



WCSU MFA



2026 Winter



Residency



When: January 2nd - January 7th



*Where: Hotel Zero Degrees,
Danbury, CT*



MFA WINTER RESIDENCY SCHEDULE 2026

	9:15 – 10:30 AM	10:45 – 12:00 PM	12:15 – 1:15 PM	1:30 – 3:30 PM	4:00 – 5:15 PM	5:15 – 7:15 PM	7:30 – 9:00 PM
FRI. JAN. 2	Arrival			New Student Orientation/ Mentor Meetings	OMG Meetings	Dinner	Welcome Reception/ Flash Faculty Readings
SAT. JAN. 3	Ian M. Rogers	Melanie Brooks	Lunch	Vine Leaves Press Panel	Sonja Mongar	Dinner	Morgan Talty (Virtual)
SUN. JAN. 4	Morgan Talty (Virtual)		Lunch	Thesis Readings	Enrichment Projects	Dinner	Jane Cleland
MON. JAN. 5	Amy Alvarez	David Rich	Genre Lunches	Alumni Panel	Enrichment Projects	Dinner	Chris Tebbetts
TUES. JAN. 6	Sean Singer	Omar Acevedo	Lunch / Dublin Info Session	Layla and Cha	Jabari Asim	Dinner	Bad Poetry Contest
WED. JAN. 7	Marlene Daut	Erik Ofgang	Lunch / Mentor Meetings	Departure			

WestConn MFA in Creative and Professional Writing

2026 Winter Residency

January 2 – January 7

[Hotel Zero Degrees](#)

15 Milestone Road

Danbury, CT 06810

203.730.9200

*All events will be held in the Hotel Zero Degrees conference rooms.

*For guests staying at the hotel, a continental breakfast is included.

*Lunch is included for all guests and will be served Saturday the 3rd – Wednesday the 7th from 12:15 – 1:15 pm at Terra, the restaurant in Hotel Zero.

*Coffee/Tea is included and available all day.

*Dinner is not included, but there are plenty of great restaurants nearby. Feel free to ask for suggestions!

*Books by faculty and visiting writers are available for purchase through [Byrd's Books](#).

***Current MFA students: In order to receive credit for attending residency, you must attend all events, including the opening reception and evening sessions.**

Friday, January 2

ARRIVAL

8:00 AM – 1:00 PM – Arrivals

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM – New Student Orientation/Mentor Meetings

Students starting in the spring semester are required to attend this orientation session. All other students may use this time to schedule meetings with their mentors to begin planning their spring syllabi.

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM – Online Multi-Genre (OMG) Workshop Meetings

Students enrolled in OMG in the spring will meet with their instructor and classmates to review course expectations and guidelines, including Blackboard, workshop etiquette, and how best to prepare and receive workshop feedback.

5:15 PM – 7:15 PM – Dinner

7:30 PM – 9:00 PM – Reception & Faculty Flash Reading

MFA Coordinator Anthony D'Aries will welcome everyone to our winter residency! MFA mentors will read short excerpts (4-5 minutes) from their works-in-progress.

Saturday, January 3

9:15 AM – 10:30 AM – “I Scene It!” – Building Scenes That Stand Out

Ian M. Rogers

Do your scenes feel flat, ambiguous, or murky? Do your readers keep saying they can't tell where the action's taking place? Or, do you find yourself writing long, wandering chapters that lump multiple events together? Everyone knows that scenes form the building blocks of a novel or memoir, but building them on the page in a way that makes sense for readers isn't easy. In

this workshop, we'll look at the essential elements that make up a scene, different ways of structuring a scene, and what gives a scene focus. Along the way, we'll look at how writers link different scenes together in a larger work, and learn tips for how to make every scene count. Come join what's sure to be the best workshop you've ever scene (along with even more bad puns!).

10:45 AM – 12:00 PM – The Healing Possibilities of Writing: A Workshop on Stories of Health and Trauma

Melanie Brooks

Whether we are healing from illness, coping with grief, navigating caregiving, experiencing family disfunction, recovering from addictions, surviving abuse, or reckoning with other challenges (either personal or global), writing can be a pathway to understanding those circumstances in a profound way. By re-entering the experience, taking it apart, and then putting it back together again on our own terms, we can build resilience that enables us to move forward despite the struggle. In the compassionate space of this workshop, we'll explore the intersection of storytelling, health, and trauma through writing exercises, readings, and reflective discussion. We'll tackle the realities of confronting the vulnerability, fear, and pain that inevitably accompany the journey to bring hard stories to the page and learn strategies for taking care of ourselves in the process. Together, we'll uncover the value that narratives of lived experiences of health and trauma have for creating community with readers.

12:15 – 1:15 – Lunch

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM – Vine Leaves Press Panel

Ian M. Rogers, Penny Guisinger, Kate Katcher, Melanie Brooks
Moderator: Alexis Paige

Vine Leaves Press is an independent publisher that likes to blur the line between commercial and experimental works. They publish biography/autobiography, creative nonfiction, reference books, short story collections, poetry collections, and character-driven novels with a literary bent. In this panel, moderated by Alexis Paige (Development and Acquisitions Editor at Vine Leaves), authors will share their paths to publication, including insights on submissions, editing, marketing, and pre-/post-publication promotion.

4:00 PM – 5:15 PM – Narrative Palimpsest Workshop

Sonja Mongar

What is a palimpsest? (pal·imp·sest)

- 1) a manuscript or piece of writing material on which the original writing has been effaced to make room for later writing but of which traces remain.

- 2) something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form (Webster's Dictionary).

There are many kinds of narrative palimpsests. Some are meditative. Some strip back layers of meaning. Through a series of interactive exercises and writing prompts, the student will begin work on their own narrative palimpsest as they explore multiple surfaces of meaning, carefully excavating and recovering their narratives, a layer at a time. Models and a reading list will be provided.

5:15 PM – 7:15 PM – Dinner

7:30 PM – 9:00 PM – Morgan Talty Reading – VIRTUAL

Our 2025 Housatonic Book Award winner in fiction, Morgan Talty, will read his work, followed by a Q&A session.

Sunday, January 4

9:15 AM – 12:00 PM – On Craft: A Harmony - VIRTUAL

Morgan Talty

This generative, lecture-based session explores how the essential elements of craft—voice, point of view, character, plot, setting, and theme—work together to build compelling fiction. Through guided writing prompts, short lectures, selected readings, and reflective discussion, participants will produce new material while developing a deeper awareness of how these elements interact to shape story.

Rather than isolating technique, the course emphasizes how voice informs setting, how character drives plot, and how theme emerges through conflict and revision. The sequence of prompts is designed to reveal these connections progressively—but the order in which these craft elements are explored is *not* a formula or commandment. Writers may begin with setting, conflict, or voice; what matters is learning to recognize the *relationships* between elements and how those relationships generate narrative energy.

Writers will leave with a substantial draft and a personalized revision plan. No pre-submitted work required.

12:15 PM – 1:15 PM – Lunch

1:30 PM – 3:30 PM – Thesis Readings

Join us in celebrating our recent and soon-to-be MFA graduates as they read from their final thesis manuscripts!

4:00 PM – 5:15 PM – Enrichment Project Presentations

Enrichment Projects are designed to give MFA students an opportunity to explore an avenue of learning outside of their coursework. A student might, for example, choose to learn a foreign language, start a new online publication, volunteer for a non-profit organization, or try another appropriately challenging activity. The Enrichment Project is not a writing project, but a project that will enrich the student as a professional writer.

Come hear students share their Enrichment Project experience and maybe get some inspiration for your own!

5:15 PM – 7:15 PM – Dinner

7:30 PM – 9:00 PM – Tell Your Story to Beat the Bots: A Writer's Guide to Thriving in the Age of AI

Jane Cleland

You have a story to tell, an important story, your story. Getting that story down on paper is hard, though, and with bots taking over the writing market, authors worry they'll soon become irrelevant. The answer isn't to surrender to the doom and gloom predictions. On the contrary, it's time to lean into your humanity, to do what artificial intelligence can't—be creative. AI is, by definition, derivative, so the trick is to come up with new ideas, new structures, new approaches. In this workshop, you'll learn how to harness your innate creativity using science-based creativity-boosting techniques to come up with fresh ideas. Jane consulted dozens of bestselling authors and publishing industry professionals to discover best practices leading to writing success. She'll share these "Pro Tips" to help you out-write AI.

Just as real food is better for us than processed food and actual social interactions are more meaningful than social media, when it comes to writing your story, artificial intelligence can't replicate your individual human intelligence, imagination, and sensibility. Your uniqueness is what separates you from a chatbot, and explains why you can't be replaced by an algorithm. You'll succeed because you're human, not in spite of it.

In this workshop, you'll learn how to bring your creativity, your individuality, and your judgment to your work. And that's how you'll out-write a chatbot all day long.

Monday, January 5

9:15 AM – 10:30 AM – Place as Character: Landscape & Memory in Poetry

Amy M. Alvarez

Places shape us as people and as poets. In this session, we will investigate how we, in turn, shape the places that matter to us on the page. We will discuss the work of contemporary poets in which places feel emotionally alive and consider how we might treat our personal geographies as living, emotional presences in our work through writing and mapping exercises.

We will explore close reading with an eye toward vivid sensory description, the impact of diction, and how both research and personal/cultural heritage can exist in poems that express place. We will work on generative exercises in the session, as well as exercises that participants can take with them to work on building a deeper sense of place in existing drafts.

10:45 AM – 12:00 PM – Ways to Visualize Your Story

David Rich

You love a book. Your friend reads it and is unimpressed. What happened? What happens when others read your work? How does your short story or novel look to readers? What do they take away from it? How can you help readers visualize your prose? How can you help them understand your tone, and your characters?

We'll look at the opening chapters of a couple of classic novels and at the opening scenes of film adaptations of those novels. How did other artists interpret what they read?

Everyone should send a two- or three-page sample of the beginning of a short story or novel that you've written (even if you're stuck there). Don't put your name on it. Send it as an attachment to richd@wcsu.edu. We'll discuss our impressions of a few examples.

- <https://giove.isti.cnr.it/demo/eread/Libri/joy/Pride.pdf>
Read chapters 1 and 2 of *Pride and Prejudice*
- <https://pdf.ai/book/history-of-tom-jones-a-foundling>
Read chapters i, ii, iii of *Tom Jones*

12:15 PM – 1:15 PM – Genre Lunches

Mentors and students are welcome to break out into groups based on genre: Fiction, Poetry, and Creative Nonfiction.

1:30 PM – 3:30 PM – MFA Alumni Panel

Lisa Acerbo, Jason Bussman, Ron Farina, Shannon Kearns, & Chelsea Nevin

Our MFA program is often described as a lifelong community of writers. In that spirit, each residency we invite a group of alumni to share their experiences in the program and their creative and professional paths after graduation. Come hear writers working in a wide range of genres and fields discuss their journeys. There will be plenty of time at the end for questions.

4:00 PM – 5:15 PM – Enrichment Project Presentations

Enrichment Projects are designed to give MFA students an opportunity to explore an avenue of learning outside of their coursework. A student might, for example, choose to learn a foreign language, start a new online publication, volunteer for a non-profit organization, or try another appropriately challenging activity. The Enrichment Project is not a writing project, but a project that will enrich the student as a professional writer. Come hear students share their Enrichment Project experience and maybe get some inspiration for your own!

5:15 PM – 7:15 PM – Dinner

7:30 PM – 9:00 PM – Theater Camp for Writers Mini-Workshop

Chris Tebbetts

As part of this [Theater Camp for Writers](#) workshop with Chris Tebbetts, he is asking for excerpts from your works in progress—specifically, short scenes (up to 1,000 words that involve a focus on dialogue, action, and/or interaction between your characters.) [Email these scenes to Chris by Dec. 18: tebbetts.chris@gmail.com](mailto:tebbetts.chris@gmail.com)

At residency, we'll use those submissions for an evening of in-person scene work, putting these scenes on their feet in an interactive workshop environment.

Tuesday, January 6

9:15 AM – 10:30 AM – The Art of Revision

Sean Singer

Revision literally means to “re-see.” In this session, we will define and practice revisions skills and strategies, closely reading several poets’ drafts and discussing their thinking before

analyzing their final versions. Afterwards, we'll focus on ways to apply these skills and strategies to our own poems.

10:45 AM – 12:00 PM – Building Literary Community

Omar Acevedo

This interactive workshop introduces students to the practical skills and strategies involved in creating and sustaining literary communities. Drawing on Omar Acevedo's experience as Literary Program Coordinator at the Mark Twain House, this session emphasizes event planning, working with publicists, and creating initiatives that are pathways to community engagement. The goals for students include, but are not limited to: learning actionable steps for planning literary events or programs and developing confidence in connecting writing to broader civic and cultural engagement.

12:15 PM – 1:15 PM – Lunch

Join Anthony D'Aries in the conference room for details about the [2026 Dublin Residency!](#)

1:30 PM – 3:30 PM – Better Together: How to Co-Write a Nonfiction Book

Cha McCoy & Layla Schlack

Cha McCoy and Layla Schlack worked together on Cha's book, [Wine Pairing for the People](#) (Harvest, November 2025) from proposal to launch. Learn about their process and how they figured out what worked for them as a team, and get a broader picture of how an illustrated nonfiction book gets made, how one becomes a collaborator on a project like this, and more.

4:00 PM – 5:15 PM - Elements of Nonfiction: Structure, Premise, and Style

Jabari Asim

Make your essay or long-form nonfiction pieces informative, engaging and persuasive by paying close attention to such fundamental elements as organization, observation, and argument. Clarify essential aspects that animate compelling narratives, including conflict, purpose, and desire. Learn the importance of strong openings, nut graphs, scene-setting, skillful use of facts and figures, sensory evocation, and choosing revelatory details. By adhering to a few critical aspects of nonfiction storytelling, you will illuminate the answers to questions most readers are likely to have, among them: 1) Why are you writing this piece now? and 2) Why is your work worth reading?

5:15 PM – 7:15 PM – Dinner

7:30 PM – 9:00 PM – Bad Poetry Contest

The cringiest literary event of the year (and that's saying something)! Share the worst poem you can come up with and maybe you'll win a prize! You've worked hard all year writing good work – now's your chance to be bad. Join us for this light-hearted event and celebrate the last night of residency.

Wednesday, January 7

9:15 AM – 10:30 AM – Writing at the Margins of Fiction and History: The Case of the Haitian Revolution

Marlene Daut

In this workshop, using the Haitian Revolution as a case study, we will explore what to do when the fictional and nonfictional worlds in our writing collide, clash, and contradict in both expected and unexpected ways.

10:45 AM – 12:00 PM – Writing About Your Writing

Erik Ofgang

How can you describe your work in a manner that impresses agents, publishers, and readers? We'll discuss finding the atomic building blocks of your project and how to effectively share that in query letters and in other descriptions of your work including your thesis proposal.

12:15 PM – 1:15 PM – Lunch/Mentor Meetings

DEPARTURE

Thesis Readers

Sophia Caselnova is an MFA candidate in Creative Nonfiction at Western Connecticut State University focusing on memoir writing. She has recently finished her first collection of work, including essays, poems, and vignettes, titled *The Climb*. Caselnova previously worked as a journalist where she won an award for her coverage of a municipal lawsuit and her poetry has been featured in *Poet's Choice* and *Sad Girl Diaries*. She now leads creative nonfiction

workshops for veterans enabling them with the tools necessary to tell their stories. In her free time, she binge reads trending romance novels, hunts down the best latte options in her area, and snuggles up with her fiancé and their four cats.

Jason Hesse recently completed his MFA in Creative & Professional Writing at WestConn—his thesis is a novel about friendship, regret, and the cost of our choices. He received multiple awards for writing during his undergraduate, where he earned a BA in English Literature and a minor in Computer Science. He has had both short fiction and poetry published in *Fresh Ink*, and he has also worked on the NVCC school newspaper and in the WestConn Writing Center. Jason has been said to use em dashes “to an alarming degree” and prefers dogs to cats, even though he is mildly allergic.

Laura Pochintesta is a writer in Connecticut. She was a recipient of the Peter K. Hixson Memorial Award for fiction, which led to her first short story publication in *The MacGuffin*. Other fiction, essays, and poems have appeared in literary journals such as *Voices in Italian Americana*, *Motherwell Magazine*, *Mothers Always Write*, and *The Fourth River*. She is pursuing an MFA in Creative and Professional Writing from Western Connecticut State University.

Featured MFA Alumni

Lisa Acerbo is the Director of General Education and Liberal Arts at Post University in Waterbury, Connecticut. She holds an MFA from Western Connecticut State University. Her short stories and poetry appear in *Scarlet*, *Poor Yorick Literary Journal*, *Ripples in Space*, *Universe in a Bottle* by Flying Ketchup Press, and *Whatever Happened to Hansel and Gretel?* by Fathom Publishing (a finalist in the 2024 Best Books Awards in the category of Fiction: Anthology). Her novel, *Death and Coffee*, was released on October 14, 2025 by NineStar Press.

Jason K. Bussman is a memoir writer who currently teaches writing courses at two universities in rural Western New York. He has led numerous workshops throughout the years; the most recent being a residency at the Chautauqua Institution. Bussman earned his MFA in Creative and Professional Writing at Western Connecticut State University. *Fumble: Just a Dad Trying Not to Drop the Ball* is a series of 21 standalone narrative essays and one poem about those imperfect “dad” moments. The informal, anecdotal approach offers guidance, sensitivity, and honesty to those moments. Each short narrative offers a different perspective for reflection, and allows the reader to find a piece of themselves or their loved ones in the work to connect to the stories. *Fumble* is a celebration of the imperfections of our fathers.

Ron Farina is the author of four books: *At the Altar of the Past*, *Out of the Shadows: Voices of American Women Soldiers*, *Who Will Have My Back*, and *Sacrifice: The Final Chapter*, released in the summer of 2024. Other works include: *Unsung Heroes*, *Keeping Promises*, and *War Torn*, personal essays about the human cost of war. In 2021, Ron was nominated for the AWP Intro Award for Fiction and the American Society of Professional Journalists, Connecticut Chapter first-place award for general column magazine feature for the essay “War Torn.” In January of 2025, cited for using his passion for writing to advocate for and bring attention to the needs of veterans and their families, Ron was inducted into the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame. Ron was selected as an INDIE Publishers 2025 book award finalist for military nonfiction for

Sacrifice: The Final Chapter. He lives in Connecticut with his wife and two Golden Retrievers, Henry and Preacher.

Playwright, author, actor, and educator, **Kate Katcher**'s plays include *Judith Keith*, inspired by Berthold Brecht's *The Jewish Wife*, *A Fox in the Henhouse* (FutureFest Finalist, 2022), *36* (Dorothy Silver Playwriting Competition winner, National Playwriting Conference finalist), and *Margot* (read at The Actors Studio Playwright/Directors Unit). Her short plays include *Scarsdale* (*Best Ten-Minute Plays 2021*, Smith & Kraus), *Bread* (*Laughter is the Best Medicine*, Smith & Kraus), *Blue Sky with Approaching Storm* (ArtAge), *Layover at Reagan National* (Chain Theatre), *Bassinette* (Ridgefield Theatre Barn), *Inclination* (Chain), and *Aftershock* (Queens One-Act Festival). Her short films available on YouTube include *Missus Dobbs*, *American* (Rogue Theater Festival), *A Nice Drive* and *Planning Ahead*. Kate's debut novel, *36*, will be released in 2026 by Vine Leaves Press. A member of the Dramatists Guild, TAS/PDU, Connecticut Theatre Women Network, Theatre Artists Workshop, AEA and SAG-AFTRA, Kate holds a BFA from Boston University and an MFA from Western Connecticut State University, where she currently teaches Playwriting.

Shannon Kearns holds an MFA in Creative & Professional Writing from Western Connecticut State University and an MA in English from Fordham University. Her poetry and short stories have been published in several journals and anthologies, including *Howl*, a women-in-horror anthology from Blood Spot Books. Her short story, "The Fawn," was a semifinalist for American Literary Review's prize in short fiction. Shannon's debut poetry collection, *The Uterus is an Impossible Forest*, was recently published by Raw Dog Screaming Press (August 2025). Her work has been supported by the Yale Writers Workshop, and she was awarded a residency in 2026 at Sundress Academy for the Arts (SAFTA). She teaches writing and literature at Sacred Heart University. You can connect with her on Instagram @shannon_mk_writer or at shannonmkearns.com.

Chelsea Nevin is a graduate of WestConn's MFA program with a focus in YA fiction and Non-Profit Writing. She is currently the Program Director at the National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault (SCESA) where she coordinates and runs national meetings across the country. When she's supposed to be writing, but really is procrastinating, Chelsea can be found crocheting, baking or watching the Smithsonian Zoo's Panda Cam.

Residency Faculty

Omar Acevedo currently serves as the Literary Program Coordinator at The Mark Twain House & Museum, where he manages a wide range of public programs, including author talks, writing workshops, and The Mark Twain American Voice in Literature Award. His work reflects a deep commitment to fostering literary appreciation and community engagement, especially for Hartford and surrounding towns, where he actively collaborates with museums, libraries, and community organizations to bring literary programs and events to all people. A writer himself, Omar is dedicated to making literature accessible and engaging for all.

Amy M. Alvarez is the author of [*Makeshift Altar*](#) and the winner of the 2025 American Book Award and CariCon Poetry Prize. Born to Jamaican and Puerto Rican parents in New York, New York, her work focuses on race, ethnicity, gender, place, and social justice. Selected as one of 2022's Best New Poets, her poetry has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *The Missouri Review*, *Poetry Foundation*, and elsewhere. She has been awarded fellowships from CantoMundo, VONA, Macondo, the Virginia Creative Arts Center, and the Furious Flower Poetry Center. In 2022, she was inducted as an Affrilachian Poet. She has taught at public high schools in the Bronx, New York, and Boston, Massachusetts, and at West Virginia University. She currently teaches writing and literature at Boston College as an Associate Professor of the Practice.

Jabari Asim is the Distinguished Professor of Multidisciplinary Letters at Emerson College in Boston, where he is also the Elma Lewis Distinguished Fellow in Social Justice. He has also been a scholar-in-residence at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, an editor and columnist at the *Washington Post*, and editor-in-chief of the NAACP's *Crisis Magazine*, founded by W.E.B. DuBois in 1910. His work has been included in *Best American Essays* and *Best American Poetry*. A Guggenheim Fellow, he is the author of 14 books for children and 9 books for adults, including *We Can't Breathe*, a finalist for PEN Diamondstein-Spielvogel Award for the Art of the Essay in 2019, and *Yonder*, a novel, named a *New York Times* Notable Book in 2022.

Melanie Brooks is the author of the memoir *A Hard Silence: One Daughter Remaps Family, Grief, and Faith When HIV/AIDS Changes It All* (Vine Leaves Press, 2023) and *Writing Hard Stories: Celebrated Memoirists Who Shaped Art from Trauma* (Beacon Press, 2017). She teaches creative nonfiction in the MFA programs at Bay Path University and Western Connecticut State University and professional writing at Northeastern University. She holds an MFA in creative nonfiction from the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast Writing Program and a Certificate in Narrative Medicine from Columbia University. She has had numerous interviews and essays on topics ranging from illness and grief to parenting and aging published in *The Boston Globe*, *HuffPost*, *Yankee*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Psychology Today*, *The Washington Post*, *Ms. Magazine*, *Creative Nonfiction*, and other notable publications. She lives in New Hampshire with her husband, two children (when they are home from life elsewhere), and two Labs.

In *Beat the Bots: An Author's Guide to Surviving and Thriving in the Age of AI*, published in August, 2025, **Jane K. Cleland** shares practical exercises to nurture imagination, spark original thinking, and resist creative conformity. Her other books on the craft of writing, *Mastering Suspense, Structure & Plot* and *Mastering Plot Twists* both won the Agatha Award. Jane has also written fourteen novels in the multiple award-winning Josie Prescott Antiques Mystery series (St. Martin's Minotaur, with short fiction published by *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*). The series has just been optioned for film and TV. In addition, Jane is a contributing editor for *Writer's Digest Magazine* and the chair of the Black Orchid Novella Award, presented by the Wolfe Pack in partnership with *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*. Jane is the Vice President of the Florida chapter of Mystery Writers of America. Previously, she served as President of the New York Chapter of MWA and was on the national board. <http://janecleland.com>.

Anthony D'Aries is the author of *The Language of Men: A Memoir* (Hudson Whitman Press, 2012), which received the PEN/New England Discovery Prize and an INDIES Gold Medal. His

fiction and nonfiction has appeared in *McSweeney's*, *Boston Magazine*, *Solstice*, *Shelf Awareness*, *The Literary Review*, *Memoir Magazine*, *Silk Road Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, and elsewhere. An Associate Professor of writing, Anthony directs the low-residency MFA in Creative and Professional Writing at Western Connecticut State University. He founded the program's Dublin Residency, which features workshops and craft talks in Oscar Wilde's historic home. Anthony serves on the board of the Arthur Miller Writing Studio, a nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring Arthur Miller's hand-built writing studio and sharing it as an inspirational, experiential, and educational space for the greater community.

An award-winning author, scholar, and professor specializing in Haitian history and culture, **Marlene L. Daut's** most recent book, *The First and Last King of Haiti: The Rise and Fall of Henry Christophe* (Knopf, 2025), a finalist for the Cundill History Prize, explores the fascinating life of Haiti's only king while delving into the complex history of a 19th-century Caribbean monarchy. Her other books include *Tropics of Haiti: Race and the Literary History of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Liverpool UP, 2015); *Baron de Vastey and the Origins of Black Atlantic Humanism* (Palgrave, 2017); and *Awakening the Ashes: An Intellectual History of the Haitian Revolution* (UNC Press, 2023), co-winner of the Frederick Douglass Book Prize.

Daut's articles on Haitian history and culture have appeared in over a dozen magazines, newspapers, and journals including, *The New Yorker* ("What's the Path Forward for Haiti?"), *The New York Times* ("Napoleon Isn't a Hero to Celebrate"), *Harper's Bazaar* ("Resurrecting a Lost Palace of Haiti"), *Essence* ("Haiti isn't Cursed. It is Exploited"), *The Nation* ("What the French Really Owe Haiti"), and the *LA Review of Books* ("Why did Bridgerton Erase Haiti?"). She has been the recipient of several awards, grants, and fellowships for her contributions to historical and cultural understandings of the Caribbean, notably from the Ford Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Haitian Studies Association, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and from the Robert Silvers Foundation for *The First and Last King of Haiti*.

Daut graduated from Loyola Marymount University with a B.A. in English and French in 2002 and went on to teach in Rouen, France as an Assistante d'Anglais before enrolling at the University of Notre Dame, where she earned a Ph.D. in English in 2009. Since graduating, she has taught Haitian and French colonial history and culture at the University of Miami, the Claremont Graduate University, and the University of Virginia, where she also became and remains series editor of *New World Studies* at UVA Press. In July 2022, she was appointed as Professor of French and Black Studies at Yale University. She lives in the New Haven, CT area with her spouse and children.

Penny Guisinger is the author of two memoirs, *Shift: A Memoir of Identity and Other Illusions* from University of Nebraska Press and *Postcards from Here* from Vine Leaves Press. Her work has appeared in *Fourth Genre*, *River Teeth*, *Guernica*, *Solstice Literary Magazine*, and others. Pushcart nominated, a four-time Maine Literary Award winner, and a three-time notable in *Best American Essays*, she is a co-director of *Iota Short Forms* and a former assistant editor at *Brevity*. Penny is a graduate of the Stonecoast MFA Program. She lives near Lubec with her wife, college-aged kids, and a slowly evolving number of dogs.

Erik Ofgang has written about robot illustrators and how AI is helping unearth lost lines from the epic of Gilgamesh for *The New York Times*, and about forgotten aviation pioneers and his obsessive quest to track down the long-lost sideshow magician who inspired Ray Bradbury's writing career for *Smithsonian* magazine. He's also written for *The Atlantic*, *The Washington Post*, *Forbes*, *Slate*, *The Associated Press*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. He is co-author of *The Good Vices*, author of *Gillette Castle: A History* and is currently writing *Many Worlds* for Penguin Press, which chronicles the mind-bending true story of the renegade scientists who developed the real theory behind the multiverse. He was an expert guest on a season 4 episode of The History Channel's "The Food That Built America" and recently appeared on NBC Morning News NOW to discuss his *New York Times* story on the intense debate around ebook pricing at libraries. In this universe, he lives in Connecticut with his wife and their two children and is a faculty member in Western Connecticut State University's MFA in Creative and Professional Writing program.

Cha McCoy, MBA, is an entrepreneur, educator, and event producer. As a certified sommelier with the Court of Master Sommeliers, she developed The Communion, a wine dinner series that offers an inviting, accessible approach to gathering and enjoying wine. This experience inspired her to open her first brick-and-mortar store, The Communion Wine & Spirits. The dinner series was profiled in *Food & Wine*, and Cha was named one of *Wine Enthusiast's* 40 Under 40. Cha has held coveted industry positions, including Cherry Bombe's first beverage director, the head of beverage for the Charleston Wine + Food Festival, and sommelier at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Portugal. Passionate about education, she spends her spare time mentoring and teaching at her alma mater, Syracuse University, where she served as an adjunct professor, educating and inspiring new wine drinkers. You can find Cha in Harlem, New York—or on one of her international adventures.

Sonja Mongar, MFA is the author of the award-winning novel, *Two Spoons of Bitter: A Story of Love, Betrayal and Redemption* (2018). Her work has been published in *Brevity*, *Saw Palm: Florida Literary & Arts Journal*, *Pink Panther Magazine*, among others and recently contributed *The Last Spike*, a chapter about her experience with railroad life to *Ghostline* by Glenn Rudolph. She specializes in creative nonfiction, survivor/trauma narrative, hybrid/speculative/crossover genres, literary fiction, feature journalism, writing for nonprofits and indie publishing. Her interests include digital & performance story work, life narrative, indie publishing, social justice/advocacy, songwriting, and blues harmonica. She's currently working on an autoethnography based on her great-grandmother's diary and just published her mother's hybrid oral history, *Take It as It Comes, A Montana Oral History*.

Alexis Paige is the author of two books by Vine Leaves Press, where she is also the Nonfiction Acquisitions Editor. *Work Hard, Not Smart: How to Make a Messy Literary Life*, a craft memoir and ode to neurodivergence, is a Wishing Shelf Book Award Finalist and winner of three 2022 Royal Dragonfly Book Awards in the categories of Writing/Publishing, Women's Interests, and Disability Awareness. Paige's memoir-in-essays, *Not a Place on Any Map*, won the Vine Leaves Press Vignette Collection Award in 2016. Her work appears in many journals and anthologies, including *Hippocampus Book's Getting to the Truth: The Craft and Practice of Creative Nonfiction*, *Longform*, *The Rumpus*, *Fourth Genre*, and *Brevity*, where she was an Assistant Editor from 2013-2019. Winner of the New Millennium Nonfiction Prize, Paige has also

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David Rich spent the early years of his writing career in Hollywood. He wrote the feature film, *Renegades*, starring Kiefer Sutherland and Lou Diamond Philips, as well as episodes of *MacGyver*, *StarGate-SG1* and other shows. Along the way, he wrote scripts about carnivorous roaches, an urban Tarzan, an obsessive snake handler, an artist tormented by visions, cowboys, spies, cops, private eyes, soldiers, psychics, con artists, politicians, and lawyers. But no writers, never writers. David's first two novels are Rollie Waters thrillers: *Caravan of Thieves* and *Middle Man*. *The Mirrored Palace* is a historical adventure based on Richard Francis Burton's infamous Hajj in 1853. He also likes to write plays.

Ian M. Rogers is an author, editor, and instructor in the low-residency MFA program at Western Connecticut State University. He grew up in New Hampshire before studying literature at Bennington College in Vermont and creative writing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he learned to write short bios like this one. He's the author of *MFA Thesis Novel* (2022) and *Carcrash Parker and the Haven of Larpers* (2025), both with Vine Leaves Press.

Layla Schlack is an award-winning writer and editor. She's currently senior editor at Clarkson Potter, where she acquires cookbooks and drinks books, and she has more than fifteen years of experience editing wine, travel, and food publications. A former senior editor and wine reviewer for *Wine Enthusiast*, she has also served as editorial director for Whetstone Media. She holds an MFA in Creative and Professional Writing from Western Connecticut State University.

Sean Singer is the author of *Discography* (Yale University Press, 2002), winner of the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize, selected by W.S. Merwin, and the Norma Farber First Book Award from the Poetry Society of America; *Honey & Smoke* (Eyewear Publishing, 2015); and *Today in the Taxi* (Tupelo Press, 2022) which won the 2022 National Jewish Book award. He runs a manuscript consultation service at www.seansingerpoetry.com

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Chris Tebbetts is the co-author of the #1 *New York Times* bestselling *Middle School* series, as well as the forthcoming middle grade adventure, *Dr. Zeus*, with James Patterson. He also co-

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