

Undergraduate Research Symposium May 20, 2011 Mary Gates Hall

Online Proceedings

SESSION 1D

ALTERNATIVE REPRESENTATIONS AND THE POLITICS OF UNDERSTANDING

Session Moderator: Crispin Thurlow, Communication

Mary Gates Hall 231

1:00 PM to 2:30 PM

* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

Donald Justice and New Formalist Poetry

Joseph Frantz, Senior, English (Creative Writing)

Mentor: Brian Reed, English

Since World War Two, free verse has been the dominant mode in English Language poetry. It has not gone without contest, however; in the mid-1980s, the New Formalist movement arose, advocating a return to traditional rhyme and meter. Two of the most influential New Formalist polemicists, Dana Gioia and William Logan, were strongly influenced by the mid-century poet Donald Justice, whom they took to be a guiding figure. Through examination of Gioia's critical opus *Can Poetry Matter?* and Logan's anthology *Desperate Measures*, the aesthetic standpoints from which these critics approach the works of Justice can be located. These standpoints are expressed in the anthology *Certain Solitudes: On the Poetry of Donald Justice* (edited by Gioia and Logan). Through close reading of *Certain Solitudes* and Justice's poetic corpus, it is found that Gioia and Logan fail to center Justice's poetic formality on the concept of *organic form*. While inorganic form takes form as prior to content, organic form takes form and content as inevitably comingling and guiding one another. Justice's work invariably makes use of organic form. In poems like "Poem" and "American Scenes," Justice's choices of line length, rhyme, and meter are closely measured against choices of diction, tone, and imagery. The appreciative criticisms of Gioia and Logan discuss issues of form separately from those of tone, diction, and rhetoric; because of this, their approaches to the poems of Justice misidentify the role played by Justice's formal considerations.