Hungry for Information: An Interview with Lynn Lurie
“Literacy is like nutrition,” says Etruscan author Lynn Lurie (Quick Kills, 2014), “it's essential.”

Lurie is one of many Etruscan authors who have participated in the Etruscan outreach program. The outreach program, developed by Executive Director Phil Brady, was created to promote literacy in underserved communities. Within the central hubs of Youngstown, Ohio and Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania the program has established “Little Free Libraries,” which circulate free books among these communities.

As part of the outreach program, Lurie and other Etruscans teach from their novels, memoirs and books of poetry at high schools and nearby prisons in Ohio. Etruscan Press provides a book to each student, funded through grants and partner donations.

“It’s a life-changing experience to give your book to someone who, you fear, may never have owned a book,” says Lurie. “It isn’t just the gift of the book, it is engaging the students, giving them the experience of asking and answering questions relating to the text, or the process of writing, and listening to their ideas,” she says.

Lurie notes that teaching high school students is different from teaching at the prison. “It appears as if school has mostly been a burden to high school students. It is especially difficult to witness this because they’re so young. It’s difficult to get them on board because they are uncomfortable participating. Anything that can move the conversation forward is valuable.” The prisoners, on the other hand, are “captivated,” according to Lurie. She says, “They are hungry for information. They are extremely close readers, and are brimming with thoughts and ideas.”

Lurie says that working in the program is bittersweet, “because you feel the weight of what’s missing in their world.” She also serves as a mentor for Girls Write Now, which is a mentoring program that matches girls with professional women writers, in New York City, where she lives. The mentees of Girls Write Now are high school students who apply to the program, and are selected based according to their talent and need.

In contrast, the students at Girls Write Now are different from the students in the Youngstown high schools. Lurie says, “Even though they’re probably from similar backgrounds economically, the students at Girls Write Now are in a better position because they know that they have something valuable to contribute.” She says that in Youngstown, it feels as if the students “have little faith in themselves” and it is “devastating to see young kids who have no confidence in their abilities.” For Lurie, this is why outreach is so valuable. “It reaches kids who deserve to have hope, and who need to know they too can tell stories, and that their stories are important.”

Lurie believes that Etruscans benefit from the outreach program just as
much as the students. “It’s really rewarding to give your book to different kinds of readers because you learn so much about your own writing.”

Lurie says she writes to understand, but also to connect to others. She says of the class at the prison, “This is why I write books; it’s a real link to the world. To have someone read your book so thoroughly, and to comment with such insight is an author’s dream.”

Lurie believes if there were more opportunities such as the Etruscan outreach program, and Girls Write Now, more authors would participate. She says, “We need more outreach programs to promote literacy, and bring the gift of reading to others.”

Emily Leonick served as an editorial associate at Etruscan Press during the Spring 2016 semester. She received her B.A. in English from Wilkes University in May 2016.

For more information about Etruscan's outreach program, please watch our video.

New Releases from Etruscan

The Dog Looks Happy Upside Down by Meg Pokrass

We are pleased to have Meg Pokrass, a leading author of flash fiction, join the brigade of authors at Etruscan Press. *The Dog Looks Happy Upside Down* is a collection of flash fiction composed of 49 stories. Touching on the themes of love, lust, marriage, relationships, and longing, Pokrass invites readers to enter the intimate worlds of her characters, and seamlessly transitions from one scenario to another. Bob Hicok, author of *Elegy Owed*, says, “Time after time these little stories read big.” Her stories delve into familiar moments that may seem insignificant, but are actually momentous in the process of painting a bigger picture. Pokrass makes the reader contemplate the inner workings of the everyday person, while also asking them to examine their own lives.
Each story is enchanting; some full of melancholy, others bewitching, and some laden with sincere happiness.

*A Heaven Wrought of Iron: Poems From the Odyssey* by D. M. Spitzer

We are pleased to welcome D. M. Spitzer to the Etruscan Press family. His collection, *A Heaven Wrought of Iron: Poems from the Odyssey* weaves together Spitzer’s own voice, and the translated Greek text of Homer’s *Odyssey*, bringing forth the rigidities, dispositions, and culture of the Bronze Aegean civilization. The collection unfolds within the framework of the ancient epic, causing Dan Beachy-Quick (author of *A Brighter Word Than Bright: Keats at Work*) to say “Spitzer’s voice is one that, like the center figure of nesting doll, finds itself enclosed in larger voices—the air a voice, the sky a voice, and the heavens, too.” *A Heaven Wrought of Iron: Poems from the Odyssey* explores the conceptualization of abstract characters in the original Greek text, as well as the tensions of unity, plurality, identity and oblivion, human and divine.

**Etruscan Prize: Creative Nonfiction Takes the Cake**
Each year, we ask students in the Wilkes University Graduate Creative Writing Program to send us their best page—any genre—that sings. This year, poet Tim Seibles (Fast Animal, 2012) judged the Etruscan Prize, which was awarded to M.A. student, Jeremiah Blue. Blue’s untitled piece, which was a work of memoir, captivated Seibles. He said, “What set this work apart, for me, was the rich sense of detail and the creeping intensity with which the author presented this character's desperation. I didn’t see the to be or not to be moment coming until it was suddenly right there! It was like being blindsided in the best readerly way.”

Managing editor Bill Schneider and production editor Heather A. Taylor presented Blue with his award in Mesa, AZ in early July.

Staff Transition

On June 1, we welcomed Heather A. Taylor to the Etruscan Press family. Taylor serves as the production editor, and works closely with authors, designers, copy editors and proofreaders to ensure each manuscript is
Taylor grew up in rural, Southeastern Ohio surrounded by books, family, and stories of coal mining and farming. Taylor now lives in the hills of West Virginia where she directs a college learning center, advises a fraternity, mentors students, and teaches. She finds time to write in the wee hours of the morning and at halftime of sporting events. Taylor received her Bachelor of Arts in English with a certification in English education Summa Cum Laude from Bethany College (WV). She also received her M.A. and M.F.A. in creative writing from Wilkes University.

Returning this semester is graduate assistant Danielle Watson, who is currently working towards her M.A. in creative nonfiction from Wilkes University. Also joining Etruscan this semester is Pamela Turchin, who is working towards her M.A. in fiction from Wilkes University.

About Etruscan Press:

Housed at Wilkes University and partnering with Youngstown State University, Etruscan is a non-profit literary press working to produce and promote books that nurture the dialogue among genres, cultures, and voices.

For the latest Etruscan events, please visit our website.