

2019-2020 Annual Report for the Poetry Center at Smith College



THE BOUTELLE-DAY POETRY CENTER

I'm thrilled beyond words by the gift of the endowment for the Poetry Center, which will be formally renamed The Boutelle-Day Poetry Center at the October 2020 dedication event. After many years of aspiring to this kind of financial independence and stability, this endowment from the Tamms A. Day Foundation affords unprecedented opportunities. These new funds have not only secured the Poetry Center's longevity, but also afford the possibility of new programming and expanded community engagement. As soon as current circumstances will allow, the Poetry Center will be privileging the following new initiatives:

- Poet Residencies

The Poetry Center will always be committed to offering readings by a diverse range of renowned and debut poets, and throughout the PC's growth, our public reading series has remained central to our programming. However, we look forward to rekindling the extraordinarily successful and student-focused poet-in-residence program. In past years, those annual week-long visits by poets afforded tremendous opportunities for Smith College students, and, moving forward, could potentially include activities ranging from class visits, craft talks, one-on-one workshop sessions with student poets, and even student writing projects related to campus assets such as Special Collections, campus art installations, and the MacLeish Field Station.

- International Writers

Through partnerships with Smith College's Lewis Global Studies Center, the Translation Concentration, and our foreign language departments, the Poetry Center plans to continue to facilitate visits by international poets following the visit by Soukaina Habiballah this past fall. Habiballah's visit was the result of collaboration with the University of Iowa's International Writing Program, which hosts a fall residency for acclaimed poets from across the globe. Recently, for instance, IWP invited poets from countries ranging from Algeria, Belgium, India, Iraq, Italy, Morocco, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Taiwan, and Venezuela. Moving forward, the Poetry Center can extend invitations to these writers for campus readings, participation in the annual Translation Slam, translation seminars, and class visits. Such diverse programming of global poets would enhance opportunities for not only the Smith College students already involved with language and translation studies, but also our international students who might not otherwise engage with the Poetry Center.

- Poetry Pedagogy Seminars for Public School Teachers

By partnering with Smith College's Urban Education Initiative, the Poetry Center could host poetry pedagogy seminars primarily intended for public school teachers. This initiative would bring together groups of both public school and alumnae teachers for symposium discussions that would provide educators from diverse communities with best practice curricular tools for teaching poetry. Smith College is known as a private college with a public conscience, and this kind of pedagogical collaboration would provide poetry teaching resources that could enact fundamental and catalytic change.

- "The Poem I Wish I Had Read" Project

The concept of the project is simple: we'll be compiling video testimonies of contemporary poets discussing one poem that they wish they had encountered as a teenager. Each poet will offer some brief personal testimony about why that poem would have spoken to them, followed by a reading of the poem. These videos, which will be housed on YouTube and linked through the Poetry Center's website, will offer readers access to intimate encounters with poetry that personalize the reading experience; rupture the frequently limited canon of poetry that many students are confined to during their teenage years; and provide teenagers with testimonials about how poetry can align with personal identity and offer transformative possibilities.

Meanwhile, on a personal note, it's been tremendously moving to know that, moving forward, the endowed Poetry Center will carry both the name of its founder, Annie Boutelle, and Tammis Day (AC '05). Numerous colleagues have told me how thrilled they are that founder Annie Boutelle's name will be forever linked to the Poetry Center, and that she had long hoped to establish an endowment that would not only solidify the center's financial standing, but more

importantly expand the ways in which poetry served Smith College and the larger community. The gift of this endowment could not be more perfect, nor have come at a more fortuitous time.

READINGS

As always, the Poetry Center sponsored visits by a tremendous group of diverse writers during the 2019-20 academic year. Highlights included a reading by MacArthur Award-Winning poet Terrance Hayes (which drew an audience of nearly three hundred people) and award-winning poet Camille Dungy (who read as part of Smith College's cross-curricular focus on climate change).

The numbers included below reflect the audience headcounts for the fall semester, as well as Kathleen Graber's reading, which was held in February. Unfortunately, due to the campus closure in the spring term, the Poetry Center's last three major events of the year – readings by Sara London and Nathan McClain, Paisley Rekdal, and Gabrielle Calvocoressi – needed to be staged as remote readings via Zoom.

Main Series Poetry Readings (with headcounts)

Terrance Hayes (278)
Dana Levin (97)
Camille Dungy (165)
Lee Ann Roripaugh (79)
Ciaran Berry (69)
Kathleen Graber (112)

Total for 2019-2020: 800 attendees, 6 poets

Cumulative totals for 23 years: 57,024 attendees and 243 poet visits

COLLABORATIONS

Over the past two years, the Poetry Center has been actively seeking opportunities to collaborate with different units on campus. During this past academic year, the PC has continued its ongoing collaborative work, as well as sought out new initiatives with constituents.

- One core collaborative project is *The Map of Every Lilac Leaf*, a publication developed in conjunction with the Smith College Museum of Art and featuring the work of poets responding to artwork housed at SCMA. The book will be published in Fall 2020.
- The Poetry Center was excited to build upon the wonderful success of last year's collaboration with the Campus School, when we helped oversee the development of the "River Poems" project with third grade students. The project, designed to foster a passion for poetry and an engagement with the natural world through language, entailed plans for three weeks of poetry writing lessons culminating in a class publication and reading at the Poetry Center. Unfortunately, although I had been actively working with a Smith College student and the Campus School to hone the project's curriculum and pedagogy, the COVID-19 crisis mandated the postponement of our work with the Campus School.

- The Poetry Center continued its collaborative work with the Lewis Global Studies Center. In December, through an expanded partnership with the Translation Concentration and different foreign language departments on campus, we sponsored a hugely successful "Translation Slam," an idea that stemmed from a conversation with a Smith College alumna and which we hope will become an annual event. Each year, the event will involve students from numerous different units and backgrounds reading "competing" translations of poems from three designated languages; for our first year, we focused on lyric poems written in Chinese, Italian, and Spanish. This year's partnership also featured a co-sponsored reading by acclaimed Moroccan poet Soukaina Habiballah.
- In Fall 2019, in collaboration with Theater Department, the Poetry Center helped develop a staged reading of "Mary Ventura and the Ninth Kingdom," a previously unpublished short story written by Sylvia Plath while studying at Smith College.

Other collaborative projects from this past year include:

- "Celebrating Art in a Time of Crisis," a workshop co-sponsored with CEEDS that featured poet Camille Dungy discussing ways to respond to climate change through art.
- Working with foreign language departments to provide an online venue for the annual International Poetry Day, which needed to be hosted remotely this year due to the COVID-19 crisis.
- Ongoing interdisciplinary project development with the Arts Afield Committee.
- A Geosciences Poetry Lunch with Teresa Carson and Bosiljka Glumac, a reading by author John Bollard with the English Department, and a Kahn Institute reading with Sergio Medeiros.
- Additional event co-sponsorships with Department of Africana Studies, Department of East Asian Languages & Literatures, Department of English Language & Literature, Otelia Cromwell Day Committee, Smith College Lecture Committee, and The Smith College Museum of Art.

Additional Poetry Center Events and Salons

Beyond our core poetry readings during the 2019-20 season, the Poetry Center sponsored and supported numerous additional events and salons, including:

- a poetry revision workshop with poets Nickole Brown and Jessica Jacobs ('02).
- a chapbook release reading by Rebecca Hart Olander ('96 MAT).
- the 11th annual *30 Poems in November!* fundraiser celebration by the Center for New Americans.
- a presentation of the film "Beyle," co-directed by Liz Walber '16 and Christa Whitney '08 with Yiddish Book Center.

This past year, the Poetry Center continued to offer the use of its space to numerous constituents on campus and for a variety of purposes, including:

- a Five College Creative Writing meeting
- Creative Writing Teaching Circle Salons
- ENG Literary Lunches
- Lewis Leadership Saturdays
- the editorial meetings of *Labrys* (Student Magazine)
- *Emulate* Workshop and Write-In (Student Magazine)
- Spitfire (Student Group)
- Writer's Flock (Student Group)
- Five College Literary Translation Seminar
- End-of-Semester classes for ENG poetry workshops
- a variety of events designed to support the Poetry Concentration students, including PYX Capstone class meetings, the PYX 140 Interterm class, and a PYX Pizza get-together.

Poetry Center BroadSides

The Poetry Center has been extremely fortunate to continue its annual work with illustrator and master engraver Barry Moser. This year, Barry produced an exquisite broadside of Terrance Hayes' poem "American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin." This broadside is the 29th in the ongoing series. Meanwhile, the Poetry Center has begun exploring additional ways of promoting these limited edition works. In addition to new marketing strategies and implementing annual discounts on selected pieces, we've begun selling the broadsides online through the Smith College Museum of Art's gift shop.

POETRY PRIZE FOR HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS

Events of this year included the 14th annual Smith College Poetry Prize for High School Girls. This prize, supported by Admission, celebrates the creative talents of young women, and strengthens our connection to high schools in the Northeast. We received around 150 submissions this year and the contest was judged by Paisley Rekdal.

This year's first-place prize winner was Rachel Brooks from the Christian Heritage School in Trumbull, Connecticut for her poem "Of Aching Knots." The judge also selected three finalists who had been enrolled as students at The Masters School in White Plains, New York, the Walnut Hill School in Natick, Massachusetts, and the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts in Windsor, Connecticut.

ALUMNAE OUTREACH

As the Director of the Poetry Center, I've been devoted to developing strong connections and relationships with poet alumnae from Smith College. During this past academic year, I've scheduled a reading by six Smith College alumnae to celebrate the publication of *The Map of*

Every Lilac Leaf; in June, I'll be offering an online class on the poetry of Jericho Brown for the Smith College Club of New York City; and I continued to foster my relationship with Minerva Neiditz in Hartford.

COVID-19 RELATED OUTREACH

In the wake of this spring's pandemic which caused the shutdown of Smith's campus, the Poetry Center found numerous opportunities to foster community, collaborations, and outreach to different constituents. These projects included:

- Poetry Center "Care Packages," which were sent out via email, and which featured curated poems, recipes, numerous poems by Smith College alumnae, and poetry-related craft projects.
- Poetry Center-sponsored "renga" projects, which featured poems written collaboratively by Smith College faculty, staff, students, and alumnae.
- "You May Notice Some Changes," a collaborative call and response featuring the work of Smith College photography and poetry students.
- International Poetry Day Tumblr in collaboration with Language Departments.

STAFF, INTERNS, AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Once again, it's important to privilege the incredible hard work of Jen Blackburn, the Poetry Center's Administrative Assistant in her ninth year of work. Jen's contributions to the Poetry Center continue to be exemplary, and her insights, guidance, efficiency, and commitment to our vision are utterly invaluable.

I was also fortunate to again work with a stellar group of student interns at the Poetry Center this year:

- Madden Aleia and Maggie Olszewski (Baptista Interns);
- Sean Joyce-Farley (Core Intern);
- Şevval Ercin (Gladys Justin Carr '55 intern);
- Courtney Arnold (Special Events and Publicity);
- Julia Fischer (photographer);
- Camila Lashbrook & Amelia Burton (STRIDEScholars)

Jen Blackburn, Cornelia Pearsall, Ellen Doré Watson, Judith Gordon, María Estela Harrette, and Jessica Moyer all served on the Poetry Center's Advisory Committee during this past year, and I was grateful to work with such a supportive group. As always, their advice and guidance were extremely useful, and the committee advised on numerous issues, including staff considerations, outreach initiatives, and campus collaborations. The committee also assessed this year's PYX applications.

POETRY CONCENTRATION

The Poetry Concentration continues to flourish, and currently includes seventeen student concentrators (including seven new students who applied and were accepted in 2019).

In Spring 2020, five poetry concentrators enrolled in the PYX Capstone course, taught by Conkling Poet-in-Residence Ellen Doré Watson. Each student enrolled in PYX 300 developed a chapbook-length collection of poems that culminated in book publications designed by the students. Additionally, I participated in an Independent Study with a PYX student on her capstone project, a bilingual collection of poems that was also designed with InDesign software and published via online services.

I've also continued to develop the curriculum for the ENG 140 interterm course, *The Art and Business of Poetry*, required of all Poetry Concentrators. The course offered a sampling of the diverse components of the concentration, with a particular focus on professional practice-related skills and information. The class featured guest speakers Barry Moser, Sumanth Prabhaker, Emily Wojcik, Leslie Marie Aguilar, Shannon Supple, and included content related to editorial work, the submission process for creative work, applying for internships, resume development, and elements of book design.

POETRY CENTER PLANS FOR 2020-2021

Given the gift of the endowment from Tammis A. Day Foundation, the Poetry Center has planned numerous events and outreach initiatives for the 2020-2021 academic year. Although the COVID-19 pandemic will require all of these events to be offered as online programming, the Poetry Center is committed to making this transition to virtual events that will be both professional and efficacious, as well as promoted in manner that will potentially facilitate even larger audiences of interested alumnae and constituents across the globe. Highlights for the 2020-21 season include:

- The Dedication Event for the Boutelle-Day Poetry Center

This October 21st dedication is an event of critical importance for the Boutelle- Day Poetry Center. As currently planned, this event will require a complex use of Zoom software that entails an online reading by former U.S Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith, registration by Smith alumnae and interested constituents and community members, and live testimonials by President McCartney and members of the Tammis A. Day Foundation.

- A Poetry Reading and SCMA "Virtual Tour" with Mark Doty

Our ongoing collaboration with SCMA includes programming that will offer a reading by acclaimed author Mark Doty (who wrote the introduction to our forthcoming publication *The Map of Every Lilac Leaf*) as well as a planned "virtual tour" by Doty of a curated selection of the museum's artwork.

- Reading and Celebratory Event for the Publication of *The Map of Every Lilac Leaf*

This event, scheduled for October 6th in order to align with SCMA's centennial celebrations, will require substantive work in order to facilitate its numerous components, including a live Zoom reading by Smith College alumnae that will require the simultaneous use of SCMA visuals; extensive PR for the event, including promotional audio and video "teaser" recordings by participating poets, and co-curricular student creative writing projects linked to participating fall classes.

- "The Poem I Wish I Had Read" Project

This new outreach project will be focused on contemporary poets choosing a specific poem that they believe would have been transformative for them had they encountered that text in high school. Although the purpose of these recordings by poets will be multifaceted, the presiding idea of this project is to offer access to intimate, emotionally resonant, and deeply personal encounters with poetry. Many of the diverse poems selected will include content that directly contends with issues such as race, gender, sexual orientation, economic disparity, and immigration, while the testimonials will include discussions of how encounters with poetry that align with identity and personal experience can offer transformative possibilities. Rather than limiting the Poetry Center's outreach to local and occasional efforts, the online presence of these videos will allow this content to reach an international audience of teachers and interested students.

In summation, it continues to be an honor and thrill to serve as the Director of the Poetry Center at Smith College. Despite the current pandemic, and thanks in large part to the ongoing enthusiastic support of Smith College's Administration, I remain deeply excited about the Poetry's Center numerous opportunities.

Sincerely,



Matt Donovan

Director of the Poetry Center at Smith College