

A Short Biography

Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1949, Meryllyn Simonds spent her childhood in Brazil and was educated at the University of Western Ontario. As an award-winning freelance journalist, she published nine nonfiction books and scores of magazine articles on subjects ranging from the environment to soap-making, from art and architecture to war. From 1987 -1991 she was an associate editor at *Harrowsmith Magazine* and has been a contributing editor at *Harrowsmith*, *Equinox*, *Canadian Geographic* and *Saturday Night Magazines*.

With the release of *The Convict Lover*, published by Macfarlane, Walter & Ross in 1996, Simonds became nationally known as a literary writer, exploring the zone where fact and fiction meet. *The Convict Lover* was nominated for the Governor General's Literary Award for Nonfiction and was chosen as one of the top ten nonfiction books of 1996 by the *Globe and Mail*, *Quill & Quire Magazine*, *Elm Street Magazine* and *Maclean's*. It was translated into Chinese, Japanese, and German, and in 1997, was adapted for the stage by the Kingston Summer Theatre Festival, premiering at Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto in the fall of 1998. It is now considered a classic in Canadian creative nonfiction.

The Lion in the Room Next Door, Simonds's collection of linked, autobiographical stories, was published in Canada by McClelland & Stewart in 1999 to enthusiastic reviews and like *The Convict Lover*, became a national bestseller. The following year, it was published by Bloomsbury in England, by G.P. Putnam's Sons in the United States and by btb in Germany.

The Holding, published as McClelland & Stewart's lead fiction title in the spring of 2004, is Simonds's first novel. On the Canadian Booksellers' Association bestseller list for five months, it received unanimously favourable reviews. In the fall of 2005 it was published in the United States, where it was reviewed enthusiastically in the *New York Times* and selected as an "Editor's Choice." The novel was published in Germany in 2007.

In 2005, her short story "Miss You Already" was published in Germany, the Netherlands, and Canada, where it was nominated for a National Magazine Award. Her short fiction has been anthologized internationally and was recently included in a special issue of *Journal of the Americas* on Canadian literature and art. She is currently working on a collection of short fiction titled *The Paradise Project* as well as a novel, *C*. She has edited two anthologies: *A Literary Companion to Gardens* (2008) and *A Literary Companion to the Night* (2009). In the fall of 2006, she was writer-in-residence at Green College, University of British Columbia, where she taught online courses for Booming Ground, the noncredit division of UBC's Creative Writing Programme. She also teaches creative writing at Kwantlen University and privately mentors writers working on both fiction and creative nonfiction projects. In 2009 she was writer in residence in Whistler, British Columbia. She also writes a monthly books column in the Kingston Whig Standard and is Artistic Director of Kingston WritersFest. Her collection of literary garden essays, *A New Leaf: Growing with my Garden*, will be published by DoubleDay in March, 2011. The travel memoir she wrote with her husband, Wayne Grady, *Breakfast at the Exit Café: Travels in America* will be released by Greystone in September 2010.

Meryllyn Simonds lives with writer and translator Wayne Grady on a small acreage north of Kingston, Ontario.

Curriculum Vitae

Education

1971 Bachelor of Arts Degree in English & Drama, University of Western Ontario

Writing Experience

1979-present Fifteen books, including nonfiction, four literary works, one stage adaptation, several stories and essays, and as editor, two literary anthologies

2009- Weekly literary essay posted on her website, www.frugalistagardener.com

2009- Monthly book column, AboutBooks, in the *Kingston Whig-Standard*

1988-present Book reviewer for *Montreal Gazette*, *Globe & Mail*, *Ottawa Citizen*

1977-present Freelance magazine journalist, publishing over 100 articles in *Saturday Night*, *Equinox*, *Harrowsmith*, *Canadian Geographic*, *Gourmet* magazines

Awards/Citations

2006 Finalist, National Magazine Award for Fiction

2005 Editor's Choice, *New York Times: The Holding*

1997 Winner, Talking Book of the Year Award for Nonfiction: *The Convict Lover*

1997 Finalist, Canadian Booksellers' Association Author of the Year Award

1997 Finalist, Arthur Ellis Award for Nonfiction: *The Convict Lover*

1996 Best Book of the Year *Globe & Mail*, *Maclean's*, *Quill & Quire*, *Elm Street* magazines: *The Convict Lover*

1996 Finalist, Governor General's Literary Award for Nonfiction: *The Convict Lover*

1996 Winner, Connaught Medal for Excellence in Health Research Journalism.

1995 Finalist, Science in Society Book Award

1990 Winner, Canadian Science Writers Association, Science & Health Award

1989 Winner, Greg Clark Award for Outdoor Writing

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Editorial Experience*

- 1992-1993 Founding senior editor, *This Country Canada*
- 1988-1993 Assistant editor, Camden House Publishing Ltd.
- 1987-1991 Associate editor, *Harrowsmith* magazine
- 1979-1995 Freelance editor, magazines and books

Professional Experience*

- 2009-present Artistic Director, Kingston WritersFest
- 2009 Writer-in-residence, Whistler, British Columbia
- 2006 Writer-in-residence, Green College, University of British Columbia
- 1996-present More than 200 readings across Canada including the Montreal, Ottawa, Calgary and Vancouver writers' festivals; keynote speaker for several provincial and national organizations; guest lecturer at Carleton University, Queen's university, university of British Columbia, State University of New York (SUNY).
- 1995-present Juror for the Trillium Book Award, Tim Findley Award, Bronwen Wallace Award, Danuta Gleed Award, Malahat Review Prize, Saskatchewan Book Awards, Alberta Book Awards, QSpel Book Awards (Quebec), Ottawa Arts Awards, National Magazine Awards, Canada Council Explorations and Emerging Writers grants, Ontario Arts Council Works-in-Progress grants.
- 1995 Contributor, *Kingston Radio Writer's Project*

Teaching Experience*

- 2009-present Adjunct Professor, Creative Writing, Kwantlen Polytechnical University
- May 2008- Dec 2009 Instructor, online creative writing courses at Booming Ground, UBC (creative nonfiction and fiction)
- 2006-present Private mentoring with writers completing fiction and creative nonfiction writing projects, as well as manuscript evaluations in both genres
- Feb-March 2006, 07 Instructor, professional development workshop for writers, The Writers' Union of Canada and Human Resources Canada
- 1988-present Instructor, various workshops in both fiction and creative nonfiction offered through the Whistler Writers' Festival, Whitehorse Writers Festival, Yukon; Quebec Federation of Writers; Saskatchewan Writers Guild; Kingston Arts Council, Loyalist College, Belleville, Ontario; Ginger Press, Owen Sound Ontario; Kingston School of Writing, the Kingston Frontenac Library, and the Kingston Writers Festival.

Professional Associations

1987-present Member, The Writer's Union of Canada, serving on the executive of National Council 2008-2010. 1996-1998, creating the Cultural Agenda lobby Committee and serving as its Chair 1997-1999, and serving as Nominating Chair 2000, 2006-2008, Treasurer 2009-2011.

1988-present Member, PEN Canada

1995 Member, Ontario Arts Council Advisory Committee

1994-6 Member, Loyalist College Advisory Board, Print Journalism,.

Grants

2009 Writer in Residence, Whistler, British Columbia

2009 OAC Writers Reserve grant for *The Paradise Project*

2007 OAC Works in Progress Grant for *C*.

2006 Writer in Residence, Green College, UBC

2006 Canada Council B Grant for *C*.

1998 OAC Works in Progress grant for *The Lion in the Room Next Door*

1997 Canada Council B grant for *The Lion in the Room Next Door*

1994 OAC Works in Progress grant for *The Convict Lover*

1991 Canada Council B grant for *The Convict Lover*

1990 OAC Writers Reserve grant for *The Convict Lover*

1989 Canada Council Explorations grant for *The Convict Lover*

List of Publications

Literary Fiction

The Holding,
McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, Canada, 2004.
W.W. Norton, New York, 2005.
btb Verlag, Munich, Germany, 2006

The Lion in the Room Next Door,
McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, Canada, 1999.
Bloomsbury, London, England, 2000.
G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, U.S.A., 2000.
btb Verlag, Munich, Germany, 2000.

Creative Nonfiction

Breakfast at the Exit Café,
Greystone Books, 2010

The Convict Lover,
Macfarlane, Walter & Ross, Toronto, Canada, 1996.
Sitak Publishing, Taiwan, China, 1997.
Bungeishunju, Tokyo, Japan, 1997.
Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, Munich, Germany, 2000.

Anthologies (as Editor)

Gardens: A Literary Companion
Edited and with an introduction by Merilyn Simonds
Greystone Books (A division of Douglas & McIntyre), Vancouver, 2008

Night: A Literary Companion
Edited and with an introduction by Merilyn Simonds
Greystone Books (A division of Douglas & McIntyre), Vancouver, 2009

History

The Valour and the Horror (co-author), HarperCollins, 1991.

Science/Children's

Fit to Drink, an Earthcare Book, Greenwood, Toronto, 1995.

Practical Nonfiction

The Games Treasury, Chapters Publishing, Vermont, 1993. (*The New Games Treasury*, 1997.)
The Harrowsmith Salad Garden (co-author), Camden House, 1992.
A Chronicle of Our House, Camden House Publishing, 1988, 1994.
Home Playgrounds, Camden House Publishing, 1987.

Sunwings, Camden House Publishing, 1985.
Canoecraft (co-author), Camden House Publishing, 1983, 2000.
The Art of Soapmaking, Camden House Publishing, 1979.

Anthologies (as Contributor)

Literature & Arts of the Americas: Review 76 (Contemporary Canadian Writing and Arts). ed. Sylvia Soderlind, Routledge, 2008.

Een Goed Verhaal, ed by Lidewijde Paris, Uigeverij De Arbeiderspers, Amsterdam, 2007.

Seventeen Women Undress a Man: International Short Fiction, ed. by Regina Kammerer, btb Verlag, Munich, 2005.

Going Some Place: Creative Nonfiction Across Canada, ed. by Lynne Van Luven, Coteau Books, Regina, 2000.

Writing Home: A PEN Canada Anthology, ed. by Constance Rooke, McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 1997.

Living in Harmony: Nature Writing by Women in Canada, ed. A. Lebowitz, Orca Books, Vancouver, 1996.

Bright Stars, Dark Trees, Clear Water, ed. Wayne Grady, David Godine Publishers, Boston, 1996.

Treasures of the Place: Three Centuries of Nature Writing in Canada, ed. W. Grady, Douglas & McIntyre, Vancouver, 1992.

Gallant Beasts and Monsters, ed. Elizabeth Harrington, Buschlen Mowatt Publishing Ltd., Vancouver, 1992.

Literary Magazines

"Miss You Already" (short story) in *Walrus* magazine, Toronto, November, 2005, and in *Vrij Nederland*, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, May 2006.

"Liars and Damned Liars" in *Brick Magazine*, May 1997. An essay on creative nonfiction and the writing of *The Convict Lover*.

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Magazine Journalism

A freelance magazine writer since 1979, I have contributed dozens of feature articles to *Harrowsmith*, *Equinox*, *Canadian Geographic* and *Saturday Night* magazines, including profiles, travel memoirs and articles in the fields of health, science, nature, food, art and architecture. For several years I worked as a *Harrowsmith* editor and columnist, responsible for energy, environment and housing. At present, I regularly reviews books for the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Montreal Gazette*.

Collaborations

"Holofernes" in collaboration with Ian Carr-Harris, in *Telling Stories, Secret Lives* an exhibit of contemporary narrative written and installation art, Agnes Etherington Art Gallery, Kingston, ON, January 15-April 30, 2006.

Quotes from selected reviews

The Holding:

"A dense and complex novel . . . as engrossing as the most intensely crafted psychological drama . . . compelling, hypnotic."

— Aritha van Herk, *Globe and Mail*

"Beautiful and unsettling . . . one woman calling to another across the years. A lush book, not to be read in a hurry."

— Audrey Thomas, *National Post*

The Lion in the Room Next Door:

"Marilyn Simonds is an accomplished alchemist . . . It is the brilliance of her supple and sculptural prose — both startling and lulling, elliptical and straightforward, nuanced and bold — that elevates what she she has dreamed of her life to the status of art."

— *National Post*

"Beautifully wrought, emotionally complex, satisfying fiction. Simonds may be the next Alice Munro."

— *Kirkus Reviews* (U.S. starred review)

"The exactitude of description, the shocks of colour and imagery and the rhythmic, sonorous prose are an intoxication, a fierce and compelling joy . . . Here is a writer of powerful talent . . ."

— *Independent on Sunday* (U.K.)

The Convict Lover:

"A tour de force . . . the quality that makes *The convict Lover* soar off the page is Simonds's ability to probe into the psyches of real people, and to find there imaginative truth."

— Sandra Gwyn, *The Globe and Mail*

"This is a beautifully controlled story that makes speculative use of intriguing materials. Simonds provocatively pushes the genre to its limits."

— Jury citation, 1996 Governor General Literary Awards