

Q&A with Pushcart Prize nominee Mylène Dressler

BY BRITTANY MURDOCK
STAFF WRITER

As I make my way into Archdale Hall, I am greeted by a tall, dark-haired, ravishing woman. Her arms coil around me as she embraces me. Her bubbly personality and radiating smile brings warmth to the room, and I find myself feeding off of her happiness.

Visiting Assistant Professor of English Mylène Dressler has recently had her novella "The Wedding of Anna F." published in the magazine "Big Fiction." She has also been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, which acknowledges the best writing that appears in small presses and literary journals.

I had a chance to sit down with Mylène to discuss her recent achievements.

Murdock: How did you find your way to Guilford?

Dressler: For many years, I was a professional ballet dancer, and it was a wonderful career. It is a short-lived career, and I always knew I wanted to either be a writer or spend a lot of time around books.

Even before I stopped dancing, I started taking college classes. When I retired from dancing, I moved directly into college and found that it wasn't that big of a leap.

I studied literature and got my Ph.D. I figured out that writing is very much like dancing. It's all about rhythm, pacing, structure, choreography and holding an audience and carrying them along. Once I realized that, I understood that move from dance to literature. It was not a difficult transition.

M: What is the novella about?

D: It's about an elderly Jewish woman who

believes she is Anna Frank. It's about a day in her life when she is being interviewed by a young graduate student who is studying delusion, and as the story unfolds, it becomes very much about the relationship between these two. The graduate student is Palestinian, and as their conversation progresses, it goes into some charged places as these two people try to work out a narrative together.

I found it a very challenging book to write, and in some ways an unsettling book to write, because it goes in many unexpected directions. Before coming to Guilford, I was about to give up on the story because I found it so difficult to write and understand the story. I found that being in this vibrant, creative place and being around wonderful people really helped me move forward and understand the story. I owe Guilford and the community a debt of gratitude for creating a place like this in which I could discover and understand this work.

M: What exactly is a novella?

D: This is an 80-page novella, but it is distinct from a novel. It's shorter than a novel and also tends to be more focused. It doesn't tend to have subplots and not a lot of minor characters. A novella tends to focus on major characters. A good way to think about a novella is as a long story.

M: What inspired you to write "The Wedding of Anna F."?

D: I worked on this for a number of years, but this story began like a lot of my others stories, with being haunted by something. It's a feeling of being followed by a voice inside your head.

In this case, I was haunted by a voice. I woke up one morning and started to hear this voice

in my head and realized quickly it was the voice of an elderly Anna Frank.

I was confused and unsettled by the idea of writing a story from that voice because Anna Frank had died in the Holocaust, and I was not interested in resuscitating her. This voice wouldn't leave me alone, and over time I realized that it was the voice of an elderly Jewish woman who thinks she is Anna Frank. Once I understood that, I was able to start writing.

M: How does your usual writing process work?

D: My writing process is rather improvisational because I do start out with a haunting of some sort. I don't outline stories. I just start writing, and then I see where the story takes me. I try to understand the story and characters as I move along. The reason I do that is partly because it's the only way I know how to write. I long ago decided that if I didn't know what happened next in the story, the reader wouldn't either. This helps me create tension, surprise and unpredictability in the narrative.

I write on the computer and tend to write for about four hours a day. I write on the weekends or before class, but most of my writing gets done during the summer or over Christmas break.

M: What's the hardest thing about being a writer?

D: The hardest thing is the work that you produce never matches the glory and sublimity of the thing that you imagined in your head. There is always a sense that the thing on the paper doesn't quite measure up to the dream. As a writer, you have to get used to



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that distance, the sense that what lives in your head is going to be transformed as it comes down onto the page.

M: How do you feel about this nomination?

D: I'm really excited about this, considering it's the first time I've received a Pushcart nomination. I am very honored by the nomination. I think writers are only human, and we like recognition. We like reward — we don't write for that reason, but it's awfully good when it comes.

I didn't know that the Pushcart nomination was something that I wanted until it finally came, and it was something that I was secretly longing for. It means a lot — it means recognition by the community of writers and editors that work in small presses and the world of literary journals. It means a great deal.

Dorm-made eggnog: the gentleman's choice

BY DAVID PFERDEKAMPER
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Hey, folks. It's that magical time of year when grocery stores start to stock what they ought to be carrying year-round: eggnog. Well, this year, why not stick it to the grocery stores and make your own 'nog?

Here's an easy-to-make recipe for homemade eggnog. Do it right, and not only will it taste better than the store-bought junk, but you'll be able to make it whenever you want.



Ingredients:
1/3 cup of sugar w/ 1 tbs. in reserve, 4 pasteurized grade-A eggs, 1 cup heavy cream, 2 cups of milk, 1 tsp. ground nutmeg, 4 ounces of spiced rum (if over 21)

*A note before we begin: there is always some risk when consuming raw eggs. However, using pasteurized eggs significantly reduces your chances of illness, and introducing alcohol into the mixture will make it safer still — there are no known pathogens that can survive in alcohol. Ultimately, your chances of getting sick are slim to none, but if you're worried about that, recipes that involve cooking the eggs are just one Google search away.

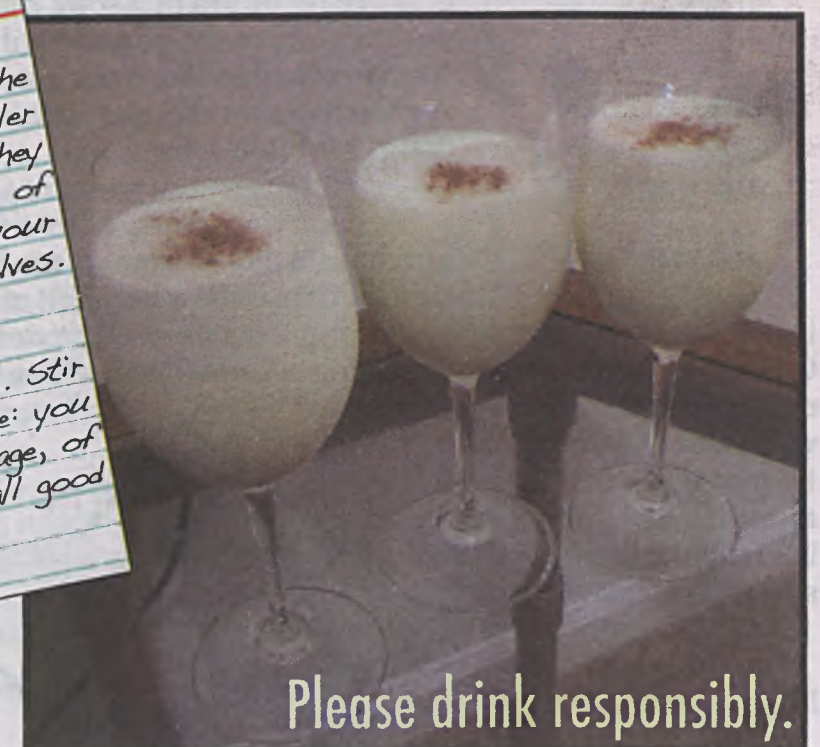
STEP 1:
Separate the egg yolks from the egg whites. Put the yolks into a bigger bowl and the whites into a smaller bowl. Put the whites aside and beat the yolks until they lighten in color. You want them to be about the color of pineapple juice. Once the color is light enough, add your 1/3-cup of sugar and beat it until the sugar dissolves.

STEP 2:
Add the milk, cream, nutmeg and rum to your yolks. Stir until all the ingredients are well-combined. One note: you can use other liquors (if you're of legal drinking age, of course). Dark or gold rum, bourbon or brandy are all good choices. Spiced rum is what I think works best.

STEP 3:
Now go back to your egg whites. Take your beater and beat them to soft peaks (this is where an electric beater becomes a lifesaver). Add the remaining tablespoon of sugar and beat the whites to stiff peaks.

STEP 4:
Whisk the two mixtures together. You'll have to mix it well because the liquid and the foam like to separate. Chill your eggnog before serving.

*Do note that the foam likes to separate from the rest of the mixture. You can stir it all back together, but the foam also makes a wonderful dip for sugar cookies. Enjoy your 'nog however you want — you deserve it.



Please drink responsibly.