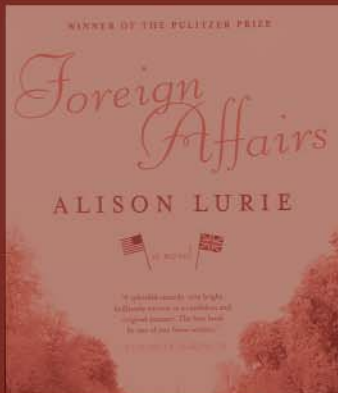


# New York State Author & Poet Awards 2012-2014



Marie Howe

The New York State  
Walt Whitman  
Citation of Merit  
for State Poet



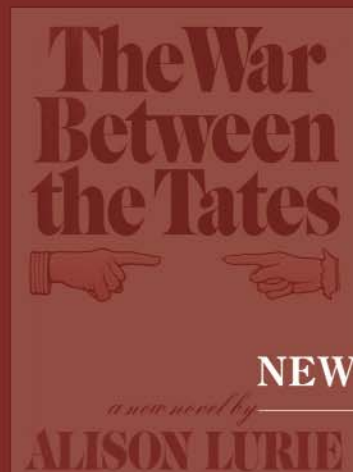
The Good Thief  
Marie Howe

The National Poetry Series • Selected by Margaret Atwood



Alison Lurie

The New York State  
Edith Wharton  
Citation of Merit  
for State Author



NEW YORK STATE **Writers** INSTITUTE  
State University of New York

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THE NEW YORK STATE  
EDITH WHARTON CITATION OF MERIT

**State Author Advisory Panel**

**Dave Eggers**  
**Mary Gordon**  
**Lorrie Moore**

**William Kennedy**  
*chair, ex officio*

THE NEW YORK STATE  
WALT WHITMAN CITATION OF MERIT

**State Poet Advisory Panel**

**Sydney Lea**  
**Philip Levine**  
**Mark Doty**  
**Jean Valentine**

**Donald Faulkner**  
*chair, ex officio*

add thank yous to Gov's office and/or whoever someplace in the program

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## THE EDITH WHARTON CITATION OF MERIT FOR FICTION WRITERS & THE WALT WHITMAN CITATION OF MERIT FOR POETS

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**The New York State Writers Institute**, the center for the literary arts in New York State, was founded in 1983 by novelist William Kennedy. The following year a legislative mandate was signed into law, fully establishing the Institute as a state-sponsored program. In 1985 the governor and state legislature empowered the Institute to award the Edith Wharton Citation of Merit for Fiction Writers (State Author) and the Walt Whitman Citation of Merit for Poets (State Poet) to authors whose career achievements make them deserving of New York State's highest literary honors. Upon the recommendation of two advisory panels of distinguished writers convened under the aegis of the Institute, the governor awards the citations every two years to one fiction writer and one poet of distinction. Each citation carries an honorarium of ten thousand dollars. Throughout their two-year terms the state laureates promote and encourage fiction writing and poetry throughout New York by giving public readings and talks within the state.

**The State Author award** is named for Edith Wharton (1862–1937), widely regarded as one of America's great novelists. Born in New York City into wealth and social status, she exposed in her darkly elegant fiction the hypocrisies and pressures of New York's high society, particularly through her examination of the role and conditions of women. Many of Wharton's works, like *The House of Mirth*, *Ethan Frome*, and *The Age of Innocence*, continue to exert a powerful hold on the popular imagination. In a phrase she herself used to describe successful short fiction, her prose is "a shaft driven straight into the heart of experience."

**The State Poet award** is named for Walt Whitman (1819–1892), the renowned "poet of democracy" born in Huntington, Long Island. More than any American poet of his age, Whitman has had the greatest and most long-lasting influence on American poetry. His masterwork, *Leaves of Grass*, heralded a new age of innovation in poetry, with its absence of rhyme and standard meter and through its abundance of oratorical rhythms. A leading poet of liberal political movements in 19th century Europe, Whitman continues to influence poets around the world.

### PAST RECIPIENTS:

#### State Author

**Mary Gordon**  
2008–2010

**Russell Banks**  
2004–2007

**Kurt Vonnegut**  
2001–2003

**James Salter**  
1998–2000

**Peter Matthiessen**  
1995–1997

**William Gaddis**  
1993–1995

**Norman Mailer**  
1991–1993

**E. L. Doctorow**  
1989–1991

**Grace Paley**  
1986–1988

#### State Poet

**Jean Valentine**  
2008–2010

**Billy Collins**  
2004–2007

**John Ashbery**  
2001–2003

**Sharon Olds**  
1998–2000

**Jane Cooper**  
1995–1997

**Richard Howard**  
1993–1995

**Audre Lorde**  
1991–1993

**Robert Creeley**  
1989–1991

**Stanley Kunitz**  
1986–1988

**Alison Lurie**, is celebrated for witty and satirical novels that examine middle class American life, particularly in small northeastern college towns inspired by Ithaca, New York (where she has lived since 1961), and on the campuses of colleges inspired by Cornell University (where she taught from 1968 until her retirement as the Frederic J. Whiton Professor of American Literature in 1998).

For her nuanced understanding and life-like portrayal of social customs and the relationships between the sexes, Lurie is widely regarded as the Jane Austen of contemporary American letters. Over the course of ten novels and half a century she has held a mirror up to people of her own generation as they navigate their lives.

Born in Chicago in 1926, Lurie grew up in White Plains, New York. She attended Radcliffe College, graduating in 1946 with a B.A. in literature and history. Lurie married in 1948 and spent much of the next decade and a half raising three sons and keeping a home. While her husband pursued his doctorate in English literature at Harvard, she helped found the influential Cambridge literary group, the Poets' Theater. She also wrote short stories and novels, but received numerous rejection slips before publishing her first novel *Love and Friendship* in 1962, at the age of 34.

*Love and Friendship* established the world that Lurie's fiction would inhabit for decades to come: the social environment of men and women living in the orbit of a prestigious college campus, their intellectual pretensions, romantic entanglements, personal blunders and hard-earned wisdom. The book's title, borrowed from a novel by Jane Austen, acknowledges Austen's influence and

announces Lurie's intention to apply Austen's trademark genre, the "comedy of manners," to modern life.

In the mid-1960s, Lurie received fellowships to work on her writing at the Yaddo artists' community in Saratoga Springs, a setting later fictionalized to comic effect in her fifth novel, *Real People* (1969). The London Times reviewer called the book, "Dazzlingly comic. . . . a superb piece of ironic portraiture."

Lurie's 1974 novel, *The War Between the Tates*, established her reputation as a major observer in fiction of the

"You can't write with only the nice part of your character, and only about nice things... I want to use everything, including hate and envy and lust and fear. Not only do I want to—I must. If nothing will finally survive of life except what artists report of it, we have no right to report what we know to be lies."

— Janet Belle Smith, a character in Alison Lurie's novel *Real People*

American experience during an era of rapid cultural change. Set at "Corinth University" (a fictional Cornell in many of her books) during the Vietnam War period, the novel follows the experiences of a professor and his wife as their family is torn apart by midlife crises, experimental lifestyles, generational conflicts and battles between the sexes. In a contemporary New York Times book review, Sara Sanborn hailed it as a classic of its time and place, "a novel not only to read, but to reread for its cool and revealing mastery of a social epoch... a near-perfect comedy of manners and morals to put on the shelf next to *Vanity Fair* or *The Egoist*."

Lurie received the Pulitzer Prize for her 1984 novel, *Foreign Affairs*, the story of two American scholars and their separate adventures during a semester abroad in London. Writing in the BBC magazine, *The Listener*, Gabriele Annan said that the novel's construction "is so neat, so ingenious and satisfying, with no loose ends anywhere, that you barely notice its two stories operating on different levels of truth and entertainment." The book was adapted as a 1993 NBC television movie starring Joanne Woodward and Brian Dennehy.

Returning to the setting of "Corinth University," Lurie's tenth and most recent book, *Truth and Consequences* (2005), is the tragicomical tale of a marriage in collapse. Writing in the *New York Review of Books*, Cathleen Schine said "[In] Alison Lurie's delightful new novel, middle age is a deep, dark forest full of howling wolves, wicked spells, ogres and witches, castles and enchanted gardens.... Her characters are, as always, wonderfully imperfect."

As a teacher of writing at Cornell for three decades, Lurie was generous in giving her time and knowledge to new generations of aspiring writers. Short story author (and Glens Falls native) Lorrie Moore, a former student, told the *Cornell Chronicle*, "She was wise, patient and astute. I found myself writing for her, towards her, because of her. She also was supportive and appreciative in a manner that could send you off feeling high as a kite. I would not have become a writer without her."

Lurie is also a pioneering champion of children's literature and has written both children's books and scholarly nonfiction on the importance to global literacy and culture of children's literature.

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ALISON LURIE  
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  - Wired for Books. Audio Interviews with Alison Lurie. <http://www.wiredforbooks.org/alisonlurie>
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**Marie Howe** is widely admired for poetry that seeks answers to metaphysical questions in ordinary day-to-day experience. In Howe's work, little incidents and inconsequential memories help to shed light on the nature of the soul and the self, as well as the meaning of life, death, love, pain, hope, despair, sin, virtue, solitude, community, impermanence, and the eternal.

Born in Rochester, New York in 1950, Howe grew up the second child and oldest daughter in a deeply committed and politically progressive Catholic family of nine children. She attended Sacred Heart Convent School where, as she told the *Poetry for Students* publication series, "the nuns modeled what it meant to live a spiritually active and politically engaged life." After graduating the University of Windsor in Ontario, she worked as a reporter for a Rochester newspaper and taught high school English in the Boston area before taking up poetry as a serious pursuit at the age of thirty.

She enrolled in the MFA program at the Columbia University School of the Arts where she received mentorship from the late poet Stanley Kunitz, who served as the first New York State Poet (1986-88). In 1988, Howe published her first poetry collection, *The Good Thief*, an exploration of human relationships, attachment, loss and personal transcendence. The book was selected by Margaret Atwood for the National Poetry Series. Also in 1988 she was selected by Stanley Kunitz to receive the Lavan Younger Poets Prize of the American Academy of Poets.

In making her selection, Margaret Atwood said of *The Good Thief*, "Reading it you feel interest always, delight often, and occasionally that cool wind at the back of the neck that makes you think there's one more person in the room

than there actually is. These poems are intensely felt, sparsely expressed, and difficult to forget; poems of obsession that transcend their own dark roots." Kunitz said, "Whether she is confronting the joys or terrors of existence, the light that falls on the page is suffused with grace and charity. In essence she is a religious poet, that rarity among writers of her generation."

"In many ways you have to write the very thing that's going to endanger you. . . . Writing is a way in for me. It's a gate and I wait to see what comes through it . . . The great poems are the ones that contain everything that can't be said, somehow, in words."

— Marie Howe, New York State Writers Institute seminar, March 11, 2008

In 1989, Howe's brother John, who was also one of her closest friends and who helped her arrange the manuscript of *The Good Thief*, died of AIDS. Howe told an interviewer for *AGNI* that John's death, "transformed my aesthetic completely." In 1997, Howe published her second collection of poems, *What the Living Do*, an elegy for John that abandons metaphor and other poetic flourishes in order to be, in the words of a Poetry Foundation biography, "a transparent, accessible documentary of loss." *Publishers Weekly* named the book one of the five best poetry collections of 1997. The *Boston Globe* reviewer called it, "a deeply beautiful book, with the fierce galloping pace of a great novel."

Howe also published a highly-praised 1994 anthology, coedited with Michael

Klein, *In the Company of My Solitude: American Writing from the AIDS Pandemic*, which presents the voices of a wide range of writers, known and unknown, male and female, gay and straight.

Her 2008 collection, *The Kingdom of Ordinary Time*, is a meditation on ordinary yet nevertheless miraculous moments, such as hurrying through errands, attending a dying mother, and helping a child on the playground. Playwright Eve Ensler said in advance praise, "These poems made me gasp. Each one a revelation, a lifeline, a domestic galaxy. This is the poetry of our times, a guide to living on the brink of the mystical and the mundane." The collection was a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize.

Howe is a member of the Writing Faculty at Sarah Lawrence College, and taught previously at Columbia University and New York University. Her poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *New England Review*, *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Tikkun* and *Harvard Review*. Her honors include National Endowment for the Arts and Guggenheim fellowships.

Howe lives in New York City's West Village. Many of her recent poems and writings explore her experiences as the single mother of her daughter Grace Yi-Nan Howe, whom she adopted from China in 2003.

MARIE HOWE  
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**NEW YORK STATE Writers INSTITUTE**  
*State University of New York*

Offering a broad range of literary and cultural programs, **The New York State Writers Institute** is one of America's premier sites for celebrating the art of the written word. Associated with the State University of New York system, and located at the University at Albany, the Institute provides unique opportunities for students and members of the community to engage in a fruitful dialogue with noteworthy writers in a variety of public settings. Designed to encourage the freedom and integrity of the artistic imagination, the Institute's largely free programs include a Classic Film Series, regular community writing workshops taught by distinguished writers-in-residence, and one of the most comprehensive Visiting Writers Series in the United States. More than one thousand artists and writers of international acclaim have visited the Institute since Saul Bellow's inaugural reading in 1984. Among them they hold nine Nobel Prizes in Literature, 90 Pulitzer Prizes, 93 National Book Awards and numerous Motion Picture Academy Awards in a range of filmmaking categories. The Writers Institute's resources include an extensive audio/video archive of author readings and interviews, as well as FENCE Magazine and Fence Books. The Institute's continually growing number of programs has established Albany as an important center for cultural and literary discourse, drawing audiences from New York City, the Northeast, and via the Internet, an international community.

The Writers Institute frequently collaborates with other colleges, universities, and cultural institutions statewide, as well as with community and arts organizations in the greater Albany area, to offer the broadest possible range of outreach initiatives. Such ventures have resulted in unique collaborations between the Institute and the New York State Museum, the Association of Writers and Writing Programs, the New York Council for the Humanities, the New York State Council on the Arts, Capital Repertory Company, the Greater Capital Region Teacher Center, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the New York State Library, New York University, The New School University, and PEN American Center. The Institute sponsors a one-month Summer Writers Institute at Skidmore College involving daily writing workshops with more than a dozen writers-in-residence and nightly readings by some of America's most distinguished poets, novelists, dramatists, and nonfiction writers. Every summer it also holds a Young Writers Institute for high school students in collaboration with Skidmore College.

For additional information on the Writers Institute and its programs contact:

**The New York State Writers Institute**  
**University at Albany, SL 320**  
**1400 Washington Avenue**  
**Albany, NY 12222**  
**e-mail: [writers@albany.edu](mailto:writers@albany.edu)**  
**Tel: (518) 442-5620 / Fax: (518) 442-5621**

**William Kennedy, Executive Director**  
**Donald Faulkner, Director**

For a schedule of current and upcoming Institute events, please visit the Institute's Web site  
<http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst>

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