

kentucky
women writers
conference

Board of Advisors

Melissa Young

President

Ellen Soileau

Vice President

Angie King

Secretary

Sylvia Ahrens

Treasurer

Sarah Chapman

Lynnell Edwards

Randi Ewing

Susan Kroeg

Melissa A. McEuen

Kimberly Miller

Kiki Petrosino

Lisa Tobe

Sonia Sanchez Series

Patrice Muhammad

Chair

Asha French

Shawntaye Hopkins

Staff

Julie Kuzneski Wrinn

Director

Kristen Pickett

Program Manager

Sara Volpi

Poetry Slam

Delving into Dungy
Pre-Conference Poetry Workshop

with:

Lynnell Edwards and Sylvia Ahrens

on:

Saturday, June 17, 2017, **10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.**

at:

Carnegie Center for Literacy & Learning

2nd floor, Allen Room

251 West Second Street

Lexington, KY 40507

Dear Friends:

Here are poems that you may read in advance of this Saturday's free workshop. These are by Camille Dungy, our KWWC2017 keynote speaker, from her newest book, *Trophic Cascade* (2017). This collection suggests both a subject and a method for thinking about how we read and write poetry. In our workshop, we'll offer a sequence of exercises to get participants engaged in this web-like sense of deep ecology that Dungy is excavating in her poems.

The "trophic level" of an organism is the position it occupies in the food chain, and a "trophic cascade" is an ecological concept having to do with predators and prey, a way of understanding the effects of lessening top predators from food webs, e.g. through hunting, fishing, and climate change.

We look forward to seeing you on Saturday!

Sincerely,



Julie Wrinn

Director

P.S. Dungy's keynote reading for KWWC2017 is free and open to the public at the Singletary Recital Hall, 405 Rose Street, on Friday, September 15, 7:30 p.m. She will also teach a two-part, small group writing workshop for conference registrants on Sept. 15–16.

Trophic Cascade

16

After the reintroduction of gray wolves to Yellowstone and, as anticipated, their culling of deer, trees grew beyond the deer stunt of the mid century. In their up reach songbirds nested, who scattered seed for underbrush, and in that cover warrened snowshoe hare. Weasel and water shrew returned, also vole, and came soon hawk and falcon, bald eagle, kestrel, and with them hawk shadow, falcon shadow. Eagle shade and kestrel shade haunted newly-berried runnels where mule deer no longer rummaged, cautious as they were, now, of being surprised by wolves. Berries brought bear, while undergrowth and willows, growing now right down to the river, brought beavers, who dam. Muskrats came to the dams, and tadpoles. Came, too, the night song of the fathers of tadpoles. With water striders, the dark gray American dipper bobbed in fresh pools of the river, and fish stayed, and the bear, who fished, also culled deer fawns and to their kill scraps came vulture and coyote, long gone in the region until now, and their scat scattered seed, and more trees, brush, and berries grew up along the river that had run straight and so flooded but thus dammed, compelled to meander, is less prone to overrun. Don't you tell me this is not the same as my story. All this life born from one hungry animal, this whole, new landscape, the course of the river changed, I know this. I reintroduced myself to myself, this time a mother. After which, nothing was ever the same.

Glacial Erratics

There are people who, when they go, shift
the meaning of words we use each day.

Down goes Frazier,
we used to joke, when sleep knocked our daughter out.

Now Frazier's dead,
and Megan's mom is dying of the same cancer.

On the phone last night, Megan was a baby.
So many new words
she needed to say, but no better way to speak than by crying.

A wrack of grief we used to say,
meaning shipwreck,
souls sunk, lost
fortune, meaning ruin.

Though wrack can also mean seaweed, vegetation,
can mean what grows up from what has fallen.

A whale fall can support life for over seven decades.

The grotesque
and beautiful blooming

off a mortal behemoth.

Bone-rooted worms
waving like marsh grasses.

Hagfish, all saw-mouth and mucous.

Brittle stars.

When she got her words again, Megan said the worst of it
was that her mother was still driving her crazy.

I want to kill her,
said Megan. *Does she always have to be so controlling?*

The morning she chose to join us, my daughter pushed against me.

My whole body, becoming a mother,
squeezed, trying to help push her along.

And what could she do
but push against me again?

Down goes Frazier, we joked
because she fought so hard to be alive she hated ever to leave us.

26

Once, my whole body, becoming a mourner, had to push my girl out,
to let her go. Like this
we'll be pushing each other, until one of us is finally done.

There are these moments of permission

Between raindrops,

space, certainly,

but we call it *all* rain.

I hang in the undrenched intervals,

while Callie is sleeping,

my old self necessary

and imperceptible as air.

Characteristics of Life

*A fifth of animals without backbones could be at risk
of extinction, say scientists.*

—BBC Nature News

Ask me if I speak for the snail and I will tell you
I speak for the snail.

I speak of underneathedness
and the welcome of mosses,
of life that springs up,
little lives that pull back and wait for a moment.

I speak for the damselfly, water skeet, mollusk,
the caterpillar, the beetle, the spider, the ant.

I speak
from the time before spinelessness was frowned upon.

Ask me if I speak for the moon jelly. I will tell you
one thing today and another tomorrow
and I will be as consistent as anything alive
on this earth.

I move as the currents move, with the breezes.
What part of your nature drives you? You, in your cubicle
ought to understand me. I filter and filter and filter all day.

Ask me if I speak for the nautilus and I will be silent
as the nautilus shell on a shelf. I can be beautiful
and useless if that's all you know to ask of me.

Ask me what I know of longing and I will speak of distances
between meadows of night-blooming flowers.

I will speak
the impossible hope of the firefly.

You with the candle
burning and only one chair at your table must understand
such wordless desire.

To say it is mindless is missing the point.

Frequently Asked Questions: #6

Now that you have a child, has your writing practice changed?

46

Digging rock from hardscaped beds, I think,
is a bit like not writing poetry—like thinking
about writing poetry but digging rock from my backyard
instead. If you've never pulled rock, with your own
gloved hands, or a trowel, with a flat-headed shovel,
on your knees, or squatting, or half bending so
your back will hurt by nightfall, never learned how
best to corral the rugged little stones so you might
scoop them and haul them to a container that will bear them
away, turn them into some other fool's problem, or if you have
and your fingers remember like mine remember a day's work
that wore holes into sweet, pink, flowered, garden gloves—
though when I called it quits after laboring more hours
than I labored with my daughter, it seemed
I'd hardly cleared any rock at all—you might wonder
why, when my shovel came down on a pyramid
of knob-sized gray and white and speckled stones
near the struggling young juniper and opened
a nest of lice—small cream eggs and writhing red and black
bodies I checked first that these were not termites—
my mercy limited by my love for the wood and mortar
I call home—then replaced the river stones
on the teeming anthill and turned to clear rock
from some other section of my hardscaped bed.

Bitan

probable root of bitter: biting, cutting, sharp

Once, she was a fierce dark girl whose tongue skipped—
top of mouth, teeth, teeth,

top of mouth,
teeth—

like double dutch was a word that meant her thoughts
cutting circles through the daybore.

No chance
she'd be the one to trip and break rhythm.

Back then she could sit all day on her porch
memorizing the trees.

She could be still.

The birds winged through leaves like they didn't know
anyone could hurt them.

Once, she believed
steam curling off asphalt when summer rains stopped
was a prophecy.

She believed this
looked the way she would feel after touching
a man:

her body clean

and black

and right:

something beautiful and painless rising up.