

## Susan B.A. Somers-Willett

### Curriculum Vitae

---

English Department, Montclair State University, Dickson Hall - Room 468, Montclair, NJ 07043  
Office Phone: 973-655-5149 | URL: [www.susansw.com](http://www.susansw.com) | E-Mail: [susan@susansw.com](mailto:susan@susansw.com)

#### EDUCATION

- 2003 | **Ph.D., American Literature** | **The University of Texas at Austin**  
With concentrations in African American Studies, Cultural Studies, and Women's Studies  
Developed the Poetry and Poetics graduate concentration in English
- 1998 | **M.A., Creative Writing** | **The University of Texas at Austin**  
With a concentration in Poetry
- 1995 | **A.B., Anthropology and Women's Studies** | **Duke University**  
Phi Beta Kappa, *Cum Laude*
- Fall 1993 | **Duke in New York Arts Program** | **New York University**

#### TEACHING INTERESTS

Creative Writing, 20<sup>th</sup> Century/Contemporary American Poetry and Poetics, African American Literature and Culture, Women's Studies, Cultural Studies, Performance Studies

#### TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

- 2009-present | **Assistant Professor of English, Montclair State University, New Jersey**
- 412: Advanced Poetry Writing
  - 312: Intermediate Poetry Writing
  - 212: Introduction to Writing Poetry
  - 365: Contemporary American Poetry
  - 325: American Poetry: WWII to the Present
  - 250: Special Topic: Poetry and Performance
  - 200: Introduction to Creative Writing (multi-genre)
- 2008-2009 | **Visiting Writer and Lecturer of English, The University of Texas at Austin**
- 391L: Independent Study in Creative Writing
  - 379S: Senior Seminar: Poetry and Performance
  - 379M: Sylvia Plath's Poetry and Prose
  - 376M: African American Poetry and Poetics
  - 341L: Advanced Poetry Workshop
- 2006-2007 | **Visiting Fellow, Center for the Arts in Society, Carnegie Mellon University**
- 64-401/76-401/76-701: Contemporary American Poetry, Poetics, and Publics
  - 64-301/76-211: Poetry and Performance
- 2004-2006 | **Visiting Assistant Professor of English and Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**
- 461: Contemporary American Poetry and Poetics
  - 460: Feminism and the African American Literary Tradition
  - 274: Poetry and Performance
- 2001-2003 | **Assistant Director, Graduate Creative Writing Program, The University of Texas at Austin**  
Developed introductory-level creative writing courses with faculty, organized a reading series, developed program advertising campaign to appear in trade journals, advised undergraduate writers about pursuing graduate creative writing degrees, and designed/maintained website for the graduate degree in creative writing.
- 1998-2002 | **Assistant Instructor, The University of Texas at Austin**
- 309K: Gender, Race, and the Image
  - 306: First-Year Composition
  - 318L: Poetry and Performance
  - 318L: Gender and Poetry Writing

**PUBLICATIONS****Books**

- 2009 | *Quiver* (poetry). *Virginia Quarterly Review* Poetry Series, University of Georgia Press.
- 2009 | *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry: Race, Identity, and the Performance of Popular Verse in America* (criticism), University of Michigan Press.
- 2006 | *Roam* (poetry). Crab Orchard Series Open Competition Award, Southern Illinois University Press.

**Selected Poems**

- 2011 | "Sugar: A Blues," *The Pinch* (forthcoming).
- 2009 | "Women of Troy." Suite of six poems aired on PRI's *Studio 360 with Kurt Andersen* and published in *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Fall).
- 2009 | "Insomnia Chiaroscuro," *Borderlands Texas Poetry Review* (Summer).
- 2009 | "Facts for Visitors Experiencing the Sensation that is the Body's Warning System Alerting Them that Something is Wrong," *foundpoetry.org*, January 5.
- 2008 | "The Golden Lesson," *The Iowa Review* (April).
- 2008 | "Half-Life," *Gulf Coast* (Summer/Fall).
- 2007 | "Petites Curie" and "Object Lesson: Horses," *Indiana Review* 29.2 (Winter).
- 2007 | "Campanology" and "Oppenheimer's Lament," *West Branch* (Fall/Winter).
- 2007 | "Girl, 7, Seeking U.S. Flight Record, Dies in Crash," "The Birds," *Connecticut Review* (Spring).
- 2007 | "The Order of a House" and "Cotyledon," *Pebble Lake Review*, Spring 2007.
- 2007 | "Ophelia's Technicolor G-String" and "The Gift," *Spoken Word Revolution Redux*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks.
- 2006 | "What the Doctors Forget to Tell You About Morphine," *Poets & Writers* Online (October).
- 2006 | "Thaw and the Beginning of Everything," *Painted Bride Quarterly* Issue 75.
- 2006 | "Notes for Living in NOLA," *RATTLE*, Summer.
- 2006 | "Darwin Strikes a Match," "First Sex," "My Natural History," *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Spring).
- 2006 | "Cow Song," Verse Daily, Poem of the Day (May 8).
- 2006 | "Decorum," "The Boy Who Would Be Achilles," "Cow Song," *Crab Orchard Review* (Winter/Spring).
- 2006 | "Polaris." Ann Stanford Poetry Prize, First Place winner selected by Al Young, *Southern California Anthology*, Volume XXI.
- 2005 | "Virginia Dare (i-vi)." *Borderlands Texas Poetry Review* (Spring/Summer).
- 2002 | "A Note on the Type." *Spoon River Poetry Review*, Finalist, Editor's Prize (Fall).
- 2000 | "Circe with Her Hair Down," "Where He Lives Rhymes with Rome," "Self-Portrait as Interstate 10." *The Madison Review* (Spring). Winner of the Phillis Smart Young Prize in Poetry.

**Essays**

- 2009 | "The City Ablaze." *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Fall 2009.
- 2009 | "Through the Invisible Cloak: Some Problems and Possibilities of Being a White Reader of African American Poetry." *RATTLE* 15.1, (Summer).
- 2007 | "Can Slam Poetry Matter?" Introduction, Tribute Issue Celebrating Poetry Slam's 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary, *RATTLE* 13.1 (Summer).

**Articles and Book Chapters**

- 2006 | "Def Poetry's Public: Spoken Word Poetry and the Racial Politics of Going Mainstream." *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 8/9: 72-89.
- 2005 | "Slam Poetry and the Cultural Politics of Performing Identity." *Journal of the Midwestern Modern Language Association* 38.1: 51-73.
- 2003 | "Authenticating Voices: Slam Poetry, Politics, and Performances of Black Identity." *Mantis Journal of Poetry and Poetics* No. 3, Stanford University: 33-55.
- 2002 | "Representing" Slam Poetry: Ambivalence, Gender, and Black Authenticity in *Slam*." *Text, Practice, Performance Journal of Cultural Studies* 3.1: 37-63.

**Interviews and Reviews—As Author**

- 2002 | “A ‘Sacred Condition’: A Review of Li-Young Lee’s *Book of My Nights*.” *E3W Review of Books*. Ethnic and Third World Interest Group, The University of Texas at Austin (Spring).
- 1998 | “Music in the Language: A Conversation with Lucille Clifton.” *The American Voice* (Summer).
- 1998 | Review of *Chicana Falsa and Other Stories of Death, Identity and Oxnard* by Michelle Serros. *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review* 12 (Fall/Winter).

**Interviews and Press—As Subject**

- 2010 | Interview: “Women of Troy: A Documentary Poem” by Danielle Blau, *The New Yorker* (June 10).
- 2010 | Cited Authority: “Performance Poetry Hits the Mainstream” by Dave McGinn, *Globe and Mail* (February 28).
- 2010 | Interview: *Narrative Digest*, Neiman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University (January 22).
- 2009 | Interview: “The Women of Troy: Upstate Girls” by Wayne Trujillo, *Huffington Post* (December 18).
- 2009 | Interview: “Women of Troy,” *Transom.org*, a Peabody Award-winning website discussing innovation in public radio (November feature).
- 2009 | Interview: “Six Questions for Susan Somers-Willett.” *VQR Blog* (November 21).
- 2009 | Cited Authority: “Is Slam in Danger of Going Soft?” by Larry Rohter, *New York Times*, June 3: Page C1.
- 2009 | Interview: “Book/Talk: A Conversation with Slam Poetry Scholar Susan B.A. Somers-Willett,” *The Arts Politic* Inaugural Issue (Summer).
- 2009 | Interview: “An Interview with Susan B.A. Somers-Willett,” by Chris Opiela and Scott Van Pelt, *West Branch* (February).
- 2007 | Interview: “Performing the Academy,” by Jeremy Richards, Poetry Foundation Website (June 7).
- 2006 | Featured author: “Finishing the First: 12 Debut Poets,” *Poets & Writers Magazine*, (November/December).

**Broadcasts and Podcasts**

- 2009 | *Word of Mouth*, New Hampshire Public Radio (December 9, 10 min).
- 2009 | “Just a Girl,” BBC Radio 4 Americana (November 22, 6 min).
- 2009 | “Women of Troy.” Three poems and interviews aired on PRI/WNYC’s *Studio 360 with Kurt Andersen* (November 5).
- 2007 | Poetry Foundation Podcast (June 11, 14 min).
- 2007 | “Slam Past, Present, and Future,” The Eclectic Word with Victor Infante, BlogTalk Radio (Aug 17, 1 hr).

**Multimedia**

- 2009 | “Women of Troy” multimedia slideshow. A collaboration with Lu Olkowski (radio) and Brenda Ann Kenneally (photography) available at <http://vimeo.com/6363677>.
- 2008 | “The Last Known Confederate Civil War Widow Writes from the Dead Letter Office of Heaven” and “Insomnia Chiaroscuro,” *If These Walls Could Speak* installation, Blanton Museum of Art. These two poems continue to be displayed alongside their referent artworks in the Blanton Museum’s permanent collection: <http://blantonmuseum.org/elearning/blantonpoetry/index.html>.

**SELECTED HONORS****Grants, Fellowships, and Teaching Awards**

- 2010 | Global Education Center Grant, Montclair State University (\$800).
- 2009 | City of Austin Artist Opportunity Grant (\$600).
- 2006-2007 | Center for Arts in Society Visiting Scholar Fellowship (\$35,000 plus \$3,000 research budget), Carnegie Mellon University.
- 2005-2006 | Nomination, Outstanding Teacher Award, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.
- 2004-2006 | Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship (\$42,000 plus \$5,000 research budget), University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.
- 2002-2003 | American Dissertation Fellowship (\$25,000), American Association of University Women.
- 2002-2003 | Keene Fellowship for Contributions in Writing, The University of Texas at Austin.
- 2001-2002 | J.M. Coetzee Distinguished Alumnus Fellowship, The University of Texas at Austin.
- 2000-2001 | Nomination, Teaching Excellence Award, The University of Texas at Austin.

**Writing Honors**

- 2010 | Gracie Award for “In Verse: Women of Troy,” Outstanding Soft News Feature, American Women in Radio and Television.
- 2010 | Third Place, *The Pinch* Literary Award in Poetry for “Sugar: A Blues.”
- 2009 | Second Place, *The Missouri Review* Audio Award for “Women of Troy.”
- 2008 | Shortlist, Rona Jaffe Foundation Writer’s Award.
- 2006 | Emily Clark Balch Prize for best poems published in 2006 (\$1000), *Virginia Quarterly Review*.
- 2006 | Shortlist, Helen C. Smith Award for best book of poetry (*Roam*), Texas Institute of Letters.
- 2006 | Pushcart Prize nomination, Southern Illinois University Press.
- 2005 | Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Open Competition selection, *Roam* (\$1500 and book publication).
- 2005 | Robert Frost Foundation Poetry Award for best poem (\$1000 and reading).
- 2004 | Ann Stanford Poetry Prize for best poem (\$1,000 and publication in *Southern California Anthology*).

**Residencies**

- 2007 | Hedgebrook Foundation Fellowship, Whidbey Island, WA (May-June).
- 2005 | Millay Colony for the Arts, Martha Martin Fellowship, Austerlitz, NY (July).
- 2004 | I-Park Artist’s Enclave, East Haddam, CT (November).
- 2004 | Alden B. Dow Center for Creativity, Northwood University, Midland, MI (Summer).

**CONFERENCE PANELS, SYMPOSIA, AND TALKS**

- 2010 | “From Slam to Def Poetry Jam: The Racial Encoding of Poetry’s Publics.” Paper delivered at the *Performance Studies International Conference*, Toronto, Canada (June 10-14).
- 2010 | “The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry.” Moderator and Panelist, *Associated Writing Programs Conference*, Denver, CO (April 7-10).
- 2010 | “Women of Troy” presentation and talkback, Union Docs, Brooklyn, NY (February 28).
- 2010 | “Women of Troy” discussion with MFA students, Sarah Lawrence University (February 25).
- 2009 | “Performing the Scripts of Lyrical Citizenship: Saul Williams and Other Poemcees.” Paper delivered at the *American Studies Association Conference*, Washington DC (November 5-8).
- 2009 | *Poetry, Voice, and Performance Symposium*, The University of Texas at Austin. Full-day roundtable discussion, performance, and Q&A session featuring Meta DuEwa Jones, Susan B. A. Somers-Willett, and Leslie Wheeler (March 31).
- 2007 | “Is There Such a Thing as Slam Poetry?” *National Poetry Slam* panel discussion, Austin, TX (August 7-11).
- 2006 | “Slam Poetry and the Academy.” Moderator and Panelist, *Association of Writers and Writing Programs Conference*, Austin, TX (March 8-11).
- 2006 | “Surviving in the Small Press World.” Panelist, *National Poetry Slam*, Austin, TX (August 9-12).
- 2005 | “Def Poetry’s Public: Spoken Word and the Racial Politics of Going Mainstream.” Paper delivered at *Attention/Inattention: Writers, Scholars, Theorists Conference*, University of Denver (October 7-9).
- 2005 | “Poetry in Public Culture.” Chair and Moderator, *Attention/Inattention: Writers, Scholars, Theorists Conference*, University of Denver (October 7-9).
- 2004 | *Black Art: A Discussion of Adam Pendelton’s Exhibit Being Here*. Symposium Panelist, Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (October 12).
- 2003 | “Authenticating Voices: Performances of Black Identity in Slam Poetry.” Lecture, *Américo Paredes Colloquium on Cultural Studies* (March 19, 2003).
- 2001 | “‘lucy and her girls’: The Generational Tradition of Lucille Clifton’s Poetry.” Paper delivered at the *College Literature Association Annual Conference*, New Orleans, LA (April 18-21).
- 2000 | “‘Representing’ Slam Poetry: Realism, Authenticity, and Images of the Black Poet in *Slam*.” Paper delivered at the *George Horton Moses Society Annual Conference on African American Poetry*, American Literature Association, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (March 31-April 2).

**EDITORIAL AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

- 2009-present | Advisory Board Member, *Yale Anthology of Rap* (Yale Univ. Press, forthcoming 2010)
- 2009 | Contributing Editor, *RATTLE* 15.1, Tribute to African American Poets.
- 2007 | Contributing Editor, *RATTLE* 13.1, Tribute to Slam Poetry.
- 2003-2004 | Editor, Holt, Rinehart and Winston (a division of Harcourt Publishing).

2001-2003 | Instructor, Grrl Action, a non-profit writing and performance workshop for teenage girls.  
1998-present | Freelance Editor and Web Designer.