# James Menill

## JAMES MERRILL HOUSE NEWSLETTER

*Spring 2017* 

## **Poet Louise Glück to Visit Stonington**

WE ARE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE Louise Glück, United States Poet Laureate



Louise Glück

in 2003-2004, as this year's Invited Merrill Fellow. The author of more than a dozen books of poetry and an essay collection, she has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for The Wild Iris; the National Book Critics Circle Award for The Triumph of Achilles; and the National Book Award for Faithful and Virtuous Night. In addition, Glück is a recipient of the Bollingen Prize, the National Humanities Medal, the Gold Medal for Poetry from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets. She currently teaches at Yale University and Stanford University, and lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In an interview shortly after

being named Poet Laureate in 2003, she revealed her admiration for T.S. Eliot and William Carlos Williams. "I like writers whose successes are quixotic and partial," she said. "Some of their poems are messes and some are astonishing." She reads from her own work at the La Grua Center in Stonington on Sunday, June 4, at 5 pm.

## **New Exhibit Captures Merrill's Storied Life**

AN EXHIBIT curated by Washington University Libraries Special Collections and Scholarly Publishing departments is now accessible online. Guided by Langdon Hammer's biography James Merrill: Life and Art, the digital display showcases handwritten letters, drafts of poems, photos, and other ephemera drawn from Merrill's literary archive, which he entrusted to the university. It is organized thematically ("Love and Money," "Water Street," and "The Other World'), and offers a fresh lens on the poet's life and career to newcomers, fans, and scholars alike. The project descended from an on-site exhibit that was installed for the James Merrill Symposium at W.U. in October 2015.

To peruse what's on display google "James Merrill: Life and Archive" or follow this link: http://omeka.wustl.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/merrill-life-archive

## **Merrill House Alums Gather to Celebrate James Merrill's Legacy**

ON APRIL 5TH, several Merrill House Fellows read to a full house at the University of San Francisco's (USF) Xavier Auditorium. The event was organized by poet and USF professor Bruce Snider, a past writer-in-residence and current member of the Merrill House Advisory Board. Joining the festivities (from left to right in photo) were past JMH Committee chair Lynn Callahan, Josh Weil, Brittany Perham, Kathleen Winter, Amy Glynn, Nate Klug, Noah Warren, Susan Steinberg, Peter Kline, Bruce Snider, and Jeff Callahan. Everyone read something by Merrill (selections included "The Victor Dog," "Charles on Fire," "The Angel," "For Proust," "The Mad Scene," and multiple extracts from "The Changing Light at Sandover") before reading work inspired by their own time at Merrill House.

Amy Glynn brought along a rare copy of *Jim's Book*—Merrill's first collection of poems and short stories, privately printed by his father as a gift for his 16-year-old son. She opened the event with a reading from this collection, and Snider closed the event with "Days of 1994" — one



of the last poems Merrill wrote. Lynn and Jeff Callahan, who held a reception for former fellows at the Association of Writers & Writing Program (AWP) conference on behalf of the Merrill House in February, again hosted nightcaps at a nearby wine bar, where the group—and their conversation about Merrill poems and their Stonington experiences—closed the place.

In tandem with the celebration, *The Ignation*, USF's student-run literary journal, is doing a feature spread on James Merrill, The Merrill House, and the West Coast Merrill fellows, which was released in late April. USF's Gleeson Library also focused their National Poetry Month display around Merrill and works by local Merrill alums.

## To Our Donors...

**THANK YOU ALL** for your support of the James Merrill House, this wonderful literary treasure now recognized as a significant national landmark in our midst. Your generous contributions allow us to provide residencies for and readings by as many as ten writers per year; all find the Merrill House a uniquely inspiring place to live and work.

Many thanks, too, to the committed volunteers on the Merrill Committee, whose involvement on behalf of the house and its programs ranges from shoveling snow from the roof and pumping water from the basement, to making the writers feel at home here and helping conserve the contents of the rooms they work in, to hosting and catering events and producing this newsletter. These unpaid efforts enable the Merrill House to achieve its mission on a tight budget, and means that 100% of your contribution goes toward supporting our programs.

With much appreciation, Bill Middleton & Sally Wood Co-chairs

#### James Merrill House Committee

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Bruce Snider
Stephen Yenser

107 Water Street, Stonington, CT 06378 www.JamesMerrillHouse.org A program of the SVIA

## JMH 2017-2018 Writers in Residence

WALTER PERRIE (August 2017) was born in

Lanarkshire, in the central lowlands of Scotland, and educated at the universities of Edinburgh (MA, Hons, Philosophy) and Stirling (MPhil). A 1987 recipient of an Ingram Merrill Foun-



dation Award, he has worked as a freelance editor, poet, critic, travel writer and sometime lecturer in philosophy and creative writing. He has given many readings of his poetry in both North America and in Europe.

**DAN CHIASSON** (September 2017) is the author



of four books of poetry, most recently *Bicentennial* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), and a book of criticism, *One Kind of Everything* (University of Chicago Press, 2006). He has received the

Whiting Writers' Award, a Pushcart Prize, and a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation. A professor of English at Wellesley College, he serves as *The New Yorker*'s poetry critic.

D.M. ADERIBIGBE (October 2017) was born in

Nigeria. He graduated with a BA in History and Strategic Studies from the University of Lagos in 2014. A 2017 OMI Fellow at Ledig House, he recently completed his MFA in



creative writing at Boston University where he received a Robert Pinsky Global Fellowship. His chapbook, *In Praise of Our Absent Father*, was selected for the APBF New Generation African Poets Chapbook Series selection.

MAXIM LOSKUTOFF (November 2017) was



raised in western Montana. A graduate of NYU's MFA program, he was the recipient of a Global Academic Fellowship (for Writing) in Abu Dhabi and the M Literary Fellowship

in Bangalore. His stories have appeared in

The Southern Review, The Gettysburg Review, Fiction, Narrative, and The Chicago Tribune. His collection Come West and See is forthcoming from W.W. Norton.

MIKE ALBERTI (Winter 2017-2018) was born and raised in Albuquerque,



and raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Minnesota. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Crazyhorse*,

Flyway, Gulf Coast, One Story, and elsewhere. He has taught writing at the University of Minnesota and in the Minnesota state prison system. He lives in Minneapolis, where he is at work on a novel.

SUZANNE RIVECCA (Spring 2018) is the author

of *Death is Not an Option:*Stories (W.W. Norton 2010), which won the Rome Prize in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Rivecca has been a National



Endowment for the Arts fellow as well as a Stegner fellow at Stanford and Creative Arts fellow at Radcliffe. Currently, she is working on new fiction and nonfiction that is drawn from her work in San Francisco's homeless-services sector.

DUY DOAN (June 2018) is a Vietnamese-



American poet from Texas. He won the 2017 Yale Series of Younger Poets prize for his manuscript "We Play a Game." A Kundiman fellow, he received his MFA

in poetry from Boston University. His poems have appeared in *Slate, The Cortland Review, Amethyst Arsenic,* and elsewhere. He is the director of the Favorite Poem Project, which celebrates the role of poetry in the lives of Americans. He lives in Jamaica Plain, Mass.

## You *Can* Go Home Again

**THANKS AGAIN** to a generous gift from Lynn and Jeff Callahan, past Merrill Fellows Michael Tyrell (2003–2004) and Peter Filkins (Spring 2012) will each return to the Merrill House for one week this July. All but the previous year's Fellows were invited to apply for the residency—the third time it's been offered—with Michael and Peter selected by random drawing.

Here's what Amy Glynn (Fall 2012) said of her experience as one of last summer's returning Fellows: "My micro-fellowship at James Merrill House came at a perfect time, when I had a lot of ideas and full-time parenting responsibility. I could get away and concentrate without placing undue burdens on caregivers at home. I wrote over 100 pages of a novel draft that week (the book's now being looked at by my agent) and returned to poems I'd started during my 2012 fellowship and was able to finish them. My second collection is now in the hands of my publisher. The brevity of the stay was probably part of what was so galvanizing about it! So grateful for the opportunity to come back."

## **A Coveted Conservation Grant for Merrill House**

WE'RE DELIGHTED to announce that the Foundation for the American Institute for Conservation has accepted the James Merrill House to its 2017 Collections Assessment for Preservation (CAP) program. The CAP award of \$7,800 enables JMH to hire a Collections Assessor and a Buildings Assessor from an Approved Assessor list to complete a general conservation assessment. JMH will be responsible for covering costs that exceed the amount of the allocation.

We're fortunate that JMH committee member Sarah Dove had the foresight to alert the committee that the CAP program, which had been shut down in 2015, was to be relaunched in late 2016 under the auspices of the Institute of Museum & Library Services and the Foundation for the American Institute for the Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works. Under this program, "Participating institutions receive support for a general conservation assessment from a qualified collections assessor and a building assessor. The two assessors work collaboratively to provide the institutions with recommendations for improved collections care. Assessments consist of preparatory work, a two-day site visit, a written report, and a oneyear follow-up consultation."

Working towards the deadline of March 1, 2017 to complete the CAP application, Sarah enlisted the help of Boston-based paper conservator Elizabeth Morse to conduct a necessary preliminary survey of the condition of the art-on-paper collection at JMH. During summer and fall 2016, Morse undertook this investigation by scheduling her work to occur in between the stays of the writers-in-residence.



Above left: MH 006, print, untitled, abstracted image of fish, signed "Hugo" and dated 1945, edition 1/xxx

Above right: Back of frame showing framer's label of John Bulfair of New York

Right: Highly acidic newspaper New York Journal American found inside frame, dated 7 May 1946

She began by removing all the framed items from the stairwell and study. Upon close inspection, many of these showed light-damage, damage from extremes of too humid and/or too dry conditions, and damage from poor quality framing materials and methods.

Her survey included recording the dimensions of the artwork, signatures, inscriptions, and making notes for the catalog record. She photographed all the works in and out of their frames or enclosures, fully surveying 93 items in toto. One interesting print, untitled, was discovered to include a newspaper from 1946 enclosed within the frame, shown in the photo at right. The artist was Hugh Parker Guiler, a.k.a. Ian Hugo, the husband of Anaïs Nin. Morse's research





findings and final report were integral to the success of the CAP application, which was completed and submitted online by Sarah Dove and Sally Wood.

## **A Concert of Poems**

#### **THE JAMES MERRILL HOUSE**

Committee has invited pianist and composer Matthew Aucoin to perform at a local venue in late winter/early spring of 2018. Accompanied by acclaimed tenor Paul Appleby, Aucoin will likely play his composition *Merrill Songs for Tenor & Piano*, a song setting of six Merrill poems of "love and loss."

Commissioned by New York's Carnegie Hall and London's Wigmore Hall, the work premiered to lavish praise at Zankel Hall in New York in March 2016. The recital received an unqualifiedly enthusiastic review from *New York Times* critic Anthony Tommasini: "As if being a gifted composer, pianist and conductor were not enough, the young Matthew Aucoin is also a poet. This gives him an insider's insight into reading poetry. The most striking aspect [of] Mr. Aucoin's compelling new cycle

[is] the intriguing way the music probes and grapples with six dense, rich poems by James Merrill." Tommasini went on to praise Paul Appleby as "that special singer who puts words first in performing songs."

thesis on the poet's work, James Merrill and Our 'Injured' Musical World. Shortly after Harvard, he was named the youngest-ever Associate Conductor at the Metropolitan Opera and is currently Artist-in-Residence at the Los Angeles

"The most striking aspect of Mr. Aucoin's compelling new song cycle is the intriguing way the music probes and grapples with six dense, rich poems by James Merrill."

This was not Aucoin's first "grapple" with Merrill's work. He has written a one-act play entitled *From Sandover*, inspired by the poet's epic poem, which recounts the tale of a gay couple who dwell in Sandover and listen to ghostly voices talking through a Ouija board. At Harvard College, from which Aucoin graduated *summa cum laude* in 2012, he wrote a 30-page

Opera where he both composes and conducts.

Appleby, who also studied literature at college, is much in demand at the world's leading recital, concert, and opera stages, including Glyndebourne, Aix-en-Provence and Santa Fe. This past autumn he sang in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

## What's New?

## Catching up with past Merrill Fellows

**MIEKE EERKENS** (Nov 2013) recently finished a book, *All Ships Follow Me*, that is forthcoming from Picador. Drafted during her Merrill House stay, it is inspired by her parents' World War II experiences at a Japanese labor camp and in German-occupied Holland.

**AMY GLYNN** (Oct 2012) says her next book, *Romance Language*, forthcoming from Measure Press, takes its structure from Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*. Glynn's piece for *Literal Latte* was named a "Notable Essay of 2016" by Best American Essays.

ADAM GIANNELLI (Spring 2016) garnered a starred *Publishers' Weekly* review for *Tremulous Hinge* (University of Iowa Press) that cited his skill at pulling "stunning phrases whole from the ether, describing the tides as 'the ocean tearing blue page after/ blue page from its journal."

JULIA GLASS (Oct 2015) launches her new book, A House Among the Trees (Pantheon), in June. While in Stonington, Glass read from a first draft of the novel, which tells the complicated history of a world-famous children's book author and the assistant he names as his trustee.

**PIOTR GWIAZDA** (Fall 2008) is a native of Poland who moved to the United States at the age of 18, and is currently Professor of English at the University of Maryland. His third book of poetry, *Aspects of Strangers*, is available from Moria Books.

by Claudia Rankine for the Barnard Women Poets Prize. *Double Portrait* will be released by W.W. Norton in August. *The Night Could Go in Either Direction*, a chapbook co-authored with Kim Addonizio, was released in 2016.

**CATHERINE POND** (Oct 2016) had two poems featured recently in *Narrative Magazine*, and an essay about the HBO series *Girls* is forthcoming in *Salmagundi*. Currently Brooklyn-based, she enters the PhD Program in Creative Writing at University of Southern California in the fall.

**ANNA POTTER** (Spring 2007) is nominated for a Pushcart Prize for "The Body in Motion," an essay published in the Winter 2016 issue of *Phoebe Journal*. As an instructor at Writopia Lab, Potter aims to "teach the art of fibbing with integrity."

**DAN O'BRIEN** (June 2013) had his play *The Body of an American* produced at Hartford Stage with subsequent runs in New York,

Washington D.C., and Chicago. It will next be staged by Denver's Curious Theatre Company during the 2017-2018 season. Catch it if you can.

**TERESE SVOBODA** (Nov 2015) recently published *Anything That Burns You*, a ground-breaking portrait of early 20<sup>th</sup> century radical poet Lola Ridge (Schaffner Press). Her latest poetry collection is *Professor Harriman's Steam Air-Ship* (Eyewear, UK).

JOSH WEIL (Fall 2010) has a new collection of stories out this fall. The tales in *The Age of Perpetual Light* (Grove/Atlantic) explore "themes of progress, the pursuit of knowledge, and humankind's eternal attempt to decrease the darkness in the world."

**KATHLEEN WINTER** (Dec 2014) reports that her second book, *I Will Not Kick My Friends*, won the Annual Elixir Prize and will be published by Elixir Press in 2018. She also received the Poetry Society of America's Emily Dickinson Prize for her poem "The Porch Roof's Sky Blue Ceiling."

**STEPHEN YENSER** (Merrill Advisory Board) has put out a new collection called *Stone Fruit* (Waywiser Press) that is drawing high praise (from The *Los Angeles Book Review* among others) for his poetry's signature "linguistic legerdemain" and "intellectual sprezzatura."

MATTHEW ZAPRUDER (Spring 2003) has a new book with Ecco Press. Described as an impassioned call for a return to reading poems, *Why Poetry* debuts this August. In 2016, Zapruder was named poetry editor for *The New York Times Magazine*.

For latest news about past and current WIR fellows visit www.jamesmerrillhouse.org and follow us on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/TheJamesMerrillHouse/



## **Food for Thought**

FROM ALICE WATERS to Alice B. Toklas, a quirky cast of culinary muses grace Merrill's cookbook shelf. As Langdon Hammer notes in his biography, Toklas put Merrill's recipe for shrimp a l'orange into her cookbook, and in turn taught him how to make hash brownies. Merrill loved pranking dinner guests, and found time in the kitchen beneficial for things besides recipe testing. As he relayed to J.D. McClatchy in an interview for The Paris Review: "Whether you're at your desk or not when a poem's under way, isn't there that constant eddy in your mind? If it's strong enough all sorts of random flotsam gets drawn into it, how selectively it's hopeless to decide at the time. I try to break off, get away from the page, into the kitchen for a spell of mixing and marinating which gives the words a chance to sort themselves out behind my back." (The Paris Review, James Merrill, The Art of Poetry: No. 31, Issue 84, Summer 1982)

## The Eel at the Dinner Party

**NEW ON THE MERRILL HOUSE WEBSITE** is a video of Robin Magowan, poet, translator, essayist and a nephew of James Merrill, in conversation with Langdon Hammer. Magowan speaks of his relationship with his uncle as well as Merrill's life, works, and intimate attachments. He shares anecdotes about visits to The Orchard, Merrill's childhood home in Southampton, and dinners in Athens and Manhattan (where Merrill's electric eel lit up at 3-minute intervals, as guests raced to compose triolets.). He also notes Merrill's realization late in life that "I don't have to be brilliant" and his regret that he chose to "do what you do well," sensing an opportunity lost by focusing on poems to the exclusion of stories and plays. The Magowan video joins those of J.D. McClatchy and Stephen Yenser, all part of a Merrill House effort to record the personal perspectives of those who knew Merrill well.

## **Donors to the James Merrill House**

We want to thank all those listed below who gave to the James Merrill House in the past fiscal year, April 1, 2016-March 31, 2017.

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This list reflects gifts received from April 1, 2016 through March 31, 2017. If we have inadvertently missed you, we sincerely apologize. If your name does not appear or if you would like to change the way we list your name, please email us at writer@jamesmerrillhouse.org.

\*Acknowledges donors who have contributed to the James Merrill House for five years or more.

+ Acknowledges former Merrill Fellows.

#### **In Memory of David Clapp**

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WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM & MUSEUM

James Merrill House 107 Water Street Stonington, CT 06378

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

For more information about our programs, visit us at jamesmerrillhouse.org and follow us on Facebook.

## **Calendar of Events**

SATURDAY, MAY 27

**Open House** Merrill Apartment 3-5 pm

#### **SUNDAY, JUNE 4**

- **Open House** Merrill Apartment 1-3 pm
- James Merrill House Ceremony to recognize its designation as a National Historic Landmark, Union and Water Streets, 3 pm
- **Louise Glück**, Pulitzer Prize Winner and Invited Merrill Fellow, reads from her work. La Grua Center, 5 pm

#### **SATURDAY, JUNE 17**

**Poetry on the Porch** Yale Younger Poets Prize Winner **Dee Mathews** reads from her work. Location to come, 5 pm

#### **SATURDAY. AUGUST 5**

**Annual Deck Party**. Merrill Apartment, 5-7 pm

SATURDAY and SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 9 and 10 Open House Merrill Apartment 3-5 pm

#### **SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23**

Annual Merrill Lecture: Poet **Claudia Rankine** reads from her work. La Grua Center, 5 pm

#### **SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 30**

September Merrill Fellow **Dan Chiasson** reads from his work. Stonington Free Library, 5 pm

#### **SATURDAY, OCTOBER 21**

October Merrill Fellow **D.M. Aderibigbe** reads from his work. Stonington Free Library, 5 pm