



Faculty Research Grant Proposal  
Cover Sheet  
**DUE: November 7, 2016**

<b>Name:</b>	Laura Bylenok	<b>Funding Period:</b>	July 1- June 30
<b>Department:</b>	English, Linguistics, and Communication	<b>IRB Required</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Project Title:</b>	Homologues: Poems	<b>Date Submitted for review:</b>	
<b>Abstract (250 words maximum)</b>			
<p>This proposal is to complete the manuscript Homologues, which is a full-length book of poems informed by the overlap between scientific inquiry and lyric poetry, perception and imagination, and reason and faith. The poems engage with the concerns of perception and identity through the mechanisms of neurochemistry, genetics, addiction, and violence. As a whole, the manuscript will explore the permeability of the body with the world, and challenge the divisions between mind and body, subject and object, self and other. By taking on a diverse array of voices and experiences, these poems weave elements of fairy tales alongside family histories and rework them to explore human and nonhuman connection and perception. Poems incorporate the language and structures of genetics to explore human connection, inheritance through genetic and epigenetic codes, and the cyclical patterns of individual, family, and cultural memory.</p>			
Budget Request: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Summer Stipend Only <input type="checkbox"/> Summer Stipend with expenses <input type="checkbox"/> Project Expenses Only <input type="checkbox"/> Fall Course Release <input type="checkbox"/> Spring Course Release			
Simultaneous Applications <input type="checkbox"/> Internal Grant <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> External Grant			
Previous FRG Awards: <input type="checkbox"/> awarded 2013-14 <input type="checkbox"/> awarded 2014-15 <input type="checkbox"/> awarded 2015-16			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By checking here I indicate that I understand that my application will not be considered if the office of the dean cannot verify the receipt of a final report for a previously funded faculty development research grant.			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By checking here I indicate that I have followed the guidelines ( <a href="http://cas.umw.edu/dean/guidelines-for-faculty-research-grant-applications/">http://cas.umw.edu/dean/guidelines-for-faculty-research-grant-applications/</a> ) and that my application consists of the following eight elements: project description, project significance, timeline and logistics, results, documentation, budget, simultaneous applications, and supporting materials.			
<b>SIGNATURES:</b>			
Applicant:		Date:	11/7/2016
Department Chair:		Date:	Nov. 7, 2016

**Laura Bylenok**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**English, Linguistics, and Communication**  
**Faculty Research Grant Proposal**

## **Homologues: Poems**

### **Project Description**

This proposal is to complete the manuscript *Homologues*, which is a full-length book of poems informed by the overlap between scientific inquiry and lyric poetry, perception and imagination, and reason and faith. The poems engage with the concerns of perception and identity through the mechanisms of neurochemistry, genetics, addiction, and violence. At the time of this application, I have finished one quarter of the book manuscript, including a structural layout and drafts of several poems in each section. The Faculty Research Grant would provide support for the writing of two central cycles of poems and the writing of remaining poems to complete the manuscript.

As a whole, the manuscript will explore the permeability of the body with the world, and challenge the divisions between mind and body, subject and object, self and other. By taking on a diverse array of voices and experiences, these poems weave elements of fairy tales alongside family histories and rework them to explore human and nonhuman connection and perception. Poems incorporate the language and structures of genetics to explore human connection, inheritance through genetic and epigenetic codes, and the cyclical patterns of individual, family, and cultural memory.

The title points to the book's themes through several meanings of the word *homologue*. First, and in general, a homologue is something that corresponds to another. More specifically, in biology, homologous parts are of similar structure and evolutionary origin but not the same in function: for example, a bird's wing, a cat's leg, and a human arm are all homologous. Mammalian pelvises are homologous to certain vestigial bones in snakes. A bone in the human ear is homologous to the jawbone in fish. In each of these cases, the similarity of structure points back to a common ancestor. The commonality is important because it already begins to implicate one subject—one animal—with all others. Additionally, in genetics, *homologs* are pairs of chromosomes: in every cell, we contain one set of chromosomes from a mother, and one set from a father—together forming a set of homologous pairs. During meiosis, which is the splitting of a cell into multiple gametes or sex cells, the homologous pairs align along an axis and then split apart.

This is the moment of origin for the book: the generative split, in other words the moment that the sex cell is defined through loss. The idea of a generative loss presents a paradox, and I begin there. I take the physical process—a cellular and genetic process—as a metaphor for the creation of the subject, and in this case the speaking subject or subjects of the poems. Implicated in this paradox of generative loss is the formation of identity and selfhood. When we speak of our “selves”—our bodies, our personal and family histories, and our status as subjects—we can define ourselves as much by what we are *not* as what we are. I touch this table—I am not this table. I have my mother's eyes—not my father's. I carry the code for passing along X, not Y. This can apply to history and memory as well, and the choices one makes, bringing the possibility of regret. When a person makes a decision, there is an implicit loss of all other possibilities. At every moment a person does something, the absent *not* doing and all of its absent consequences defines one, too. By bringing

attention to the definitions of self as negative, as absence, the subject becomes a cut-out, existing in relation to everything one is not.

The manuscript is informed and structured by an epigraph from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: "Like the two youths in the fairy-tale, their two horses, and their lilies. They are all in a certain sense one." The four sections of the book are structured around the movement suggested by the passage. The first section, "Some Youth," begins, as I have mentioned, with the process of meiosis. The generative split is critical as an opening image. The crossover that occurs between homologous chromosomes in preparation for such a split becomes a figure through which to view the relations between speakers and other subjects in the book. The second section, "Animal Kingdom," explores the relation between human and nonhuman experience, and draws on the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ideas of subjectivity and vitalism of Henri Bergson, and recent theories by writers such as Jane Bennett and Timothy Morton on the nature of matter and objective affect in ecology and eco-poetics. The third section, "Lilies," focuses on one specific family history, in which a husband convinces his wife to undergo a late-term abortion of a healthy fetus, and the poems in this section explore the violent consequences of that decision on their own and others' lives. The final section of the book, "The Fairy Tale," moves to a realm of the cycles of myth. The deep woods, wolves, and children of fairy tales become the backdrop for innocence and betrayal in the "real" world. In this section, timeless story allows multiple individual experiences *to become* "in a certain sense one." Throughout the manuscript, the ideas and multiple meanings of "certain," "sense," and "one" play against quantum mechanics' uncertainty principle, which limits the precision of perception when observing systems of particles. At the end of the collection, the opening image and moment of meiosis returns to reveal the complementarity of destruction and creation.

### **Project Significance**

This project will result in an original collection of poems and will contribute to the diversity and variety of texts and voices within contemporary poetry. I have published two previous collections, including *a/0*, a hybrid-genre sequence of prose poems, and *Warp*, which won the 2015 T.S. Eliot Prize. My work is informed by the ideas, structures, and language of mathematics and physics, and I experiment with traditional, idiosyncratic, and hybrid forms. Completion of the manuscript *Homologues* will allow an opportunity to develop a new depth of inquiry into the nature of subject as it is caught between the inquiries in the humanities and the sciences, and to explore new material.

My research in planning and beginning writing *Homologues* has centered on the interstices between poetic texts and scientific methodologies and discourses. The critical importance of depth in historical, philosophical, and literary investigations informs my research. I am committed to understanding and to incorporating into my writing the ideas contained in the long history of natural philosophy that has endeavored to investigate, understand, and explain the nature of the world. This includes religious and metaphysical investigations and explanations, as well as the multiple disciplines in the natural sciences: physics (geo- vs. heliocentric models, Newtonian physics, quantum mechanics, string theory), chemistry (pre-Socratic atomism, electromagnetism, atomic and subatomic models), geology, and biology (theory of evolution, physiology, molecular biology, genetics). In my research, I have endeavored to take into consideration the multiple avenues that writers, thinkers, and scientists have taken toward the discovery of truth. The disciplines of science, governed by reason, reveal physical data and information to build clear theoretical models. On the other hand, the metaphysical and philosophical disciplines such as phenomenology seek to understand the experience of the self and the world in a way that cannot be objectively quantified.

I am deeply committed to an investigation of perception and truth in my research, as it informs my poetry. I have investigated the intersections, correspondences, convergences and divergences among scientific discourse, religious and metaphysical investigations, and poetry in order to understand how poetry uses, manipulates, transforms, questions, and otherwise engages with the understanding and explanations of the nature of reality. In line with this, I have a deep interest in the lineage of metaphysical poets that includes George Herbert and John Donne, particularly in how they grapple with an understanding of the physical world, human spirit and consciousness, and religious faith. By studying these poets' use of poetic form and technique, we can gather insights into their and our contemporary understanding of the world. I take as a model Gerard Manley Hopkins, who, as a Jesuit priest and as a poet, struggled to encounter truth in the world and to reconcile in his writings the mechanistic scientific theories of his time with his religious faith—these were inseparable, and through his concepts of *instress* and *inscape* he came to the understanding that “mechanics contains that which is beyond mechanics.” The crossover of texts among multiple and overlapping disciplines has influenced my work and is reflected in the form of the individual poems in the manuscript.

### **Timeline and Logistics**

I will not be teaching during the summer, and I plan to complete the writing of the poems during that period.

#### July-August 2017

Write drafts of poems for two central cycles, consisting of 13 poems in each cycle. Writing includes daily production of drafts of new poems.

Revise drafts. Revision includes substantial structural changes and rewriting each draft multiple times.

#### September-December 2017

Begin submitting individual poems for publication in literary journals.

Write and revise remaining poems to complete manuscript.

Continue structural development and ordering/re-ordering of poems in the manuscript.

Prepare manuscript to send to publishers.

#### January-May 2017

Make initial contact with independent and university book publishers.

Submit final report on project.

### **Results**

I will complete the two central cycles of poems, together consisting of 26 poems, which I will submit to literary journals for individual publication. These cycles, along with additional remaining poems, will constitute the full-length poetry book manuscript *Homologues*, which I plan to send to publishers in the spring of 2018.

### **Documentation**

The following is a partial list of sources consulted in conjunction with the proposed project. Sources include books of poetry, scientific texts, and literary and critical theory.

Beer, Gillian. *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. North Carolina: Duke UP, 2009.

Bergson, Henri, and Mitchell, Arthur. *Creative Evolution*. New York: Holt, 1911.

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- Heisenberg, Werner. *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*. New York: Harper, 2007.
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- Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *Poems and Prose*. New York: Penguin, 1953.
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- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, and Lefort, Claude. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1968.
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- Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2010.
- . *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2007.
- Mukherjee, Siddhartha. *The Gene: An Intimate History*. New York: Scribner, 2016.
- Narby, Jeremy. *Intelligence in Nature: An Inquiry into Knowledge*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2005.
- Oppenheimer, J. Robert. *Atom and Void: Essays on Science and Community*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989.
- Pollan, Michael. *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's Eye View of the World*. New York: Random House, 2001.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, and C. K. Ogden. *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*. London: Routledge, 1955.

### **Budget**

I am requesting a summer stipend of \$4,000. I own or have access to necessary materials and primary and secondary texts for ongoing research in conjunction with writing the poems.

### **Simultaneous Applications**

An application including some poems from the manuscript *Homologues* is under consideration for an Individual Grant for a Creative Writing Fellowship in Poetry through the National Endowment of the Arts. The application was made in February 2016, and the earliest announcement of grant award or rejection is December 2016. The NEA Individual Grant is highly competitive; if it is awarded, it will partially overlap with the Faculty Research Grant period.

### **Supporting Materials**

None.