



From novels and poetry collections to the university's literary journal, publications coming out of the MFA program are contributing to Boise State's national reputation.

# WRITING ON THE WALL

## MFA Program Gets National Play

By Erin Ryan

**MARK TWAIN PUT IT THIS WAY: "EDUCATION CONSISTS MAINLY OF WHAT WE HAVE UNLEARNED."**

This is especially true for writers who rush into the craft with too many words and not enough scarred-up wisdom. Some are born great, but even they could benefit from spending a few years in a kindred community talking about how to be better.

"A lot of what makes it successful is not statistically quantifiable. It's more about the experience, a process of osmosis," says Martin Corless-Smith, a poetry professor and director of Boise State's Master of Fine Arts program in creative writing. "As an MFA student, being a writer becomes your real life."

The real lives of talented MFA students, faculty and alumni continue to draw the national spotlight. Ranked by The Huffington Post among the top 25 under-rated programs in the country along with

others at Cornell, Johns Hopkins and Purdue, Boise State's MFA program was praised last year for its small size, enviable setting, robust support for students and "extremely strong" faculty in both fiction and poetry.

"Everyone here is a productive writer, and seeing that life as a possibility often is quite a revelation for students," says Corless-Smith.

Boise State's MFA faculty is far from being merely productive. Recent accolades include high praise for books by fiction professors Brady Udall, Mitch Wieland and Anthony Doerr, ranging from rankings on national top 10 lists by Publishers Weekly, Entertainment Weekly and Amazon.com to distinctions such as the national Story Prize, Idaho Book of the Year Award, and New York Times Notable Book.

Corless-Smith and fellow poetry professor Janet Holmes are equally distinguished by commendations from esteemed peers, critics, literary magazines and blogs. Corless-Smith recently was designated one of six

favorite contemporary poets by the Boston Review's venerable poetry editor, while Holmes' latest collection was a small press bestseller and "best of" honoree in the premier poetry magazine Coldfront.

Holmes' leadership of the university's Ahsahta Press has established it as one of the best publishers of contemporary poetry in the country. Thanks to her shrewd author selections over the years, the press recently received a nod from The Atlantic as one of 10 favorites.

Boise State's literary journal, The Idaho Review, has comparably prospered under Wieland's guidance as founding editor. Featured stories have been reprinted in prestigious anthologies such as "The Best American Short Stories," "Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards," "The Pushcart Prize: Best of the Small Presses," "New Stories from the South" and "Best of the West."

Some of these anthologies have featured the work of Boise State MFA graduates. The quality of the program is reflected in their achievements, from JR Walsh

winning Esquire magazine's fiction contest to Karena Youtz sharing her poetry on PBS NewsHour and Alan Heathcock's debut story collection earning a starred review from Publishers Weekly and inclusion in the Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers series.

Heathcock, who teaches writing in Boise State's Department of English, says the power of the MFA program lies in its community environment, the freedom it affords to learn and unlearn.

"The professors are setting the highest of standards and diligently teaching to those standards, but also encouraging students to encourage each other toward the best possible version of themselves," Heathcock says. "For me, that's all my students need to know about the business of being a writer."

Learn more about the MFA program at <http://www.boisestate.edu/english/mfa/>.



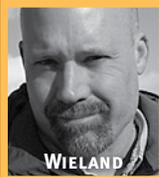
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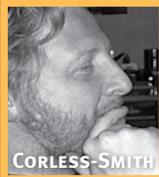
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## Faculty Spotlight

### BOISE STATE'S MFA COMMUNITY IS EXPANDING THE LITERARY MAP IN IDAHO'S CAPITAL CITY AND BEYOND. HERE IS A SAMPLING OF RECENT FACULTY ACHIEVEMENTS:



WIELAND



CORLESS-SMITH



DOERR

- **Brady Udall's** novel, "The Lonely Polygamist," made several national top 10 fiction lists in 2010, including Publishers Weekly (No. 9) and Amazon.com (No. 10), as well as being named No. 1 by Entertainment Weekly.
- "THE MS OF MY KIN," the latest collection by **Janet Holmes**, was a 2009 bestseller for international publisher Shearsman and for Small Press Distribution.
- **Mitch Wieland's** 2009 novel, "God's Dogs," was Idaho Book of the Year, a John Gardner Fiction Book Award finalist and a selectee for the "Best of the West" prize anthology.
- A new collection by **Martin Corless-Smith**, "English Fragments: A Brief History of the Soul," prompted longtime Boston Review poetry editor Timothy Donnelly to name him one of six favorite contemporary poets.
- Visiting professor **Anthony Doerr's** latest book, "Memory Wall," was named one of the best of 2010 by Amazon.com (No. 9), The Boston Globe (No. 3) and The Oregonian (No. 6), as well as being a New York Times Notable Book and winner of the \$20,000 Story Prize.
- **Brady Udall** became Idaho's writer-in-residence in 2010, an honor awarded every three years by the Idaho Commission on the Arts. Udall is the fifth with Boise State ties since 1990.

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