

Poet on the good road

“‘Good Hope Road’ — that sounds so American.”

Stuart Dischell recalls his friend, Pulitzer Prize winning-poet Frank Bidart, hissing those words upon hearing the title. He remembers the critique with a smile.

“It’s an aspirational title for an America that seemed to be all possibilities, at least in my childhood,” he says, “or maybe an America where possibilities seemed to have dwindled.”

Last year, “Good Hope Road” became the 105th book published in the Carnegie Mellon University Press Classic Contemporary Series, putting Dischell in the company of Pulitzer Prize winners like James Tate and Carolyn Kizer, as well as National Book Award winners like Gerald Stern and Jean Valentine.

The 1991 National Poetry Series winner was originally published by Viking in 1993 to much acclaim — the book was reviewed approximately 25 times. The re-release of “Good Hope Road” through the prestigious Classic Contemporary Series means it will remain in print. It’s a fitting honor for Dischell, who is a recipient of awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, the North Carolina Arts Council, and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and author of four other collections of poems.

Twenty-four years after the book’s initial publication, the scenarios within are still contemporary. The poems show Dischell’s uncanny ability to vocalize the complex thoughts of a variety of characters as they contemplate the boundaries of their lives.

“A lot of the characters — when I look at them now — they seem to be like many characters in fiction, a composite of people I knew as well as myself at that time,” Dischell says. “In my poem about the old woman who’s returning groceries at the supermarket — that’s me. The girl who has aspirations of going to live in Paris, that became me. The old man with problems with his teeth — that’s me too, unfortunately. Maybe I was just laying the groundwork for what I would be like in 25 years.”

In the past few years, Dischell has published a series of essays focused on urban landscapes of France.

“I do ‘ambient research.’ More so than my poetry, my nonfiction writing is integrally set in places, and I need to be in those locations intensely in order to write about them.” In 2015, he was awarded a residency at the Château de Lavigny near Lake Geneva in Switzerland.

“I’ve kept what I absorbed of that experience, and subjected it to the quirks of my imagination,” he says. “These experiences cannot be simply imagined: they need to be experienced in order to be imagined.”

As one of the UNCG MFA program’s resident faculty, Dischell has seen many former students publish their first books through nationally prominent series as well — students such as Jennifer Whittaker, Ansel Elkins, Jillian Weise, Sarah Rose Nordgren, Christina Stoddard, Alison Seay, and Dan Albergotti.

“We are successful creative writers educating future successful creative writers,” says Dischell. “Researchers teaching researchers. We teach the deep process of writing and revision that, with the right talent and perseverance, leads to fine published books.”

Dischell’s newest poetry collection, “Children with Enemies,” will be published this year by the University of Chicago Press.

... Good Hope Road: that name alone

Takes me from suburbia to Alpha Centauri,

Quick as the once-taught “World of the Future” ...

Good Hope Road: I was a boy there delivering papers,

A hitchhiker, a convict working a jackhammer ...

By Susan Kirby-Smith • Photography by Martin W. Kane • Excerpt from the poem “Good Hope Road” • Learn more at <https://english.uncg.edu> & <http://mfagreensboro.org>

