

## THE POETS OF MOUNTAIN LAURELS

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One cannot claim that poetry has long been found in our valley, so most of the lyrics set by Bruce Trinkley for *Mountain Laurels* are by poets who are happily still among us. These poets are representative of what is a populous and active confraternity perhaps best known now to Bruce, who has read all their work in seeking poems that lend themselves to composition in another medium. These poets had their predecessors, of course, some distinguished and some lesser-known. Few of us have probably ever heard of Charles Calvin Ziegler, who published a charmingly printed (and very thin) book, *Drauss un Deheem*, in Leipzig in 1891 with the legend attached: 'Gedichte in Pennsylvanisch Deitsch beiëm Charles Calvin Ziegler von Brushvalley, Pa.'

Only three years later, in 1894, Fred Lewis Pattee arrived to teach American literature at the Pennsylvania State College. Pattee never made great claims for his own poetry. He never sought to reprint his youthful volume *The Wine of May* (1893), but along with his pioneer treatises on American literature he wrote a fair amount of occasional poetry, including the Penn State Alma Mater (which, by the way, he wrote while in retirement in Winter Park, Florida, where he also published an autumnal volume, *Beyond the Sunset*, in 1934).

While he was not a prolific poet, Pattee set the stage in a grandfatherly way for other State College poets. There is a link between Pattee and an older generation of poets whose work began in the 1930s. One of these, the winner of the National Book Award for poetry, was Theodore Roethke, who in a ten-year stay (1938-1948) in the Department of English published his first book, *Open House* (1941), and was asked to write occasional poems, one of which written for the local chapter of Phi Beta Kappa has been set to music for this concert. Roethke left Penn State in 1948, leaving behind the manuscript of *Open House*, which he presented to the University Libraries, and at least seven presentation copies of the book, one of which was autographed for Fred Lewis Pattee.

The next figure of prominence was Joseph Grucci, whose first book of poems, *Love of Earth* (1933), carried a Foreword by Fred Lewis Pattee. In 1947 he wrote to Pattee, "I am by some special favor your spiritual grandson, though an undeserving one." Grucci published other volumes of poetry. But from the standpoint of this centennial concert, he should be recognized for his lifetime accomplishment, the founding and the editing of *Pivot*, which began in 1951 just a year after the death of Pattee and was continued after Grucci's death by another of our poets, the late Jack McManis. McManis had long assisted Professor Grucci, in addition to writing his own original and provocative poetry. Both these gentlemen are much missed.

*Pivot* in a very real way is the poetic record of State College; everyone involved in the literary life of the University contributed to it, and many writers around the country sent poems. Kenneth Burke and Marianne Moore went out of their way to praise the magazine, and in both longevity and quality it is a fine memorial to Grucci and a singular and living record of his contributions.

*Mountain Laurels* echoes all of this and is indicative of a continued poetic vitality in State College that has flourished for a long time. It is a wonderful tribute to that vitality that Bruce Trinkley has so carefully read so much so well and has brought to the poems the added dimension of music. Let us hope that there will be another program such as this one in much less than a century.

**Charles Mann**

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