral and shudder and sway. Hector is imprisoned and tortured for several chapters, during which the reader's sense of the passage of time begins to deteriorate. Hector, astonishingly, emerges with his life intact and accepts an offer to join an elite paramilitary unit. Colford then takes a series of perspectival leaps, exploring the psyches of Nadia, Enrique, and several more incidental characters.

In the final chapters of the novel, the already significant presence of military strife and civil conflict boil over and drive the action almost exclusively. Nadia joins a dangerous underground resistance, a prominent US dignitary is assassinated, and Hector participates in a horrifically botched paramilitary raid. These events are followed by a litany of deaths and betrayals as the novel charges towards its surprising conclusion, never losing



force along the way.

Crimes is a commendable follow-up to Colford's first book, *Evidence*, a collection of short fiction which won the Margaret and John Savage First Book Award and was shortlisted for the Danuta Gleed Literary Award. *Evidence*, a dark collection set in Eastern Europe and told through the voice of a solitary, dubious narrator, established Colford as a serious writer who deals deftly with difficult themes and resists fluff and sentimentality at all costs.

In *Crimes*, Colford explores similar themes – trauma, masculinity, the aftershocks of war –

and continues to do so with lean, vivid prose. Perhaps the most noticeable facet of Colford's writing is his spare, unadorned style. Emily Donaldson, writing for the *National Post*, has called Colford's prose "disarmingly formal" and Shawn Syms, in the *Winnipeg Review*, has described it thus: "What makes this so effective and thought-provoking is an admirable demonstration of authorial restraint. The prose is detailed, yet sparse and subtle – allowing graphic and frequently disturbing events to imprint upon each reader based upon his or her own scruples and worldview." In addition to Syms' adjectives, I would add "eerie" and "macabre." For there is always a sense of mystery underlying Colford's prose – an unspoken darkness left tantalizingly offstage, the darkness Donaldson finds "disarming."

But, more importantly, Syms is absolutely right to describe Colford as a writer who does not impose his own morality. Colford does not moralize; he refuses to pander, tamper, or preach. Instead he allows – and encourages – readers to rethink and re-examine their previously held moral and political beliefs.

This tendency is most clearly evident in Enrique, a sexual "pervert" with whom, by the end of the novel, the reader deeply sympathizes. The anti-sentimentality of Colford's prose style certainly helps to allow him to take this step away from predetermined moral solutions, but there is more at stake here than a formal gesture. Through smooth, lithe, and highly readable fiction, Colford invites us to interrogate our ethico-political presuppositions.

It is an invitation we would all do well to accept.

— David Huebert

David McNeil

IN HIS OWN WORDS

We asked David McNeil to describe his experience teaching a class on hockey literature, an idea which he invented and which is still the only class within the faculty of Arts and Social Sciences that can be taken entirely online. Here's what he had to say.

English 2060, "Sports Literature and Culture: Hockey" was first offered in 2008. I look forward to teaching it again in the Winter Term of 2014, in two sections—one a regular format and another online. The material includes classics like "*The Hockey Sweater*" by Roch Carrier and Ken Dryden's *The Game*. Students come from various faculties to take the class, including journalism. The latter shouldn't be a surprise since there are a number of works that fall into the sports journalism category, like a magazine feature by William Faulkner for an early edition of *Sports Illus-*



Gerry McNeil (above), in the net for the Montreal Canadiens (c. 1953)

trated and Stephen Brunt's *Searching for Bobby Orr*. Students also study a selection of poetry, fiction and drama. In addition, the class examines Binamé's 2004 film *The Rocket*, some famous and not so-famous hockey songs, and the sport as it has been depicted in the visual arts.

One of the special joys for me is that my father, who was the goalie for the Montreal Canadiens in the early 1950s, makes a couple of "appearances" in the class material (Gerry McNeil himself passed away in 2004). Wayne Johnstone, as is his wont, includes an historical scene in his novel, *The Divine Ryans* that reconstructs what had to be one of the happiest moments in the goalie's life--winning the Stanley Cup with a 1-0 shutout in overtime in 1953. Of course as with all athletes, Gerry McNeil suffered losses as well. A famous photo by Nat Turofsky of the Barilko goal, which won the Cup for Toronto in 1951, also

comes into the class via a song by The Tragically Hip. Literature has certain advantages over the season-by-season play (or not during lockouts) of the NHL as I can promise Leaf fans that their team will win the cup as least twice during the course of the class.

I believe that the regular section of English 2060 and the online one complement each other as members of the former have access to special "sound files" of the lectures, while those online can access the regular in-class sessions via *Camtasia* recordings. The technology exists to enhance the experience for both groups. One unique feature of the class is the use of nicknames. It's like we're all playing on the same team. Students call me "Mac," and why shouldn't they? For more information about the class visit www.myweb.dal.ca/dmcneil/2060/des-w12.htm



Awards and Prizes 2012-13

Many students graduating with degrees in English and Creative Writing will be attending convocation on Tuesday, 21 May 2013, at 2:30 pm. We extend congratulation to all of these graduates as well as to those students who already received their degrees from King's (16 May 2013). And we add our special commendation to the winners of awards and prizes listed below.

University Medal in English

Rebecca Rowat
Hons. English/Social Anthropology

University Medal in Creative Writing

Mollie Winter
Hons. English/Creative Writing

James Tupper Fellowship awarded to outstanding students who propose to do graduate work in English:

Tessa Cernik
Eleanor Greer

Archibald MacMechan/IODE Scholarship in English awarded to a Dalhousie student of special ability in English:

Eleanor Greer

Margaret Nicoll Pond Memorial Prize awarded to a woman graduate of Dalhousie University who leads her class in English:

Rebecca Rowat

Allan and Lura Bevan Memorial Scholarship awarded to a student in the Major program, entering third or fourth year:

Brittany Eisner

Graham Creighton Prize in English awarded to students entering their fourth year of study who have "demonstrated a high level of academic excellence":

Adam Cameron
Caroline Holden
William Tilleczek

Paul MacIsaac Memorial Prize awarded to a second or third-year student who demonstrates "an original and inquiring mind":

Stephen Tallon

Samantha Li Memorial Award awarded to a student in the Honours program who demonstrates "intellectual reach and creativity;

Matthew Gillis

Barbara Bennett-Chittick Prize awarded to "an outstanding first-year student enrolled in introductory English at Dalhousie":

Stephanie Greer

Kim Rilda LeBlanc Prize awarded to an outstanding student who combines "work in the arts with work in medicine or health care":

Sarah Fraser

Avie Bennett Prize awarded for "best essay on Canadian Literature submitted from an undergraduate class at Dalhousie":

Samantha Emsley

Varma Prizes in Gothic Literature

1st: *Brittany Kraus, "Body Found"*
2nd: *Tiffany Morris, "Love Story"*
3rd: *Alanna Ferguson, "Phobophobia"*

Valentine's Sonnet Prize

1st: *Katherine Connell, "Café"*
2nd: *Jacob Sandler, "Monday Morning, 7:45"*
3rd: *Katie MacDonald, "Ages Apart"*

Clare Murray Fooshee Poetry Prizes

1st: *Brittany Kraus, "Instructions"*
2nd: *Ciarra Glass, "Eating Together"*
Third Prize: *Rachel Gray, "The Tick"*

The Honorable W. H. Dennis Memorial Prizes

Poetry

1st: *Katherine Wooler, "Love Poem"*
2nd: *Anna Sparrow, "Ten"*

Essay

Julia Manoukian,
"On George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four"

Short Story

Geordie Miller, "Renovations"



**DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY**

Inspiring Minds

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