

Willingham Garden Society hosts annual poetry reading for students and faculty to celebrate autumn weather change

Rebecca Reed

The Willingham Garden Society had an autumnal poetry reading on Oct. 11. Students and faculty members came prepared with poems addressing aspects of the impending fall weather.

“The Garden Society was originally created by students in seventeenth-century poetry and prose class to bring the poems outside, going beyond the classroom and even the text, to experience them as living, breathing and natural, a presence we could share, rather than something alien, from long ago and far away,” said Dr. Deneen Senasi, Mercer English professor.

The 1989 Peter Weir film “Dead Poets Society” inspired the Garden Society’s meetings. Just like in the film, students meet to read their favorite poems to one another. Different from the film is the attendance of the students’ professors, who also read from their favorite selections. In the film, the students find a release in the poetry they read in secret at night. Mercer students wanted to have an outdoor reading of poems, and people could join in as they pleased.

Anyone was welcome to come and read a favorite poem from any author. The meeting was on the Quad by the Christmas tree. Attendees sat in a semi-circle of chairs moved from Willingham. The turnout was small but pleasant. Professors were also present to read with their students. The most recent reading included Dr. Anya Silver, Dr. Andrew Silver and Dr. Bryan Whitfield. Students in attendance were senior Jaclyn Crumbley and juniors Kyle Shook and Jan Jones.

This meeting was Shook’s second time going to a Garden Society meeting. He felt that reading outside captured the true meaning of the poetry. “The beauty that the artist is attempting to capture is truly lost in a classroom but when you can feel the air and hear the noises, it adds a bit more reality to the poet’s intentions,” said Shook. Shook dressed in costume for the event, wearing a raven on top of his hat, a reference to the Edgar Allan Poe poem “The Raven.”

This reading was Jones’ first Garden Society event. “Reading outside created an ambiance that cannot be recreated in a classroom,” said Jones.

The poets range from periods, including William Yeats, Emily Dickinson, Dylan Thomas and others. The readings take a step away from the student-professor relationship that

allows for fun by bonding over language and poetry. Each meeting is different because the poems vary and Senasi works on trying to have different poems to read each time, usually to fit the season.

“In addition to our inaugural reading, ‘In the Gloaming: Poems at Twilight’ in the Spring semester of 2009, Garden Society members created May Day baskets, a centuries old celebration of the coming of Spring, inscribed them with passages from poems, filled them with fresh flowers, and distributed to offices across campus, including that of the President,” said Senasi.

The Garden Society’s next event will include students and faculty from the foreign language department to share international poetry.