



COE COLLEGE

BIBLIOPHILE

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POETRY & THE LIBRARY



Ann Struthers

ANN STRUTHERS | 'We are the witnesses to our time'

Ann Struthers started writing in first grade, and she never stopped. Poems, plays, short stories, essays, chapbooks, book reviews, scholarly articles. For the past 30 years or so, she has spent most weekdays writing and researching in her office, tucked into a corner of Stewart Memorial Library. She was Coe's Writer in Residence for many years. The former Fulbright Scholar started the Fulbright program at Coe.

She is an evangelist on the merits of writing.

"We are the witnesses to our time," the retired English professor says. "It is important to tell your story. No one else is going to know what it was like, or at least what it was like for you. It's essential, for you as a witness, to leave your record behind."

Libraries have been a constant in her life, too. First came the public library in Terril, the northwest Iowa city of 700 where she grew up, and now the library at Coe.

"Libraries are the heart of education," she says.

"This is a good reference library. I can just go get something off the shelf. And when it's not there, the staff will help me find anything. I'm interested in Arabic writing now. I can't read Arabic so they'll find French translations of Arabic poems I can read."

The library feels the same way about Struthers.

"She's our treasure," says Director of Library Services Jill Jack, noting April was National Poetry Month. She noted, too, that Struthers has donated her papers to the George T. Henry College Archives at the library.

Struthers wrote her first poems in first grade. She showed the first two, written on a Big Chief tablet, to her teacher. The teacher said, "But they don't rhyme."

"I was a pretty bad child because I knew, in my heart, she was wrong — though I would never have said that to her," Struthers says.

By the time she was in second grade, the weekly newspaper was publishing her poetry. "I'm sure it was pretty bad, but the teachers sent it in because they were trying to fill up the space," she adds with her trademark chuckle.

Struthers' family lost their farm during the Depression and, like millions of others during that time, worried about money and how they could afford to send their precocious oldest child — or any of the six Mohr children — to college. But a Methodist minister took the 18-year-old Ann on a visit to Morningside College, a private liberal arts college a hundred miles away in Sioux City. The college's president, also a pastor, and his wife hired her as a live-in nanny, providing her with free room and board while she was a student. She also spent two summers caring for a young girl she escorted from Iowa to Long Island to spend summers with her dad.

"I got to see New York, which opened up my world a great deal," she recalls.

Four years later, in 1952, college degree in hand, the English major married Mel Struthers and moved with him to Washington, D.C., where he was finishing law school. She taught at a junior high in Silver Spring, Maryland — long enough to convince her she wanted to teach college students, not junior high students. The couple returned to Des Moines and then Cedar Rapids, where they started a family.

When her four children were in school, Struthers began commuting to the University of Iowa in Iowa City to work on her master's degree. At her graduation, her husband said, "Why not go for a Ph.D.?" So she did, studying poetry at the famed University of Iowa Writers' Workshop with such well-known poets as Richard Hugo and David Ray. She completed her Ph.D. in modern letters — a combination of writing, poetry and literature.

Going to school while shepherding a family was challenging, and she credits her husband with getting to the children's swim meets when she couldn't. "At one point," she laughs, "we had three people in college at one time — two kids and me! Not good!"



"I write because I am a witness to the reality of today, because I am a witness to the imagination, more real than reality, reals and reels of its golden insights, iridescent possibilities, delicate delights; I write because I am a writer: a writer writes."

— Ann Struthers, quote a Stewart Memorial Library wall

Struthers taught four-and-a-half years at the University of Northern Iowa before working as a poet in the public schools for the Iowa Arts Council. And then came the teaching appointment at Coe, in 1986, and there she stayed.

"Coe has such wonderful students," she says. "I have students who are now publishing poetry in the North American Review and other places. And even those who are not publishing now look at poetry in a different way."

Struthers says the three years she spent as a Fulbright Scholar teaching abroad — two at the University of Aleppo in Syria, where she fears many of her former Kurdish students have died, and a year at the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka — enriched her poetry. It's one reason she encourages Coe students to seek international learning opportunities.

"Not only do these programs help other countries," she says, "but it's wonderful for Americans to live in other countries and see a different way of looking at the world, getting to know people who may be very much unlike them but who are still people of great interest."

Struthers has published two collections of poetry and five chapbooks. The latest two, "The Kindness of Crocodiles" and "Aleppo Burning," were published last spring and were prize winners. She publishes extensively in literary magazines, including the North American Review, both in the United States and abroad. She recently finished a play about Louisa May Alcott as an Army nurse during the Civil War and now is working on one about Alcott's "little romance" in Europe. If that weren't enough, she also teaches a memoir writing workshop at St. Paul's United Methodist Church.

At age 89, after a full life, she has one major goal left. She'd like to hear a nightingale sing.

"I've written many poems — not all of them good. Maybe 1% are top-rank. You have to write a lot to get a good one," she says. "I was bitten by something early — in first grade."

As for the role of poetry in today's world, she quotes the famous lines from William Carlos Williams:

*It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.*

Writing 'Moby-Dick'

By Ann Struthers

*The winter of 1851 was snug, tight,
snow heaving its waves over Massachusetts.
Melville awoke with a "sea-feeling..."
The frost on his windows left only
a small, clear glass in the middle.
It was like "a port-hole of a ship
in the Atlantic." He wrote, "My room
seems a ship's cabin; at nights
when I wake up & hear the wind shrieking,
I almost fancy there is too much sail on the house."*

*At Arrowhead, Melville was up at eight,
tramped to the barn and poured out bran
for the horses, their hot breath
warming its rafters. His corn knife
sliced pumpkins for the cow. She munched
them, contented as cream, drooling the seeds
and looking up at the sailor with great
South Seas eyes. Augusta and Helen, his sisters
who were his copyists, served his breakfast
in the kitchen; then he clumped
up the back stairs to his cold study,
the desk before the windows looking out
over the double ridges of Mount Greylock.*

*He laid the fire, lifting recalcitrant logs
with a harpoon poker—below him the sounds
of the household chores, his four sisters,
his wife Elizabeth, his tyrannical mother,
their high collars buttoned under their proper chins.
The Tahitian flames in his fireplace danced,
and those other fires, melting down whale blubber,
flared, leaped, translated hell, and Melville
wrote steadily till 2:30.*

NICK TWEMLOW | Poetry as 'the Antidote to Noise'



Nick Twemlow
Associate Professor

Associate Professor Nicholas Twemlow, who teaches creative writing and film at Coe, says he wanted the students in his poetry workshop to quickly learn about "one of the sacred places on campus" — Stewart Memorial Library.

"I want them to browse the stacks, look at the artwork," he says. "The library feels like a beautiful space for students to think and lose themselves. It's a place for thinking and creating."

This April — during National Poetry Month — Twemlow's students created an "Instructions for Living" box they placed at the reference desk. Library patrons were invited to dip in and pull out a slip of paper offering a creative instruction for living. The instructions, though, weren't like your parents' advice to pay your bills on time. They offered ideas for "stepping outside yourself and slowing down," Twemlow says. "Our lives seem like they're always in motion."

The "conceptual thought exercise" was inspired by a show of Yoko Ono's conceptual artwork Twemlow saw in New York City three years ago. "One of her pieces," he says, "covered three walls with pieces of paper with typed instructions on them, almost like post-it notes. You walk up to them and read them, and they have really interesting instructions. One said to record the sound of a stone aging."

Twemlow's poetry students came up with ideas of their own, typed the instructions — about 45 of them — and printed them on colored paper. They duplicated them and cut them into strips. Coe students were invited to pluck a slip from the "Instructions for Living" box and, it was hoped, pause a moment to read it and contemplate.

"It's a way to engage with poetry," says Twemlow, whose students also inked some of their poems on the library's glass walls. The students loved that opportunity, too, he adds. "They like the idea of being able to see their work in public. You don't always get a chance to see your poetry displayed somewhere where you have no control over who sees it. It's like instant publication, to have other people looking at your poem. Students came to think of their poems as a living thing others can engage with."

Twemlow has been teaching at Coe for six years, with many of his classes meeting in the library, including in the Media Technologies Theater on the library's lower level. "It was an easy fit," he says. "A lot of people like teaching in the library because of the incredible resources and also the people there. I like teaching in the classrooms with the glass walls. It's a contained space, but with a sort of grandeur, with the Marvin Cone galleries adjacent. To me, it fosters an artistic environment for students."



Standing behind the “Instructions for Living” box are (left to right) Julia Pross ’22, Taylor Slavens ’21, Chance Bednorz ’21 and Nick Twemlow.

Part of teaching poetry at the library involves Twemlow having students look at the many paintings that hang there. “They walk around and find a painting that speaks to them, then they write a response. The idea is to expand the sense of a poem beyond personal expressions, to see a bridge to a piece of work someone did years ago. It seems to work pretty well.”

Twemlow also brought students from Metro High School, the alternative school in Cedar Rapids, to the library, where he paired them with his poetry students. “They broke off in groups and lost themselves in the art and photography. They were able to consider the materiality of the work, why artists made the choices they did. The Metro students absolutely loved it, especially the Cone and Andy Warhol pieces.”

Twemlow was born in Topeka, Kansas, where his parents had moved from New Zealand so his physician father could study and work at the famed Menninger Clinic. During his undergraduate years at the University of Kansas, he came to love writing poems, which led him to the Iowa Writers’ Workshop at the University of Iowa. He earned his M.F.A. there, as well as an M.F.A. (later) in film and video production. It’s also where he met his wife, poet Robyn Schiff. After living in New York City and Chicago, they moved to Iowa City, where Schiff teaches creative writing at the University of Iowa. A few years later, Twemlow ended up at Coe.

When Coe students sign up for Twemlow’s poetry workshop, “they come in and all appear to have written some poetry in the past,” Twemlow says.

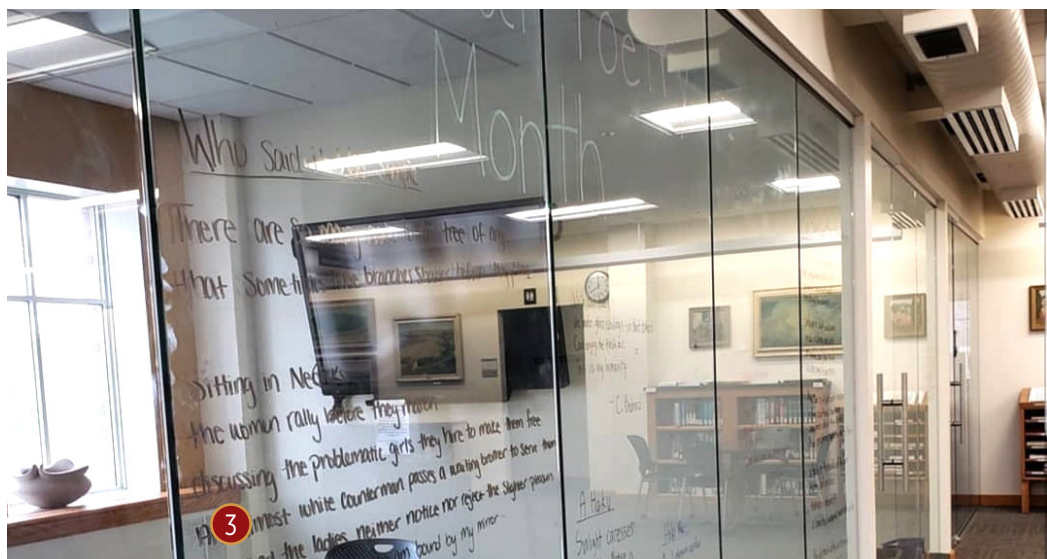
“Not all of them are creative writing majors, and poetry is something they do on the side. Can you explain why you need to write poems, how they can change your vision?”

“Sometimes poetry does not necessarily have a function. It’s an antidote to noise.”



LEFT: Students from Metro High School pull “Instructions for Living” from the box.

BELOW: In celebration of National Poetry Month, Nick Twemlow’s students wrote their poems on the glass walls in the library, where they remained for the entire month of April.



The Sleep

By Nicholas Twemlow

The sleep touches everyone. The sleep is pinned to the junipers wracking their collective sunshine for the answer. If only, one said, we could sleep inside the machine’s breath, we’d dream of the other orchard, the one that sleeps in cunning, colors in the leafy margins a cobalt blue sampled from the leaf’s imaginings of sky-as-blue, blue-as-death.

All the sand, too, the cormorant as natural engine, subject lines, medicated correspondence bottling its essence in tinctures, tinctures favoring feverish, feverish describing the immigrant labor napping beneath us. Too tired to dream the way the rich dream. Flies collect on the crust of the sandwich flopping from one’s hands, so restful, the hand, the fly, the dream inspired by gears turning over, levers and levels, all the abstraction drawn into focus. A worker proud of nothing, the interior homelessness circumscribing itself around two or three of her best dreams.

An accord with linoleum floor, an accord with recurring nightmare. An accord with husband and wife sharing a towel, blessed towel.

Flunk Day at the library



Larissa Alire '20, Morgan Clemons '20 and Joi Damaris Blue '22



Josh Edel '20



Corey Caldbeck '21, Anthony Gallaher '20,
Jack Pollack '20 and Tom Hannon '19



Qiuyang Zhang '20, Mohan Xu '19, Xiaohui Huo '20,
Nia Ishioka '22 and Xinyue Li '21

It's hard to imagine a nicer spring day for Flunk Day than April 8, 2019. Hundreds of students upheld one of Coe's oldest traditions by taking the day off from classes and enjoying the sunshine, music and games. Among their choices for fun and relaxation in the library were painting canvasses, crafting, virtual reality, games, puzzles and more. The first Flunk Day at Coe was May 3, 1911, when flyers flooded the Coe campus, encouraging students to take the day off and "pause in their mad rush for knowledge and give intellectual organs respite."

HOW TO DO RESEARCH

Librarians this spring taught a class on Research Methods. It was the first time the seven-week class had been offered, says Director of Library Services Jill Jack.

“The goal was to take the stress out of doing research,” Jack says. “We wanted to teach students to have a better understanding of what their search results mean and how to craft their search to retrieve the best results, not cut corners, and to hone their research skills.

Research is not easy nor quick, but as you improve your skills and develop a better understanding of your results, the process becomes less stressful and more fruitful. We live in a time of almost too much information. How do we assess the value of what we’re reading? How do we find reliable, trustworthy sources, and how do we verify what we think we know?

Those are all aspects that researchers have to navigate, and a better understanding of the process and results is key to unlocking these answers.”

Joining Jack in teaching the classes were Head of Reference Elizabeth Hoover de Galvez, Head of Media Technologies Laura Riskedahl, and Head of Technical Services Hongbo Xie. Jack plans to offer the class again in the spring term.



Yale professor dips into William Shirer papers



A senior research scholar at Yale Law School spent four days this spring searching through the **William Shirer '25** papers in the George T. Henry College Archives of the Stewart Memorial Library.

Patrick Weil was reviewing Shirer's papers for mentions of William C. Bullitt Jr., the first U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1933 to 1936 and the ambassador to France from 1936 to 1940.

"The papers were very helpful," said Weil, who is writing a biography of the colorful and controversial Bullitt. "Shirer knew of Bullitt in 1932 when Bullitt was in Vienna working with Sigmund Freud on a biography of President Woodrow Wilson, a book that wasn't published until 1966."

Weil, who holds a degree from the Sorbonne and a research appointment with the renowned school in Paris, also spent a day at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum in West Branch, "where I also found good stuff for my book."

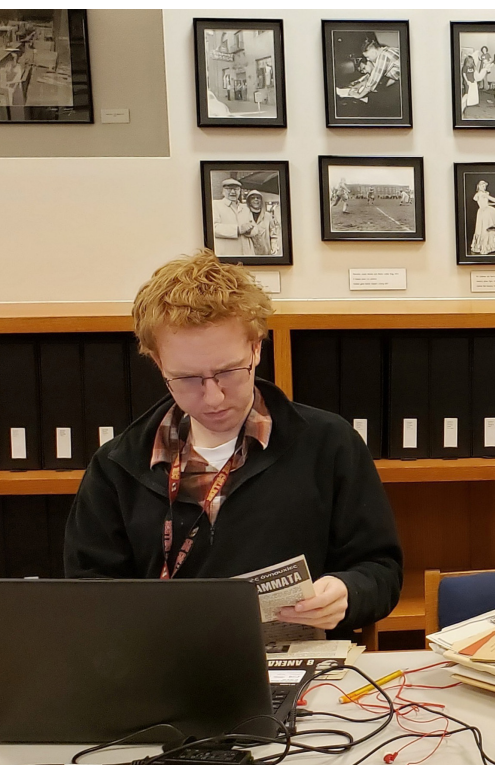
"I look forward to sharing all these discoveries with the Coe College community once the book is published," he said. "Jill Jack was a wonderful host, and I am very grateful."



YOU CAN HELP

Libraries are the heart of a community, and Stewart Memorial Library is the heart of the Coe College campus. Would you consider a gift to keep that heart strong? Donations can be made online (tinyurl.com/coe-library-support) or by mailing a check to the Coe College Advancement Office, 1220 First Ave. NE, Cedar Rapids, IA 52402. Please designate the gift for Stewart Memorial Library.

Thank you for supporting the work and mission of Stewart Memorial Library.



LEFT: Donald Reif '19 going through a collection of papers given to the George T. Henry College Archives relating to the German occupation of Crete.
RIGHT: Ella Gibbons '19 and Jaeden Peterson '22 searching the George Henry proofs for a requested photo.

ALUMNI AND FACULTY PUBLICATIONS

Added to the George T. Henry College Archives, 2018-2019

Adamson, Tom. *Both Sides of the Night*. Fremont, NE: 2018. (Tom Adamson, Class of 1972)

Barnett, Dennis and Branko Mikasinovich. *Selected Serbian Comedies*. Fairfax, VA: New Avenue Books, 2018. (Dennis Barnett, Professor of Theatre Arts, 2001-)

Boland, Janice Dockendorff and John Dowdall. *Home Sweet Home*. (sound recording) Port Washington: NY, Koch International Classics, 1995. (Janice Dockendorff Boland, Instructor in Music (flute), 1997-) (John Dowdall, Instructor in Music (guitar), 1978-)

— *Chamber Music at Schönbrunn*. (sound recording) Buffalo, NY: Fleur de Son, 2007.

— *Chamber Music for Flute, Guitar, and Strings*. (sound recording) Buffalo, NY: Fleur de Son Classics, Ltd., 2010

Boland, Janice Dockendorff and Martha Cannon. *A Method for the Flute*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. (Janice Dockendorff Boland, Instructor of Music (flute), 1997-) (Martha Cannon, Professor of French, 1971-1990)

Budhwani, Karim Ismail. *Nanomedicine: Electrohydrodynamic Atomization (EDHA) to Engineer Next-Generation Biometric Systems (MPS) and Precision Drug Delivery Systems (DDS)*. Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest LLC., 2018. (Karim Ismail Budhwani, Class of 1993)

Garcia, J. Malcom. *Riding Through Katrina with the Red Baron's Ghost: A Memoir of Friendship, Family, and a Life Writing*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 2018. (J. Malcolm Garcia, Class of 1979)

Hoffman, Ann. *The Happy Expat: Your Guide to Joyfully Retiring Abroad*. Melbourne, FL: Motivational Press, Inc., 2015. (Ann Hoffman, Class of 1968)

Kelly, TV and J.R. Miller. *In His Steps: A Book for Young Christians Setting Out to Follow Christ*. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1885. (TV Kelly, Class of 1893)

Lanegran, Kim and Andrew H. Campbell. *Global Leadership Initiatives for Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding*. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2018. (Kim Lanegran, Professor of Political Science, 2005-)

Lapetito, Cynthia Marie and Cindy Veach. *Gloved Against Blood*. New Jersey: CavanKerry Press Ltd., 2017. (Cynthia Marie Lapetito, Class of 1975)

Penn, Alexandra. *The Letter Mage: The First Quarto*. 2018. (Alexandra Penn, Class of 2013)

— *The Letter Mage: The Second Quarto*. Broken Leg Books, 2018.

— *The Letter Mage: The Third Quarto*. 2018.

Roeder, Randy. *Sins of Omission*. Cedar Rapids, IA: Dusty Typewriter Press, 2018. (Randy Roeder, Class of 1986)

Struthers, Ann. *Aleppo Burning*. The Head & The Hand, 2018. (Ann Struthers, Professor of English, 1986-2011)

— *The Kindness of Crocodiles*. Emory, VA: Wild Leek Press, 2018.

Twemlow, Nick. *Attributed to the Harrow Painter*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2017. (Nick Twemlow, Professor of English, 2013-)

Zalesky, Mark and C. Houston Price. *Official Price Guide to Collector Knives*. New York: House of Collectibles, 2008. (Mark Zalesky, Class of 1992)

Zalesky, Mark and William B. Worthen. *A Sure Defense: The Bowie Knife in America*. Little Rock, AR: Historic Arkansas Museum, 2017. (Mark Zalesky, Class of 1992)

