Susan Stewart: 52nd Wallace Stevens Poetry Program

Susan Stewart read from her work on April 1st as part of the 52nd Annual Wallace Stevens Poetry Program at the Konover Auditorium of the Dodd Research Center. Stewart is the author of award-winning books of poetry, as well as critical studies of literature and the visual arts.

Stewart's poetry collections include *Red Rover* and *Columbarium*. Her awards include the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry, the Christian Gauss Award for Literary Criticism, and the Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism. She is the Avalon Foundation University Professor in the Humanities and Director of the Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts at Princeton University. A 1997 MacArthur "Genius" Fellow, Stewart recently served as a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets.

The evening began with a short reading by each of the three Wallace Stevens Poetry Prize contest winners: Abigail Fagan, Marissa Stanton, and Michael Stankiewicz, as well as the Early College Experience (ECE) Wallace Stevens Poetry Prize high school winner, Jennifer Carroll. After the student speakers read their pieces, Stewart took to the podium. She began by reading a poem by Wallace Stevens, who was a Connecticut native that worked in the insurance industry and wrote poetry. His poem described the beauty and history of Connecticut and made everyone in the audience feel very proud to be living in such an amazing state.

Stewart spoke of how she started writing poetry at a very young age, and she was always looking for new ways to challenge herself. One of the poems that she read was a narrative which she originally wrote as a challenge between her and a friend to see who could successfully transform a novel into a poem. She had never really written narratives before, but she said that good writers are always challenging themselves. This was very great advice that could translate over to many other professions, as well.

A favorite poem that Stewart read was called “The Apple.” She began the poem by saying that if she were to come back from the dead it would be to take a bite of an apple. She repeated this line later in the poem as well, which helped to add to the poem's overall strength. “The Apple” featured a lot of religious imagery like a snake in the garden and coming back from the dead. She also named about a dozen different types of apples in the poem, most that many have never heard of, which was another way that she successfully captured one's attention. There was a great amount of wit in each of her poems, as well, like when she said “An apple called ‘Delicious’ is anything but” during her reading of “The Apple.”

Stewart joins a long line of Wallace Stevens Poetry Program poets that includes Paul Muldoon, Susan Howe, Kay Ryan, Charles Simic, Adrienne Rich, June Jordan, and Derek Walcott. On April 2nd, she gave a reading at this year’s partner high school, the Hartford Classical Magnet School, followed by an afternoon talk on poetry and translation at the UConn Humanities Institute.

--Review by Sarah Nesci, Undergraduate Student
Jason Koo
Poetry Reading

The first poetry reading of the UConn Creative Writing Program kicked off at the UConn Co-op Bookstore at 6 p.m. on September 10th with a speaker who brought both the funny, sad and terrifying side of poetry to campus.

Jason Koo is a poet and assistant professor at Quinnipiac University who resides in Brooklyn Heights, New York City. He learned to get rid of his shyness through poetry and now enjoys sharing his passion with his students. Koo is the founder and director of the Brooklyn Poets, a non-profit organization helping poets learn through workshops and mentor programs like The Bridge. He won multiple awards for his first poetry book *Man on Extremely Small Island* including the Asian American Writer's Workshop Members' Choice Award and the De Novo Poetry Prize.

Koo read to a UConn audience from his new book *America's Favorite Poem* filling the night with laughter and a distinct personality. Koo also read a brand new poem called “Single Gay Uncle.”

Koo's poetry was inspired from his personal experiences being Asian American, like in his poem “Model Minority” and the poem “A Natural History of My Name.” The latter poem was inspired by the fact that there are an even amount of vowels and consonants in his name. Koo's poetry was about topics very relatable to the average college student spanning from ex-girlfriends, unenthusiastically sitting through class and his cat named Django.

Koo is often inspired by modern American society. “The first part of the book kind of reflects on American culture, consumerism and how we're all terrible. How we're all imperialistic in our own ways,” Koo said as the crowd laughed.

The second half of the book is more personal, according to Koo, and reflects on the consequences of the aforementioned topics.

Associate Professor of English Penelope Pelizzon asked Koo to speak on campus and had her English 1701 students, an introductory creative writing class, read Koo's poetry and many of the students were present in the audience. The class mainly focused on the poem “Giant Steps,” according to Nic DiBenedetto, a 5th-semester ecology and evolutionary biology major.

“For this particular book I wanted to start with it because I was interested in his use of a big persona voice...there's a kind of exuberance and energy and a really distinctive voice,” said Pelizzon. She wanted her students to draw inspiration from the over-the-top voice and use it in their own creative writing.

According to Koo, persona wouldn't be the most accurate term to describe his most recent book and finds that he uses persona more in his first book. He prefers to call them “projections.”

“I really liked the way he read it. It was almost kind of enlightening because I feel like he kind of read it out loud in a way that helped me understand it a bit better,” said DiBenedetto. DiBenedetto also liked the fact that Koo included a quote from Kanye West's song “Power” in his epigraph. “It really stuck out to me because I don't see that a lot in poetry. It's almost like you are having a conversation with him,” said DiBenedetto.

According to Koo, Kanye West is right to say he is a genius because he “captures America” very well. “I think in particular for this book me quoting Kanye West as an epigraph is, like, very serious. It's not ironic, some people think it's ironic...”

Nikki Barnhart, 21, a 7th-semester journalism major said, “I liked him as a person. I thought he was very personable and friendly and he related really well to the audience.” Barnhart had never heard Koo's poetry before the reading, but found it “very real and conversational.”

The event was sponsored by the Asian American Cultural Center, Asian and Asian American Studies Institute, the English Department Speaker’s Fund, the Creative Writing Program and the UConn Co-op Bookstore.

--Review by Reid DiRenzo, Undergraduate Student
Margaret Gibson
Poetry Reading

On September 2nd, UConn proudly welcomed back former professor and renowned poet Margaret Gibson for an honorary reading of her most recent book of poetry, Broken Cup.

Gibson dedicated Broken Cup to her husband of 39 years, David McKain. The poems were written as part of her journey in coping with his diagnosis of Alzheimer’s in 2007.

Also a former UConn faculty member, McKain was a professor at the University for almost 30 years. During his retirement he was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, an illness that also afflicted his mother and grandmother.

In one of his own poems, “Spell Bound,” which Gibson read to the audience, McKain describes his own foreknowledge of the disease.

“The odds are one out of five that I’ll lose my mind as well. The odds are slightly better in Russian roulette; one out of six. It’s almost a family tradition.”

Gibson said that her husband’s illness “changed everything in our lives.” She described Alzheimer’s as “tragically long but mercifully slow,” and spoke of taking comfort in each other’s company, in traveling and in the beauty of their home in Preston, Connecticut.

“After David was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, I didn’t write anything for a couple of years,” Gibson said. “Then [the poems] started coming and they didn’t stop.”

Gibson has authored 10 books to date, including Second Nature, Icon and Evidence and Earth Elegy: New and Selected Poems. She is also the author of the memoir The Prodigal Daughter: Reclaiming an Unfinished Childhood.

In addition to her extensive authorship, Gibson is also the recipient of numerous awards, including the Connecticut Book Award and the Melville Kane Award from the Poetry Society of America. Her collection The Vigil: A Poem in Four Voices was a finalist for the 1993 National Book Award in Poetry.

During her years at UConn, Gibson was a member of the Creative Writing Program and served as chair of the Wallace Stevens Poetry Program for over a decade.

“We’re thrilled to have Ms. Gibson back to read. She was a beloved member of our faculty here for many years, and instrumental in building interest in some of our key courses, like Nature Writing,” said Penelope Pelizzon, poet and Associate Professor of English at UConn.

Pelizzon later introduced Gibson to the audience as a “former colleague and admired mentor,” and “one of the people who made me feel at home when I was hired.”

After years of home care, Gibson now drives up every day to see her husband at the Chestnut Cottage Elms in Westerly, Rhode Island an assisted living care residence. She fondly recalled his occasional tendency to believe he is back in the classroom, which often leads to a spontaneous lecture.

Gibson said she is actively writing and has a new project in the works.

--Review by Cate Kohn, Undergraduate Student
Jared Demick
Poetry Book Launch

Combing his knowledge of American history, growing up in the mill towns of Massachusetts and a dark but upbeat sense of humor, UConn graduate student Jared Demick presented a series of poems from his debut book The Hunger In Our Eyes at the UConn Co-op Bookstore on October 15th.

Demick refers to his poems as “Encyclopedic Poetricks,” meaning that his poems have a narrative sense, but are illustrative anecdotes, focusing on specific moments. Several feature bits of dialogue and during his reading, Demick would give his voice the appropriate accent or even break into song.

A number of his poems focus on historical events, including the Civil War and the Dust Bowl. One of the poems was written about bushwhackers, gangs of marauders who raided people’s homes and Missouri, one of who was Jesse James.

“Boots thunder onto the porch and knuckles knock a sharp alarm...Neighborly bullet bore into your door, the lantern light peeps through the holes, a siege of feet make the door give way,” Demick read in a poem about one such home invasion.

A series of his poems, called “Honky Tonking” were written for several country musicians, including Buck Owens, Patsy Cline and Merle Haggard. The reason he gave was: “I’m so sick of poets constantly writing about jazz and classical music. Enough already, there’s beauty in all kinds of music.”

One humorous poem about alcoholism he wrote for Merle Haggard contained the line “I ooze so much booze I make the breathalyzer gag.”

Students responded well to Demick’s new take on poetry. “I thought the country and western poems were especially interesting because he had a lot of interesting factoids about the genre, I have never heard that connected with poetry, at least in a flattering way,” Lawrence Petery, a 6th-semester English major said.

One of his poems visualized the meteorological phenomenon of mud rain, which Demick described as “God slinging mud at you.” The poem reads, “Rusted voices and road kill hearts, poetry aches in his shot mouth, God spies through that big sky, better know your devils. Keep on the sunny side, even in the mud rain.”

Christopher Meyers, a 3rd-semester business administration major, who had Demick read several of his poems on WHUS the week prior said after hearing the poem, “I will be dreaming about mud rain for weeks.”

Demick said that his book was split about 50-50 between historical and character pieces, and works about personal life. The poem in the latter category that he shared was called “At Hartford Hospital” about a time he sat in the emergency room just looking for interesting things to occupy his time while waiting seemingly endlessly for test results. One such image was “The MRI magnets look like techno beats.”

Demick wrote the book over the course of seven years, with the most recent poem written a month before the manuscript was submitted. He said the title The Hunger In Our Eyes was selected simply because it sounds nice.

--Review by Brendon Field, Undergraduate Student
Jo-Ann Mapson: Fall Aetna Writer-in-Residence

The fall Aetna Writer-in-Residence Jo-Ann Mapson read from her latest novel, Owen's Daughter, at the UConn Storrs campus on October 28th. Mapson, the author of eleven novels and a collection of short stories, lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico with her husband Stewart Allison. Though her writing has a distinctly southwest flair, Mapson connected easily with her New England audience and drew them in to her world.

Dr. Regina Barreca introduced Mapson as she would introduce an old friend. The two met at the Steamboat Literary Sojourn in the mountains of Colorado in 1996. “Back then,” Barreca said, “Mapson was everything a writer wanted to be because she could tell a captivating and multi-layered story through beautiful and flowing prose.” Barreca described Mapson’s characters as being able to “edge in and out of each other’s lives,” which creates a separate story-world for the characters, and Mapson’s mind, to inhabit. “Check out Jo-Ann’s cowboy boots,” Barreca laughed as she walked off stage, “They’re her signature.”

When Mapson took the stage fresh off of travels from New York City, she expressed her genuine gratitude for being at UConn. Mapson chose to read from her newest novel, Owen’s Daughter, which is a sequel to Blue Rodeo. As Barreca said, Mapson’s characters and settings come and go, filtering in and out of the stories, and Owen’s Daughter was no exception. The story begins with a ghost named Dolores who has haunted the worlds of the past three books. The prologue of the novel traces generations of women living in a house by considering their relationship to a heavy sideboard in the living room. The novel then jumps to 2009, where a woman named Sky writes a letter to her absent father. Mapson creates an animated and believable character in the young mother Sky and draws the reader in to Sky’s experience with a broken family, a young child of her own, and a stint in a rehab facility. The first chapter that Mapson read from ends with Sky waiting for her soon-to-be ex-husband to pick her up from the rehab facility. Unsurprisingly, he does not show up. Mapson left Sky – and the audience – at a pivotal moment in the narrative and created a natural urge to finish the story.

In the question and answer portion of the evening, Mapson was shown to be light-hearted, conversational, and very funny. Questions ranged from “Do you believe in ghosts?” (Yes, of course) to “How do you make up your characters?” (Every character is me, just a different incarnation). Mapson shared with the audience her 3-piece method for creating a successful and meaningful plot. The three pieces that are necessary, Mapson said, are: what actually happens in the novel; the current events of the era, because they cause pressure on the plot and allow readers to identify with the time period; and the subplot - what the characters are afraid of, what is in their past. These three layers combine to form the believable and complex stories that are Mapson’s signature.

By the end of the reading, the audience walked away looking forward to the remainder of Mapson’s visit at UConn and to picking up where she left off in Owen’s Daughter.

--Review by Lauren Silverio, Creative Writing Program Intern
Denise Abercrombie & Jon Andersen: Creative Sustenance

The UConn Co-op Bookstore welcomed poets Denise Abercrombie and Jon Andersen to the stage on November 11th for the annual Creative Sustenance reading. This event benefited the Covenant Soup Kitchen in Willimantic, Connecticut. Audience members were asked to contribute a food or monetary donation to sustain the efforts of the soup kitchen while Abercrombie and Andersen provided poetry to feed the creative appetite of the UConn community. A little over $500 was raised at the event along with many nonperishable food donations from the community.

Even when stacks of additional chairs were brought out in an attempt to accommodate the impressive crowd, rows of eager individuals stood in the back. The energy created by a room full of friends, family, students, and fans was truly incredible; the space felt alive and poised for an exceptional reading. Though several people of note were in attendance at the event, including novelist and former director of the Creative Writing Program, Wally Lamb, the joy and excitement of the evening were the stars of the event. The audience fought to hold back their applause between each poem and Abercrombie and Andersen embraced and worked off of this boundless encouragement.

Unfortunately, the Director of the Covenant Soup Kitchen, Heather Clark, was ill and unable to attend the event, so Denise Abercrombie took right to the stage after a brief introduction by Professor Sean Frederick Forbes. The bubbly, curly-haired poet dedicated her reading to the memory of her dear friend and mentor Joan Joffe Hall, a talented poet who engaged life through language and who inspired Abercrombie to write.

The first few poems Abercrombie read were drawn from her experience growing up in the “working class Mecca” that is Waterbury, CT; notably, “Pink Thread” and “The Mary Kay Lady” touch on her memories of living in an all-girls house with her sisters and mother.

Abercrombie also drew inspiration from her students and coworkers at the nearby E.O. Smith High School. The poem “The Ordinary Magic” was dedicated to her fellow teachers as an acknowledgement of the difficult and rewarding task of “teaching students how to think.” One cannot help but admire the pride that Abercrombie takes in her teaching job and thank her for her work.

Abercrombie dedicated her final poem, “Taking Turns,” to her husband Jon Andersen. The poem mused over a night when, with a new baby sleeping in their bed, Denise and Jon took turns going outside to watch a huge meteor shower. This poem created a beautiful and seamless bridge between her reading and his.

When Jon Andersen took the stage, he adjusted the microphone to fit his tall stature, and looked out over the sea of faces. As a Veterans Day tribute to his late father, Andersen commented on the fact that, though not all soldiers are heroes by virtue of their profession, his father was a hero in many ways. Andersen read and spoke about his father as a man and as a soldier, before segueing into a discussion of the generalized anxiety that is implicit in our modern culture of “relentless, apocalyptic war.” It was on the tails of this comment that Andersen introduced his collection of Serbian poetry. His focus on Serbia was refreshing and incredibly important because he seeks to bring humanity to a people that are often unfairly judged and misunderstood.

Andersen did considerably more speaking between each of his poems than Abercrombie did, but he spoke with such confidence and conviction that it almost felt as though he was speaking in seamless verse. Since many of Andersen’s poems were inspired by articles or stories in the news, they necessitated a bit of explanation to ensure that everyone was fully informed.

The question and answer session of the evening continued in the same vein as the readings – it was energized, lengthy, and informative. Abercrombie and Andersen once again took turns answering the questions and providing their outlooks on the importance of the arts, creative time, and the nature of poetry.

--Review by Lauren Silverio, Creative Writing Program Intern
Q & A about MFA Programs

A panel of students currently enrolled in MFA programs across New England met in the UConn Co-op Bookstore on October 17th to share their experience and advice with UConn undergraduates. The panel consisted of Miller Oberman (English Ph.D. Candidate at UConn), Jerome Daley (MFA in Poetry at the University of New Hampshire), and Chelsea Dodds (MFA in Fiction at Southern Connecticut State University). The panel was moderated by UConn Professor Ellen Litman.

Professor Litman began the session by asking the panel about what motivated them to pursue MFAs. Most of the panelists’ responses were very similar – they expressed a need to be immersed in an environment that was more conducive to writing than their day job was. Oberman touched upon the struggle of trying to find discipline outside of a school setting and the difficulty of finding a group of people that is the right mix of supportive and constructively critical. While all of the panelists agreed that the creative spark was lacking in their non-academic lives, each experienced the work-writing balance in a different way. While Dodds, for example, chose to continue to work full-time as she pursues her MFA, Daley was fortunate enough to be granted a teaching opportunity at UNH so he is able to focus solely on writing and teaching.

When the discussion naturally turned to funding, the panel also had some good advice for the audience. Dodds, an MFA student with a full time job, discussed her experience of working by day and taking classes by night. Dodds acknowledged that not all students have the ability or desire to drop everything for an MFA, and her story provided the undergraduates in the audience with a different idea of what school can look like. Daley took the initiative to make phone calls to the eleven schools he was interested in and was able to get the application fees waived for almost every school. Daley stressed the importance of taking responsibility for the future and seeking out the best opportunities that are available. Oberman echoed Daley’s sentiment by saying, honestly, that it is “nuts to go into debt for your MFA.” He reiterated the importance of asking about teaching opportunities and said that it is better to go to a small school with complete funding than a larger-name school with minimal funding.

On the rather controversial topic of taking a gap year, all of the panelists agreed that, as Oberman put it, “you are not a slacker if you take a year off.” The panelists all made it clear that learning should be a joy; students who do not take a year off tend to burn out quickly and not enjoy writing as much as they could. Though a gap year may not be necessary for all students, it should be looked as a legitimate option for students that would benefit from some time away from the classroom.

When the panelists wrapped up their discussion, satisfied undergraduates closed their notebooks and capped their pens - relieved that they had gotten meaningful guidance on the next big step in their academic careers.

--Review by Lauren Silverio, Creative Writing Program Intern
Blind clowns, hairy librarians, a man so ugly as to be called “The Vampire of Bensonhurst” and the unusual, conversational “Orphan” make up the dating scene for Russian immigrant and divorced mother of two, Lena Finkle, the protagonist in Anya Ulinich’s graphic novel *Lena Finkle’s Magic Barrel*. Ulinich showcased the graphic novel on November 19th at the UConn Co-op Bookstore in Storrs Center during a multimedia presentation.

In the novel, Lena embarks on a nonlinear narrative in which tales of her dating adventures are accompanied by flashbacks of her developmental years in Russia and her first years as an immigrant in America. Lena expressed her opinion as a twice-divorced mother of two: “Dates were like deep friendships filmed in time lapse; one-night stands were like express-marriages from courtship to dissolution.” Besides making an amusing foray in the metropolitan dating scene, the work references classic Russian and other literature, contains self-deprecating humor and had mild adult themes.

David Ulin of the Los Angeles Times wrote that the novel “works as something of a confessional, a series of notebooks that excavate its protagonist’s life and psyche from the inside.” And a confessional it is: the novel mirrors Ulinich’s autobiographical life, following her from her developmental years in Moscow, Russia, her immigration to Arizona as a teenager, and her move to Brooklyn in her twenties. This memoir-esque approach lends a more personal and consequently keener eye to the nuances of life as a Russian-Jewish immigrant in the States, including the particulars of love, sex gender roles and identity.

However, Ulinich is quick to point out the distinction between real life and fiction. “You cannot compare fiction to real life,” she said. “You take parts of your life…and when you put them into a book, they become part of the internal logic of the work.”
Ben Grossberg: “Writers Who Edit, Editors Who Write”

Yesterday poet Ben Grossberg filled the UConn Co-Op Bookstore with equal parts poignancy and humor as part of the Writers Who Edit, Editors Who Write series. Grossberg’s accomplishments are numerous and varied. He is currently the director of creative writing and an associate professor at the University of Hartford, as well as the assistant editor of the Antioch Review. He has written three books of poetry, including Space Traveler, Sweet Core Orchard, and Underwater Lengths in a Single Breath. He’s received both a Pushcart Prize and an Artist Fellowship from the Ohio Arts Council.

Professor Penelope Pelizzon emceed the event and opened the evening by explaining the background of the Writers Who Edit, Editors Who Write series.

The program has been in existence for almost 10 years, said Pelizzon and it started on behalf of UConn’s undergraduate-run literary magazine, the Long River Review.

“Long River is based in Storrs, not in New York, not Boston. We’re kind of cut off from the outside world. [UConn professor] Ellen Litman and I wanted to bring some contact with editors to Long River students, specifically those that both write and edit,” Pelizzon said.

“The difficult thing about wearing both of those hats is that writing is a full-time occupation and editing can be too. They can be joyous, but also taxing,” continued Pelizzon. She said the goal of the series was to present those that “manage this difficult task but also have a rich life in both editing and writing.”

The Writers Who Edit, Editors Who Write series has had guests from such prestigious magazines as Poetry, N=1, and as Pelizzon said, “we are delighted to add Ben Grossberg to that list from Antioch Review.”

As a final means of introduction, Pelizzon then read a quote by Grossberg from an interview: “The right mode is, ultimately, a key to the utter(ing) self: it allows you to express more of yourself than you realized existed[…]. For me the ‘space traveler’ was this kind of discovery. Looking back three years on, I realize I was at an impasse. But I knew after I wrote the first ‘space traveler’ poem that I had stumbled on something larger than a single text, a new mode that seemed to expand what I could bring to the page. It again became possible — and for a month, almost easy — to surprise myself exploring the same old concerns.”

“I love that quote because it speaks to questions that many students have on how a writer can continue to surprise themselves,” Pelizzon said.

Grossberg then took the stage and started the evening by reading a few older poems from his book, Sweet Core Orchard.

He had an energetic and enthusiastic presence that matched the style of his writing. His first few poems, “Beetle Orgy” and “Terro Ant Killer,” spiraled from their naturalistic setting and transcended to something existential.

Grossberg then transitioned to poems from his latest collection, Space Traveler.

“The best part about writing these poems was that I got to use all the science that I know, which isn’t much,” Grossberg said.

Space Traveler was particularly striking with lines such as, “When my afterburn ignited what was left of the place, I allowed myself a small smile, and then I set the toaster for space. It didn’t ding for years.”

He read a few more from that collection, including “The Space Traveler Talks Frankly About Desire,” “The Space Traveler’s Husband” and “The Space Traveler Sex.”

One poem, “The Space Traveler’s Tense” was particularly interesting in its exploration of language. As Grossberg explained, the idea came to him when reflecting upon his college study of German. “I’m fascinated by studying language and how language shapes thought. Language is a paradigm.”

Grossberg closed the night with a few newer poems, “all terrestrial,” that experimented with sonnet form and current events, such as the execution of Dennis McGuire and the Sochi dogs.

He then led a lively Q and A session, encouraging students to ask about his expertise in both editing and writing.

The evening was diverse in scope and enlightening on multiple levels, adding another accolade to the reading series as a whole.

“It was definitely cool, it was really interesting to hear all his different types of poems,” senior Emily Chiarelli said. “I really liked the difference between the first few about bugs and the space traveler. It really showed how versatile a writer he is. What he read is a good window into what he writes.”

--Review by Nikki Barnhart, Undergraduate Student
Camille T. Dungy, Spring Aetna Writer-in-Residence

On Tuesday, March 10, acclaimed author Camille T. Dungy, gave a reading to a full house at the UConn Co-op Bookstore. The following day, she met with six undergraduate and graduate student poets for one-on-one tutorials to discuss their poetry.

Dungy is the author of three books of poetry: *What to Eat, What to Drink, What to Leave for Poison*, *Smith Blue*, and *Suck on the Marrow*. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry, Callaloo, the Missouri Review*, and *Crab Orchard Review*. Her honors include fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Virginia Commission for the Arts. She is the recipient of the 2011 American Book Award, a two-time recipient of the Northern California Book Award, and a two-time NAACP Image Award nominee. She is a Professor of English at Colorado State University.

Tara Betts, when reviewing Dungy’s quiet yet lively poems in *Pembroke Magazine*, says “…[Her poetry] offers a number of ways to look at what is considered to be a part of nature, whether it is a part of the plants or the people that inhabit a place.”

Dungy began the reading by apologizing for her bronchitis-ridden voice, but launched right into reading a poem for the sultry, velvety Billie Holiday, titled “black spoon.” She moved chronologically through her books, reading poems like “Road Tennessee,” “The Preachers Eat Out,” from *What to Eat, What to Drink, What to Leave for Poison*. It’s full of crackling emotion—in “The Preachers Eat Out,” the speaker is refused proper service because of his skin color. After eating, the kitchen staff begins to break the plates that he and his comrades used. The speaker hisses, “Lady, my one regret / is that we don’t have appetite enough / to break every damn plate in this room.”

She continued with poems from her second book, *Suck on the Marrow*, which delves into the lives of fictional characters placed in mid-19th century Virginia and Philadelphia. She spoke briefly about the importance of empathy when writing creatively—“if you can’t feel compassion for your characters,” she says, “how can you possibly understand them enough to write about them?” After that, she read several newer works, both from *Smith Blue* and from the book that is currently in the works. This included a poem/essay (she called it a “pessay”) for Professor Penelope Pelizzon, titled “Arts Poetica: Mercator Projection.”

Once the room was opened to questions, the audience learned a little more about how Dungy saw her own trajectory as a writer. A question was asked about the process of moving through different interests; how does her writing maintain itself? She responded by aptly describing her books as a series of survival manuals. The first was a “survival manual for the late twentieth century,” she says; the next was a survival manual for the mid 19th-century and the abolitionist period. Her forthcoming book, she says, is turning into a survival manual for early 21st-century motherhood. She laughs, “Survival manuals must be my obsession!”

--Review by Marissa Stanton, Creative Writing Intern
Claire Kilroy
Gerson Irish Reading

On March 31st UConn’s Alumni Center hosted its Gerson Irish Reader, novelist Claire Kilroy who read from and discussed her most recent novel, *The Devil I Know*. Kilroy is the first author to be featured twice by the program, having previously spoken at the event in 2009. The event was sponsored by the Gerson family and supported by the Irish Studies and Creative Writing programs.

Mary Burke, professor of English, introduced Kilroy and praised her work for its “lush language” and “intricate plotlines.” Kilroy has received much critical acclaim in Ireland and internationally. She was awarded the 2004 Rooney Prize for Irish Literature for her debut novel *All Summer*, and currently holds the prestigious Heimbold Jr., Chair of Irish Studies at Villanova University for the spring 2015 semester.

In her introductory remarks Kilroy said that she had written the most work “at a time when the Celtic Tiger had just been slain.” She is referring to the recession of 2008 in Ireland, which followed a period of great economic boom.

*The Devil I Know*, said the author, “is structured around a banking inquiry into what went wrong.”

The audiences listened intently as she read passages from the book, particularly those focusing on the business enterprises and relationship between the two main characters, “who are old enemies: Hickey, a builder… and Tristram St. Lawrence, who is as posh as they come… [and how] two jokers become architects of the Celtic Tiger.”

Kilroy’s work has been compared to famous Irish writers of the last two centuries such as James Joyce and Oscar Wilde. The story is largely set in the Irish town of Howth, as is Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* [sic], and features the motif of selling one’s soul to the devil, much like Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Grey*.

Following the reading, the floor was opened to the audience. Kilroy described her writing style and influences, saying she starts her novels when she will “just keep putting sentences down on the page until I know where it’s started,” and that her “process is gradual and slow, painfully slow.”

She discussed her fondness for the first person style of narration, as well as her decision to switch her characters to male “to give myself more freedom” after she felt people had begun to confuse her characters for the author herself. “You realize that the people in your book are more real than the people in your life,” she continued, “You don’t spend all of your time thinking about the real people in your life.”

*The Devil I Know* prominently features Tristram’s alcoholism, and when asked how she came to describe the condition with such depth, the author described her personal experiences as an Irish undergraduate spending summers in New York City and meeting members of Alcoholics Anonymous, who shared intense and personal stories.

She talked about interviewing the addicts and the strange experience of seeing sponsors “couching these people on what to say” and how fascinating it was to “talk to them [the AA members] without them being there” as they used another’s voice.

On being compared to famous Irish writers, the author said, “You don’t deliberately try to emulate the authors… but you are schooled in your forbearers. I found things in [John] Banville’s work… sentences that were eerily close to those I thought I’d written… All cultures read Irish literature. We are schooled in it and it’s a rich schooling.”

The event was well received by the audience. “I was impressed by Kilroy’s ability to seamlessly blend classic Irish folklore with contemporary themes,” said Jesse Cohen, 4th semester English major, “Her writing is pithy but accessible and I look forward to seeing what she has to write in the future.”

Professor Burke was similarly excited. “We were delighted to have her back and it speaks to her talent. She builds on Irish literature, on Joyce and Stoker, she’s coming off a series of famous Irish writers whom I think she’ll soon be considered a part of.”

--Review by Christopher McDermott, Undergraduate Student
Rigoberto González: Aetna Celebration of Creative Nonfiction

On April 16th, American Book Award winning author, Rigoberto González read from his recent books of essays Red-Inked Retablos as the guest speaker for the Aetna Celebration of Creative Nonfiction. The event honors the undergraduate and graduate student winners of the annual Aetna Creative Nonfiction Awards.

Graduate student winner Abigail Fagan began the evening by reading an excerpt from her essay about how she took care of her terminally ill father. She portrayed the very understandable, but difficult position she had in caring for her father who was not the easiest to not only care for, but also be around day after day. She did not try to hide or lighten her true feelings regardless of what anyone would think when reading her perspective and in that is great strength that one could not ignore. Her inclusion of other events going on at that time such as looking for an apartment also gave the complexity to the narrator allowing the book to further the feeling of reality. After her reading, one was able to realize the inner strength it takes to write non-fiction. This was a lesson that served as the heart of the entire event.

González was phenomenal and the perfect writer to invite to take part in this event. He is the author of four books of poetry including Unpeopled Eden, winner of the Lambda Literary Award and the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize, and Black Blossoms, two bilingual children’s books, four novels including Crossing Vines and The Mariposa Club, three books of nonfiction including Butterfly Boy: Memoirs of a Chicano Mariposa, a book of short stories and the editor of two anthologies. His honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Arts, and the Poetry Center Book Award. He is a contributing editor for Poets & Writers Magazine, and serves on the board of directors for the National Book Critics Circle. He is currently

Professor of English at Rutgers-Newark, the State University of New Jersey.

The chapters he read from his books focused on his relationships with the people around him are written so well and feel so intimate that one could really get an understanding of what he went through. The relationship with his father was depicted using the smallest of details such as the conversation his father had with the neighborhood boys about his son’s fear of the dark and the way he just grabbed another beer after his son shot the rifle and missed, but the perspective on the relationship came across clearly.

González talked about the vulnerability in writing nonfiction and how he needed 20 years to even publish one of his books because he needed to be able to read it without crying. Few people, even authors are willing to admit their vulnerabilities even if it is present in their writing.

--Review by Jocelyn Rosenzweig, Undergraduate Student
The Long River Reading Series

The 2014-15 Long River Reading Series (LRRS) featured writers from the UConn writing community, pairing undergraduate and graduate writers with professors and visiting writers. This series now takes place at the theater in the beautiful Storrs Center Co-op Bookstore. Each of our readers begins by giving a short talk on a writer of their choosing, reading some of their work and discussing how that work has influenced their own. These readings are free and open to the public, and co-sponsored by the Creative Writing and the UConn Co-op Bookstore.

Our fall reading took place on October 17, 2014 in front of a packed house at 7 PM, and was preceded by a Q&A about the process of choosing and applying for MFA programs in Creative Writing, hosted by Ellen Litman. The reading featured Kate Monica, an undergraduate from UConn, Sean Frederick Forbes, the director of UConn’s Creative Writing Program, and Tennessee Jones, a short story writer and novelist who travelled to UConn from Brooklyn, New York City. There was a lively Q&A following the reading, and the three readers fielded many questions from the audience on topics ranging from poem content and writing process to publication and the writerly life.

Kate Monica won the Collins Literary Prize and was the second-place winner of the University’s 2014 Wallace Stevens Poetry Award. Her poetry has been featured in The Long River Review, Holey Scripture Magazine, and Orchid Children, and she was elected to the 2015 Connecticut Poetry Circuit.


Tennessee Jones is the author of the Lambda Literary Award nominated collection Deliver Me From Nowhere, a “cover” of Bruce Springsteen’s Nebraska. He is the recipient of awards from the Jacob K. Javits Foundation, the Christopher Isherwood Foundation and Hunter College, where he received his MFA in Fiction in 2010. He was also the George Bennett Fellow (Writer in Residence) at Philips Exeter Academy 2010-11, and the Philip Roth Writer in Residence at Bucknell University (2013). He grew up in the hollers of Appalachia and currently lives in Brooklyn.

Our spring reading took place on February 10, 2015 at 7 PM at the UConn Co-op bookstore in front of a standing room only crowd, and featured UConn graduate students Abby Fagan and Matthew Shelton, and undergraduate Emmanuel Oppong-Yeboah. Abby read from a memoir about her father, Matthew read poems and translations of the poet Paul Celan, and Emmanuel read poems.

Abby Fagan is a PhD candidate in English whose focus is gender performance and appeals to citizenship in anti-alcohol literature written in the nineteenth-century U.S. She is currently working on a memoir project about her father, whom she took care of for six months before he died in 2009. Abby is the 2015 Wallace Stevens First Prize Winner and the winner of the Aetna Creative Nonfiction Award.

Matthew Ryan Shelton is currently a second-year MA/PhD student in the Department of English, specializing in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Poetics of Ireland and the UK, as well as Poetic Translation Practice and Creative Writing. He holds an MA in Creative Writing from Queen’s University Belfast. His work has appeared in such publications as The Open Ear, Critical Bastards Magazine, The Swarthmore Review, and Coldfront. Matthew is the current COO of the Irish Studies Alliance here at UConn.

Emmanuel Oppong-Yeboah is a graduating senior at the University of Connecticut. He is currently studying Urban and Community Studies and English.

--Review by Miller Oberman, Creative Writing Program Assistant Director
Each year the Connecticut Poetry Circuit holds a contest for undergraduate student poets and each college in the state of Connecticut is eligible to nominate one undergraduate poet for consideration for the reading tour. For 2015, five students were chosen: Kate Monica (University of Connecticut), Nikki Byrne (University of Saint Joseph), Lisa Gaudio (Central Connecticut State University), Justin Greene (Wesleyan University), and Jessica Yuan (Yale University). Each year the Circuit poets give a tour of readings, stopping at each of their institutions.

This year’s reading, sponsored and organized by the Creative Writing Program, was free and open to the public and held in the Stern Lounge, Austin 217 on Tuesday, February 3, at 6 PM. We had all five of the poets in attendance, and many of them brought guests to UConn. The poets each introduced one another, and also stayed for a Q&A session after their reading. Although the weather was a bit dicey, all of these intrepid poets arrived in time for the reading.

--Review by Miller Oberman, Creative Writing Program Assistant Director
Unveiling of the 2014-2015 Poetic Journeys Series

The Poetic Journeys release party took place on April 29th, at 7 PM at the UConn Co-op Bookstore, where the poets and designers had a chance to meet each other, and where the new posters were be on display. The poets each read their winning poems. The new series of posters will be featured on buses and buildings around the UConn campus, as well as at E.O. Smith high school starting in the fall of 2015.

Poetic Journeys is an interdisciplinary collaboration between the Creative Writing Program and the Art Department’s Design Center. This year a new series of seven posters under the direction of CW Assistant Director, Miller Oberman will be unveiled on April 29. The program features poetry by students and, occasionally, faculty, printed on professionally designed placards, posted on campus transportation in spaces normally occupied by advertisements. This year the Creative Writing Program, in addition to taking nominations, had an open submission policy for the Poetic Journeys series, in which all students were allowed to submit their best work. Poetic Journeys is an interdisciplinary collaboration between the Creative Writing Program and the Art Department’s Design Center. The program is modeled after the MTA’s “Poetry in Motion,” and features poetry by students and faculty, printed on professionally designed placards, posted on campus transportation in spaces normally occupied by advertisements. The 2015 series features, for the first time, work by high school student Abby Kamphausen from UConn neighbor, E.O. Smith, where a creative writing class taught by UConn graduate Denise Abercrombie was invited to submit poems for Poetic Journeys.

This year’s poster series features poems by Erick Piller, Chitra Nidadavolu, Matthew Shelton, Marissa Stanton, Abby Kamphausen, Shaine Scarminach, Christiana Ares-Christian, and Zara Rix. This year’s posters feature design by Samantha Weiss, Franklin Canales, Rachael Conti, Marilyn O’Dowd, Hannah Lucca, Hunter French, Jocelyn Lau, Bria Caso, Drianne Laliberte and Haley Taylor. In addition to the eight poem posters, this year we have an event poster for the Poetic Journeys release party, designed by Samantha Weiss.

--Review by Miller Oberman, Creative Writing Program Assistant Director
CONGRATULATIONS TO THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT’S 2015 CREATIVE WRITING AWARD WINNERS!

The Edward R. and Frances Schreiber Collins Literary Prizes
Prose Winner/$4,000: Catherine Hires for “Cold Water”
Poetry Winner/$4,000: Zachary Bradley for “The Scientific Process”
Honorable Mention in Poetry: Kathryn Eichner for “The Number Five Fulton Inbound”

The Jennie Hackman Memorial Prize for Fiction
First place/$1,000: Loriann Dozier
Second place/$300: Stephanie Mei Koo
Third Place/$200: Joshua Couvares

Wallace Stevens Poetry Contest
First place/$1,000: Abigail Fagan
Second place/$500: Marissa Stanton
Third place/$250: Michael Stankiewicz

The Aetna Creative Works in Progress Grant
Winner/$500: Miller Oberman

The Aetna Children’s Literature Award
Winner/$250: Christiana Salah

The Aetna Translation Award
Winner/$250: Nathan Herter

The Aetna Creative Nonfiction Awards
Undergraduate First prize/$250: Eleanor Hudd
Graduate First Prize, /$250: Abigail Fagan

Long River Graduate Writing Award
Winner/$250: Kristina Reardon
For 18 years, the creative works of UConn students have been published in the Long River Review. Each year, the talent and diversity of the study body has been exemplified and celebrated. This year was no different.

Starting originally as a club, the Long River Review has since been integrated into the English department in order to offer students real world experience. The students are required to apply for the 15 seats in the spring semester class with applications typically opening in October. This year, the class accepted 19 students, as it was difficult to reject many talented applicants.

In celebration of yet another journal production, the Long River Review held its annual publication party last night at the Co-op Bookstore. The new space made for a perfect reading area, as selected writers and poets shared portions of their work. Winners of the fiction, non-fiction, poetry and translation entries read aloud and the journal was available for purchase.

One selected reader was Michael Stankiewicz, who read a piece entitled “Argument Lying in Wait.” The poem describes an entrancing woman whose “hips were a time bomb.” With single lines, Stankiewicz brought a temptress before the audience; a woman who was powerful and real, absent-mindedly sashaying through the room.

The ends with a dramatic line; one that resonates with listeners and clearly defines the character: her “intentions were life boats taking on water.” Stankiewicz’s commanding voice stopped with each line, allowing the audience to sift through the meaning of what was said, but continued before it completely set in, forcing the mysteriousness of this protagonist to truly come alive.

One other notable addition to this year’s journal was the interview section, run by Nikki Barnhart. She had the opportunity to meet with Claire Kilroy, Kate Monica, Benjamin S. Grossberg and Paul Muldoon, among others.

“The interviews offer the journal a variety of outside perspectives that I believe give an extra layer of depth and place it inside of a larger literary conversation,” Barnhart said. The interviews can be found online as well as inside the journal.

In addition to the interviews, the website now features blogs, of which all editors were required to publish at least four of within the last semester. Katie Loughrey, the blog editor, suggested that this allowed for “insight into our generation” and that it gave quick reviews and updates about the journal’s process.

The class’s professor, Penelope Pelizzon said. “The release is always a bittersweet experience, as it is scheduled during the last meeting time for the class, and is therefore the last time we see each other.”

The project is a wonderful collaboration between writers, editors and art students.

She also highlighted the print insert, included in every copy, created in association with Counter Proof Press. The print is hand colored, and so it had to be pressed four different times. The print was inspired by the art and written word throughout the journal.

“The journal was an opportunity to see the talent coming out of UConn, which is simply impressive and inspiring,” Lauren Silverio, the editor in chief, said. “I would like to encourage that more people submit work next year and apply for the editor positions. It is just a great community to be a part of and to learn from.”

--Review by Emily Lewson, Undergraduate Student
LRR Letter From the Editor,
Lauren Silverio

This journal is dozens of worlds stitched together. It is places and smells and characters and colors falling over one another when the pages close and bursting outward when the pages open. Press your nose to the binding and close the pages around your ears. Are you here yet?

These stories are our lovers, are our children; they keep us up at night. We dream of them and they, we hope, dream of us. These characters have belayed into the crevices of our brains; they have taken on lives of their own inside us. They look out of our eyes, chins on folded hands, and we are learning, slowly, how to look out of theirs.

These images have left shadows on our retinas; the negatives dance across the insides of our skulls. We reach out to them, call to them, ask them not to fade away.

There is room for you here – empty pages, insides of covers, outsides of margins. Come in.

Come explore.

We want you to get caught up in the collision of words and worlds with us. Bring your writing, bring your friends. If you find or leave something on the page, we hope that means you will come back to it.

Thank you for experiencing this journal with us.

Lauren Silverio
Faculty & Staff Updates


Darcie Dennigan’s short play Dandelion Farm, with images by artist Carl Dimitri, was published by Smoking Glue Gun press in April 2015. She wrote the libretto for Hunger, an opera based loosely on Knut Hamsun’s modernist novel of the same name and in 2014-2015 it has been performed as part of opera festivals in Darmstadt Germany, Los Angeles, and New York, and excerpts from a play in verse called Animal Land have been published by The Enemy and Bort Quarterly.

Sean Frederick Forbes published poems in The Midwest Quarterly and was one of four Connecticut based poets featured on WNPR with John Dankosky titled “The Art and Power of Poetry. He serves on the Board of Directors for 2Leaf Press and is a poetry reader for the literary journal Westview. He gave poetry readings at Quinebaug Valley Community College and for the Long River Review Series.

Miller Oberman gave a poetry reading and presented his paper “Wolf in the Ruins: on “Wulf and Eadwacer” and some notes on the poetics of translating Old English poetry” at “From Eald to New: Translating Early Medieval Poetry for the 21st Century” In Cork, Ireland in May 2014. His poem “On Trans” was published in Poetry in the March 2015 issue, and also featured on their website and their Poetry Podcast. His poem “Lies After the War” is forthcoming in The Nation. He is also was the winner of the 2015 Aetna Works in Progress Grant from UConn and served as the 2014/15 Assistant Director of UConn’s Creative Writing Program, directing the newest incarnation of Poetic Journeys, while receiving honors on two counts on his comprehensive PhD exams and achieving the coveted “All But Dissertation” status.

V. Penelope Pelizzon gave readings this year as a visiting writer at Loyola University, the University of Maine, the University of Missouri, and at UCLA’s Hammer Museum series in Los Angeles, alongside readings across New England and New York. Her new poems appear or are forthcoming in The Village Voice, Gulf Coast, and The Hopkins Review, while poems from her most recent book Whose Flesh is Flame, Whose Bone is Time (2014) were featured on Poetry Daily and Verse Daily.

Erick Piller will serve as the Assistant Director of the Creative Writing Program for 2015-2016. His poem “Quickening” was published by an online journal A-Minor in January 2015.
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- Tom Deans
- English Department Head Bob Hasenfratz
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