

Event Title: Iowa Short Fiction Award Series 50th Anniversary Reading

Event Description:

Since its creation in 1969, the Iowa Short Fiction Award series, juried through the Iowa Writers' Workshop, has awarded the publication of the first fiction books of over sixty-five writers. This reading will bring together current and past winners of the Iowa Short Fiction Award and John Simmons Short Fiction Award in celebration of the series' fiftieth anniversary and the University of Iowa Press's ongoing commitment to elevating the voices of emerging fiction writers.

Event Category: Fiction Readings

Event Organizer: Ashley Wurzbacher

Event Moderator: Ashley Wurzbacher

Event Participants and Short Bios:

Ashley Wurzbacher's debut short story collection, *Happy Like This*, won Iowa's 2019 John Simmons Short Fiction Award. She lives in Birmingham, Alabama and teaches creative writing at the University of Montevallo. She is at work on a novel.

Allegra Hyde's first book, *Of This New World*, won the John Simmons Short Fiction Award. She is the recipient of three Pushcart Prizes, as well as fellowships from the Lucas Artists Program, the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and the Fulbright Commission. She teaches at the University of Houston.

Ruvanee Pietersz Vilhauer won the Iowa Short Fiction Award in 2018 and the Commonwealth Short Story Competition in 2004. Her story collection, *The Water Diviner and Other Stories*, was published in 2018. Her novel, *The Mask Collectors*, is forthcoming in June 2019.

Anthony Varallo is the author of a novel, *The Lines*, as well as four short story collections, including *This Day in History*, winner of the John Simmons Short Fiction Award. He teaches in the MFA Program in Creative Writing at the College of Charleston, where he is the fiction editor of Crazyhorse.

Emily Wortman-Wunder is an award-winning essayist and fiction writer who has published in Kenyon Review, Creative Nonfiction, Nimrod, High Country News, and elsewhere. Her book of stories, *Not a Thing to Comfort You*, won the 2019 Iowa Short Fiction Award.

Outline:

Ashley Wurzbacher (2019 John Simmons Short Fiction Award) will introduce participants and give background on the Iowa Short Fiction Award Series, which includes the Iowa Short Fiction Award and the John Simmons Short Fiction Award from the University of Iowa Press. She will read from her book, *Happy Like This*.

The characters in *Happy Like This* are smart girls and professional women—social scientists, linguists, speech therapists, plant physiologists, dancers—who search for happiness in roles and relationships that are often unscripted or unconventional. In the midst of their ambivalence about marriage, monogamy, and motherhood and their struggles to accept and love their bodies, they look to other women for solidarity, stability, and validation. Sometimes they find it; sometimes they don't. Spanning a wide range of distinct perspectives, voices, styles, and settings, the ten shimmering stories in *Happy Like This* offer deeply felt, often humorous meditations on the complexity of choice and the ambiguity of happiness.

Allegra Hyde (2016 John Simmons Short Fiction Award) will read from her book, *Of This New World*.

Of This New World offers a menagerie of utopias: real, imagined, and lost. Starting with the Garden of Eden and ending in a Mars colony, the stories wrestle with conflicts of idealism and practicality, communal ambition and individual kink. Stories jump between genres—from historical fiction to science fiction, realism to fabulism—but all ask that fundamental human question: is paradise really so impossible?

Ruvanee Pietersz Vilhauer (2018 Iowa Short Fiction Award) will read from her book, *The Water Diviner and Other Stories*.

In this thought-provoking collection, Sri Lankan immigrants grapple with events that challenge perspectives and alter lives. A volunteer faces memories of wartime violence when she meets a cantankerous old lady on a Meals on Wheels route. A lonely widow obsessed with an impending apocalypse meets an oddly inspiring man. A maidservant challenges class divisions when she becomes an American professor's wife. An angry tenant fights suspicion when her landlord is burgled. Hardened inmates challenge a young jail psychiatrist's competence. A father wonders whether to expose his young son's bully at a basketball game. A student facing poverty courts a benefactor. And in the depths of an isolated Wyoming winter, a woman tries to resist a con artist. These and other tales explore the immigrant experience with a piercing authenticity.

Antony Varallo (2005 John Simmons Short Fiction Award) will read from his latest novel, *The Lines*, also from the University of Iowa Press.

Set in the summer of 1979, when America was running out of gas, *The Lines* tells the story of a family of four—the mother, the father, the girl, and the boy—in the first months of a marital separation. Through alternating perspectives, we follow the family as they explore new territory, new living arrangements, and new complications. The mother returns to school. The father moves into an apartment. The girl squares off with her mother, while the boy struggles to make sense of the world. *The Lines* explores the way we are all tied to one another, and how all experience offers the possibility of love and connection as much as loss and change.

Emily Wortman-Wunder (2019 Iowa Short Fiction Award) will read from her book, *Not a Thing to Comfort You*.

From a lightning death on an isolated peak to the intrigues of a small town orchestra, the glimmering stories in this debut collection explore how nature—damaged, fierce, and unpredictable—worms its way into our lives. Here moths steal babies, a creek seduces a lonely suburban mother, and the priorities of a passionate conservationist are thrown into confusion after the death of her son. Over and over, the natural world reveals itself to be unknowable, especially to the people who study it most. In the words of a wildlife biologist, “You can take all of your measurements, but I don’t think they ever really tell you about what you need to know about the forest.”