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Merrimack College

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# THE BROADSHEET

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Issue XII

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Photo by Tony Rossetti

## **This Issue:**

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## **Gail Caldwell at the Writers House by Emily O'Brien**

I first encountered Gail Caldwell's work during my Senior Seminar course last fall. My instructor assigned us Caldwell's 2010 memoir, *Let's Take the Long Way Home*, the story of her friendship with the late Caroline Knapp, who passed away from a rapid battle with lung cancer in 2002. I was struck by the raw emotion of the book, and it touched me in a way I had not expected. I learned quickly that Caldwell has a gift for tugging at the heartstrings and making sense of life's most challenging and trying experiences. *Let's Take the Long Way Home* focuses primarily on the beauty of her friendship with Knapp, and then provides an honest, touching depiction of grief. I reviewed *Long Way Home* as part of a class assignment (appearing in Issue X of *The Broadsheet*). I had no trouble doing this. My opinion of the book was strong and clear: it moved me. When I learned that Gail (cont'd on p. 2)

*An official publication of the Merrimack College English Department, The Broadsheet is published monthly during the academic calendar year. Its mission is to celebrate the English Department's role in promoting the literary arts on campus, to acknowledge the accomplishments of faculty and students, to profile students and alumni, and to create a forum in which issues relevant to English studies can be discussed.*



Caldwell would be returning to The Writers House for a second time, this time as Writer in Residence, I immediately began pouring over her newest memoir, *New Life No Instructions*, the story of her struggle with polio and the persistence with which it affected her life. This memoir functions almost as a sequel to *Let's Take the Long Way Home*, because it chronicles her life after Caroline, and invites us into her world once again. We see her develop a relationship with her new, young sled dog, as she discovers that she needs a total hip replacement, and this reveals more of her signature kernels of truth about life. It is a story about aging, hope, and second chances, and it is profound. I recognized quickly that my feelings about her work had not

changed since reading *Let's Take the Long Way Home*. Her writing drew me in once again, making me feel as though I knew her personally. This is what a good memoir like Caldwell's does: it forges a personal connection between reader and writer by revealing so much of the writer's personal truth. Connections are made through shared experience, and memoir is the perfect medium for this.

I was lucky enough to sit down with Gail Caldwell and ask her some of the questions that had been on my mind since I first encountered her work. I wanted to know how writing *New Life* compared with writing *Long Way Home*. "It was very different," she told me, "but similar in the sense that there is always the certain crucible when the work appears and how you shape it when fear turns to passion. That's the important part. *Long Way Home* was so particular and so finished as a narrative that the struggles and challenges that I had writing that book were emotional more than anything else. I really knew what I was doing. The problems were not technical or existential. When you write a memoir, like *New Life*, that is from the recent past, you don't have the same perspective and same hindsight. The story wasn't completed when I started it, so it kept veering off. I felt like I was driving a car with no brakes, because it started off one thing and became another. It was too close and too emotional. The thing that wound up ending the book hadn't actually happened yet when I started writing it."

One of Caldwell's signature characteristics as a writer is her use of precise and jarring metaphor. She has a way of looking back and reflecting on experiences from the near or distant past and turning them into riveting tokens of truth and honesty. It pervades her writing, and it is one thing that makes it so beautiful. I asked Gail how she creates these crystalizing metaphors. "I take a lot of notes on my own thoughts," she responded. "When I'm first starting a book I give myself the latitude to spend a lot of time in a chair with a legal pad and I'll write down things that I'm thinking about. Often, in that process, which is very rough and imperfect, the images come. It would be like if I were sitting and talking to you over a cup of coffee."

I told Gail that when meeting her I felt as though I already knew her, simply because I had read so much of her life story and connected with it on such a personal level. I asked her if this is a reaction she often gets, and if it was a comforting or uncomfortable feeling. (cont'd on p. 3)

“Both, actually. It’s very odd,” she replied. “I had a little bit of exposure to it when I was writing for *The Globe*, back when people read the paper, and I’d meet people and they would say to me ‘Oh my God, I read you every week!’ So that gave me the feeling of being known, but it was not as intimate as when someone has read a book as intimate as *Long Way Home*. It’s funny because when you’re writing in that zone, I don’t think you know what you are doing. Caroline and I used to talk about this a lot because she wrote very intimate, first person narrative. When you’re writing, I don’t think you feel what you’re doing. There is some odd bubble or armor that comes over you and keeps you from realizing you’re putting this out there until its done.”



I asked Gail about a certain point in *New Life, No Instructions*, the moment when the doctor shows her the x-ray of her hip. Her reaction to the x-ray feels like a turning point in the book, and I asked if she considered how readers would react to this moment when she was writing.

“There is always a way you hope readers react, which is with the same sort of compassion or insight that you felt. The thing I remember from experiencing that was how weird it was to be able to quantify something as disparate as pain. It felt like such an infinite and weird thing that I couldn’t do anything about, and then suddenly there was this thing that explained it all. This oddly beautiful explosive x-ray, and I said ‘there it is!’ It was more of an illumination than anything else and I wanted to reveal that.”

I told Gail that I had always felt a personal connection with her work, and that reading her story as she pieced together her past and present with astounding clarity helped me to make sense of my own life. I asked her if this is a reaction she often gets.

“That’s what I would most hope and want, that it would be able to touch somebody in that way. What I think has happened, inadvertently, is when I wrote *Long Way Home*, I remember hearing people say to me ‘thank you for describing what grief was like for me.’ I didn’t see that coming.”

Before she began writing memoirs, Caldwell was the head book critic for *The Boston Globe* and won the Pulitzer Prize for criticism in 2001. I wondered if her experience writing reviews of other authors’ books affected the way she read reviews of her own memoirs, mentioning that I had been reading reviews of *New Life* and I noticed that many of the reviewers compared the book with *Long Way Home*. I asked Caldwell how she reacts to these comparisons. She responded: “It’s hard because they are two very different books and I probably compare them myself.... I think *USA Today* said something like ‘This is much less anguished for Caldwell which is good for her but bad for the reader,’ and I remember thinking ‘I’m so sorry but I couldn’t redo Hamlet for you.’ There’s a way that I understand the tendency to want to do that, but for me they are apples and oranges because I had to write a very different story in the wake of *Long Way Home*. It’s a very different feeling. I think it’s a struggle for any writer. You can (cont’d on p. 4)

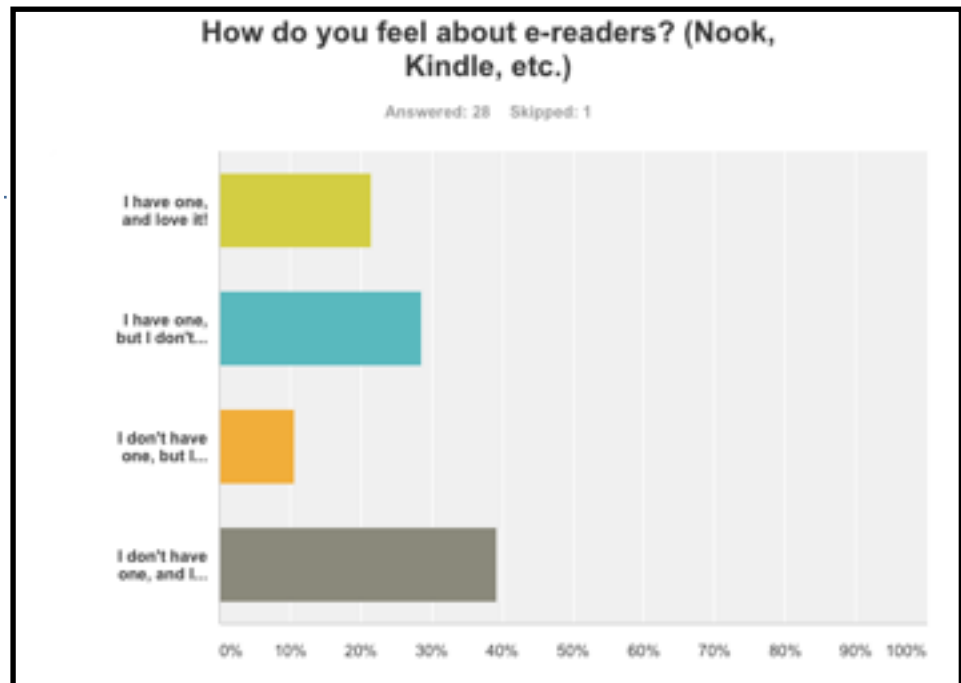
bring the same set of skills to every book, but you can't bring the same material, because you are obviously telling a different story. All I can hope is that I did that different thing as well as I did the other, knowing that they are two very different jobs."

Finally, I asked Gail what place she thinks memoir has in literature today (a question we had explored in the Senior Seminar course) and why she chooses to write memoirs.

"I think it has created a golden age for itself in the past 20 years or so," she offered. "I think memoir has always been important, although we may have called it different things. I think I'm done, because nobody's life is important enough for four. Although, I said that after the last book, and I say that every time. For me, it is a form that has allowed me to really write about the world, through the voice and the lens of one person. I think that is what is appealing about it for writers, and I think it is appealing to readers because if they are lucky, they may find what you did, which is that somebody has told a story that speaks to them, and to their heart and to their own experience. That's the best any of us want from reading."

## Results from the Great E-Reader Debate

*Broadsheet* staff member Emily O'Brien surveyed a number of students on campus to see who prefers books and who prefers e-readers. The results seem to favor books to e-readers.



Answer Choices	Responses
▼ I have one, and love it!	21.43%
▼ I have one, but I don't really use it.	28.57%
▼ I don't have one, but I would like one!	10.71%
▼ I don't have one, and I would never use one.	39.29%
Total	

## English Awards and Honorary Society Induction Ceremony by Jessica Brusco

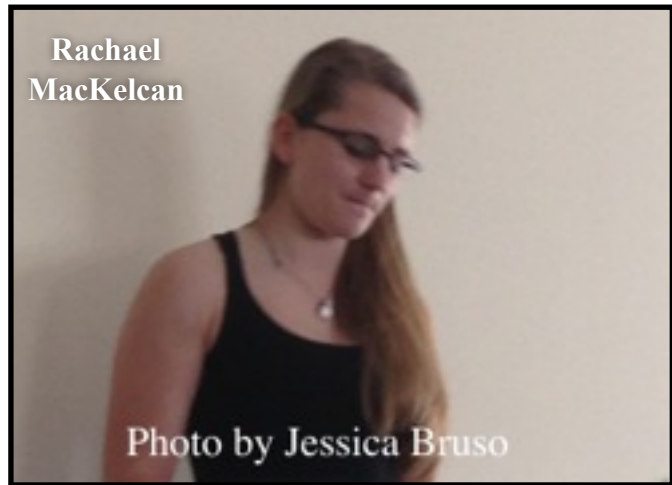
“To me, literature presents one of the most profound opportunities to engage with the world” began Dr. Steven Scherwatzky in his welcome at the Annual English Awards Ceremony on March 25<sup>th</sup>. He spoke of the importance of the study of English, beginning an event that honored both the ongoing accomplishments of Sigma Tau Delta inductees and winners of the Aherne Poetry Contest.

Dr. Ellen McWhorter, Merrimack’s chapter advisor for Sigma Tau Delta, welcomed Erin Beausoleil, Jacques Denault, Miranda Frezza, Jamie Hayes, Julia Lemieux, Michelle Norton, Mark Anthony (Tony) Rossetti, and Daniel Sullivan into the English Honors Society.

In an interview I conducted with Dr. McWhorter, she said, “Sigma Tau Delta is an international English honor society that began in 1924 and currently has chapters all over the world. Its mission, as described on all of its professional documents, is ‘to confer distinction for high achievement in English language, literature, and writing; and to foster literacy and all aspects of the discipline of English.’ In less formal terms, it’s an organization designed to bring people who love and are skilled [at] English studies together and to offer them opportunities for advancement in the field.”

In order to be invited to Sigma Tau Delta, one must be an English major that has taken at least two English classes beyond the introductory level and have a 3.0 GPA or higher in the major and a 3.0 GPA or higher overall.

In her interview, McWhorter emphasized the growth of the program saying, “My lofty goal for the 2015-16 academic year is for the chapter to take advantage of all of the opportunities offered by Sigma Tau Delta. We’re currently holding elections for next year’s officers and once those are completed we’ll start meeting this year to form a plan of attack for next. Next year our chapter will nominate at least one student for a Sigma Tau Delta scholarship. I’m hopeful that our members will submit some essays for both conference and publication consideration. (I’m especially looking forward to working with everybody on those!) Ideally a group of us will (cont’d on p. 6) attend the 2016 conference in Minneapolis, where





we'll take in the sites and network with other Sigma Tau Delta members.”

She highlighted the benefits of membership. “For our English majors, Sigma Tau Delta is a huge opportunity both for professional and personal development. The society holds yearly conferences where students can present papers to an international audience. So far we’ve had one student submit a paper and it was selected for inclusion at the 2014 conference in Savannah, Georgia. Sigma Tau Delta also publishes two journals, *The Sigma Tau Delta Review* (for scholarly essays) and *The Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle* (for poems and short stories). My hope is that our members will submit some of their work this year and maybe earn the title of ‘published author’

before they graduate. Lastly, Sigma Tau offers scholarships and study abroad opportunities to members. The existence of the chapter alone brings prestige to Merrimack, and these other opportunities provide for the possibility of circulating the merits of the college even more widely. And that’s just the professional side of things. As a group of people who enjoy literature and words, we also have a chance to have some fun in the form of visits to literary sites, archives, etc.”

After the induction, the winners of the Aherne Poetry Contest read their pieces (reprinted on the final pages of this issue). First Place winner and freshman English major Rachael MacKelcan delivered her poem “The Memories that Haunt Me”, a narrative about her late father. Second place winner Jamie Hayes read her poem “Unfiltered” about being one’s true self, and third place winner Jacques Denault read his “Modern America”, which was a reflection on pop culture and the way media portrays current events and issues. All three recited from memory, giving this portion of the night a coffee house vibe. This resonated well with the audience and I myself was fascinated by both the writing and the performance of these winning entries.

Guest speaker Danielle Jones Pruett addressed the crowd last. As Program Coordinator of the Writers House and recent Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers Award recipient, she provided advice to aspiring writers. She told her story about being a Psychology and English Literature undergraduate student saying, “When I was about to graduate and had taught a pigeon to play chopsticks, I had a panic attack”. Realizing that writing was her true calling, and not Psychology as she had originally thought, she decided to spend her time focused on this passion. “Be aware of what you love to do,” she told everyone, “[and] once you find that thing, clear a path for it”.



Sigma Tau Delta inductee Tony Rossetti poses for Jessica Brusio

## **A Glimmer of Civility in a Barbarous World: Wes Anderson's *Grand Budapest Hotel*** **A Review by Tony Rossetti**

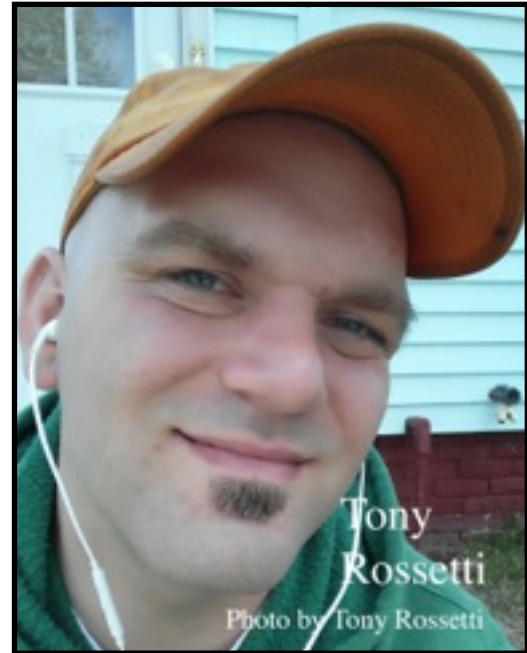
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From the very first shot of the movie, any Wes Anderson veteran can immediately identify his distinctly imaginative signature—from the painstakingly meticulous composition of mise en scene, to the brightly colored visuals that are fantastical enough to root its viewers in a playful, imaginary world, but realistic enough to suspend their disbelief. Anderson's eighth full-length feature, *Grand Budapest Hotel*, showcases his amazing visual talents while honing his storytelling ability. At its core, the movie is the filmic equivalent of a Matryoshka, or Russian nesting doll—a story about a story in a story inside of another story, all inspired by an entirely different story (I'm still trying to wrap my head around that). It's a story about storytelling, and, more importantly, illustrates why narrative remains integral to our humanity.

Like a knowing elder opening and revealing each new layer of the Matryoshka to an amazed and delighted child, Anderson begins from the outskirts of the narrative and leads us to the bullseye of myriad concentric circles. First, we encounter a young girl at the end of her pilgrimage, standing before a bust of a deceased fictional author, holding a red and white hardcover book. A close-up of the book displays the title *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. The book cover opens, transporting us back to 1985, where we meet the fictional author of the fictional book, played by Tom Wilkinson. In this amusing and somewhat comical vignette, we learn from the fictional author that many people believe writers simply imagine all their stories. On the contrary, he informs us, once established, a writer will often be approached by others who offer up their own stories to the writer. Anderson uses this as a dual-pronged plot device to set up an additional layer of the story while paying homage to the inspiration he drew from the work of Stefan Zweig's writings.

Flashback to the 1960s, when a younger version of the author, played by Jude Law, had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Moustafa (F. Murray Abraham), the one time lobby-boy and subsequent owner of the Grand Budapest Hotel. Mr. Moustafa invites the young author to dinner and shares his own story of how he came to the Grand Budapest during a tumultuous time between the two great wars in a violently evolving European landscape. F. Murray Abraham expertly establishes his character's reliability, likability, and sentimentality throughout the opening scenes, while his narrative voiceovers maintain that character during the central story, infusing the story with a certain fictional credibility. Most importantly, he reveals the final nesting doll, the tale of the central character, M. Gustave (Ralph Fiennes).

The core narrative revolves around Monsieur Gustave, the flamboyant, charming, nonsense head of staff at the Grand Budapest Hotel, which is located in the fictional eastern European country of Zubrowka in 1918. We attain our first glimpse of Gustave (cont'd on p. 8)





through young Zero Moustafa, Mr. Moustafa's 1918 counterpart, played by Tony Revolori. Part disciplinary, part gigolo, part Romantic poetry enthusiast, and "the most liberally perfumed man" Zero has ever met, Ralph Fiennes, in an excellent performance as M. Gustave, offers grace and panache that vivifies and compliments Anderson's imaginary world. Gustave serves as a lovable escort to innumerable rich, single, old widowers and divorcées, and they reciprocate by lavishing him with expensive gifts and hefty tips. Zero tells us that he believes Gustave is the main reason the Budapest's most loyal clientele return season after season. Yet, beneath the hard exterior and promiscuous persona, Fiennes' performance evinces civility and aplomb, creating an onscreen complexity that engenders sympathy for Gustave. As we get to know him, we begin to see why Mr. Moustafa has come to believe that "[t]here are still faint glimmers of civilization left in this barbaric slaughterhouse that was once known as humanity...he was one of them."

One of Gustave's favorite guests, an old, rich woman named Madame D. (Tilda Swinton), dies not long after visiting the Grand Budapest under very mysterious circumstances, presenting Gustave with a serious conflict. Gustave, her family, and many rather distant relatives, all convene at her mansion to find out if they have inherited anything, and, in a shock to the family, Gustave inherits a priceless painting named "Boy with Apple." Gustave and Zero abscond with the painting, infuriating the immediate family, particularly Dmitri, the widower's nefarious son, played by Adrien Brody. Not long after, Gustave is accused of murdering Madame D., setting a whirlwind of events in motion that thrill and surprise while making you smile. What ensues is a comical caper, during which Zero and Gustave form an enduring friendship through their codependence amidst a violent, changing landscape.

Speaking of the landscape, the fictional setting of Zubrowka tells a story of its own, while simultaneously creating the perfect backdrop. By placing the story in a fictional eastern European country in 1918, stranded in the interim between two World Wars, Anderson provides a context that is easy for most to imagine, allowing him to construct a believable narrative in an imaginary world without having to spend a great deal of time on exposition. What we find is a place—more specifically a person—that embodies the last vestiges of civility in an increasingly violent and terrifying world. The monumental changes during this modern era forced humanity to adapt and survive after a collective, global loss of innocence in the first World War. As Mr. Moustafa's tale shows the fictional author, The Grand Budapest, somehow poignantly beautiful in a dilapidated and ruinous state, stands as a testament to the once great civilization it came from, and serves as a sentimental touchstone for those with the right kind of eyes.

The stunning mise en scene, carefully orchestrated cinematography, pleasant musical score, brilliant storytelling, and superlative thespians combine to create a wonderful tale, the sum of which is greater than any of its separate parts. Most importantly, Grand Budapest Hotel tells a story about why humanity needs great stories. To Mr. Moustafa, the Grand Budapest is a remnant of the things he loved and cherished, the things gone past, never to return. For a moment, Moustafa becomes a historian on a subject he is uniquely qualified to narrate. What is history, if not a collection of stories passed down from generation to generation? We pass on stories to remember. Now, we have Anderson's lovely work to remember, Grand Budapest Hotel—evidence of a once great civilization and the glimmers of civility that we find in humanity from time to time.

#### RATING



## **Review: Merrimack Onstagers Production of *Next to Normal* by Rosemary Morton**

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Director: Brian Boruta

### CAST

Diana Goodman: Mick Lonati

Dan Goodman: Michael Semonelli

Natalie Goodman: Emily Bertolami

Gabe Goodman: Liam Devine

Henry: Mike Ralphs

Dr. Fine/Dr. Madden: Fr. Richard Piatt, O.S.A.

### BACK STAGE CREW

Music Director: Gina Naggar

Assistant Director: Nathaniel Vilandre

Technical Director/ Designer: Evan Kelly

Stage Manager: Erin Beausoleil

Choreographer: Lissette Schum

Stage Crew: John Barbetto, Lizzy Barcomb, John Casaletto, Joey Colbert, Brendan Doherty, Will Lee, Gaby Martello, Kasey Miller, Will Morgan, Sam Royston, Lissette Schum

Front of House Manager: Meghan Looney

Original Production Music: Tom Kitt

Original Production Lyrics: Brian Yorkey

Original Script: Brian Yorkey

Original Production Awards: Tony Awards for Best Score; Best Orchestration, Best Performance by a Leading Actress; Pulitzer Prize for Drama (the eighth musical to do so)

### RATING



(cont'd on p. 10)

I have always adored the theater. When I was four, my mother took me to see *Cinderella*, and, because my mother shares the same passion, we attend at least two shows a year, these days with more adult-appropriate themes, such as *Phantom of the Opera*, *Book of Mormon*, *Once* and my favorite, *Wicked*, which we have seen four times. I also participated in some shows in middle school and high school, including *Aladdin*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Pajama Game* and *Godspell*. So, when I was given the opportunity to interview cast members for the Onstagers' production of *Next to Normal* and to write a review to go with it, I was thrilled.

*Next to Normal* tells the story of a mother suffering from bipolar disorder and the effect that her illness has on her family. It was first performed on Broadway in April 2009, starring leading actress Alice Ripley, playing Diana, for which she won the Tony Award that year. *Next to Normal* is considered a "trigger warning show," because it treats sensitive issues, such as attempted suicide.

I sat down with the cast and asked them what makes *Next to Normal* different from other shows and whether or not this difference makes the play special. "*Next to Normal* is a good way to remind people why theater is important," states Michael Semonelli, who plays Dan Goodman. "The show is able to balance out being realistic and yet remains a tasteful piece of Broadway." The show continues to be popular, in part because it engages an important subject. *Next to Normal*, according to Mick Lonati, who plays Diana Goodman, tackles the topic of mental illness, which people are hesitant to discuss in our society. "The show is able to maintain a down-to-earth attitude, making it considerably different, compared to the regular flashy atmosphere of Broadway with

such shows like *Wicked*" (Michael and Mick). The show, therefore, is a hidden gem, because it is able to discuss such a difficult subject, yet still remains in the Broadway tradition, meaning the show remains tasteful and entertaining.

No show runs smoothly (in fact, runs at all) without the skillful arrangement of lighting, scenery, and many other technical elements, most of which occur behind the curtains and in back of the audience. These different techniques are important to mention because they form the framework, or production backbone, of what the audience sees on stage. The set for this production was distinctive compared to others. Basically, the set was made up of different metal railings and the wooden stage sat on top of it. There were stairs that connected the top of the set down to the floor of the set, creating the illusion that one is viewing a house largely devoid of furniture, except for a kitchen table, a bathroom and a front door. Most of the play's action occurred around these three props. The rest of the set pieces (a chair, a front door, and a bare bones mock-up of a therapist's office) represented different locations and were handled by the backstage crew.

For *Next to Normal*, the backstage crew played a significant role in ensuring the play's success. Oftentimes, the cast would be on stage while the crew was making transitions, so it was imperative for them to execute their tasks as quietly and quickly as possible. As an audience member, I noticed them, but not so much so that they created a distraction. In my opinion, they made the transitions flawlessly; the wheels on the set pieces barely made a sound. The crew was able to do what they had (cont'd on p. 11)

to without disturbing the story or rupturing the actors' connections with one another.

The lighting was also very effective, spot-on throughout the performance. The spotlights arrived at their targets quickly, despite the rapid pace of much of the action. The conversations between characters were well lit and it was easier to see how the characters were reacting in different situations. The main lights were nice, because they were able to convey the feelings of the characters. For example, during a sad scene the lights turned blue. The range of lighting throughout the performance remained bright and colorful despite the delicate issues explored. Soft blues and purples softened the characters and drew sympathy from the audience.

The final thing that I'd like to mention on the technical side of this production involves sound quality. I admit that occasionally I was having trouble hearing the actors. However, the voices sounded great and I liked how loud the songs were compared to other shows that the theater program had produced in the past. The sound of *Next to Normal* was innovative to the extent that it managed to convey successfully a lot of emotion through song. I felt that for this show the microphones worked well and suited the needs for each actor.

Stage Manager Erin Beausolei explained to me that email correspondence between the stage crew and the actors helped streamline production, keeping the production running on time from its earliest to its final stages. For "every rehearsal," she said, "I sent out a

rehearsal report to the entire production team, so everyone was aware of what happened at each rehearsal and what the show required. E-mail was my strongest form of communication. Once an e-mail was sent, I knew everyone not only had the information, but had the ability to look back on the information and verify it." During the running of the show, however, Erin points out that the communication vehicle changed: "When it came to running the production, I communicated via headset with the spotlight operators and one of my assistant stage managers, so we were always able to contact one another in case of a problem." She added, "everyone who worked on the production was very dedicated."

*Next to Normal* succeeded as a show because of the dedication of the entire production staff. According to Erin, "I was able to accomplish this show due to the help of the crew, cast, and my production team. Throughout the process, I had two assistant stage managers who I was always able to count on. Every show is a large group effort and I would never have been able to manage this production without the respect and help of everyone involved." Judging by the reaction of the audience to the production, it looks like the work of this team really paid off.

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Character portrayal also proved to be quite the task for the cast in this production. Mick Lonati elaborates on the challenges of playing Diana, the mother who has a mental illness: "Diana is the one character in the show that is covering all the emotions. (cont'd on p. 12)

In order to portray this role, I have to jump from these different emotions in a short amount of time, making it a very challenging part. My hope in acting as Diana is to get the audience to understand her as much as I have.” Mick succeeded beautifully. She was able to remain balanced between emotional extremes, making her a relatable leading character. What I mean is that Diana captured the audience’s attention. She made viewers want to follow her struggles and victories. Mick succeeded at making an interesting leading character even more interesting because she skillfully infused so much emotion into the role.

Played by Michael Semonelli, Dan Goodman, Diana’s husband, is the character who directly struggles with Diana. In Michael’s view, “The challenge of portraying Dan is that he is such a realistic character. The show is so grounded in realistic situations that the audience can look at these characters and see ‘someone I know’ in the show.” Michael did a great job of portraying Dan. He was able to balance out being a loving husband/father while also remaining a strict leader in the family dynamic. Semonelli’s performance encourages the audience to empathize with Dan as much as it does with Diana.

The supporting cast also portrayed their parts extremely well. The audience cared about them as much as they did the two leads. I don’t want to give anything away, but I have to say that the supporting cast members, especially the daughter (played by Emily Bertolami) and son (played by Liam Devine), were my two favorite characters in the story. Because I’m the same age as they, I found it

very easy to connect with them. Initially the son and daughter might not seem to be important characters, compared to Diana and Dan, but later in the story they become a pivotal part involving the relationship between the two leads.

Of course, I cannot mention the characters without commenting on the quality of the music in this production. The music in this show consists of rock-and-roll. In many rock theater productions, the music doesn’t move the narrative forward. For example, compared to musicals which might feature big flashy dance numbers, adding little to the storyline, rock musicals frame songs around dialogue. The songs in such shows as *Next to Normal* and *Rent* rely on music as a medium of communication instead of dialogue alone.

I WOULD ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO CHECK OUT THE ONSTAGERS’ PERFORMANCES IN THE FUTURE; THEY ARE DEFINITELY WORTH A WATCH.

Enjoyable and attention-grabbing, the music in *Next to Normal* varies between loud and soft, depending on mood. I found this element virtually addictive. Playgoers will have a hard time getting so many

of these tunes out of their heads. The performers’ voices, however, are what made this Onstagers’ production so fantastic. Everyone in the cast worked very hard on these songs and it shows on stage. The songs in *Next to Normal* are hard to sing at times, especially because in most of the scenes the cast members are physically active while singing. Many of the songs consist of interlocking parts, adding to the difficulty, because the actors are singing different lyrics at the same time. The performers in this show sang better than the Broadway cast alumni. For anyone who has not seen the show, I recommend seeing (cont’d on p. 13)

*Next to Normal* live, rather than listening to the cast soundtrack. I attended two performances of the show and the second exceeded the first.

Opening night is difficult for everyone in a cast and crew because they are running it for the first time with a live audience: anything can or will happen. There were small mistakes in this show and seeing it for the second time greatly influenced my favorable opinion. The show was definitely worth a second look not only because *Next to Normal* was a wonderfully performed show, but also because it improved greatly from opening night. I would encourage everyone to check out the Onstagers' performances in the future; they are definitely worth a watch.



## **Life As An English Major At Merrimack: A Senior Retrospective** by Tony Rossetti

Graduation day is almost here, and this is my last full week of classes at Merrimack. Spring Fever is in the air again—every spring, students and teachers look forward to their summer vacation while everyone crams to finish up the semester. As a senior, this is my last spring, and I'm feeling mixed emotions as I prepare for life after college. While this time is extremely exciting, it is also bittersweet. I am simultaneously terrified, overjoyed, and a little sad, too. Merrimack has been my home away from home for the last two years of my life. I have learned so much, worked with so many passionate, talented, and wonderful people, and made some great friends along the way. The entire Merrimack community has been great to me, but I'd like to focus on a smaller, tightly knit group that I am proud to be a significant part of—the English Department.

From the moment I walked into the English Department main office, I knew I would be right at home. I was greeted with a friendly smile by the English Department's administrative assistant, Helene Nicotra, the most organized, helpful, and sweet secretary I've ever met. (If you are an English major, or

even a professor, pop in sometime and thank her for all she does. She is truly awesome). From there I was escorted into the office of my prospective advisor, Dr. Scherwatzky. We spoke casually and fervently about everything from comic books to music, and I immediately felt quite comfortable. Something was telling me that Merrimack would be a great fit for me. I really felt as though I could become a part of the small family that is the English program.

Because I entered Merrimack as a transfer student, carrying with me a number of credits from another institution, I was not able to take a course from every English professor in the department, but the ones I have studied under have enriched my life so much. The English Department has some of the best faculty around. In my experience, our dedicated professors have proven to be knowledgeable, passionate, approachable, and caring individuals that vivify quotidian college life. They are always willing to help, and their commitment to the advancement of literary studies really shows. Their collective knowledge span is impressive, and their determined efforts to (cont'd on p. 14)

perpetually bring new life to the classroom is evidenced by the lasting effect they have on each student. They have a real knack for illustrating the immense value of English studies, and they demonstrate time and again why studying any art is important. I would never want to imagine a world without art—the thought alone sends chills through me. Art justifies itself in many ways, but mostly because it justifies life.

There are so many opportunities for English majors to get involved in college life and gain some helpful experience at the same time. Students can get involved with writing, publishing, and editing through the Merrimack Review, The Broadsheet, and The Beacon. Excursions for the English students bring learning outside of the classroom. My classmates and I had the pleasure of taking trips to the seacoast for our *New England Shore* class with Dr. Vatalaro, an experimental class that combined literature about New England's beautiful coastal locations with a chance to explore those environments together. Internships are also a great way to get in some career experience, and the career center has many talented people willing to help students on their way.

One of the biggest reasons I chose Merrimack is its Writers House. A space dedicated to serving creative writers and promoting the power of imagination, the Writers House, directed by accomplished poet Andrea Cohen, stands as a living testament to the vitality of imaginative expression. Open-microphone nights, writers' circles, and readings from famous authors occur regularly. I have had the opportunity to meet many successful, talented, and, most importantly, living writers at the Writers House, and I simply cannot

emphasize enough how inspiring, challenging, and rewarding these events are. Authors who have read here range from Pulitzer Prize winners to poet laureates, and I have been fortunate enough to interact with many of them.

Over the last few years, I have learned that an education in English represents an open-ended ticket to wherever in the world I choose to venture. I mentioned earlier that I was a little terrified about life after college. It's certainly not because there aren't jobs in the market for an English major. On the contrary, there are many different jobs for an English major, in law school and publishing, certainly, but also in social media analysis, library science, marketing and event planning.

In a few short weeks, I will walk down the aisle to pick up my diploma, and my journey here at Merrimack will be over. Although it saddens me to leave such a wonderful and exciting community, I will treasure the experience I carry with me

everywhere throughout life. To

all the faculty and friends that have helped me along the way—thank you for everything. Your efforts have helped me to grow into a better person. To those who have dedicated themselves to the study and advancement of the written word—I commend you. Our society needs you at the vanguard, championing humanity and the importance of the arts. To those English majors I will leave behind—never forget the importance of why we study English. We study to gain an understanding of humanity, and to give back to it. It builds character. And to all those prospective English majors, debating if they should follow this daring and fulfilling path—dare to disturb the universe. I leave you all with my love, gratitude, and the hope that many more will someday be inspired to pick up a pen and search for meaning and purpose.

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# Aherne Poetry Contest Winners

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## **First Place: Rachael MacKelkan—The Memories that Haunt Me...**

I remember...

The faint smell of cigarettes in the downstairs bathroom each and every morning...  
His own personal scent, was nicotine, concealed by just the right amount of spearmint  
So he smelled more sweet - than smoky.

I remember cigarette buds

    In the flowerbeds

And all the times I stole his smokes because I had heard the rumors  
And I just didn't want him to die.

I remember the day my parents sat us down...

“Cancer...

Esophageal fucking Cancer” and you know what I did...

I laughed...

    I laughed and I joked because I didn't know it yet  
but I was scared shitless.  
I didn't want my father to die.

I remember softball games,

Playing catch in the backyard,

And the way I had to pinch his nose when he snored -  
Just so I could fall asleep myself.

I remember ice cream sundaes and days at the pool,

Climbing on his back begging him to toss me further into the water because I was a kid,  
And he loved to see me smile.

See life isn't hard until the proverbial bubble pops...

Until your world crumbles...

Until you can't remember your dead fathers face because “selfies” weren't a thing in 2010 and all  
you have left are those fucking photos from 1996-2006 or -

... If you're lucky ...

That - random shot

From the last family gathering...

Which in my case is a photo of me dancing with him at my cousins wedding in 2008...

    Our first...

    And last...

    Father daughter dance at a wedding...

Well shit...

See, soon all the memories just become questions of what was real and what is just a picture on  
your bedside table



That you still kiss goodnight every night even though you know...  
That wherever the universe decided to shit him out...  
He has been sleeping for hours.  
I remember scruffy kisses like pin needles on my cheeks,  
Walking around in his size 11 shoes  
And the nights I snuck out of my own bed because in the process of tucking me in  
He had fallen asleep himself.

I remember  
Big bear hugs,  
Screams from the sidelines  
And racing to the door when he got home...  
Especially on the days he had given blood because he always  
Had presents.

I remember...

- The Figure -  
Of my Father...

Standing at the laundry room door,  
Arms wide  
And open  
Waiting for a hug he got every night... even when I was hesitant to give it.

I remember sounds,  
Smells,  
The shirt he wore to meeting  
And the colors of the lollipops I got from the bank tellers that passed us our money  
Through a stupid glass window.

I remember...  
Orange t-shirts,  
Red drawstring bags,  
a smile across his face when he walked through the door even though he secretly hated his job...

I remember infectious laughs  
and the tube they drilled into his side -  
...And I still hear the sound of the garage door closing behind him.

**Second Place: Jamie Hayes—*Unfiltered***

take it off?  
all of it? in public?  
well if you've no reservations  
then I suppose  
I don't mind.  
so you want my nakedness, even with  
eyes averted from shivering splotched gooseflesh.  
sure, I'll disrobe right here,  
slide off the gossamer gown of delusion and misdirection,  
but gosh what will the neighbours think?  
I know what's beneath--  
where horror skulks in the starless shadows and  
the sobbing woman flips the scalpel clever and calm  
that keeps you awake at night--  
but I'm not so sure you do,  
for all your insightful mirage understanding.  
there is no truer mirror than a looking glass,  
and you are a great deal less spotty than  
the one hanging in the bedroom, and still less clear.  
ask and ye shall receive; forgive me  
for I have sinned, but I won't apologise.  
you've gotten the gift of pretty boxed chaos, pandora,  
so when you open it you'd better say thanks.  
this is new art, baby.

**Third Place: Jacques Denault—Modern America**

If there's one thing that I've learned  
It's that we live in a world where the mass media mediates how many people  
Get to see what's going on—from Isis, to E-bola.  
You know, Billy Mays would say in these dark days, "But wait! There's more!"  
Because we forgot to mention the cutthroat execution tactics  
Of Brian Williams. Who got mixed up on his "facts" in order to get viewers.

But, let's face it, it's tough to care  
When we're Eskimos buried in over five feet of snow—  
No! I don't remember moving to Alaska—but, "I can see Russia from my house."  
And there's Putin, putting his Pinocchio nose into Europe's business,  
But you don't want to be on his hit list so  
Go hide in Chernobyl, where the cold wind blows radiation rather than air.

After all, we don't pay attention to cancer when there's the threat of injection.  
The Vexation brought about by the Anti-Vaxxers knows no bounds  
Because they'd rather their kids die of the measles  
Than trust hundreds of years of medical progress,  
Since we're trained to process information with a certain sense of skepticism,  
This socio-economic-socialism is worse for us than prison.

At least in-mates get three meals a day,  
What's that say to the people on the streets  
Who would rather commit a crime than live in poverty?  
Don't you see where we have it wrong? We may be Boston strong,  
But our hands are bound, and our eyes are blind as we close our minds,  
Like the doors we're forced to lock to prevent robbery,

While we stand and watch the global collapse of the bee.  
Pretty soon honey will just be a *sweet* pet-name rather than a spread.  
After all we're already stretched too thin,  
So go to your spin class with your protein shake—like Parkinson's—  
Which is exactly where our research money's not going.  
Now go ahead and rub your magic lamb because I've heard that genies grant wishes,  
While geniuses wish for grants at Apple's bar.

Don't get me wrong, it's great that we've made it this far—but,  
We're still a world away from being able to say that we shot for the moon  
And landed among the stars, like a piece of interstellar dust.  
But it's not so stellar, standing in front of a solar flare, like an EMP.  
Maybe, just maybe, today will finally be the day that the lights all go out,  
And the curtains close, but before that happens—  
Let's all take a moment to learn one thing that no one else knows.

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