

[REDACTED]

From: Wolf, Karin
Sent: Wednesday, October 14, 2015 10:35 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: 1) Poet Laureate Nomination Angela Voras-Hills & Rita Mae Reese
Attachments: Voras-Hills CV & References.pdf; Voras-Hills Larueate Letter.pdf; Voras-Hills Poet Laureate Sample.pdf; FullApplication.pdf

From: Wolf, Karin
Sent: Tuesday, October 13, 2015 4:14 PM
To: 'Barbara Schrank'; [REDACTED]; Kia Karlen; Kia Karlen; 'Yvette Pino'; 'Yorel Lashley'; 'Sarah Sosa'; 'Rick Tvedt'; 'Briony Jean Foy'; [REDACTED]; 'Cedric Johnson'; 'Ginger Ann'; Carter, Sheri
Subject: 1) Poet Laureate Nomination Angela Voras-Hills & Rita Mae Reese

Dear Selection Committee,

Angela Voras-Hills and I are applying to be co-poet laureates of Madison. Her application will arrive separately.

Please let me know if you require some proof of residency and what type would be best to submit. I first moved to Madison as an MFA student in 2003 and moved back in 2009.

Part of what makes Madison such a wonderful place to live is its vibrant literary community. Wendy Vardaman and Sarah Busse have done an amazing amount of work to make that more visible, accessible and sustainable for everyone. It would be a challenge and an honor to follow in their footsteps.

I have attached the requested materials. Thank you so much for your attention. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Rita Mae Reese
author, *The Book of Hulga*
www.ritamaereese.com
Co-founder, *The Watershed: A Place for Writers*
Marketing, *Headmistress Press*

From: Angela Voras-Hills [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, September 28, 2015 1:59 PM
To: Madison Arts
Subject: Poet Laureate Nomination Angela Voras-Hills & Rita Mae Reese

Dear Selection Committee;

Please see the attached nomination materials for the Madison Poet Laureate position. I am applying jointly with Rita Mae Reese, whose materials should also arrive today. We are honored to be considered for this position and look forward to hearing from you.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions or require additional information.

Thank you,
Angela Voras-Hills

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Angela Voras-Hills
Co-founder, The Watershed: A Place for Writers
www.angelavorashills.com

Angela Voras-Hills

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

September 25, 2015

Madison Arts Commission
215 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. Suite LL-100
P.O. Box 2985
Madison WI 53701-2985

Dear Selection Committee;

Thank you for considering my application for poet laureate of Madison. I am applying jointly with Rita Mae Reese, with whom I'm currently working to develop The Watershed: A Place for Writers, a community-driven literary arts center. Over the years, we've collaborated to coordinate various poetry-related activities, events, and workshops in Madison. Our ideas, goals, and dedication to the advocacy of poetry, as well as our strong ties to this city, make us an excellent choice as co-poet laureates.

Madison is a city of poets. They are writing in coffee shops, serving at restaurants, teaching in public schools, standing in line at the vet—they are everywhere. Even people in Madison who don't write poetry often read it, quote it, and share it with friends on Facebook. Yet, despite its higher-than-average poet-per-capita ratio, many people in Madison are turned off by "Poetry." They think it's pretentious and/or the art form of dead white men.

Our big-picture goals as co-poet laureates are informed by this poetic landscape. While there are pockets of poets scattered throughout the city, there are few inclusive-feeling spaces or events where they can gather and share ideas. We'd like to help poets build relationships by coordinating events that encourage a diverse group of poets to engage with one another, other artists, and the community. The Olbrich Gardens readings have served this function by inviting various poets, writers, artists, and community members to not only read poetry, but also to engage in conversation. We would love to organize this reading and build on its success by offering workshops and related activities prior to the event.

We would also promote poetry as a living, accessible form of art in the community through projects that engage the community with both writing and reading poetry. By sneaking poetry into places people don't expect to see it—newspaper ads, bulletin boards, local shop windows, etc.—we hope newcomers to poetry will be curious, moved, and seeing the world a bit differently at the end of the day. The Bus Lines project achieves a similar goal, and we are thrilled to have the opportunity to continue working on the project.

Since returning to Madison four years ago, I've built relationships and collaborated with writers, artists, and community organizations, such as The Writers in Prison Project, Sustain Dane, and Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, in order to introduce poetry to broader audiences. I worked with Trent Miller to help develop writing workshops at The Bubbler and have taught beside Bruce Dethlefsen and Max Garland at UW's School of the Arts. For years, I've attended Arts Day and

have connected with leaders of arts organizations in our community, including Beth Racette from Overture Center and Any Given Child, Meghan Blake-Horst from Mad City Bazaar, and Ann Katz from Arts Wisconsin. I enjoy meeting with and learning from others, and I look forward to forging new relationships to ensure poetry is made an accessible, public form of art in our community.

Please see my CV for details on events, workshops, and references. I am happy to provide more information upon request.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/Angela Voras-Hills
Angela Voras-Hills

ANGELA VORAS-HILLS

EDUCATION

University of Massachusetts, Boston Master of Fine Arts, Creative Writing Thesis: <i>Here Begins the Account of Worms</i> , Poetry Manuscript Committee: Joyce Peseroff, Lloyd Schwartz, Suji Kwock Kim	2011
University of Wisconsin, Madison Bachelor of Arts with Distinction, English with Creative Writing Emphasis Honors Thesis: <i>In the Absence of Sunlight</i> , Poetry Manuscript	2008

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Co-Founder, The Watershed: A Place for Writers, Madison, WI	May 2015
Student Services Coordinator, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Madison, WI	May 2012-July 2015
Lecturer, Introduction to Creative Writing, University of Massachusetts-Boston	2010-2011
Composition Tutor, Writing Proficiency Office, University of Massachusetts-Boston	2009-2011
Private Composition, Literature, and Creative Writing Coach	2009- 2011
Freshman Composition Tutor, University of Massachusetts-Boston	2008-2009
Teaching Apprentice, Introduction to Poetry, University of Massachusetts-Boston	Fall 2009

SELECTED WORKSHOPS

Bandit Poetry Workshop: In collaboration with Sustain Dane's Tactical Urbanism Series The Bubbler: Madison Public Library, Madison, WI	October 2015
Write What You Don't Know The Bubbler: Madison Public Library, Madison, WI	September 2015
Three Days, Six Poems: A First Draft Workshop & The Life of a Poem UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies, School of the Arts, Rhinelander, WI	July 2015
Five Days, Ten Poems: A First Draft Workshop & The Life of a Poem UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies, School of the Arts, Rhinelander, WI	July 2014
Lie, Cheat, & Steal: How to Write a Good Poem The Bubbler: Madison Public Library, Madison, WI	February 2014
5 Days, Ten Poems: A First Draft Workshop & The Life of a Poem UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies, School of the Arts, Rhinelander, WI	July 2013
Write What You Don't Know & The Trail of Breadcrumbs: Finding Your Way Home UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies, UW Writers' Institute, Madison, WI	April 2013
How to Write a Love Poem Madison Public Library, Madison, WI	February 2013
Poetry Primer & Staying Inside the Lines: Poetic Forms Workshop UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies, School of the Arts, Rhinelander, WI	July 2012
Secrets of Famous Prolific Writers UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies, UW Writers' Institute, Madison, WI	April 2012

The Unwritten Poem: Found and Erasure Poetry Massachusetts Poetry Festival, Salem, MA	May 2011
Young Poet's Workshop and Café Boston Book Festival, Boston, MA	October 2010
Young Writer's Workshop and Café Massachusetts Poetry Festival, Lowell, MA	October 2008

PUBLIC OUTREACH

PANEL PRESENTATIONS

- "Surviving the Post-MFA Hustle." AWP Conference, Boston, MA. March 2013.
- "Inspired Ideas—Finding the Right Words." UW Writers' Institute, Madison, WI. April 2012.
- "Getting Your MFA?" Massachusetts Poetry Festival, Salem, MA. May 2011.
- "Street Smarts: Getting Real World Literary Experience While You're a Student." AWP Conference, Denver, CO. April 2010.

READINGS

- Beyond the Water's Edge. Madison Public Library, Madison WI. November 2013.
- Lightning Strikes Twice. Madison Public Library, Madison, WI. May 2013.
- Distilled From Nature: Poetry and the Works of Ellsworth Kelly. Madison Museum of Contemporary Art. Madison, WI. March 2013.
- Monsters of Poetry/Wild America, Commonwealth Gallery, Madison, WI. March 2013.
- Breakwater Reading Series, Brookline Booksmith, Brookline, MA. May 2011.
- Brookline Poetry Series, Brookline Public Library, Brookline, MA. April 2011.
- Massachusetts Poetry Festival, Lowell, MA. October 2010.

INTERVIEWS

- Beyond the Breakwater*. Conducted by Ariel Wood. WSUM 91.7, Madison, WI. December 2014.
- Literature for the Halibut*, Conducted by Nicole Rainey. KDHX 88.1, St. Louis, MO. January 2014.
- Kenyon Review Online*. Conducted by Heather Crowley. February 2012.

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

- February*. Created with Ari Brice and exhibited at Commonwealth Gallery, Madison, WI. March 2013.
- The Poetry Dress*. Created with Danielle Jones-Pruett and exhibited at:
Massachusetts Poetry Festival, Salem, MA. April 2011.
University of Massachusetts-Boston, Healey Library, Special Collections, Boston, MA. January-June 2012.

GUEST BLOGGING

- "Literary Boroughs: Madison, WI." October 2012. *Ploughshares Blog*. <http://blog.pshares.org/index.php/literary-boroughs-22-madison-wi/>.
- "Don't Quit Your Day Job: How Busy People Make Time to Write." April 2012. Chloe Yelena Miller. <http://chloeyenamiller.blogspot.com/2012/04/national-poetry-month-guest-blogger.html>.

EDITING, PUBLISHING, AND ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

Reader Series Coordinator, ALL Reading Series, Madison, WI	Beginning Fall 2015
Event Coordinator, The Watershed: A Place for Writers, Madison, WI	Fall 2015

Juror, Sustainable Arts Foundation Awards	Fall 2014, Spring 2015, Fall 2015
Poetry Reader, <i>Ploughshares</i>	2009-2014
Reading Series Coordinator, Breakwater Reading Series, Boston, MA	2009-2010
Managing Editor, <i>Breakwater Review</i>	2009-2010
Fiction Editor, <i>The Madison Review</i>	2007-2008
Fiction Reader, <i>The Madison Review</i>	2005-2007
Research Assistant, Professor Lisa Cooper, English Department, University of Wisconsin-Madison	2005-2006

VOLUNTEER AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Instructor, The Writers in Prisons Project Collaborate with other instructors to lead biweekly poetry workshops with inmates.	2012-2013
Newsletter Editor, The Literacy Network Develop story ideas, solicit and write articles, edit, and design layout for newsletters.	2012-2013
Wisconsin Book Festival Assist with promotion, ushering, and event coordination.	2011
Massachusetts Poetry Festival Assist poets and presenters in green room, prepare refreshments, and provide directions.	2010
Word Jams, Boys and Girls Clubs of Dorchester Plan and lead weekly creative writing workshops for inner-city middle school students.	2009-2010

PUBLICATIONS

POETRY

- "All-Inclusive Trip to the Land of Milk & Honey." *Sycamore Review*. Forthcoming.
- "Abandoned Nest." *Salamander*. Forthcoming
- "In the Beginning" & "On the Eve of the Death of the Patron Saint of Those Whose Lives are Lost to Something Science Can't Explain." *Memorious*. Summer 2015.
- "When We Were Prey to Nothing" & "Maps of Places Drawn to Scale." *Adroit Journal*. Spring 2015.
- "Perpetuity." *ZO Magazine*. Spring 2015.
- "Growing Season" & "Home (iv)." *The Harlequin*. Fall 2014.
- "Preserving." *Best New Poets Anthology of 2013*. Fall 2013.
- "Wait in the Bathtub & It Will Carry You" & "In Which I Hoard the Air Escaping." *Post Road*. Fall 2013.
- "Muss Es Sein? Es Muss Sein!" & "Retrospective." *Hayden's Ferry Review*. Fall 2013.
- "Water, Water Everywhere" & "Alarm." *Echolocations Anthology*. Fall 2013.
- "but I to you of a white goat," "If December," & "Encourage Birds." *Vinyl Poetry*. Spring 2013.
- "At the Periphery, Where Life Hums." *Verse Wisconsin*. Spring 2013.
- "If You Give a Chimp a Gin and Tonic," "A Drain Full of Eels," & "Apple Picking." *Eleven Eleven*. Winter 2013.
- "Painting the Garage" & "Bake Sales, Anyway." *Midwestern Gothic*. Winter 2013.
- "Unfurling." *Linebreak*. Winter 2012.
- "Nothing to Undo That Can't Be Done Again" & "Chateaubriand." *Kenyon Review Online*. Winter 2012.
- "Krakow" & "Dear Abby." *Barnstorm*. Winter 2012.
- "Island," *Blackhawk Island Chapbook*. Winter 2011.
- "Itch," *Cimarron Review*. Fall 2011.
- "The Spider," *ripple(s)*. Fall 2011.
- "Commuting" & "Screening." *Breakwater Review*. Fall 2010.
- "Condemned," *The Watermark*. Fall 2009.
- "Driving in the Rain," *Fox Cry Review*. Fall 2004.

FICTION

"Perms," *MARY Journal*. Spring 2006.

ANTHOLOGIES

"Krakow," "Itch," "Unfurling," "Bake Sales, Anyway," "Preserving," & the essay "Rod McKuen Saves the World (Why I Write Poetry)." *Poets on Growth: An Anthology of Poetry and Craft*. Math Paper Press, Spring 2015.

"Itch." *New Poetry from the Midwest*. New American Press. Spring 2015.

"Water, Water Everywhere" & "Alarm." *Echolocations Anthology*. Cowfeather Press. Fall 2013.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Sustainable Arts Foundation Spring Promise Award	2014
Finalist, Tom and Stan Wick Prize for Poetry, full-length manuscript	2014
Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets Triad Contest, selected by Nick Lantz	2014
Finalist, Milkweed Editions Lindquist and Vennum Prize for Poetry, full-length manuscript	2013
Finalist, Bull City Chapbook Competition	2013
Poetry Fellow, Writers' Room of Boston	2011
Key West Literary Seminar and Writing Workshop Scholarship	2011
Mary Doyle Curran Scholarship, University of Massachusetts, Boston	2009, 2011
Martha Collins Prize in Poetry, selected by Robert Pinsky	2009
English Department Highest Academic Excellence Award, University of Wisconsin, Madison	2008
English Student of the Year, University of Wisconsin- Fox Valley	2004

MEMBERSHIPS, AFFILIATIONS, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Association of Writers and Writing Programs, AWP

Wisconsin Alumni Association, WAA

Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, WFOP

REFERENCES

Jesse Lee Kercheval
Zona Gale Professor of English
University of Wisconsin, Madison
6195G Helen C. White Hall
Madison, WI 53706

Phone: 608-301-5353
Email: jlkerche@wisc.edu

Rebecca Dunham
Professor of English
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee
Curtain Hall 586
Milwaukee, WI 53211

Phone: 414-229-4416
Email: dunham@uwm.edu

Danielle Jones-Pruett
Program Coordinator, The Writer's House
Merrimack College
315 Turnpike Street
North Andover, MA 01845

Phone: 978-854-2634
Email: djonespruett@live.com

At the Periphery, Where Life Hums

A white box is not the house, the house
is not white. The house cannot be separated
from the white barn, which is also not white,
because the wood is rotting, and its silo
is silver. The beige Formica table
on its chrome legs cannot be removed
from the kitchen. There are always
Oatmeal Cream Pies in the cupboard.
But the children can leave, and have left,
and she remains with her mind separating
into blue and red. Now, someone must be paid
to remove the pins from her gray hair
and tie her shoes. There is an illusion of life
when the colors connect: the doll she carries
in her arms is the memory of all her children.
She hums to them. She still hums, though they
have grown and gone, and she cries, and in the corner,
Mary is mourning, and the Bible is always
open to a page. She may know the words by heart.
She may not understand them at all. Today, the pages
are blank. The Bible cannot be removed from the house.
The house is not white, the garden is not green, the apples
hang heavy and will soon collapse, covering the ground.

Preserving

I can spend a whole winter
in the summer of these lemons
if they're covered in enough salt.

Trucks are salting the roads
so I can drive. Men
salt the earth so I can walk

without falling. When I fall,
I catch myself with my face.
When I fall, I go

to the hospital, to make sure
the baby is still alive.
There are so many small things

to worry about in a large way.
How much coffee should I drink?
For every bean ground, someone

is having sex or a child
is starving. How do I know?
Because I'm always reading

warning labels or watching
children pick dandelions near the slide.
Except they are never

dandelions, but toads. And the children
pick them up and throw them
into the pond by the handful,

believing they are frogs.
And we can't blame them for not knowing
what swims, what sinks, what floats.

Controlled Burn

The doe ran into the road, flipped
over our hood and dragged her back legs

across the highway into woods. The same day,
they were killing a man in Oklahoma

who wouldn't die, they were deciding
when to try again, and men in masks

and bright orange suits set fire to the marsh—
the burning flesh of milkweed and switchgrass.

We are told to be fruitful. We are told
to rejoice. The next day, a hospital bed

is set up in the front room of the farmhouse
whose roof might collapse at any minute, as though

the heavens are aware of the weight
of a minute, as though each minute

responds solely to the sky. It's illegal
to follow an injured deer

into woods with a gun,
but is it ok to tell a child about heaven

if you don't believe it exists? Yes,
sing the chorus frogs,

who'd burrowed into the heart
of the marsh to escape the flames.

No, hisses the body
of a vole squashed flat,

perfectly filling
a crack in the blacktop.

Reflex

Fumble on the big screen, everyone
up in arms. My daughter grasps my shirt
while nursing and can't let go. Across the room,
my mother applies chapstick without taking
her eyes off the screen. It's Christmas. Everyone believes
in miracles and wants to hold the baby. My grandmother
sits at the table holding a doll. Beyond her, a train
slips through the snowy field carrying—what? Time
moves backwards on the field. Less than a minute left
on the clock. My grandmother's lips barely close around the red
spoonful of Jello with coconut. A marshmallow falls
from the spoon in all its puffed-up,
childhood ecstasy. The game is nearly over. Pins
and needles. The tree is heavy with color
and ornaments of beans and children's faces.
My grandmother tightens her fingers around the hanky
she has always held. Eventually, there is nothing
left beneath the tree. Everyone kisses the baby.
They each slip a finger into her palm,
and she struggles to let them go.

Water, Water Everywhere

Children and pregnant women
should avoid eating yellow
perch, bluegill, inland trout.

No one should eat the muskie
from Lake Monona. Last summer,
boys dove into the lake's belly

under a full moon. Behind them, the city
lit the shore, and from far away, I could see
what I was missing. After years

near the ocean, I'd been dreaming
of clean water surrounded by trees.
When I came home, I needed

a car to find that water.
On the shoulder of all the highways
I took to find it, the faces of bloated deer

were painted pink. Each road
was soaked with blood
until it rained. There were no children

running through the fields
as I'd imagined. The beach I live near
in the city is clean enough

for mallards, who live here year-round
and rest in pairs in the garden.
My backyard is big, but squirrels

empty the feeder before cardinals
can find it. Cats dig up my pansies.
Weeks after the screech owls nested

in the tree across the street, the tree
was sprayed blue and cut down.
I began counting

the feathered-bodies on curbs
and center-lines. As I drove
to work, watching the honey locust

lose its leaves, fall skipped winter
completely. And the lake,
cold as a restless baby,

was afraid to fall asleep.

On Earth as It Is in Heaven

Days after my mom finishes radiation, she's in Vegas on a Harley. It's 80 degrees, and she sends selfies with cocktails in the sun. Here, everything is beginning to thaw: the body of ice thunders and pings and cracks in its undoing. When I was young, I believed the lake froze completely, along with all the creatures inside it: the glass-eyed fish, the bug-eyed frogs, painted turtles' wrinkled necks stuck outstretched. But then the lake was pocked with shanties, and men in orange hats and snowsuits hoisted Northern Pike up through icy holes—their shiny bodies struggling as they were pulled by their lips into sky. The idea of heaven is ridiculous and comforting and full of misdirection. In that same winter of my childhood, my grandpa landed his plane on the lake. A few days later, his friend learned he had brain cancer and shot himself. The funeral home was covered in yellow lilies and white roses, but his wife was not relieved. In the basement of the church, we ate ham and potato casserole and prayed holding hands. All year long, we filled our freezer with fish, and in the cold, I was thankful for the sun warming us through the windows of the boathouse as my mother slipped her knife into the fish—pulling their skin from flesh, removing their flesh in pieces.

Itch

The nag tail-whipped flies from her back,
boys jumped from boats into rushes
to avoid being bitten. Even cranes left eggs

to hatch untended off marshy, wooded trails. So,
when our swatter's waffle-holes jellied yellow and red,

it was impossible to know whose blood it was.

The man lying on shore watched the boys
splash, disappear, while filling his mouth with flies,
then spiders, sparrows, like the old woman

who'd swallow anything living
to get rid of the tickle inside her.

But this has nothing to do with gain

or the soul's weight: it's about heat—
The train carries a woman in a winter coat,
carrying dirty bags full of dirty bags and empty bottles.

This is silently about the flies pouring from a slit
along the seam of her coat as she stands,

whispering: *this is my blood, this*

is my cup, and the secret way
I inch a pen down the back of my throat
to scratch out the ink of their crawling.

On My Way Home

A great horned owl sits in the window
of a silo along the highway. The foundation
of the barn is now rubble, its boards salvaged.
My mother has scraped and painted the wood
into plant stands. On the other side
of the highway, flames chew clean
to the steel skeleton of a sedan, its body
barely identifiable. Firemen stand close
with the hose, but no water comes through.
There's no ambulance. The lake
has recently frozen over. Yesterday,
firemen gathered on it, jumped hard
to collapse the shell, and fell through.
Each body tall in a black dry-suit, then,
only a watery hole where they'd stood.
The mother of one of the men watched
in the snow beside me. Just then,
my son was in Biology class.
But what he was learning about the body,
I don't know.

Splendor

The worm writhing, tying its body into knots
in the grass, the body tearing in half, the millipedes

approaching. The millipedes taking over the living
body of the worm, my sister, who rinses the worm with water,

unraveling the body as I watch. The millipedes still searching
for their meal when I smear their bodies through the dirt

with my shoe. I am disgusted and enthralled and
in love. The baby grows too big for my womb. The flies

are small enough to slip through the screen toward the light
above the sink and fall into water around the faucet.

The spider's full belly. Its web in the window above the sink.
The other spiders who nest on the ceiling, and my husband,

who kills them on my behalf. The heaviness of the spider
as it scrambles to the last dry edge of toilet paper

before the water pulls it under. The oats that once grew
in a wet field that now rest in our bowls. My son

in his 14th year, my daughter almost in her first. The difference
between the moment of being and a moment of being.

The difference between when there are words
and when there are no words. When there is a body

and when there is none.

Rita Mae Reese



www.ritamaereese.com

September 28, 2015

Madison Poet Laureate Commission

MadisonArts@cityofmadison.com

Dear Committee Members:

I am so delighted that Madison continues its position of poet laureate. I love Madison and feel like a member of the Chamber of Commerce when I'm traveling—I have so much genuine enthusiasm for this city.

Angela Voras-Hills and I have been deeply engaged in promoting writing around Madison. Our collaboration started with a poetry workshop at Hawthorne Library, after which I helped Trent Miller create regular creative writing programs at the Bubbler for the Central Public Library and in the branches. Recently, Angela and I have founded The Watershed: A Place for Writers, whose mission is to create a welcoming community that nurtures the artistic growth of all writers, fosters relationships among writers and readers, and fuels a passion for literature. Angela and I are also currently working on a tactical urbanism project called Bandit Poetry, which will empower residents to turn old yard signs into poetry.

I attended the MFA program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and so still have close ties to the creative writing community there. I was also part of writing programs in Florida and California and so have connections and keep up a poetry conversation with poets around the country. These contacts allow me to learn about exciting initiatives around the country that might be replicated in Madison, and also learn about opportunities for individual poets. I am passionate about making connections that help not only individual poets but the poetry community as a whole thrive.

I should be clear: by "poetry community," I do not mean simply published poets, but anyone who enjoys poetry, like my dentist who told me that he and his wife were reading a poem each night before bed. As a person who grew up poor in West Virginia and as a lesbian, I am keenly aware of how communities become insular and the damage that can do to people who feel invisible or unworthy. Angela and I would make every effort to make sure that no one in Madison feels excluded.

One of the major challenges of connecting people to poetry is its history as a classroom subject. People feel intimidated or, even worse, bored by it. Angela and I would like to try taking poetry out of that context and putting it in places where the surprise of deep meaning might help people read surrounding texts more critically. I have experimented with placing books of contemporary poetry in a local hair salon and that has been successful. We will explore expanding this pilot to include waiting rooms in other salons, clinics, and public places. We would like to get poems on the radio, in *The Cap Times* and *The Isthmus*, in people's yards, on bulletin boards, and perhaps even on billboards, expanding both on the Bus Lines program and Bandit Poetry. As co-poet laureates of Madison, Angela and I will use poetry not only as a tool to bring meaning to individual lives but to foster connections across the city and beyond.

Sincerely,

Rita Mae Reese

www.ritamaereese.com

Rita Mae Reese, Curriculum Vita, 1

Education

Master of Fine Arts, Creative Writing Major Professor: Ronald Wallace Thesis Title: <i>The Builders Were Human</i> , Poetry	University of Wisconsin-Madison Madison, WI	2005
Master of Arts, Creative Writing Major Professor: David Kirby Thesis Title: <i>The Wolf's Daughter Writes Home</i> , Poetry	Florida State University Tallahassee, FL	2003
Bachelor of Arts, American Studies	Florida State University	2000

Academic Experience

Instructor	Stanford Continuing Studies	2011-present
Associate Faculty	Associate University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI	2009—2010
Marsh McCall Lecturer	Stanford University, Stanford, CA	2007—2009
Teaching Assistant	Stanford University	2006-2007
Senior Project Mentor	Stanford University	2007
Graduate Instructor	University of Wisconsin-Madison	2004 – 2005
Graduate Instructor	Florida State University	2001 – 2003

Selected Awards & Honors

- Honorable Mention, Lorine Niedecker Poetry Award, 2013
- “Who Will Give My Father a Needle, a Cat, a Mouse, a Bird?” selected for Poetry in Motion (a project that places poetry on public transit), Spring 2013
- Drake Emerging Writer Award, 2012
- Pamaunok Poetry Prize, 2012
- Study Abroad Program for Arts and Writing Contest, The University of New Orleans, Poetry Runner-up, 2009
- Finalist, Campbell Corner Poetry Prize, 2008
- Finalist, Lena Miles Wever Todd Poetry Prize, 2008
- Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers’ Award, 2006
- Glenna Luschei *Prairie Schooner* Award, 2006
- “Discovery”/*The Nation* Prize, 2005
- Wallace Stegner Fellowship in Fiction, 2005-2007
- Stadler Fellowship in Poetry, Bucknell University, 2005-2006 (declined)
- Finalist for Pavel Srut Poetry Fellowship, 2004
- Martha Meier Renk Poetry Fellow, 2003-2004
- Ann Durham Prize for Best Creative Writing Thesis, Florida State University, 2004
- Dean’s Prize for Creative Writing, Florida State University, 2003
- Finalist, Ruth Lilly Poetry Fellowship, Modern Poetry Association, 2002
- Two Associated Writing Programs (AWP) Intro Journal Awards in poetry, 2001-2002

Selected Publications

Books

- *The Book of Hulga*, winner of the Felix Pollak Prize, selected by Denise Duhamel, 2016.
- *The Alphabet Conspiracy*, Arktoi Books/Red Hen Press, February 2011.

Fiction

- "The Lenores," *New England Review Digital*, March 27, 2013.
- "Me, Myself and I," *New England Review*: Vol. 29 #2.
- "My Summer in Vulcan," *Prairie Schooner*: Lincoln, NE. Vol. 79 #2 (Summer 2005): 138-149.
- "My Summer in Vulcan," and "Magnets" (exercise) *From Where You Dream: The Process of Writing Fiction*, by Robert Olen Butler, Grove/Atlantic, Summer 2005.

Poetry

- "Hulga's Crown," with an introductory essay, *The Flannery O'Connor Review*, 2015.
- "Feast Day," *Joys of the Table* anthology, 2015.
- Three poems featured on Poetry Foundation's website:
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/rita-mae-reese>
- "On the Problem of Empathy," *Rattle*, Fall 2014, Vol. 20, #3.
- "Welcome to Milledgeville" and "Hulga As Sara in The Book of Tobit Who, Possessed of a Demon, Was Given Seven Husbands and Killed Each on Their Wedding Nights," *Verse Wisconsin*, Vol. 113-114.
- "Feast Day," Eat Local/Read Local Project, Milwaukee, WI, April 2014.
- "At 36, Hulga Speaks of Love," *The Lavender Review*: Issue 9, June 2014 (nominated for Best of Web).
- "Flannery's Crown," a crown of sonnets, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, 2014.
- "The Margin is for the Holy Ghost," a crown of sonnets, *jubilat*, Issue 24.
- "Feast Day," *The Rumpus*, April 2013.
- "How to Lose a Leg," "What Her Mother Knew When She Heard," *Driftless Review*, 1.0, Spring 2013.
- "Cherry Garcia," "The Burnt Triolet," "Unique Chicken Goes in Reverse," and "Red Riding Hoodie," *Sand Hill Review*, 2013 edition.
- "The Given Lines," a crown of sonnets, *Alligator Juniper*, 2013.
- "The Humorous Tales of E.A. Poe," *Quiddity*, Edition 5.1, Summer 2012.
- "Skate World," *So To Speak online*, Summer 2011.
- "Three or Four Things I Know for Sure," *Wisconsin People and Ideas*, Summer 2010: 61.
- "Auto Life Fire," *Switched-on Gutenberg*, November 2010. Nominated for Best of the Web.
- "Terrible Holy Joy: On Reading the Norton Anthology of Poetry in Bed," *The Rondeau Roundup*, Feb. 8, 2010, first place winner.
- "Apocrypha: Flannery and the Book of Tobit," *Shenandoah*, Vol. 6, #1-2, Spring/Fall 2010: 16.
- "The Alphabet Conspiracy," 2nd runner up, Wabash Poetry Prize, *Sycamore Review*, Issue 22.1, Winter/Spring 2010.
- "This is the final day of sweetness," Tupelo Press Poetry Project, December/January 2009-2010.
- "The Opposite of Falling Stars, 1978" and "Monongah, 1907," *Connotation Press*, Issue VI, Volume II.
- "Who Will Give My Father a Bird a Needle, a Mouse, a Cat and Bird?" and "In the ER Waiting Room with My Girlfriend," *The Normal School*, Vol. 3, Issue 1.
- "To Milk," "The Whore's Guide to Etymology," "Mishap," and "Within Five Miles of Home," *Blackbird*, Spring 2009, Vol. 8, #1.

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- “Seed Store Sestina” and “The Opposite of Falling Stars,” *The Artist as Activist in Appalachia*, University Press of North Georgia, September, 2010.
- “A History of Glass,” *Imaginative Writing, Third Edition*, edited by Janet Burroway, Penguin Academics, 2010.
- “There are no patron saints of accidents.” and “Smite, Smitten,” *Anti-Poetry*, March 2009 (Featured Poet #22).
- “At the Castillo de San Marcos,” *National Poetry Review*, Issue 8, Winter 2008.
- “You Bring Out the Dead in Me,” *Memorious*, Volume 11, December 2008.
- “Dear Reader,” *Broken Bridge Review*, Vol. 3 2008: 164-65.
- “Spurious Entry,” *Cimarron Review*, Issue 164, Summer 2008: 35.
- “Ur: What Signs & Wonders,” *32 Poems*, Hyattsville, MD, Vol. 6, No. 2, Fall 2008.
- “Almanac,” *32 Poems*, Hyattsville, MD, Vol. 5, Issue 1, Spring 2007.
- “The Plagiarist” and “This Is Not True,” *Bloom*: New York, NY. Issue 5, Fall 2006.
- “The Sin-Eater,” *The Pinch*: Memphis, TN. Fall 2006.
- “Key to Pronunciation: /sälml/,” *Verse Daily*: www.versedaily.com. January 19, 2006.
- “For Western Violence & Brief Sensuality: A Rondeau,” *Cream City Review*, Milwaukee, WI. Vol. 29.2, 2006: 104.
- “Flannery, Are You Grieving?” *The Cortland Review*: www.cortlandreview.com. March 2006.
- “A History of Glass,” *The Nation*, New York, NY. May 30, 2005: 33.
- “Bondmaid,” “Key to Pronunciation: /sälml/,” and “Womanless,” *The Southern Review*, Baton Rouge, LA. Autumn 2005: 756-761.
- “Remembering Emily,” *Poetry from Sojourner*, University of Illinois Press, 2004.

Criticism & Nonfiction

- “Poetry in Late Capitalism,” Report from the Field, VIDA, Women in Literary Arts, <http://www.vidaweb.org/poetry-in-late-capitalism/>, September 2015.
- “I’m Gonna Cry,” flash nonfiction, *New England Review Online*, August 2014.
- Featured in *The Artist’s Library: A Field Guide* by Laura Damon-Moore and Erinn Batykefer, Coffee House Press, 2014.
- Review of *The Red Wolf* by R.T. Smith, *Flannery O’Connor Review*, 2014.
- “The Mysticism of Flannery O’Connor,” review of *A Prayer Journal*, *Fourth Genre*: Fall, 2014, 16:2.
- Various reviews, *Gently Read Literature*, October 2011 to 2012.
- “A World Shot Full of Holes: Writing White Trash Poetry,” *So to Speak Blog*, June 16, 2011.
- “A History of ‘A History of Glass,’” *Imaginative Writing, Third Edition*, edited by Janet Burroway, Penguin Academics, 2009.
- “We Teach Alone: The Lesbian Instructor in Academia’s Lonely Groves,” *Finding Our Way: A Writing Teacher’s Sourcebook*, edited by Deborah Coxwell-Teague and Wendy Bishop, Houghton Mifflin, Spring 2004 (co-author with Brandy T. Wilson).

Works in Progress

- *The Quiet House*, a novel about a haunted Appalachia.

Video & Other Media

- Lesbian Poet Trading Cards, Headmistress Press
- “The Alphabet Conspiracy,” video created by Flavor for the Association of Independent Commercial Producers 2013 Midwest trade show, <https://vimeo.com/80099306>

Selected Readings, Workshops & Panels

- Reading, Flannery O'Connor and Other Southern Women Writers," September 19, 2015
- Guest on "Beyond the Breakwater," 91.7 FM Madison, July 18, 2014
- Organized a screening of *An Encounter with Simone Weil*, Madison Central Public Library, July 22, 2014
- "She Can Smell the Stupidity on Nice Young Men: [Writing] Disagreeable Narrators the Reader Will Love," Panel, Popular Culture National Conference, April 18, 2014
- Writing Life Stories, Madison Central Public Library, January, 2014
- Bridge Poetry Reading, Chazen Art Museum, Madison, WI, November 7, 2013
- "The ABC's of Creative Writing," Central Public Library, Madison, WI, November 2013
- "Turn Here," poetry course, Sequoya Library, Madison, WI August 2013
- Reading, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL, April 7, 2013
- "How to Write a Love Poem," with Angela Voras-Hills, Hawthorne Library, Madison, WI, February 9, 2013
- "Recovering Lost Worlds: Two Poets Reveal How They Resurrected Abandoned Projects" with Cynthia Marie Hoffman, Wisconsin Book Festival, November 10, 2012
- Reading, Bowery Poetry Club, New York City, September 7, 2011
- Reading, Annenberg Community Beach House, Santa Monica, CA, June 21, 2011
- "Beyond the Blank Page: Inspiration and Techniques for Writing Great Poems," week-long workshop, Write by the Lake, Madison, WI, June 13-17, 2011
- Young Writers Discuss Breakout Books Panel, Wisconsin Book Festival, Madison, WI, October 2, 2010
- "Habit of Poetry," week-long workshop, Write by the Lake, Madison, WI, June 5-10, 2010
- "Start Publishing Now: Markets for Stories, Poems and Essays," Writers' Institute, April 24, 2010
- Workshops on endings, emotions and minor characters, Weekend with Your Novel, October 23-25, 2009
- Campbell Corner Poetry Reading, Sarah Lawrence College, October 7, 2008
- Poetry reading, Writer's Studio Faculty Reading, Stanford University, September 25, 2007
- Panelist, Writing Historical Fiction, The Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP) Annual Conference, Atlanta, GA, March 1, 2007
- Poetry reading, Bernal Yoga Literary Series, San Francisco, January 27, 2007
- Poetry reading, New York University's Creative Writing Program Reading Series, September 15, 2006
- Moderator and Panelist, From Where You Dream: Crafting Fiction from Your White-Hot Center, AWP Annual Conference, Austin, TX, March 10, 2006
- Reading, Fiction Writers, South Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference, Atlanta, GA, November 5, 2005
- Poetry reading, 92nd St. Y, New York, NY, May 16, 2005
- Reading for Blue Ox Series, Madison, WI, December 9, 2004
- Reading for "Why I Vote," Wisconsin Book Festival, Madison, WI, October 6, 2004
- "Listen," (music by Pavel Polanco-Safadit), 50th Anniversary Celebration, Memorial Library, Madison, WI, September 27, 2004
- Reading for Felix: A Series of New Writing, Memorial Library, Madison, WI, April 7, 2004
- Reading for Florida State University's Warehouse Reading series, July 29, 2003
- Panelist on "Getting the Music into Free Verse" at the Spring Writer's Festival, Tallahassee, Florida, April 11, 2003
- Reading, Seven Days of Opening Nights, Tallahassee, FL, February 17, 2003

Professional Experience

- Organizer, Bandit Poetry, Tactical Urbanism Project, Madison, WI
- Co-founder of The Watershed: A Place for Writers, whose mission is to create a welcoming community that nurtures the artistic growth of all writers, fosters relationships among writers and readers, and fuels a passion for literature in Madison
- Board member, Madison Community Discourse, 2015 to present
- Board member, Council for Wisconsin Writers, 2015 to present
- Member, Association of Writing Programs
- Director of Marketing, Headmistress Press, 2014 to present
- Member, LGBT Writers in School Program, 2011 to present
- Permissions assistant for *The Making of a Sonnet*, edited by Eavan Boland and Mark Strand
- Participant, Reconsidering Flannery O'Connor Institute, National Endowment for the Humanities, 2007
- Co-host, Stanford University Stegner Reading Series, 2006-2007
- Reader, *Zoetrope All-Story*, 2005-2006
- Screener, Brittingham and Pollak poetry book contest, 2003, 2004
- Mentor, First Year Writing teaching assistants, Florida State University, 2003-2004
- Advisory Council of English Students (ACES) Representative, Florida State University, 2002-2003
- Student representative on the Florida State University English Department Creative Writing Committee, Fall 2002-Spring 2003
- Editorial Board Member, Steel Toe Books, 2002 – 2003
- Associate Poetry Editor & Associate Fiction Editor, *The Southeast Review*, 2001 – 2003

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The Given Lines

beginning and ending with lines from Simone Weil

There is the nothingness from which we flee
& the nothingness toward which we go.
Hell is nothing, God is nothing & we
are the nothing lost between. Out of our pain

we make countries, maps, direction. She
has made herself into a map of the Red Forest
where an albino swallow circles & drops,
where boars & bison & roses

have made an almost home—but no human
ever comes & none ever will.
All of the empty spaces have the outline
of someone missing.

Her heart, never still, digs its red hole,
forcing roots into the absence.

Revising History

To be rooted in the absence of a definite place,
to belong to mountains that have been removed,
to valleys that have been filled—a world gone flat—
is to learn geography as affliction. To be rooted

as if my spine extends invisibly down
into dirt & rock, deeper than drills can go,
tethered to some hot core, is to lose part of myself
when I leave. Nothing thrives here

& I can't thrive anywhere else. We
don't get to choose which part of ourselves
we'll lose, or even to know what it is we've lost.
We don't get to know where we should go

or how to hold still or any of the other things
Pavlov's dogs & other martyrs seem to know.

The Reward

Pavlov's dogs & other martyrs know
after great pain a bell rings.
Their eyes strain to see the vial sutured
in the cheek below catching

drool they know is worthless,
or worse. After being made fluent
in Russian pain they become his & deathless,
or close. A bell rings & the heart relents

until everything sounds like a bell.
The vials fill with faith in master
& reward— it is all
they can offer the reward that is their master,

but even this holds a drop of alchemy in its dregs—
a lesson in giving in the spirit of one who begs.

J-O-B

Learning to give in the spirit of one who begs
means first you have to learn how to beg.
I think of my drunk friend telling
a homeless guy in DC: get a J-O-B.
A few years later, drunk again, hits a tree.
He told me once that his father would
come home drunk, come into his room
with a gun, threaten to blow his brains out.

He never said if he'd pretend to be asleep, cry,
plead, pray or how he'd rise the next day,
go to school, return to that room, lie down & wait.
Never said if he knew why any man
would want to see his own son begging for his life.
The stories about miracles confuse everything.

There's wood enough within

The stories about miracles confuse everything:
You awake to the wolf of Gubbio licking your hand,
St. Francis bringing you breakfast in bed.
Your room is the lion's den & you are Daniel.
Your room is a whale & you are Jonah,
Pinnochio, Ahab. The windows disappear,
the walls lean in. The walls of Jericho may fall
but not these walls. These walls are trees
& you are where someone loves you best
of all, your room is the woods & you
are only a girl, but a whole girl, a girl
without pain, standing still at the edge.

Then comes a knock like a flame catching the trees, & you,
poor wooden girl caught, as pain opens the door.

A Bird Sanctuary

The pain that opens the door
sometimes opens windows too.
You lie on the floor as if
you're floating on a sea of board.

You watch the birds fly in. All you want
is for them to pick you clean.
Instead they make nests, lay eggs,
raise their feathered young. You pluck

out your hair, one by one. Blind fingers find
each loose thread and pull. You pick
yourself clean. The floor is cool and smooth,
the air fills with flight patterns

and something like happiness in between:
a purpose for every kind of error.

Everything that Rises

There is a use for every kind of error
& you're still asking what yours will be.
It is one of your weaknesses that you believe
someone or something can spin you into gold.

The black dog at the foot of the bed stirs,
digs a hole to bury you. Nothing to do
but lie still, taste dirt. Nothing will save you
from tragedy except comedy, which is worse.

Let the ground find a use for your body
which was my home, which was never my home.
Let your words sink beneath your tongue
which was my root.

Close your eyes now & let the nothingness
from which you flee be the nothingness

On the Problems of Empathy

1

Twice a year the orphans come.
Like Job's children, pawns in a bet
made with the Devil.

2

You and your mother watch
from the porch as Father Whiskey's car
rolls up the long dirt drive.
The orphans inside ignore the fields,
the cows, the pond, the patch of woods.

3

When you were younger,
you begged for a brother,
or even a sister.

4

What should you say to an orphan?
You think of your mother's prelude to sympathy:
"There's nothing easier
than burying other people's children but..."
The orphans are beyond sympathy.

5

Sympathy being one of the problems.
How far does it go?
Not quite to the horizon.
Not even to the trees beyond the pond.

6

The orphans, their still-breathing,
lye- and cabbage-smelling bodies,
are also a problem.

7

Father Whiskey with his lazy eye
thinks a good Catholic family
with only one child is both
problem and solution.

8

One blue eye looks at your mother.
The other looks at God
looking at you.

9

Sympathy requires action, or at least words;
empathy is a private affair,
which is nevertheless a basis for community.
However the distinctions are imprecise and need further work.

10

Father Whiskey sees God looking at you as if
--if you believed in the Creed, the Holy Ghost,
and all that he has tried to tell you,
if you could even look a statue
of Mary in the eye—
then you could reach out a hand,
lay it on this boy's scrubbed forehead,
make him your brother.

11

Later, in college, in a winter of mind and place,
you will read Edith Stein's
On the Problem of Empathy.
Now though she is of no help to you.

12

You stand on the front porch
and wait for the miracle
to begin in your shoulder
and travel down through your fingertips,
the way you've heard lightning
tries to escape the body.

13

In a few months there will be different orphans.
Then the time comes but no orphans.

14

Years later, in a city where you can't speak
the language, you will pass a woman
sitting on the pavement, a burnt out shell
of a woman holding an infant. The infant is sleeping,
on his head a robin's-egg-blue bonnet, spotless.

15

Your problem is you feel too much, or not at all.

16

Their grown bodies move past you.