

Critic studies three writers

# America 'isolates' poets

By Sandy Johnstone  
Of the Emerald

American poets are "isolated spiritually and emotionally" because America does not need poets, according to a poetry critic who visited the University Tuesday.

Only about 10,000 people are capable of reading poetry judging from book sales, said Peter Stitt, who was on campus to discuss three contemporary poets.

Because poetry is "the hardest, most challenging" form of literature, most people don't indulge in it, Stitt said, pointing out that a well-received book of poetry sells only 3,000 copies on the average.

Stitt, an associate professor at University of Houston, has been published in the New York Times Book Review, Georgia Review and Carolina Quarterly.

Traditional poets use devices such as meter and established poetic forms to communicate human truths, Stitt said. They have a sincere desire to communicate in a relatively familiar way.

Innovative poets, on the other hand, experiment with the ways in which poetry is written. To these poets "form seems to be more of an impediment than an aid to communication," Stitt asserted. "Innovative poets are less likely to deal with the world as we know it."

Most of his lecture focused on the relation between the traditional and innovative styles of three poets — James Wright,



Photo by Mark Pynes

Peter Stitt

"... America does not need poets."

Louis Simpson and John Ashbury.

Stitt drew most of his information from personal interviews with the poets, interspersing extra detail and humorous incidents through his written lecture.

Wright went through four phases in his writing, Stitt said. He is "trying to find a way to live in an essentially hostile world."

After a period when Wright doubted his own ability, Wright wrote light poems, published in "The Branch Will Not Break." This was followed by some gloomier poems and eventually Wright felt as though he was through with writing forever. However, his fourth stage goes back to a happier style, accord-

ing to Stitt.

Compared to Wright, Simpson is "almost classical," as he deals with the "ancient subjects of love, war and death." Simpson was born in Jamaica and is "more British than the British," but "gives a clear vision of the United States," Stitt said.

Simpson deals with the "commonest life" in America — the "suburban middle-class family" with Mom in curlers and Dad in Bermuda shorts. His tone is not satirical, Stitt insisted, but "describes empathetically the nature of American life."

In contrast to both Wright and Simpson, Ashbury is an innovative poet, Stitt said, calling him "one of the most obscure well-known poets around."

Ashbury "tends toward meaninglessness," Stitt said, because the "words take over the meaning" of his poems. He advises readers to look at detail and not even try to figure out an entire poem's meaning.

Stitt's presence at the University is made possible by grants from the Time-Life Foundation with matching funds from alumnus Kenny Moore, a senior writer for Sports Illustrated, in conjunction with the Visiting Scholars Program at the University. The program is sponsored by the University creative writing program.

The next speaker in the program will be poet John Haines, who will give a reading at 8 p.m. on April 21 in Room 146, Straub Hall. Paul Friedman and Janes Heynen will present lectures in May.

## LTD notches ridership gain

Ridership on Lane Transit District buses increased about 5.5 percent for the month of March, compared to the same

time last year, according to an LTD official.

The March increase, representing nearly 282,000 person trips, continues a ridership increase trend for the months of January and February from a year earlier.

January posted an increase of 0.6 percent, and February's ridership increased 3.9 percent.

"More students are definitely riding," says Dave Kensler, LTD marketing administrator.

Kensler says more people are riding the buses because for

some it's cheaper than car use and because of LTD's "streamlined" routes, which were introduced in October.

"We're starting to get some people back on the bus."

Much of the ridership increase has occurred on the routes to the University, such as the Fairmount and Bailey Hill routes, he says.

The Santa Clara and River Road routes also have had marked ridership increases, he added.

## Correction

An article in Tuesday's Emerald incorrectly stated that Incidental Fee Committee candidate Mike Cross is head of the Young Americans for Freedom. He is a member, but not the head of the organization.

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