

# HoCoPoLitSo

HOWARD COUNTY POETRY & LITERATURE SOCIETY

ENLARGING THE AUDIENCE FOR CONTEMPORARY POETRY & LITERATURE SINCE 1974

ANNUAL REPORT FY 2024

JULY 2023-JUNE 2024

## We All Contribute to 50 Years of Stone Soup

By Susan Thornton Hobby

We all know the tale of stone soup: a visitor starts the pot with a stone and some water. A villager brings some onions, another some celery, some salt, some carrots. Next thing you know, the cooks present soup.

That's how for nearly 50 years HoCoPoLitSo has managed to present some of the world's and the region's most illustrious writers in Howard County, and worldwide. We pull in partners, we ask writers we know for help, and the next thing you know, we have a steaming hot bowl of literature. In 1974, HoCoPoLitSo started with something humble — those stones — and in the half-century since, layering each new ingredient, we are proud to have turned them into savory offerings for our loyal audiences.

Last year started with the Lucille Clifton Reading, where we welcomed two stalwart poets and friends. Poet and musician Truth Thomas and then-Maryland Poet Laureate Grace Cavalieri joined HoCoPoLitSo in partnering with



*Poet and musician Truth Thomas at Blackbird Poetry Festival*

COURTESY OF HOWARD COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Howard County Library System and a distinguished panel to present “Freedom to Read,” pushing back against the rise in book bans. That reading was another stone soup, pulling together talented people to speak the message that stories matter, that all stories matter.

That's why this year HoCoPoLitSo, Howard County Arts Council, and Howard County Government through the office of County Executive Calvin Ball collaborated on finding the first-ever Howard County Poet Laureate.

This poet would speak stories, encourage writing, and celebrate the power of words.

With the recommendation of a review panel

coordinated by HoCoPoLitSo, Ball joined us at the Blackbird Poetry Festival to announce the appointment of Truth Thomas to the inaugural two-year term, bringing the power of poetry to public events in the county.

During this next year, our golden anniversary year, our metaphorical soup needs your ingredients—a question for a poet, a few lines shared, a donation to fund more soup.

Bring your bowl and let us fill it.



### *In Loving Memory of Catherine McLoughlin-Hayes*

With deep regret, we recognize the loss of long-standing HoCoPoLitSo board member and Irish Evening champion, Catherine McLoughlin-Hayes, who passed away December 28, 2023. Born in County Roscommon, Ireland, Catherine once recalled that poetry was almost a second language in her first home, and after moving to Columbia, Maryland, in 1977, her life-long love of poetry and literature found a second home with HoCoPoLitSo.

With unflagging enthusiasm and steadfast leadership, she served with distinction as the Irish Evening Chair for nearly 40 years. Without Catherine's passion and perseverance in bringing many of Ireland's most renowned writers to our community and securing the participation of successive Irish ambassadors, Irish Evening would never have become the joyous seasonal rite it is today.

For all you have given us, the wonderful world of Irish writers and music, and, especially, your dear friendship, we thank you and will remember you always with love.

# Season Highlights July 2023-June 2024

## New and Old Partnerships

Approaching its 50th anniversary, HoCoPoLitSo recognizes this milestone would not be possible without the support of passionate peers, and partners. In October 2023, the **Lucille Clifton Reading** partnered with Howard County Library System to welcome **Truth Thomas** and **Grace Cavalieri** for an in-person reading at the Miller Branch location, along with a virtual panel including author **James McBride**, *Washington Post* satirist **Alexandra Petri**, historian **Dr. Richard Bell**, and ALA President **Emily Drabinski** for “Freedom to Read,” in response to the national rise in book bans and challenges.

At the 46th **Evening of Irish Music and Poetry**, held February 3, 2024, novelist **Darragh McKeon** read from his work and engaged Georgetown University’s **Cóilín Parsons** for a conversation dubbed “Novel Approach,” on the overlap between the Troubles and our current political moment. Ireland’s Deputy Ambassador **Orla Keane** gave opening remarks, **Poor Man’s Gambit** (**Corey Purcell**, **Deirdre Lockman**, and **Tim Buchanan**) played a concert of traditional Irish music, and photographer **Denny Lynch** exhibited his photos in the lobby of Smith Theatre, Horowitz Center, Howard Community College (HCC). Irish Evening was again helmed by co-chairs **Anne Reis** and **Ed Young**.

The 16th annual **Blackbird Poetry Festival** was again held in partnership with HCC on April 25, 2024. The all-day event celebrating poetry on the college campus, titled “Poetry, Speak Easy,” featured writer and educator **Nate Marshall**, who MCed a lively student open mic, joined this year’s Bauder Writer-in-Residence **Hayes Davis** to record an edition of *The Writing Life*, and took the stage for the Nightbird reading in the Rouse Company Foundation



COURTESY OF HOWARD COUNTY LIBRARY

*Susan Thornton Hobby, left, types up a young poet's work at the Miller Branch Library's H3 Carnival.*

Studio Theatre of the Horowitz Center. Former writer-in-residence **Teri Ellen Cross Davis** conducted a morning student writing workshop.

Beginning in late 2023, HoCoPoLitSo undertook a close partnership with Howard County Government and Howard County Arts Council to design and implement the first-ever positions of **Howard County Poet Laureate** and **Youth Poet Laureate**. An open call for applicants was announced at the 2023 State of the County address, and following a review coordinated by HoCoPoLitSo, County Executive **Calvin Ball** announced the appointment of **Truth Thomas** as the inaugural adult laureate

from the Nightbird stage. Thomas will serve a two-year term until March 2026.

This year’s **Wilde Reading Series**, organized by **Ann Bracken**, **Laura Shovan**, and **Linda Joy Burke**, presented ten readings at Columbia Art Center. Covering genres and topics all the way from the coming-of-age story of a tomboy in 1970s Baltimore to tackling the opioid overdose epidemic through the lens of dark satire. Participating authors included: **Adina Ferguson**, **Carole Boston Weatherford**, **Charles Rammelkamp**, **Deborah Kalb**, **Edward Belfar**, **Eric D. Goodman**, **Esperanza Hope Snyder**, **Fran Abrams**, **Heidi Mordhorst**, **Jared Smith**, **Joseph Ross**, **Kathy MacMillan**, **Michael Salzman**, **Monica Prince**, **Nancy Naomi Carlson**, **Odessa Rose**, **Pantea Tofangchi**, **Sam Schmidt**, **Victoria Adams-Kennedy**, and **Yvette Neisser**.

## Welcome to Nicholas Trappler

In summer of 2023, HoCoPoLitSo welcomed to its staff **Nicholas Trappler**, a long-time resident of the county, who in 2019 helped establish the HoCoPoLitSo Kennedy Collection of books, open to the public in Howard Community College’s Clark Library. Trappler has been a regular volunteer in the years since, forming a close partnership with HoCoPoLitSo’s long-term Managing Director **Pamela Simonson**, now amicably retiring with the deepest thanks of HoCoPoLitSo for her many noble years of support.



PHOTO BY CHRIS JOHNSON

*Darragh McKeon, center, with high school volunteers at annual Irish Evening.*

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# Season Highlights, cont'd.

## Youth & Student Programs

HoCoPoLitSo's Bauder Writer-in-Residence **Hayes Davis**, a poet and educator of 24 years' experience who concurrently served as Director of Institutional Equity, Justice, and Belonging at Sandy Spring Friends School, this year succeeded above and beyond, completing a "full tour" of all 13 county public high schools, including the newly opened Guilford Park, the Homewood Center, HCC, and at the HCPSS Professional Learning Day. Working in tandem with HoCoPoLitSo's High School Liaison **Judy Young**, Davis met with more than 1,200 students and teachers total.

Among its many activities, HoCoPoLitSo considers its student programs perhaps most important, including sponsoring more than 30 past writers-in-residence and 44 years of presenting Howard County high school students with personalized book awards, including students nominated by their teachers for **Promise and Achievement in Language Arts**, and to the winners of HoCoPoLitSo's **All-County Writing Competition**. With the support of donor **Dr. Lillian Bauder**, the tradition continued.

The five creative writing winners were **Estelle Chen** (River Hill), **Katie Thai** (Long Reach), and **Abigail**

**Bekele** (Mt. Hebron) in the poetry category; and **Caitlyn Foot** (River Hill), and **Maire Crooks** (River Hill) in the personal essay category. This year's reviewers were coordinated by Judy Young, in collaboration with a team of educators headed up by **Nancy Czarnecki**, Curriculum Coordinator, Language Arts, HCPSS.

In addition, 24 students were chosen by school English Departments to receive HoCoPoLitSo's Promise and Achievement Award in Language Arts: **Jaxon Molinari**, **Jordan Neperud** (Atholton), **Nicole Cavey**, **Shruthe Yoagentharan** (Centennial), **Cole Bruner**, **Piper Stimler** (Glenelg), **Arjun Aute**, **Marianne Chukwunye** (Hammond), **Carlin Margazano**, **Gabby Addow** (Homewood Center), **Madeline Roy**, **Miriam Roy** (Long Reach), **Vardaan Srivastava**, **Victoria Yi** (Marriotts Ridge), **Angel Baldwin**, **Abbey Yonas** (Mt. Hebron), **Tseboh Mibigah**, **Ashley Sanchez** (Oakland Mills), **Anna Ayodele**, **Victoria Williams** (Reservoir), **Jasmitha Alle**, **Naomi Ling** (River Hill), **Jamie Burris**, and **Keira Kasmuel** (Wilde Lake).

Student awardees received books by such outstanding poets and writers as: **Kwame Alexander**, **Holly Black**, **Joy Harjo**, **James McBride**, **Colum McCann** and **Colm Tóibín**.

## Third Annual Ellen Conroy Kennedy Poetry Prize

**Steph Sundermann-Zinger** was awarded first prize in the 2023 Ellen Conroy Kennedy Poetry Prize for their poem "A Dream of Solitude." Reviewers noted the poem's gorgeous language, and the strong voice present in its imagery, alliteration, and meter; one reviewer called it "a mature poem that is a moment in time." Sundermann-Zinger was awarded a \$500 cash prize and the poem was published in the winter 2024 edition of the Little Patuxent Review.

**Larraine Denakpo** was awarded second place with a \$100 cash award for their poem "Lullaby for Daughters" for its restrained composition and universal resonance. One reviewer said, "This neatly packed, tiny poem is so enjoyable to read."

**Eileen Wu** and **Joshua Ward** and were unanimously awarded honorable mentions: reviewers recognized Wu's poem, "Why Storms Have Human Names," for immediately subverting reader expectations with its vivid imagery and provocative final line; Ward's poem, "Some Thrushes on Migration," was noted for its strong, consistent imagery and structure, and for unique word choices that create a vivid picture for the reader.

# Annual Contributors

*HoCoPoLitSo is grateful to all who support our programs and mission—without you, the past 50 years would not have been possible. This list includes contributions from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. Serial gifts by the same contributor are merged. Every effort has been made to include all names and to spell them correctly. Please let us know if there are errors or omissions.*

### \$5,000 and above

Dr. Lillian Bauder  
*Student programming sponsor,  
and in honor of Tara Hart*  
Howard County Arts Council  
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### \$1,000 and above

Columbia Film Society  
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### \$500 and above

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### \$250 and above

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### \$100 to \$249

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## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

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### Ellicott City 250

A second printing of HoCoPoLitSo's poetry anthology *Through the Eyes of Poets: Ellicott City at 250* was made possible thanks to a generous, anonymous donation, copies of which were distributed free to county middle and high school libraries.

### Howard Community College

In partnership with Howard Community College, HoCoPoLitSo invited writer **Tope Folarin** to moderate a conversation and Q&A with **Nadia Owusu**, author of *Aftershocks*, at the **Bauder Lecture Series** held September 21, 2023.

At the college's Creative Write-In on March 7, 2023, HoCoPoLitSo provided books to be given away to participating students. **Laura Yoo**, **Ryna May**, **Sylvia Lee**, **Tara Hart**, and **Tim Singleton** offered workshops and mentored young writers.

In fall 2023, the campus office of Student Life hosted a reading by **Wayne Karlin**, a veteran of the Vietnam War, writer, and English-Vietnamese translator; with the campus bookstore then in transition, HoCoPoLitSo provided for book sales at the event.

### Howard County Library

HoCoPoLitSo joined in at the library's "H3 Carnival," a do-it-yourself festival held August 5, 2023 at the Miller Branch location, where *The Writing Life* producer Susan Thornton Hobby and Bauder Youth on Board **Naomi Ling** helped community members of all ages type up their own poems on a vintage mechanical typewriter, which proved quite a draw to younger visitors who may never before have seen one in person.

### The Writing Life

HoCoPoLitSo's writer-to-writer talk show, *The Writing Life*, filmed in the studio of Dragon Digital TV on the campus of Howard Community College, airs via local broadcasts and is available free online on the HoCoPoLitSo YouTube channel, found at [youtube.com/hocopolitso](https://youtube.com/hocopolitso).

Two new editions were produced this year: **Darragh McKeon** hosted by **Cóilín Parsons** in February 2024; and **Nate Marshall** hosted by **Hayes Davis** in April 2024. HoCoPoLitSo's free, public archive of more than 220 videos, including *The Writing Life*, the Poetry Moments series, and recordings of select past in-person events, was seen by an additional 103,500 viewers from around the world.

**HoCoPoLitSo**  
HOWARD COUNTY POETRY & LITERATURE SOCIETY



PHOTO BY STUART SIMPSON / PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

Celebrates its 50 Years at The Annual Evening of

# Irish Music and Poetry

**The Language of Landscape: Seán Hewitt on Place, Identity, and Belonging  
In conversation with C  il  n Parsons, and music by Poor Man's Gambit**

**Saturday, February 15, 2025, 7:30 p.m.**

**Smith Theatre, Horowitz Center – Howard Community College  
10901 Little Patuxent Parkway, Columbia, Maryland 21044**

**\$50 general in-person admission, \$30 educators and students**

Tickets are available through Howard Community College's Horowitz Center Box Office, by phone call to 443-518-1500 during their normal operating hours, or online 24/7 at [hocopolitso.org/irish-evening](https://hocopolitso.org/irish-evening).

Questions? Contact HoCoPoLitSo at 443-518-4568 or [info@hocopolitso.org](mailto:info@hocopolitso.org).