

off the lip

No beret required

PETER COVINO, 45 | Poet

His 2005 book of poetry, "Cut off the Ears of Winter," opens with an epigraph from John 18:11, "Then Jesus said unto Peter, Put up thy sword..." Peter Covino follows those instructions but with a pen. Covino — who grew up in Glen Cove, N.Y., after emigrating with his family from Italy at age 3 — brought his pen-wielding skills in 2006 to the University of Rhode Island where he is an assistant professor of English and creative writing. His path toward poetry began while working as a social worker in the South Bronx, counseling groups of abused and sexually abused individuals with the idea of writing as a way to heal. He earned a Ph.D. in English and creative writing from the University of Utah. His work has received several recognitions including the PEN/Joyce Osterweil Award in 2007 and the Frank O'Hara Chapbook Prize for his 2001 book, "Straight Boyfriend." Now Covino is finishing up his second full-length collection of poetry, "The Right Place to Jump" and gearing up for URI's third summer writing conference set for June 18-20. **BY JENNIFER NICOLE SULLIVAN**

What's your favorite poem you've written?

A lot of my poems are really revealing. I don't know if those are my favorites, but those are the most powerful. I have a poem called, "Telling My Story" which chronicles sexual abuse. It's pretty disturbing, but I've always liked that poem a lot. It's one of the most powerful that gets a lot of attention. But my favorite poems now are the poems I'm working on.

What's one of your newest poems?

One poem that will be published in my new book is called, "Tell it to My Heart," which is about Taylor Dane the pop star, who sings (*singing*) "Tell it to My Heart."

Oh yeah, I remember her!

It's about thinking I saw Taylor Dane outside of Penn Station in New York City and realizing what the late '80s, early '90s meant to me. I thought I saw her, but who knows. But I have seen her in concert. I love all her songs. Maybe she'll have a comeback.

What makes a great poet?

I think heart and openness to different

thing after 1950. A lot of people send me these bad rhymed poems. I love reading poems that rhyme, but writing poems in rhyme is really difficult. Beyond Emily Dickinson, it's hard to get away with. And I don't like poems that have a lot of anthropomorphizing. I don't believe that the trees can speak to us.

Are you a rhyme guy or a free verse guy?

Free verse. Deep, psychological, wild, associative free verse.

Haiku — love it or hate it?

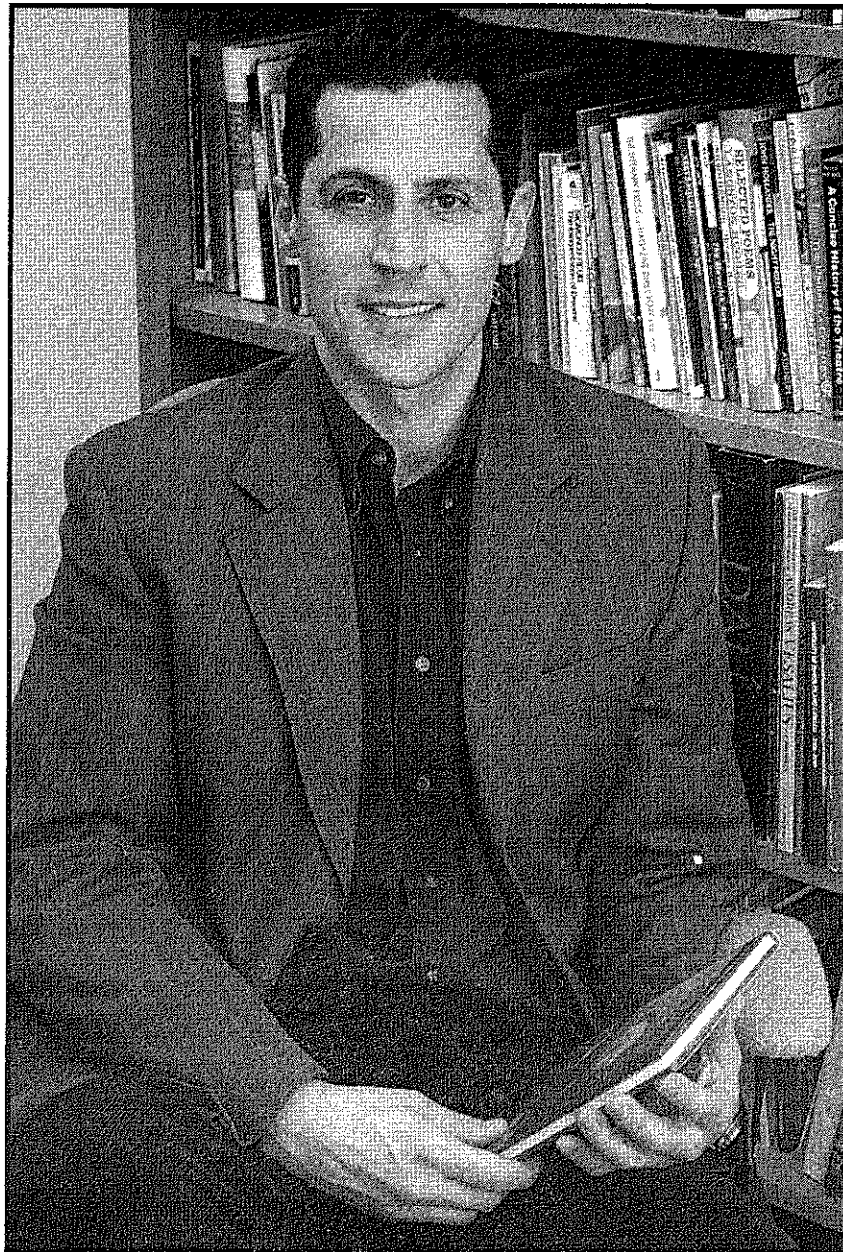
I don't know a lot about haiku except that it's an ancient Japanese form and I love some of those ancient Japanese poets. But it's like a lot of things, like overdoing rhyme; we've overdone haiku. Some are beautiful.

What's your favorite word?

"Splendid." Without a doubt.

What word should never be in a poem?

Liminal. It's so ridiculous. It's one of those over-poeticized words that mean this "in between state." I'm like OK, all poetry is liminal, isn't it? Numinous is another one. Liminal and numinous.



'Take the whole trip.' Great poets keep going until they tucker out, says Peter Covino, University of Rhode Island assistant professor of English and creative writing. PHOTO BY MICHAEL DERR

intense study to publish something at a commercial press or university press.

Museum of Literature of Providence.

What rhymes with Covino?

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What makes a great poet?

I think heart and openness to different experiences. Gorgeous, non-judgmental, egoless. I'm always saying take the whole trip. Knowing what it is specifically that you're feeling and thinking and keep going until you tire yourself out. Take the whole trip. Poets understand that it's a way of looking at the world.

If you could be any poet and have lived any poet's life, who would it be?

Walt Whitman, because he seemed like he had a lot of fun. He was able to do what he wanted to do in the way he wanted to do it. He was a newspaperman, went to a lot of operas, and lived in New York City before it was too crazy. I think he's a great poet.

What is your poetry pet peeve?

I hate when poets haven't read any-

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Do you own a ruffly shirt?

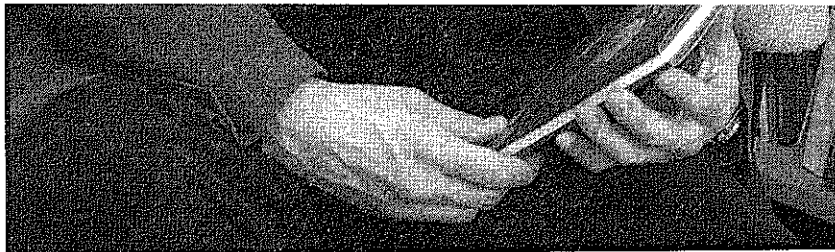
No, but I wore one to my prom in the '80s. I wore a light blue ruffly shirt and I loved it. And it matched the gown of the woman I went to the prom with. That's frightening isn't it? I often think about that shirt and want to wear it at a reading.

Do you own and/or wear a beret?

No. Too poet-y.

Other than that, what's the biggest misconception about poets?

I think people who start writing poetry don't realize how much hard work it is. It takes between 5 to 10 years of



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In your classes, you talk about poetry dates. What are they?

It's a very inexpensive way to have fun. Find five of your favorite poems, and write one yourself and then read them to each other over an inexpensive bottle of red wine and chocolates. That's my ideal date.

You've said you want to start a poetry museum. What would it be like?

I want to start this museum of literature. We would have period rooms, a room with the Beat poets, it would be very visual with film clips. And we would have books that have influenced film. We could have Starbucks. Wouldn't that be great? This is like, one of my fantasies to be the head of the poetry museum, or be on the board of the

Museum of Literature of Providence.

What rhymes with Covino?

Lots of vino. Covino means "with wine."

Fill in the blank, poetry is...

Glorious.

Peter Covino is...

A good dude.

E *The 3rd Annual Ocean State Summer Writing Conference, June 18-20, features readings, panels, seminars and workshops in poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction and publishing. The University of Rhode Island, Swan Hall, 60 Upper College Road, Kingston. (401) 874-5931. Tuition, not including room and board, is \$135 (\$90 for students). Registration deadline is June 14. To register; visit www.uri.edu/summerwriting.*