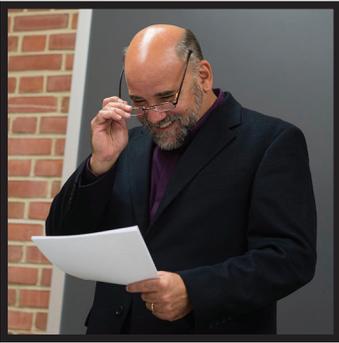


Glimpses into the Imagination

BY CHRIS QUIRK



**Poetry will
never be music,
but poetry
without music
is not poetry
that lasts**

Sascha Feinstein

Every once in a while you come across a true polymath whose talent could find a home in a variety of mediums. Sascha Feinstein, a professor of English and creative writing at Lycoming for more than 20 years, had options when he was growing up. He came from a highly artistic household in New York City — his parents were both abstract expressionist painters who were among the famous crew that blew off steam at the boisterous Cedar Tavern in Greenwich Village during that movement’s zenith in the 1950s. A passionate devotee of jazz from a young age, Feinstein learned the saxophone, and founded and edits *Brilliant Corners*, a jazz-focused literary journal. He gigs regularly in the Williamsport area and even hosts a jazz radio program on WVIA, a local public television station. But in college, poetry took the prize and became the vessel for his vision.

Among the many books he has written or edited, Feinstein has penned two editions of poetry, “Ajanta’s Ledge” and “Misterioso,” winner of the Hayden Carruth Award, and his poems have been published in the *American Poetry Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *The North American Review* and numerous anthologies. As a professor, he has won the Constance Cupp Plankenhorn Senior Faculty Award, the Junior Faculty Award, and has been recognized as the Artist of the Year in 2008 by the Pennsylvania Governor’s Award for the Arts program.

“Poetry will never be music, but poetry without music is not poetry that lasts,” Feinstein declared. “My musical background helps with that. Sentence variety and elements like line breaks can be like pulses in music. The spaces on a page of poetry resemble rests in music. There are all kinds of fascinating analogies. That’s also the reason I push students to read their poetry out loud. Poetry comes from an oral tradition, and using your ears will help your writing.”



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G.W. Hawkes

A teacher for 26 years at Lycoming, G.W. Hawkes is a novelist, scholar, and poet who is also recognized for his short stories. He won a prestigious National Endowment for the Arts grant for his fiction in 2000, and Publishers' Weekly called the prose in Hawkes' novel, "Gambler's Rose" (MacMurray & Beck, 2000), "sharp and clean," noting the "force and wily integrity of the tale."

A self-described service brat, growing up Hawkes lived in England, Norway, Hawaii, and Texas, and his novels are often set in remote locales. "I am drawn to places that are magical and imbued with something enigmatic, like the Four Corners area," where "Surveyor" (MacMurray & Beck, 1998) takes place, Hawkes said. He is currently working on a novel set on a Caribbean island adorned with a beached 18th century British frigate.

Hawkes' complex characters can be clairvoyant, or spring from a classic American noir. "In any one of my books, I couldn't tell you precisely where they come from, but they often find themselves caught in the crossroads of fate and chance. Like Fitzgerald's green light at the end of the dock that became the lodestar for "The Great Gatsby," sometimes my characters arise out of a line of dialogue or voice I hear in my head, and the novel becomes an interrogation of that to find the themes and story around it."

In addition to his novels, Hawkes also writes a great deal of short fiction as well as scholarly articles. "I could be working on both stories and novels at any given time. As I am writing a novel, I often have bits that don't belong there, and they become short stories. I look at my writing as a kaleidoscope, you keep turning it until the patterns fall into a captivating design."

He co-directs the creative writing program at Lycoming with Sascha Feinstein.

The Bellmore poem was the winning entry for poetry in the most recent issue of The Tributary.

READING PROGRAM

One of the jewels of Lycoming's creative writing program, the Himes/Sweeney Visiting Scholar in Creative Writing Series, brings some of the top writers in the country to the college to share their work and insights with students and the Lycoming community.

Originally dubbed simply the Reading Series, its longevity has now been guaranteed by the generous endowment of alumna Diane Himes-Sweeney '63. Past visitors in the series include two of the nation's former poets laureate, Philip Levine and Billy Collins, as well as winners of almost any American literary prize you could name, including the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize, the O. Henry Award, and many others. "It's fabulous how many sensational writers we have been able to bring to Lycoming with this program," said Prof. Sascha Feinstein, who directs the series. "At first I had to call in all my favors, but now the word has gotten out and writers really enjoy coming here."

Because of opportunities like this and the structure of the creative writing program as a whole, undergraduate students at Lycoming essentially get graduate-level seminar and critique experiences. "When our students go to MFA writing programs, they regularly tell me how much better prepared they are for it than counterparts from other schools, who are often taken aback by the intensity of things at the graduate level," Feinstein noted.

The educational benefits of the Himes/Sweeney series for Lycoming students go beyond witnessing great writers presenting their work. "Our students get to work directly in small groups with artists at the peak of their craft," Feinstein said. "Imagine ten of our students sitting in a workshop with C.K. Williams. They will never forget that. Ever."

SUBTERRANEAN

BY BRIDGET BELLMORE

You found black-eyed Susans pressed within the flecks of my irises, as if they'd been fossilized, and I, rising from the earth to take on life, carried them with me, used them to see.

If I could have created you, I would have sculpted you from the clay I dug from the stream behind my house, pleased to be the one who molded the muscles along your spine, who shaped them to fill my hands perfectly whenever I'd hold you.

Is it so wrong to doubt our mothers and search for our conception between layers in the ground, believing the evidence that the matter of our souls and selves were formed among impressions of previously flourishing things?

OUTCOMES Alumni

Stephen Cramer '97

Language is more than just words for poet Stephen Cramer '97. It inhabits the body. "I fell in love with poetry at the age of 14, when I saw a video of Stanley Kunitz reading his poem 'The Round.' I was amazed at how incantatory it was, and I played it until I hadn't just memorized it, but felt as if it were part of my musculature."

Cramer's work often combines gritty imagery with rhythms that are palpable, as in "What We Do," from his book "Tongue and Groove": "He's drumming/a rim full of dents, angled/facets that pull to themselves/all the sun they can bear." Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Yusef Komunyakaa has described Cramer's work as giving "a map of sound, where the pastoral and the urban inform each other, and the only level and plumb line that matters is the heart."

Last year, Cramer released his third volume of poetry, "From the Hip" (Wind Ridge Books, 2014), a series that merges the rigor of the sonnet form with the urgent cadences of hip-hop. "I am addicted to sonnets these days," Cramer confessed. "The form takes you out of your mental agenda. When you sit down to write, the sonnet is going to push you around."

A prolific writer who teaches at the University of Vermont, Cramer is a four-time Pushcart Prize nominee, and has published dozens of his poems in periodicals and literary journals, including *The American Poetry Review* and *The Harvard Review*. He recently completed a fourth collection of poems, "Bone Music," and already has another book in development, a culinary series entitled "A Little Thyme and a Pinch of Rhyme," poetic recipes where the ingredients are haiku and the instructions sonnets. "Poets typically have two masters: reason, so the poems make sense, and musicality," explained Cramer. "These poems have to taste good too."



OUTCOMES

Alumni



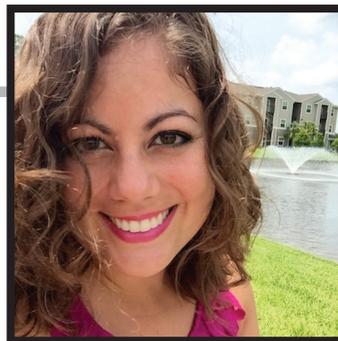
Phoebe Wagner '14

Phoebe Wagner '14 cut a brilliant streak through Lycoming's creative writing program during her undergraduate tenure, participating in nearly every poetry and writing workshop offered, delivering a scholarly paper on Chaucer at a medieval studies conference, and seeing both her poetry and prose published. "The teachers here took me under their wing and helped me develop every aspect of my writing, sometimes word by word," Wagner recounted.

Growing up in nearby Muncy, Wagner did not have to travel far to find a writing program that suited her. "I already knew Lycoming had a great department and great professors, and it was right in my backyard. There was no need to look farther."

Currently employed as an admissions counselor at Lycoming, Wagner's work has already appeared in the *Rose Red Review*, *Hearth* magazine and *Vine Leaves* literary journal. In the fall, she's off to the heartland to earn her MFA at Iowa State University, where the Creative Writing and Environment program has offered her a three-year fellowship.

The environment is a recurring element in Wagner's work, and appropriately her vocabulary hails more from the rugged Anglo-Saxon parish of the language than the more cerebral Latin one. She frequently connects words and nature, as in "River Words," a prose meditation on a kayak outing on the meandering Susquehanna River, and "Jacklight," which opens with a rune appearing in the carcass of a bird. "I don't use many urban settings for my stories," Wagner said. "The environment is very powerful and I do a lot with it in my writing. I hope when people read my work that they will be inspired to look at the natural world in a different way."



Melody Johnson '11

You don't find too many writers who land multiple book contracts a few short years after graduating from college, but that's what Melody Johnson '11 just did. Author of the recently released "The City Beneath" (Kensington Books, 2015), Johnson's publisher has agreed to terms on three more volumes that will make up her Night Blood series of paranormal romances. A chilling vampire love story, "The City Beneath" takes place in New York and explores the less-than-savory underside of the city.

Entering Lycoming as an English major, Johnson graduated magna cum laude and added a major in psychology along the way, to which she attributes her attraction to the villainous aspects of human nature. "I knew very little about psychology when I began studying it, but it totally captivated me," said Johnson. "It also helps me to make my more twisted characters compelling."

As she began developing her writing at Lycoming, Johnson worked first with G.W. Hawkes, who was instrumental in her choice of a college. "Dr. Hawkes was the most intense professor that I met when I was looking at colleges. Between that and his published work, it was an easy decision to come here." Johnson wrote her first full length novel under the advisement of Hawkes. "It was a huge breakthrough for me. Prof. Hawkes worked with me for a full year, and finishing that manuscript was a really big thing for my career."

While her topics are dark, there is always room for redemption in Johnson's novels. "No one is purely good or evil, and it's important to explore why people are the way they are," Johnson asserted. "I hope my books will help people connect with issues like this in a way that will broaden their views."

The second book in The Night Blood series, "Sweet Last Drop," is slated for release later this year. ♦

