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UNH Professor Weaves Loss, Love and Renewal in Her First Novel

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By [Tracy Manforte](#)
UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- In her debut novel, Charlotte Bacon, University of New Hampshire assistant professor of English, navigates the lives of four generations of women and their complex connections to one another.

Lost Geography, to be released this month by publisher Farrar, Straus and Giroux, explores life, death, change and survival in a multi-generation journey that takes readers from a farm in Saskatchewan to Paris, London, and finally, to an apartment on Manhattan's East Side. As time and location change, the novel's narrators also change to feature the character of the moment.

"It's a story about inheritance," says Bacon, "not the inheritance of someone's furniture, someone's money or even their nose, but of personality and character traits that are passed down." Woven throughout the chronology, readers will notice similarities in how each family member handles loss, change and migration from landscape to landscape.

Bacon says the idea for the book grew from personal traveling experiences abroad. On Asian trips, in particular, she was impressed by the practice of bartering for rugs. "It's a long, elaborate and dramatic process. It's like a courtship that takes weeks to develop before there is an actual transaction," she explains.

She noticed that each hand-woven rug had a story behind its arrival. Who made it, where did it originate, and how did it get there? "Objects are laced with memories, but people are needed to interpret them and add dimension."

Her story, while it does involve a part-Turkish dealer of Oriental rugs, mostly centers on the history of people and their stories that span six decades. Those same questions associated with the history of objects apply to

the family members in *Lost Geography*.

Bacon, who teaches fiction writing at UNH, says she hopes the novel reflects life stories. "I want readers to be moved by the characters' plight and feel immersed in the worlds I have created. On a core level, I hope it works that way."

Already the novel is being touted by literary critics, including Kirkus Reviews (March 2000), which calls it a "resonant" and "impressive" debut. "Her descriptions of the ways in which love compels risk in each generation are fresh and moving, and her portraits of several complex women, each struggling to find her unique strength and identity while passing on a sense of life's possibilities, is often exhilarating."

Bacon is scheduled to read excerpts from her book and sign copies at Water Street Bookstore in Exeter Tuesday, April 11, at 7:30 p.m. A resident of Lee, Bacon is also the author of *A Private State*, a collection of short stories.

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