

Report on 2016-17 DCC Foundation Mini-Grant Project: *Process to Text Reading Series*

Anne Gorrick and Melanie Klein

With a \$2400 DCC Foundation Mini-Grant awarded this past academic year, we built on the project we began in 2015-16, organizing and hosting six poetry readings (three per semester) in the *Process to Text* series. As we did previously, we focused primarily on writers based in the greater Hudson Valley area whose work tends to involve unusual and inventive strategies, but this year we expanded the range somewhat to include both spoken-word and more traditional lyric poets. Each reading in the series featured two writers¹, paired for interesting resonances or contrasts between their work. On a given evening, each writer would read for about twenty minutes, and then both writers would engage the audience in a lively question-and-answer discussion of their individual writing processes. These discussions were often the highlights; students and others in the audience felt comfortable enough to ask real and illuminating questions, and the writers always responded thoughtfully and generously. A resulting sense of mutual respect for and joy in writing, and a sense of community, were the consistent notes on which these evenings closed.

The twelve participating readers this year were Celia Bland, Kenyatta JP Garcia, Tamas Panitz, Sparrow, Joanna Fuhrman, Anton Yakovlev, Cheryl A. Rice, Janet Hamill, Cole Heinowitz, Michael Ives, William Lessard, and Poet Gold, the current Poet Laureate of Dutchess County. Their work represents a rich mixture of approaches, sensibilities, subjects, and sounds. They were, every one of them, gracious, responsive to students, and deeply appreciative of the opportunity to visit our campus with the college's support and to read and discuss their work. Without exception, the visiting writers also commented on the level of engagement they saw in our students, as reflected in their questions, and on the quality of the exhibitions in the Mildred I. Washington Art Gallery, where each reading was held. It is important to us that *all* of the money from the mini-grant went directly to the writers in support of their work; each of the twelve received a \$200 honorarium. The writers' bios are attached.

Attendance was quite good throughout the series. Our goal was fifty people per reading. Except for the last reading of the year, which directly conflicted with a major campus event, there were always at least thirty in attendance—an ideal mix of students, faculty and staff members, and members of the broader community—and we once exceeded fifty, making it necessary to borrow chairs from nearby classrooms. This year, Melanie Klein was able to incorporate one of the readings into her ENG 210: Directed Writing of Poetry course, providing an invaluable opportunity for the class to hear and speak with practicing poets about their process and craft, as well as to actively participate in hosting a public poetry reading. Lucia Cherciu also incorporated the series into her ENG 210 section, and other professors encouraged their students to attend as a supplement to their ENG 215, ENG 102, and other courses. Students were interested and engaged, with some attending more than one reading. Some faculty / staff members attended several (or all) of the six readings, and their feedback was consistently positive and appreciative. Comments from students, faculty, and staff appear below.

The benefit of the six-part nature of the series, especially as it now expands beyond its first year, is that it allows us to build momentum—to build a sense of community and common purpose

¹ There were two exceptions: one reader had to cancel at the last minute, so we had one reader that night and three at a subsequent reading.

with a group of people over time and through shared experience. The feeling in the room where such an event takes place is galvanizing; it's an important sensation for students to encounter and feel a part of. Given the opportunity to extend the series for the 2017-8 academic year, we believe that *Process to Text* will continue to build in energy, quality, and power.

Comments from Students

It was my first time seeing a live poetry performance, and it was definitely unique to me. It really changed my perspective of poetry and it became real that it's something I want to do. It's one thing to read poetry in class on paper, but to hear the raw emotion in the poets' voice really changes the entire experience. They're telling the poems the way they want to be heard. It also gave me the opportunity to speak to other writers with loads of experience, and get their input on their techniques for writing. I asked about ways to overcome writers block and ways to explore different areas of poetry, and I've been using their techniques ever since! Seeing poetry performed live really solidified my interests in writing, and being able to hear the different voices or writers, all coming from different places, is an experience I won't forget.

—Shannon

Attending these poetry readings of Dutchess Community College was worthwhile, as I learned about many different forms of writing and poetry. I am a writer and I benefited from attending these sessions as it gave me confidence to be wild and free with my imagination and it reminds me that it is MY writings and no one else's although people are entitled to their opinions so a little criticism is accepted. [...] These sessions will allow a student or anyone to come out of their shell and share their art, or writings. In my honest opinion, I have never met a group of people so enthusiastic about writing and sharing their passion for it. I think involving young adults to speak up or ask questions, really adds a positive gesture to the program. [...] I always got new ideas of writing styles as well as more observation skills in regards to literature and music. When I listen to these poems that they read, I go home and listen to some deep rap songs and I try to think more about the metaphor of the lyrics or what they are actually trying to say. Since I got myself more involved with poetry, whether it was in class or attending these poetry readings, I benefited from it and I learn to listen to what the writer is trying to get across. I would recommend anyone to attend these, especially young adults because I truly enjoyed being one of the positive factors of my whole college experience of it.

—Jason

Comments from Faculty / Staff

As a teacher and an artist/poet, I want to thank Melanie Klein and Anne Gorrick for their continuing series of contemporary poetry readings. I was able to attend all of this year's readings, and found myself both fascinated and inspired by the variety of ways the writers approached and delivered their work. The series culminated in a beautifully inspiring performance by Poet Gold, our new Poughkeepsie Poet Laureate, who will also deliver a poem written for DCC's graduating students in this year's graduation ceremony.

Each reading was attended by a healthy mix of students, faculty, NTEs, and community members. I was grateful, particularly, that the students who attended (I encouraged my Modern

Poetry students to attend) had the chance to see poetry in action, poetry in performance, and poetry as a way to communicate and reach out to others.

—Leigh Williams, English / Humanities

The Process to Text poetry reading series that Anne Gorrick and Melanie Klein have organized is an invaluable treasure on our campus. Over the past two academic years, I've had several of my English 102 students meet poets who are actively engaged in their craft. All too often, in English courses, students study *the greats*, the canonical poets, which of course has its merits. However, what Process to Text reminds us is that poetry is alive and shouldn't be relegated to the dusty pages of anthologies. The series underscores the dialogic relationship between creative writing and the work that literary critics do—essentially commenting on and *making something* out of someone else's creative writing. Each of my students who attended a reading was interested in seeing the poets perform their work, and while many of my students didn't comment on whether or not they understood the poetry, they gained an experience, which is another layer of pedagogy that extends the intellectual work beyond the strictures of the classroom. Without qualms, I support this literary enterprise and look forward to another academic year of Process to Text on campus.

— Gail Upchurch-Mills, English / Humanities

Having “Process to Text” as a poetry series for the second year in a row has been an excellent learning opportunity for students at DCC. Students have become accustomed to this event, and I require my students to attend the readings in order to learn about ways to improve their writing skills, to find inspiration, and witness other writers as they engage in the difficult process of writing and revision. This year I have incorporated the Process to Text series into the curriculum. I often buy books from the poets who come and read, and I use their work as examples in the classroom in order to enrich students' learning experience. Students benefit from listening to a variety of voices and writing styles. The question-and-answer feature of the reading series provides students with an opportunity to get engaged in their learning process. As writers, our students need to find models of enthusiasm, passion, and success when it comes to writing. The writers that Melanie Klein and Anne Gorrick invited this year were committed to their craft and innovation, and were willing to experiment with new forms and push boundaries.

I attended five out of the six readings this year, and I was always happy to meet new writers, learn about new writing techniques, and ask many questions. As our students know, writing is a lonely enterprise, and writers often feel isolated. This series has offered writers in our area the opportunity to express themselves and share their work with others. It has helped to connect writers with their readers, and for this it has made a tremendous contribution to our community.

I am grateful for all the work Melanie Klein and Anne Gorrick have put into this reading series. I hope the series will become a permanent feature at DCC that the college will be recognized for in the writing community.

—Lucia Cherciu, English / Humanities

This year, I attended all of the Process to Text: Reading Series events, and I've realized two things. The students who attend quickly learned that poetry is no longer that stuffy old art form, which opinion they may have formed from what they read in high school. Instead, they learn that today's poets are mining Facebook for material and writing computer programs to make poems. How do I know this? Because the poets talked about these techniques. The poets we saw were eclectic, witty, smart, off-beat, and cool. They demonstrated to us that POETRY, as an art form, is

alive and well, and that is a good thing for our students. (What good is an art form if it can't connect to its audience, if it's not contemporary?) This semester, we even had a preview of Dutchess County Poet Laureate, Bettina "Gold" Wilkerson, who was fabulous and will read at this year's graduation ceremony. With such hip poets presenting their work, the students responded. They asked the authors questions about subject matter, editing, and work habits. This is a marvelous series: professional writers and college students talking about writing and art. Any liberal arts college would be proud! It benefits the students by enriching their view of literature, and, we must admit, the faculty is enriched, as well. This program is such a wonderful addition to the Dutchess campus.

—Henry Ricci, Professional Writing Tutor

Biographies of the 2016-17 Participating Writers

Celia Bland is a writer-in-residence in Bard College's Written Arts Program and the Associate Director of the Bard Institute for Writing & Thinking. Her poetry recently received the Raynes Poetry Prize and a *Narrative Magazine* poetry prize. A graduate of Sarah Lawrence College and New York University, she has published fourteen young adult novels, and *Soft Box: Poems*, and *Madonna Comix*, a collaboration with the artist Dianne Kornberg. Her third collection of poems, *Cherokee /Road /Kill* will be published in 2017. Her essays have recently appeared in the "Second Thoughts" series for the *National Book Critics Circle* website and in *Vela*, and are upcoming in *Tarpaulin Sky*. Recent poems are in Station Hill Press's new poetry anthology, *Infiltration: An Anthology of Innovative Poetry from the Hudson Valley*, and are upcoming in *Storyscape* and *Red Wheelbarrow*.

Joanna Fuhrman is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *The Year of Yellow Butterflies* (Hanging Loose Press 2015) and *Pageant* (Alice James Books 2009). She teaches poetry writing at Rutgers University and Sarah Lawrence College's Writers Village, through Teachers & Writers Collaborative and in her apartment in Brooklyn. She recently finished a book-length poetry/photography/sculpture project with the artist Toni Simon. You can find her online at <http://www.joannafuhrman.com/>.

Kenyatta JP Garcia is the author of *This Sentimental Education*, *Enter the After-Garde* and *ROBOT*. Their work has appeared in *BlazeVOX*, *EOAGH*, *Brooklyn Rail*, and *Queen Mob's Teahouse*. Originally from Brooklyn, NY, Kenyatta grew up on comic books and trash talk and later went to SUNY Albany to study English and Linguistics. Kenyatta's work combines elements of humor, sci-fi and pop culture to create a poetry that allows room for the audience to fall into the daydream space where poetry truly thrives until being forced to face reality again. In addition, they were an editor for *Horse Less Review* and currently are a judge for the Goodreads Poetry Competition.

Janet Hamill is the author of seven books of poetry and short fiction: *Troublante*, *The Temple*, *Nostalgia of the Infinite*, *Lost Ceilings*, *Body of Water*, *Tales from the Eternal Café* and *Knock*. Her poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and the William Carlos Williams Prize and *Tales from the Eternal Café*, was named one of the "Best Books of 2014" by *Publishers Weekly*. Her most

recent book *Knock*, (Spuyten Duyvil Press, Brooklyn, NY, 2016) is a surreal trip book written in the form of 72 pantoums. In addition to writing, Janet performs with the band Lost Ceilings. Together they have released two CD's of poetry and music— *Flying Nowhere* and *Genie of the Alphabet*. She has taught at Naropa University and New England College, where she received her MFA. At present, she is a senior artist advisor at the Seligmann Center in Sugar Loaf, NY where she co-directs Megaphone Megaphone— a monthly series of workshops, readings and presentations focusing on surrealism's literary origins, its predecessor and legacy.

Cole Heinowitz is a poet, scholar, translator, and associate professor of literature at Bard College. Her books of poetry include *The Rubicon* (The Rest Press, 2008), *Stunning in Muscle Hospital* (Detour Press, 2002), and *Daily Chimera* (Incommunicado Press, 1995). Her poems have appeared in journals such as *Aufgabe*, *Fence*, *The Poker*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *HOW2*, *6X6*, *Factorial!*, *Highway Robbery*, and *Mirage 4 Period(ical)*. She is the author of the critical study, *Spanish America and British Romanticism, 1777-1826: Rewriting Conquest* (Edinburgh University Press, 2010) and numerous essays and articles on British and American poetry from the early 19th century to the present. She is the translator of Mario Santiago Papasquiaro's *Advice from 1 disciple of Marx to 1 Heidegger fanatic* (Wave Books, 2013) and *Beauty Is Our Spiritual Guernica* (Commune Editions, 2015), the *Selected Prose of Alejandra Pizarnik*, as well as poems by Felipe Vázquez, Luis Vicente de Aguinaga, and Luis Felipe Fabre. Cole lives on the banks of the Esopus Creek in the Catskills.

Michael Ives is a writer, musician, and sound/text performer living in the Hudson Valley. His poetry and fiction have appeared in numerous magazines and journals in the United States and abroad. He is the author of *Wavetable* (Dr. Cicero Books, 2015) and *The External Combustion Engine* (Futurepoem, 2005) and has taught in the Written Arts Program at Bard College since 2003.

William Lessard has writing that has appeared or is forthcoming in *McSweeney's*, *FANZINE*, *Prelude*, *Hyperallergic*, *PANK*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *FUNHOUSE Magazine*, *Maudlin House*, and *People Holding*. His work has also been featured at MoMA PS1. His chapbook *Rembrandt with Cellphone* was published by Reality Beach

Tamas Panitz is the author of *Blue Sun* (Inpatient Press); several chapbooks available at Metambesen.org; and most recently *Uncreated Mirror* (Lunar Chandelier). He edits *The Doris* magazine with Billie Chernicoff, where he lives and writes in Hudson.

Cheryl A. Rice, a Long Islander by birth, has called the Hudson Valley home for over 35 years. She is the author of numerous chapbooks, most recently *Lady in Red* (2016: Flying Monkey Press), and her poems have appeared in a wide range of magazines and anthologies. Rice is a past member of Voices of the Valley, The Goat Hill Poets, and the Poetry Society of Woodstock. She has featured at readings from Albany to Middletown, and is the founder/host of the now defunct Sylvia Plath Bake-Off. Rice was nominated for Best of the Web in 2015. Her RANDOM WRITING poetry workshop is for poets from 1 to 92. Her poetry blog, Flying Monkey Productions, is at <http://flyingmonkeyprods.blogspot.com/>.

Sparrow published three books with Soft Skull Press, the most recent being *America: A Prophecy – The Sparrow Reader*. The Operating System recently published *How to Survive the Coming Collapse of Civilization (And Other Helpful Hints)*. Sparrow is the longest-running contributor to the *Sun* magazine, and writes monthly for *Chronogram*. His poems have appeared in *The New*

Yorker, *The New York Times*, *Lungfull!* and *The American Poetry Review*. Sparrow plays flutophone in the disquieting “juice bar band,” Foamola. Follow him on Twitter: Sparrow@Sparrow14. Sparrow lives in a doublewide trailer in Phoenicia, N.Y.

Bettina “Poet Gold” Wilkerson is the Dutchess County 2017 Poet Laureate and recipient of the 2016 Dutchess County Executive’s “Artist” Award. She received the 2016 Dutchess County Athena Award from The Chamber Foundation, Inc., the 2016 Exempt Firemen’s Association Black Heritage Committee’s “Outstanding Community Service Award” for Extraordinary Contribution and Dedication, and the 2014 NYSCA Individual Artist Tier Grant for Dutchess County. To fulfill her passion for mentoring and fostering young talented minds, Gold has collaborated with educational institutions and arts and youth development organizations such as R.E.A.L. Skills Network, Inc., Mill St. Loft, Breaking Barriers, the Mid-Hudson Heritage Center, Arts Mid-Hudson, The Lincoln Middle School (Passaic, NJ) and The Berta A. Dreyfus Intermediate School 49 (Staten Island). Through her mentoring and poetic performances, she has touched over a thousand middle- and high-school-aged students, engaging them in understanding the direct connection between literacy, goal setting, and the achievement of their dreams. Poet Gold was the “Artist-in-Residence” for the “Leadership Overnight Camp” hosted by Rural & Migrant Ministry, served as host for the 2016 RMM Rural Women’s Assembly, hosted the 2015 NYS Women’s Rural Conference, and has spoken at renowned organizations such as YAI National Institute for People with Disabilities (The Women Stepping Up Employee Resource Group) and the Omega Institute’s 2014 “Women Serving Women Summit.” She has inspired women with her words for the Women’s Leadership Alliance International Women’s Day. Poet Gold’s spoken word performances are countless, and her poetic work has been featured at Arts Westchester-SHE Exhibit (part of “HER”), Barnes & Noble (Poetry Month 2016), the Howland Cultural Center (You are My Blue, I am Your Red), and the Queens New Music Festival/Tenri Cultural Center. Presently, Poet Gold is the Host for “POELODIES” at The Falcon, Marlboro, NY, and for “Newburgh’s Open Mic” at The Warehouse, Newburgh, NY. Her book, *When My Soul Speaks, I Scribe...poetry* is available on www.amazon.com.

Anton Yakovlev was born in Moscow, Russia and moved to the United States when he was 15. He studied filmmaking and poetry at Harvard University. He is the author of poetry chapbooks *Ordinary Impalers* (Aldrich Press, 2017), *The Ghost of Grant Wood* (Finishing Line Press, 2015), and *Neptune Court* (The Operating System, 2015). His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Hopkins Review*, *Prelude*, *Measure*, *Amarillo Bay*, *The Stockholm Review of Literature*, and elsewhere. A two-time Pushcart Prize nominee, he was a finalist for the 2016 Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award and the winner of the 2016 KGB Poetry Annual Open-Mic Contest. *The Last Poet of the Village*, a book of translations of poetry by Sergei Esenin, is forthcoming from Sensitive Skin Books in 2017. He is a co-host of the Carmine Street Metrics reading series and of the Rutherford Red Wheelbarrow reading series, and, starting in January 2017, Education Director at the Bowery Poetry Club. He has also written and directed several short films.