

James Merrill

JAMES MERRILL HOUSE NEWSLETTER

Spring 2017

Poet Louise Glück to Visit Stonington

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



KATHERINE WOLKOFF

Louise Glück

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/james-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

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107 Water Street, Stonington, CT 06378
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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 Foundation 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, 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 re-launched 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 one-year 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.

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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."

"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

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

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.

Catching up with past Merrill Fellows

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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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+ Acknowledges former Merrill Fellows.

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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