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## Meet Patrick Donnelly, Director and Faculty



Check out Patrick's website [read more...](#)

An interview with Patrick on *Poet's Corner* [read more...](#)

Patrick wins Keene Prize for translation [read more...](#)

**Patrick Donnelly**, director of The Frost Place Poetry Seminar, is the author of *The Charge* (Ausable Press, 2003, since 2009 part of Copper Canyon Press) and *Nocturnes of the Brothel of Ruin* (Four Way Books, 2012), the latter book a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award. Donnelly is a current associate editor of *Poetry International*, and a former associate editor (1999 - 2009) at Four Way Books. He has taught at Smith College, Colby College, the Lesley University MFA Program, The Frost Place, the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and elsewhere. His poetry has appeared in many journals, including *American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The Yale Review*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *Hayden's Ferry Review*. He lives in Western Massachusetts with his spouse Stephen D. Miller, with whom he translates classical Japanese poetry and drama.

Donnelly and Miller's translations are included in *The Wind from Vulture Peak: The Buddhification of Japanese Waka in the Heian Period* (Cornell East Asia Series, 2013). Their translations have also appeared in many journals, including *Bateau*, *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, *Circumference*, *The Drunken Boat*, *eXchanges*, *The Harvard Review*, *Kyoto Journal*, *Metamorphoses*, and *Noon: The Journal of the Short Poem*; the *Vulture Peak* translations were awarded the 2015-2016 Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Prize for the Translation of Japanese Literature from the Donald Keene Center of Japanese Culture at Columbia University. Donnelly's other awards include a U.S./Japan Creative Artists Program Award, an Artist Fellowship from the

Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Margaret Bridgman Fellowship in Poetry from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and a 2018 Amy Clampitt Residency Award.

## HOW TO APPLY

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### **'Poets for Life: Poets Respond to AIDS' Hosted by Patrick Donnelly on Apr. 9**

“In the 35 years since AIDS began, there has been not only a medical and social-service response to preventing and treating the disease, but there has also been a response from artists of all kinds, mourning the losses and celebrating the victories,” Donnelly said. “Specifically, American poets have created an entire literature of AIDS, leaving for the future an important record of this time.”

Poets for Life will feature readings by award-winning poets Eduardo C. Corral, Patrick Donnelly, Michael Klein, and Joan Larkin, who will read not only from their own poetry about the epidemic, but from the work of other notable poets, living and dead. Singer-songwriter Laura Wetzler will also perform.

Saturday, April 9 at 3 p.m

Paradise Room, Conference Center, Smith College, 51 College Lane,  
Northampton

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## On Poetry and Teaching

***"This experience of community can be like jumper cables applied for writers who need the juice of that connection."***

At The Frost Place we have the luxury to have a deep and intimate conversation about poems over five and a half days, and this experience of community can be like jumper cables applied for writers who need the juice of that connection.

I see my role as two-fold: firstly, to inspire participants to full-out engagement with their writing lives over the long term, in part by strategizing with them about removing whatever obstacles prevent that. Secondly, during workshop, it's my job to describe the strengths and weaknesses of poems in ways that will help participants strategize about re-entering and fully realizing that work, as well as to generate new work. I ask participants to respond to each other's work the same way, especially by coming to the Seminar thoroughly prepared to discuss the workshop poems.

In my workshop, and at the Seminar as a whole, we have a good time, we get silly, we laugh, we dance, we enjoy each other's company, the beauty of the White Mountains, and Robert Frost's tailwind. But we also gather, as peers at different levels, to do serious work and to give each participants the close, honest, generous readings they may not have access to elsewhere.

***"Let's be honest: it's never completely comfortable, is it, to receive feedback about our poems?"***

Sometimes poets working with me for the first time are a little caught off guard by the rigor of my workshop, and by the frankness of a discussion which, while it's always respectful and kind, isn't limited to praise for what's working well about the poems. Let's be honest: it's never completely comfortable, is it, to receive feedback about our poems? So it's also my job to give participants the encouragement necessary to stay engaged with a process that is often enjoyable but which is also real *work*, in the most satisfying and transformative sense.

It's always my goal to send participants home with new and sharpened craft tools, blown away by the possibilities suggested by encounters with poems new to them, and most of all charged up to work on their own poems.

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## Craft Book Recommendations

[Richard Hugo's \*The Triggering Town\*](#) is a wonderful book, especially useful on the topic of what Adrian Blevins calls "counterfactuality," or the benefit of wandering away from whatever might have been the initial agenda, or "trigger," of the poem. I think the question "How might the opposite be true?" can be very helpful in relation to agendas that might ruin a poem, by preventing a turn from the expected or planned path. I always try to ask that question of my own poems at some point during revision. "Odi et amo," Catullus said, "I hate and I love"—the shadow of *yin* stirred into the *yang*, and vice versa, is, to me, what makes any poem feel true to life.

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*A session with Robert Frost and students of the Hebrew University. (American Friends of the Hebrew University)*

"Don't tell the poem in other and worse English of your own to show you understand it. But say something of your own based on the poem (not an opinion of it though!)." - Robert Frost, Dartmouth College Archives

## **What are Patrick's Inspirations/Obsessions?**

***I walk this lonesome valley behind many pillars of fire, not all of whom are poets:***

Walt Whitman, Allen Ginsberg, Christopher Smart, John Keats and Walter Jackson Bate's biography of Keats (dead at 25), Pound's "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter," William Meredith's "The Illiterate," Tennyson's inconsolable *In Memoriam*, Maria Callas (dead at 53), Judy Garland (dead at 47), Fred Astaire, Frank Sinatra singing "One For My Baby," Lorraine Hunt Lieberson singing "As With Rosy Steps," then dying at age 52, Mozart's song "Abendemfindung" (*our friends' tears already flow over our grave*; he died at 35), Bach's cantata *Ich Habe Genug*, Nina Simone, drunk, abandoned and delusional in "Lilac Wine," Beethoven's "To the Far-Away Beloved" sung by Fritz Wunderlich (dead from falling down the stairs, likely drunk, at 36), Rufus Wainwright, Ray

LaMontagne singing “Trouble,” Iris DeMent singing “No Time To Cry,” *The Tale of the Heike*, *The Tale of Genji*, and *The Pillow Book*, John Dowland’s “Flow My Tears” and Philip K. Dick’s *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*, all of Diane Seuss’s poems, Pedro Almodóvar’s *Talk to Her* and *Bad Education*, Fellini’s *La Strada*, *8 1/2*, and *La Dolce Vita*, the howling, ecstatic *qawwali* songs of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, the Hebrew psalms, the black church baptizing in white robes in a river in Melbourne, Florida which I saw when I was six, the thousand-and-one golden bodhisattvas of mercy at Sanjūsangen-dō temple in Kyoto, the statue of the monk Kuya at Rokuharamitsu-ji with six tiny Buddhas coming out of his mouth, and the incomparably delicate fingers of Miroku Bosatsu, from the year 700, in the treasure house of Kōryū-ji.

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## On the Writing Process

My writing life is messy: my pattern is that there are irregular patches of non-writing between stretches of intense work. I get unhappy the longer the non-writing periods go on, even if the other things I’m working on are necessary and interesting, because some important piece of what keeps me in “a maker’s” or craftsman’s relationship to the world is missing during those times.

From time to time I organize a peer workshop with two to three other very fine, very different poets. We meet by Skype videoconference when our schedules allow. That means I know I have to have something to show, and the fact that I admire the other poets so much means I can’t show just *anything*: it has to be as good as I know how to make it, and not an early draft. That’s a strong incentive to work regularly. My advice is, if you’re thinking of creating a peer workshop, choose poets who are stronger than you are in some ways, and who will be honest with you. There’s little point in assembling a group that won’t challenge you, or won’t call you on bad habits.

***"My advice is, if you're thinking of creating a peer workshop, choose poets who are stronger than you are in some ways, and who will be honest with you."***

I work on lots of poems at the same time, maybe as many as twenty, with three to five on the front burner. When I get stuck with one, I shift to another. I keep a list of working poems in a computer file, and keep going back to that, trying to finish as many as possible. I never give up on anything, however dire it seems; some fragment might turn out to be useful. When poems are ready to be sent out, those titles move to a submission list, and if they come back from any

particular journal, they go out to another the next day—but that’s another story.

***"I recommend translation as part of a writing life, both the reading and writing of. Otherwise it's too easy to conclude that what's happening in English, diverse as that is, is all that's going on. Which it isn't, not by a long shot."***

Translating Japanese poetry and drama with Stephen D. Miller has been important to me since we embarked on that in 2004. It's a different but related activity I can turn to, if for whatever reason I'm out of sorts with my own poems. It refreshes me, and sends me back to my own poems with strategies that wouldn't have occurred to me. So I recommend translation as part of a writing life, both the reading and writing of. Otherwise it's too easy to conclude that what's happening in English, diverse as that is, is all that's going on. Which it isn't, not by a long shot.

One doesn't need to be fluent in a foreign language to work on translations; you can work with a partner who *is* fluent, as I do, though that person also needs to be a reader and lover of poems, as well as knowledgeable about the culture and literary tradition the poems come from. I guarantee this will stir fresh qualities, elements, and topics into your own writing.



*Maestà* by Duccio di Buoninsegna in the Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana del Duomo, Siena

**I told Jesus When I was afraid**  
by Patrick Donnelly



as a child, I looked for pictures of you in the encyclopedia and circled them around my bed.

Jesus said, I remember Giotto, Cimabue, Fra Angelico. I remember the bells as Duccio's *Maestà* was carried into the cathedral.

I told Jesus, I asked you to lift my gayness from me, laid down on my face in front of the altar at All Saint's Church on West Fort Street in Detroit. I was nineteen, it was 1975, midnight and the tiles were cold.

Jesus said, I remember asking you Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew?

I told Jesus, for thirty years I asked you to send me someone to love, and then Stephen came and we married, but we were old, so I begged you, keep us alive, let us live a little longer.

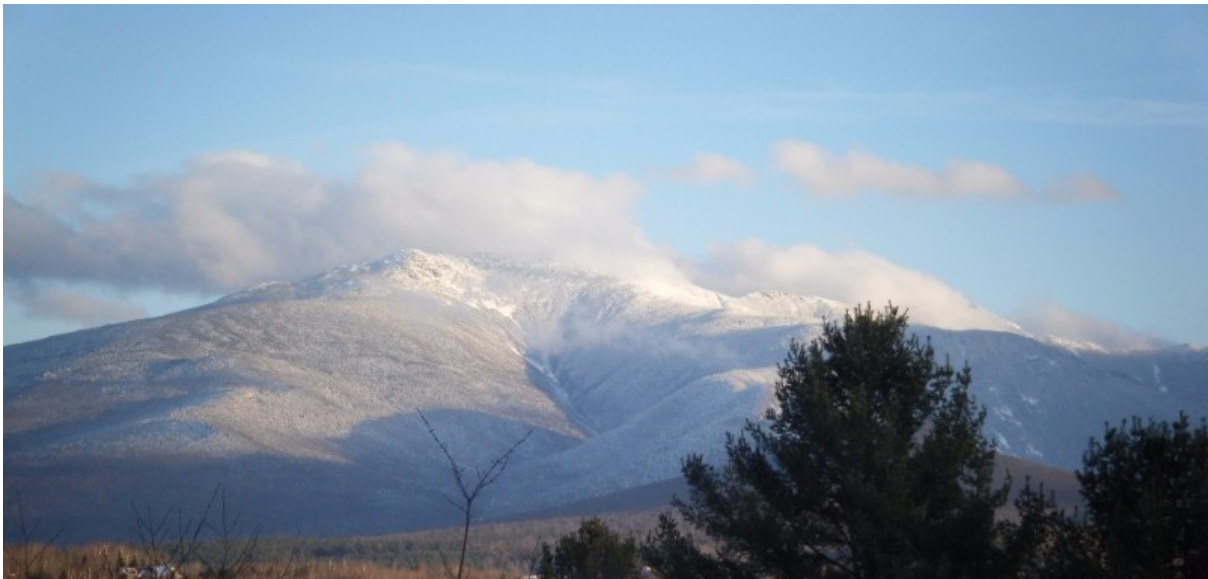
Jesus said, I remember I remember I remember the poem of you that I sent to the empress with a branch of flowering.

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From JESUS SAID, a poem sequence. Originally published in *American Poetry Review*. Used with permission of the author. All rights reserved.

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## **More Information About Summer Programs**



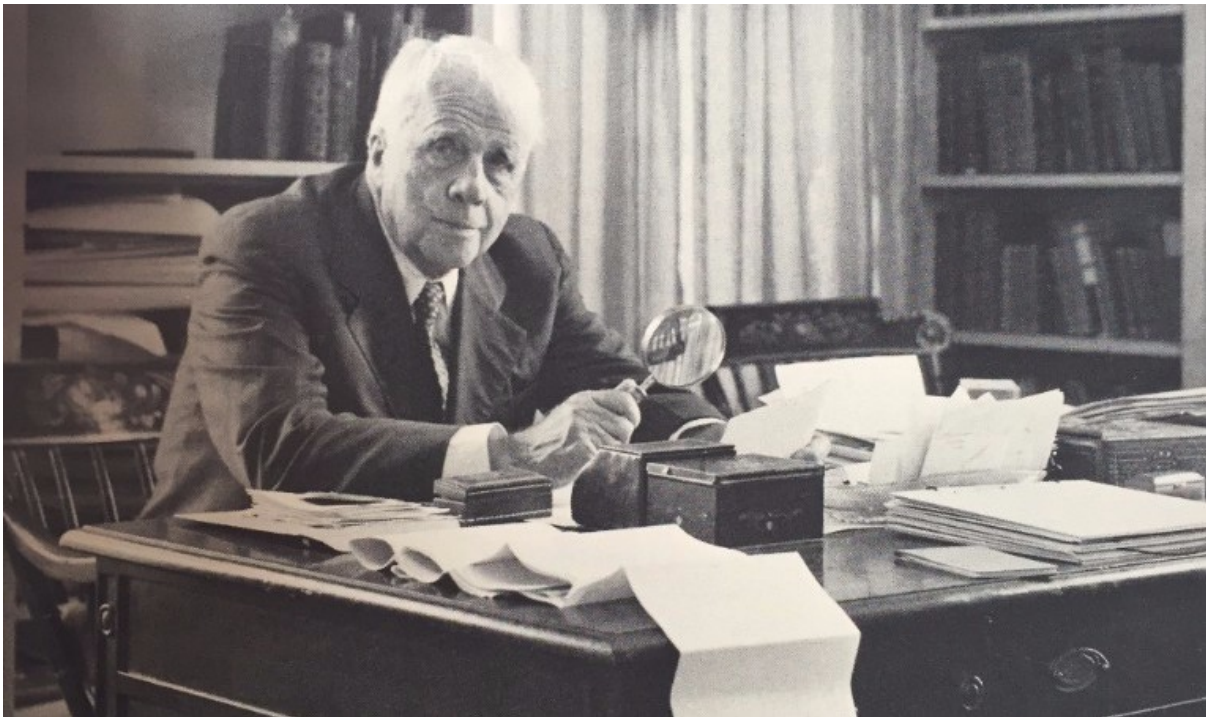
## Conference on Poetry and Teaching | June 25 - 29, 2016

**Director:** [Dawn Potter](#) **Associate Director:** [Teresa Carson](#)

**Faculty:** [Kerrin McCadden](#), [Rich Villar](#)

Held each year in June, the Conference on Poetry and Teaching is a unique opportunity for teachers to work closely with both their peers and a team of illustrious poets who have particular expertise in working with teachers at all levels.

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## Writing Intensive | June 29 - 30, 2016

**Director:** [Afaa M. Weaver](#)

The Frost Place Writing Intensive is a day-and-a-half reading and writing workshop that directly follows the Conference on Poetry and Teaching. Led by renowned poet-teacher Afaa Micheal Weaver, it gives teachers the opportunity to focus entirely on their own creative growth.

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**Conference on Poetry | July 10 - 16, 2016**

**Director:** [Martha Rhodes](#)

**Faculty:** [Gabrielle Calvocoressi](#), [Maudelle Driskell](#), [Rachel Eliza Griffiths](#),  
[Michael Klein](#), [Matthew Olzmann](#)

Spend a week at “intensive poetry camp” with writers who are deeply committed to learning more about the craft of writing poetry.

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**Poetry Seminar** | July 31 - August 5, 2016

**Director:** [Patrick Donnelly](#)

**Faculty:** [Ilya Kaminsky](#), [Cleopatra Mathis](#), [Lyrae Van-Clief Stefanon](#)

You're invited to join a select community of poets for 5-1/2 days this August to refresh your artistic inspiration in a setting of great natural beauty.

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