

Announcing the 2020 Recipient of the WCPA's Stanley Kunitz Medal (embargoed until 5-7-20)

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Princeton, Mass. poet and teacher Susan Roney-O'Brien has been chosen to receive the 2020 Stanley Kunitz Medal, which is awarded through a bequest from two-time Poet Laureate of The United States and Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and Worcester native Stanley Kunitz.

The medal, presented annually since 2015, is awarded by the Worcester County Poetry Association to a person with a strong Worcester County (Mass.) connection who best exemplifies Stanley Kunitz's (born in Worcester in 1905) life-long commitment to poetry and poets. The award recognizes the total commitment to poetry as Kunitz lived it: Teaching poetry, mentoring poets, speaking poetry, publishing poetry, and supporting organizations that nurture poetry.

Former New Hampshire Poet Laureate Emeritus Patricia Fagnoli says, "Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote: 'Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar.' Just so, wrought with exquisite craft and care . . . Susan Roney-O'Brien gives us a world both familiar and made strange."



Photo credit: Philip O'Brien

Susan Roney-O'Brien has published two chapbooks and two full-length books of poetry. Her third full-length collection is due out in 2020. Her books *Farmwife* won the William and Kingman Page Poetry Book Award in 2000. Her poems have been exhibited, read, and discussed as part of the Massachusetts-based 4x4 Poet and Artists Collaborative as well as published in the anthology *Echo and Spark*. Roney-O'Brien works with international students and local writers, curates The Thirsty Lab, a monthly poetry venue, and is the summer writing series coordinator for the Stanley Kunitz Boyhood Home in Worcester, Massachusetts. Her work has been widely published and translated into Braille and Mandarin. She is a featured poet in the international exchange program

Poetry Bridging Continents between China and The United States. She received her MFA in Poetry from Warren Wilson College.

Eleanor Wilner says of her poetry, "With the authority of a rural life lived close to nature, Roney-O'Brien's moving poetry answers what it asks, 'if I am keeper of tree and land, am I not also steward of memory/' for 'who else/can trace the spaces gone to dark?'"

Or, as Donald Hall Poetry Prize winner John Hodgen said, "Most poets lack the courage to focus on their family and tell the unvarnished truth. Roney-O'Brien is braver than most."

The medal will be presented at the Worcester County Poetry Association's sixth annual medal ceremony on Thursday, July 23, 2020. The award presentation, which will be followed by a reception, will be held at the Worcester Historical Museum (30 Elm Street, Worcester, Mass.) and will start 6:30 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.

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About the Worcester County Poetry Association

The Worcester County Poetry Association (WCPA) was founded in 1971 with a threefold mission: celebrate the rich literary history and creative energy of Central Massachusetts through public readings, workshops, festivals, scholarly conferences and other programs; support the publication of the literary journal, *The Worcester Review*; and collaborate with libraries, bookstores, colleges and universities, museums, churches, schools, community centers, businesses and a variety of cultural organizations to promote poetry events. The WCPA is an all-volunteer 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

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