Sophie Kerr and Rose O'Neill Literary House

2008 - 2009 Events
Washington College

The Sophie Kerr Legacy

SOPHIE KERR, a prolific and popular American writer of the early 20th century, has left an indelible literary mark at Washington College, where the gift she bequeathed 40 years ago has enabled the College to bring to campus a succession of the nation's top writers, editors and scholars. Edward Albee, Joseph Brodsky, Gwendolyn Brooks, Mary Karr, Lucille Clifton, James McBride, Eamon Grennan, Toni Morrison, Joyce Carol Oates, Robert Pinsky, Charles Simic and Jane Smiley are just a few of the literary heavyweights who have inspired and instructed the next generation of American writers at Washington College.

In addition to the Sophie Kerr Speaker Series, the Sophie Kerr Gift provides scholarships for students who show literary promise, pays for library books, and supports various student literary activities. The result is a wonderfully vibrant intellectual culture where the literary arts thrive.

The Kerr endowment also funds the Sophie Kerr Prize, awarded each year to the graduating senior who has the best ability and promise for future fulfillment in the field of literary endeavor. Valued at $67,481 in 2008, it is the nation's largest literary prize awarded solely to undergraduate students.

The Rose O'Neill Literary House

ESTABLISHED IN 1985, the Rose O'Neill Literary House is a center for creative life on campus, a comfortable, sociable place that appeals particularly to students within the creative writing program, English and drama majors, performance artists and aficionados of the literary and book arts. This refurbished Victorian—with its rows of books, wraparound porch, quiet garret retreats, antique letterpress and expansive outdoor deck—iis the perfect venue for co-curricular activities that bring together students and faculty with visiting writers, scholars, editors and other literary artists.

The Lit House's fall "Literature of the Fact: Masters of Topical Non-Fiction" series, in conjunction with the English Department's "Living Writers" course, explores current American topical writing by bringing to campus working writers who will both meet with students and present public readings.

Colson Whitehead

August 23, 3 pm, Dining Facility

FIRST-YEAR BOOK: *Apex Hides the Hurt* by Colson Whitehead

The first-year book program gives new students a common experience over the summer and introduces them to Washington College's tradition of bringing great writers to campus. This event is open only to Washington College first-year students.

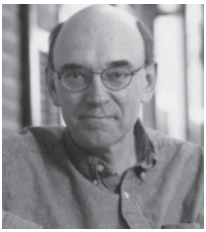
A New York City native, Colson Whitehead has drawn massive acclaim—including a Whiting Award and a MacArthur "genius grant"—for his idiosyncratic voices, deep-reaching parables, and searing visions of class, race, history and community. His first novel, *The Intuitionist*, won the QPB New Voices Award for its depiction of intrigue in a big-city Department of Elevator Inspectors. *John Henry Days*, a meditation on the legendary folk hero, won the Young Lions Award and was a finalist for both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award. *Apex Hides the Hurt* tells the story of a naming consultant—a character who remains unnamed —called on to settle the past and future of a small town. Critics have called the book "wickedly funny" (*The Boston Globe*), "brilliant" (*The New York Times*) and "dazzling ... an eloquent novel about racial identity in America" (*Newsweek*). Whitehead is also the author of *The Colossus of New York,* essays on his hometown, and the forthcoming novel *Sag Harbor*.

SPONSORED BY: The Rose O'Neill Literary House and the Dean of the College

Henry Wiencek - HISTORICAL LIT

September 8, 4:30 pm, CAC Forum

"A Paradox to Posterity: Jefferson and Slavery at Monticello"



Henry Wiencek, a leading American historian, is the author of *The Hairsons: An American Family in Black and White* (winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award) and *An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America* (winner of the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award for history). In 2008-2009, Wiencek is the debut Patrick Henry Fellow at Washington College. The Patrick Henry Fellowship, co-sponsored by the C.V. Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience and the Rose O'Neill Literary House, brings a top historical writer to Chestertown for a year of writing, reflection, and engagement with students and faculty. In this lecture, Wiencek will address the topic of his forthcoming book, an intimate study of Jefferson and his slaves. Reception follows in CAC foyer.

SPONSORED BY: The Rose O'Neill Literary House and the C.V. Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience. This event is part of the Lit House's "Literature of the Fact: Masters of Topical Non-Fiction" Series.

Helen Cooper

September 9, 4:30 pm, CAC Forum

"Shakespeare and the *Canterbury Tales:* The Case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*"

Professor Helen Cooper was an undergraduate, research student and research fellow at Cambridge before being appointed as the first woman fellow at University College, Oxford, in 1978. In 2004, she returned to Cambridge as Professor of Medieval and Renaissance in English, a post originally created for C.S.Lewis—who also held it in Magdalene College. She is the author of numerous works of scholarship including *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare*, *Pastoral: Mediaeval into Renaissance,* and *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales.*

SPONSORED BY: The Sophie Kerr Committee

Stefan Fatsis - SPORTS LIT

September 16, 7:30 pm, Literary House

Stefan Fatsis is an acclaimed writer on the business and culture of sports. A staff writer for the *Wall Street Journal* and a regular commentator to National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, he is also the author of three books. *Wild and Outside: How a Renegade Minor League Revived the Spirit of Baseball in America's Heartland* followed a troupe of anti-establishment baseball entrepreneurs. *Word Freak: Heartbreak, Triumph, Genius, and Obsession in the World of Competitive Scrabble Players* chronicled the obsessive subculture of the iconic board game. And Fatsis's most recent work, *A Few Seconds of Panic: A 5-foot-8, 170-pound, 43-year-old Sportswriter Plays in the NFL* is the Plimptonian story of his summer as a training-camp place-kicker for the Denver Broncos.

SPONSORED BY: The Rose O'Neill Literary House. This event is part of the Lit House's "Literature of the Fact: Masters of Topical Non-Fiction" Series.

Alexis Stamatis

September 17, 4:30 pm, CAC Forum

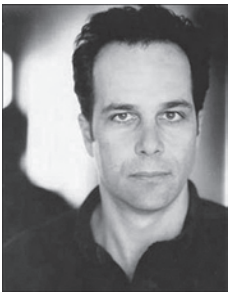
Reading from his fiction

Alexis Stamatis is the author of fourteen books: eight novels and novellas as well as six collections of poetry. *American Fugue* (*Amerikaniki Fouga*) is Stamatis's first book published in America and available to U.S. readers. The book, translated by author Diane Thiel, follows a Greek protagonist who visits America, travels across the country, and has a strange and compelling adventure. It examines the basic themes that are persistent in all of Stamatis's works of fiction: an all-consuming past, the flight to escape one's personal demons, and, most importantly, the search for personal identity.

SPONSORED BY: The Sophie Kerr Committee

Philip Gourevitch - WAR LIT

October 2, Literary House



4:30 pm: **WRITERS AT WORK: *THE PARIS REVIEW.*** Join Philip Gourevitch for an in-depth look at *The Paris Review* and working in publishing and the literary field. This event is open to members of the Washington College community.

7:30 pm: **A READING** by Philip Gourevitch

Published in 1998, Philip Gourevitch's searing account of the Rwandan genocide, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families*, won the 1998 National Book Critics Circle award, the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, and the George K. Polk Award for Foreign Reporting. Gourevitch, a long-time staff writer for *The New Yorker*, and the editor of *The Paris Review*, is also the author of *Standard Operating Procedure*, with Erroll Morris, about the prisoner abuse at Abu Graib in Iraq.

SPONSORED BY: The Rose O'Neill Literary House and The Goldstein Program in Public Affairs. This event is part of the Lit House's "Literature of the Fact: Masters of Topical Non-Fiction" Series.

Jehanne Dubrow

October 7, 4:30 pm, Literary House

Reading from her poetry

Jehanne Dubrow's work has appeared in *Poetry*, *The Hudson Review, The New England Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Barrow Street*, and *Gulf Coast*. She is the author of a chapbook, *The Promised Bride* (Finishing Line Press). Her full-length collection of poetry, *The Hardship Post*, won the 2007 Three Candles Press First Book Prize and will be published in 2008. She is a Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Washington College.

SPONSORED BY: The Sophie Kerr Committee

Deborah Landau

October 27, Literary House

Navigate Your MFA & A Poetry Reading

4:30 pm: **NAVIGATE YOUR MFA:** Deborah Landau provides tips and information about choosing and pursuing a Master of Fine Arts degree. This event is open to members of the Washington College community.

7:30 pm: **A POETRY READING** by Deborah Landau

Deborah Landau is an award-winning poet whose 2004 collection, *Orchidelirium,* was a National Poetry Series finalist. She is a two-time winner of the Los Angeles Poetry in the Windows Contest and was twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is Director of the Creative Writing Program at NYU.

SPONSORED BY: The Rose O'Neill Literary House, the Sophie Kerr Committee, and the Office of Career Development.

Amanda Hesser - FOOD LIT

November 14, 4 pm, Literary House

Amanda Hesser, the former food editor of *The New York Times*, is the author of the award-winning *The Cook and the Gardener*, *Cooking for Mr. Latte* and *Eat,*

Memory. Join us for a special afternoon of readings, conversation, and freshly made treats from Hesser's recipes.

SPONSORED BY: The Rose O'Neill Literary House. This event is part of the Lit House's "Literature of the Fact: Masters of Topical Non-Fiction" Series.

Dan Kennedy - ROCK LIT

November 20, 8 pm, Norman James Theatre

With his pieces in *McSweeney's* and his memoir *Loser Goes First*, Dan Kennedy established himself as one of the funniest writers in America. With his follow up, *Rock On: A Corporate Office Ballad*, he has cemented that reputation and also shown his chops as a first-rate writer on music and music culture. *The New York Times* called *Rock On* "A succession of gently mordant vignettes, with hilariously spot-on asides about media image-making, music-biz hierarchies and sensitive singer-songwriters…. Neither Kennedy nor the music business will ever be the same."

SPONSORED BY: The Rose O'Neill Literary House and the Student Events Board. This event is part of the Lit House's "Literature of the Fact: Masters of Topical Non-Fiction" Series and Comedy Week from the Student Events Board.

Terry Eagleton

February (date TBA)

"The Death of Criticism"

Terry Eagleton, who *The Guardian* calls "Britain's best-known academic rebel and literary critic," was Thomas Warton Professor of English at Oxford University and is currently Professor of Cultural Theory and John Rylands Fellow at the University of Manchester. He began his academic life as a Victorianist, and is still interested in the history and literature of the nineteenth century, as well as in 20th-century literature. His specialties are literary and cultural theory and the English-language literature and culture of Ireland, on which he has recently completed a trilogy of works. He is the author of over forty works of literary and cultural criticism including *Literary Theory: An Introduction, The Ideology of the Aesthetic, The Illusions of Postmodernism,* and *After Theory,* as well as a memoir, *The Gatekeeper,* and plays and which have been performed in Ireland and London. His most recent book is *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction.*

SPONSORED BY: The Sophie Kerr Committee

The First-Year Reading

February 24, 7 pm, Literary House

Come hear the best and brightest Washington College first-year student writers read from their original work. Reception follows.

SPONSORED BY: The Department of English, The Writers' Union, and The Rose O'Neill Literary House

Thom Ward

Thursday, February 26, 4:30, CAC Forum

Reading from his poetry

Thom Ward is editor for BOA Editions, Ltd., an independent publishing house of American poetry and poetry in translation, headquartered in Rochester, New York. In his fifteen years at BOA, he has edited more than 80 collections of poetry. Ward's own poetry collections include: *Small Boat With Oars of Different Size*, (2000, Carnegie Mellon University Press); *Tumblekid*, the winner of the 1998 Devil's Millhopper Poetry Contest, (2000, the University South Carolina-Aiken); *Various Orbits* (2004, Carnegie Mellon); and a limited-edition, leatherette chapbook of prose poems, *Fog in a Suitcase* (2004, Picadilly Press). Ward's fifth book, a collection of prose poems, *The Matter of the Casket*, was published by Custom Words Press in May, 2007. Ward also teaches creative writing workshops at elementary and high schools and tutors adult poetry students. In the droll but macabre prose poems of *The Matter of the Casket,* Thom Ward keeps the light and the dark in crucial, perfect balance: deepening mirth into intelligence, and finding solace in the blackest corners of human experience.

SPONSORED BY: The Sophie Kerr Committee

Ted Kooser - SOPHIE KERR WEEKEND SPEAKER

March 27, 4 pm, Norman James Theatre

Reading from his poetry

Two-time U.S. Poet Laureate (2004-2006), the highly regarded Nebraskan poet Ted Kooser was the first poet from the Great Plains to hold the position. A professor of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, he is the author of eleven full-length collections of poetry, including *Delights and Shadows* (Copper Canyon Press, 2004) and *Weather Central* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994). His newest book, *The Poetry Home Repair Manual*, gives beginning poets tips for their writing. Over the years his works have appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker, Poetry*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Nation*, *The American Poetry Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Antioch Review*. He has received two NEA fellowships in poetry, the Pushcart Prize, the Stanley Kunitz Prize, The James Boatwright Prize, and a Merit Award from the Nebraska Arts Council. He is the winner of the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for his book *Delights & Shadows*.

"For more than thirty years Ted Kooser has written poems that deftly bring dissimilar things into telling unities. Throughout a long and distinguished writing career he has worked toward clarity and accessibility, making a poetry as fresh and spontaneous as a good watercolor. A gyroscope balanced between a child's hands, a jar of buttons that recalls generations of women, and a bird briefly witnessed outside a window—each reveals the remarkable within an otherwise ordinary world." —*Poetry Daily*

SPONSORED BY: The Sophie Kerr Committee and The Rose O'Neill Literary House

Lisa Couturier

April 14, 4:30 pm, CAC Forum

"Urban Animals Unveiled"

Lisa Couturier is a nature writer who has worked as an environmental journalist and as a magazine editor, during which time she traveled to remote parts of South America, Central America, and South East Asia. Her work has appeared in the well-regarded *American Nature Writing* series, in *National Geographic's Heart of a Nation: Writers and Photographers Inspired by the American Landscape*, in the PBS series "Writers Writing," and in other anthologies and magazines. She is the author of *The Hopes of Snakes: And Other Tales from the Urban Landscape*.

SPONSORED BY: The Sophie Kerr Committee and the Center for Environment & Society

The Senior Reading

April 22, 7 pm, Literary House

Bid farewell to your favorite senior writers as they read from their original pieces. Reception follows.

SPONSORED BY: The Department of English, The Writers' Union, and The Rose O'Neill Literary House

Other Spring 2009 events:

Graphic Narrative Festival, featuring Neil Gaiman

April 2009

Sponsored by: The Rose O'Neill Literary House

Creative Arts Career Festival

Spring 2009

Sponsored by: The Rose O'Neill Literary House and the Office of Career Development

Music & Free Society Festival and Songwriting Workshop, featuring Paul Weinfield

Spring 2009

Sponsored by: The Rose O'Neill Literary House and the Student Events Board

Visit english.washcoll.edu and lithouse.washcoll.edu for dates and more information.

The Sophie Kerr Committee and the Rose O'Neill Literary House gratefully acknowledge additional support for these events from: The Admissions Office, The Center for Environment and Society, The C.V. Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience, The Dean of the College, The Department of English, The Goldstein Program in Public Affairs, The Office of Career Development, The Student Events Board, and The Writers' Union.

All events listed in this brochure—except those noted as open only to members of the Washington College Community—are free and open to the public.

WASHINGTON COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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