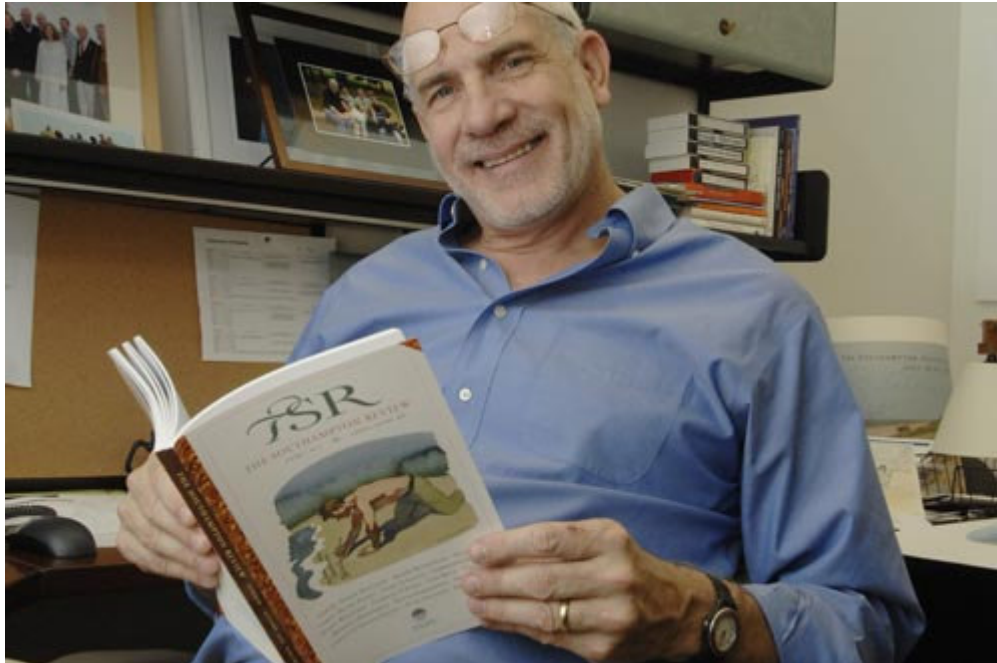


Big names light up the new Southampton Review



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Robert Reeves, the Director of the Master of Fine Arts Program in Writing and Literature at Stony Brook Southampton, is also the driving force in the new literary journal, The Southampton Review. He is shown holding one volume of the two volume first issue in his office in Chancellors Hall. (Newsday / Ken Spencer)

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Fishermen, prone to exaggeration, sometimes claim to have had days so remarkably abundant in catches that dozens of trout practically leapt from beneath the pond's surface into their boats.

To hear those responsible for assembling the Southampton Review, the new literary magazine put forth by the masters in fine arts program in writing and literature at the Southampton campus of Stony Brook University, one might think they're stretching things when they say contributions came with the same prolificacy as those hypothetical fish.

They insist they're not.

"We only started soliciting things in the spring," says Lou Ann Walker, the Review's editor in chief and one of three full-time faculty members of the MFA program headed by Robert Reeves, the Review's publisher. "Once we started asking people, things just kept rolling in that were wonderful." Things bearing names like Jules Feiffer, Marsha Norman, Frank McCourt, Billy

Collins. "We thought, 'Why not have two issues for the first edition, instead of one?'"

Turn up the volume

Again, Walker's not exaggerating. The Southampton Review - launched July 27 at a reception loaded with literary heavyweights at Stony Brook's annual two-week Southampton Writers Conference - debuted with not one, but two volumes, one of them 185 pages, the other 196 pages.

They are glossy, meaty and eclectic collections of poetry, fiction, essays, lectures and even a short play (by onetime New York Times science reporter Dava Sobel) from those who have taken part, either as faculty or students, in the Southampton writing programs.

In one volume, there's an excerpt from "Angela's Ashes" author Frank McCourt's forthcoming first novel, along with fiction from Ursula Hegl, Hilma Wolitzer, Bharati Mukherjee and Roger Rosenblatt, who also teaches full-time at Southampton. There's poetry from Patricia O'Hara and Julie Sheehan, and essays by Christopher Durang, David Rakoff and Daniel Menaker, among others. The other volume includes new poems from former United States poet laureate Collins; fiction from Clark Blaise, Matthew Klam and Meg Wolitzer; memoirs from Feiffer and Kaylie Jones; and tips on writing plays from Pulitzer Prize

winner Norman.

There's more. The Review's volumes also boast illustrations from the New Yorker's Edward Koren and Roz Chast (whose whimsical depiction of a beachfront writing shack adorns one of the covers) as well as Amy Portnoy and Pulitzer winners Garry Trudeau and Feiffer, who teaches a course every spring semester at the Southampton campus entitled "Humor and Truth."

Literary luminaries

A star-studded launch such as this is even more conspicuous in a time when newspaper book review pages are dwindling, scholarly literary publications are hanging by their fingernails and even a mainstream magazine as prestigious as the Atlantic Monthly has stopped soliciting new fiction.

But given the high-wattage of writing superstars connected to the East End in general and the Southampton program in particular, it's probably not as surprising as it seems. Still, it's no small thing.

The Southampton Review now joins a nationwide body of journals that, according to the Manhattan-based Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, totals about 1,000 at any given time, says Jeffrey Lependorf, the council's director. While acknowledging that journals come and go based on funding and interest, he added that the The Southampton Review holds promise not only for its illustrious contributors but also because of its regional focus. "People feel good about having a journal that represents their region," he said.

Reached by phone at his Martha's Vineyard summer home, where he's finishing up the memoir from which his Review contribution, "The Warrior Liberal" is adapted, Feiffer says he didn't have to think twice about giving to the Southampton Review because he admires the MFA program for its "cheerful and robust" atmosphere. It is, he said, "particularly important to have such a civilizing cultural force like this in a community like the Hamptons, where so much is about money and all the things that go with it."

For his part, Reeves says now that the 1,000-copy printing of the two-volume journal is behind him, he is "too busy basking in the glow of this [issue] to think too much about the next one." He's also preoccupied with planning the graduate program's 2007-08 slate of classes. "There's still a good amount of stuff that didn't make it into the launch, but we are ready to go for the next one."

An associate professor of English, Reeves came to teach at Southampton College in 1992 when it was still owned and operated by Long Island University. Summer writers' conferences, he says, have been held on the campus for more than 30 years. Stony Brook University bought the 88-acre Southampton campus in October for \$35 million, and six months later, SUNY officials authorized a new budget for the MFA program, which included funds to begin the magazine.

Reeves says he's not able to say how much of the program's budget was for the journal. "We're still in the process of developing a budget that will match our needs as they continue to emerge," he says. He expects the Southampton Review to be a "self-sustaining initiative, through sales, subscriptions, advertising and contributions." Start-up costs for the inaugural double issue, he says, were paid by supporters of the MFA "as well as a generous grant from BookHampton" (the East End-based bookstore chain). The journals cost \$20 apiece, though you can also purchase both for \$30 ([stonybrook .edu/writers](http://stonybrook.edu/writers)).

Though readers may have to wait a year for the next issue of the Review, Reeves and Walker intend, from that time on, to keep the journal coming out twice a year.

"The high you get from being part of the conference and part of the program, and that applies to faculty and students, carries over from year to year," Walker says. "And we get excited just thinking how much that high will carry into this project. We're kind of resting now, but part of us can't wait to see what happens next."

'Professor' Alda at Southampton

Pulitzer Prize winners Jules Feiffer, Frank McCourt and Marsha Norman and former U.S. poet laureate Billy Collins are among the 15 visiting faculty members appointed to teach in Stony Brook University's MFA program at the Southampton campus this coming school year. But a new addition to this list arrives with a slew of Emmy and Golden Globe awards under his belt: actor Alan Alda, whose second volume of memoirs, "Things I Overheard While Talking to Myself," will be released next month by Random House. In addition to teaching classes in memoir writing this fall, Alda, longtime host of PBS' "Scientific American Frontiers" series, may also lead a workshop on science and environmental writing at next year's Southampton Writers Conference, scheduled for July 16-29.

Alda did not contribute to the two-volume maiden issue of the Southampton Review. But as a member of what novelist Robert Reeves, the Review's publisher and founder/director of Stony Brook's Literature and Writing Program, characterizes as "our extended family" of faculty, students and graduates, Alda, he speculates, may well have something for the Southampton Review when it again publishes next summer.