

BACKGROUND OF THE WELLS COLLEGE VISITING WRITERS SERIES

(from Wells Visiting Writers Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/wellswriters>)

Wells College's Visiting Writers Series was established in 1973. Under the auspices of the Series, which is supported by Wells College, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Virginia Kent Cummins Fund (for poets), the Mildred Walker Fund (for fiction writers), and gifts from friends and alumnae, the college brings to campus each academic term an average of three or four writers who have distinguished themselves in poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and drama. These writers not only give public readings of their work; they also conduct writing workshops, participate in classes and discussions, and often hold individual conferences with interested student writers.

Among the hundreds of writers Wells has hosted over the years, many have been top figures in their field who have won such prestigious awards as the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award. One (the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky) was even a Nobel Prize winner. Yet, the Visiting Writers Series selects only those writers who can bring something special to the close-knit Wells community, which has had its continuously growing share of ambitious and committed undergraduate writers.

Visiting writers are frequently editors and publishers, or are involved in graduate writing programs, and all have wide publishing experience, so they can help students learn about practical matters relating to the literary scene and publishing in addition to providing hands-on advice and criticism. Sometimes there are group readings by editors and writers representing journals, such as THE HEALING MUSE and STONE CANOE, and by publishers, such as Michael Czarnecki of FootHills Publishing, enabling students to gain exposure to the vital work being done all over the country by small presses and literary magazines.

Below are the Visiting Writers events for Fall 2012. For more information about any of these writers or events, contact Bruce Bennett at brbennett@wells.edu, or call (315) 364-3228.

Philip Memmer (Poet)
Thursday, September 20th
Reading: 7:00 AER
Class visits: English 272, English 275
Book: The Storehouses of the Snow

Martha Collins (Poet)
Thursday, November 1st
Reading : 7:00 AER

Class visits: English 272, 275
Books: Blue Front; White Papers

HEALING MUSE ISSUE #12
Editors and Writers, including from Wells
Monday, November 12th
Reading: 7:00 AER
Book: HEALING MUSE #12

Austin MacRae (Poet)
Wednesday, Thursday, November 14th-15th
Reading: Thursday 7:00 AER
Class visits: English 272, English 275
Book: The Organ Builder

All interested students are invited to have dinner with the visiting writers.

FURTHER DESCRIPTION OF THE VISITING WRITERS SERIES

Professor Bruce Bennett has been mainly responsible for coordinating the Visiting Writers Series and inviting and hosting the writers. Professor Cynthia Garrett has worked with Professor Bennett, and has generally selected and hosted the fiction writers, including those brought under the auspices of the Mildred Walker '26 Visiting Fiction Writer endowment; Dorothy Allison and Lauren Belfer. are just two of the notable authors who have come to Wells through this funding. A vital aspect of the entire Visiting Writers program is the involvement of visiting writers in classes: they conduct writing workshops in fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and they participate in literature classes, discussing their own work and the work of other writers. When possible, writers even hold conferences with individual students.

Writers who come to campus through the Visiting Writers Series give public readings (that is the basis of our long-time support from the New York Council on the Arts, which has made the scope of the Series possible), and we are constantly striving to increase the size and diversity of our audiences. In recent years we have managed to attract an average audience of about 30-40 people for a reading, and on some occasions far more (poet and political columnist Katha Pollitt drew an audience of more than 80 for her reading/discussion in Fall 2010). The Visiting Writers Facebook page, established in 2009, which now has about 280 friends, has been extremely helpful in spreading the word about readings, as have emails to the entire community and announcements in the Wells Daily News.

An exciting development occurred last fall, with the "expansion" of the Series to the Aurora Inn under the heading, "Literature on the Lake." Two former English Majors, Emily Ambrose and Alex Schloop, now working in Marketing at the Inn, have organized reading/discussion events in the Inn Dining Room on Mondays and Tuesdays, days

dinners are not served there. Poet Phil Memmer read and commented on the poems in his new book, *The Storehouses of the Snow*, on September 24th, 2012 (a few days after he read at Wells), and two Literature on the Lake events will take place this spring: a Healing Muse reading on March 26th and an as-yet-unscheduled April reading by authors contributing to a tribute anthology for poet Adrienne Rich, who died last year.

Finally, the Visiting Writers Series has for many years worked closely with the Book Arts Center and Wells College Press. Each term two or more letterpress broadsides of work (usually a poem) by visiting writers are published and made available for sale at the readings. Last fall there were three broadsides: "Parable" by Phil Memmer, "White" by Martha Collins, and "Mowing" by Austin MacRae.

These broadsides then become part of the extensive, impressive, and valuable collection of letterpress broadsides that are a pride of the Book Arts Center and Wells College.

Submitted by Bruce Bennett to Dean and Provost Cindy Speaker, February 3rd, 2013