

Poem emphasizes collaboration

By Doug Norris
Features Editor

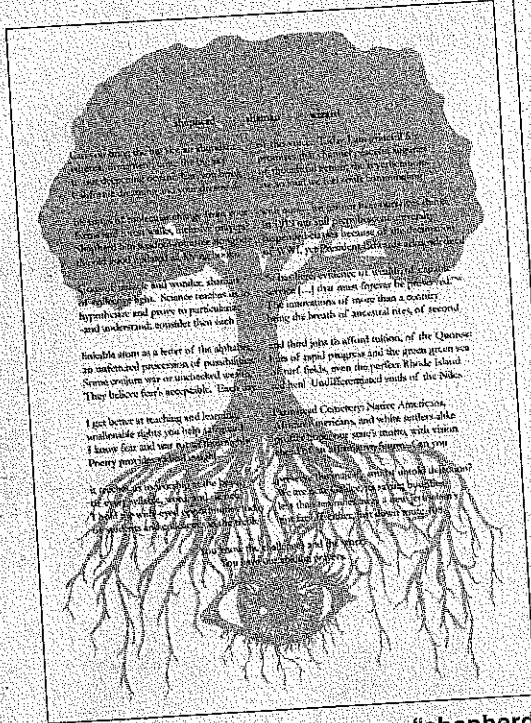
When Peter Covino took on the daunting task of composing a new poem for the inauguration of University of Rhode Island President David M. Dooley, he was swimming in uncharted waters.

Covino, a poet and URI assistant professor of English, describes his own work as "highly personal and intense," and said that the act of putting a literary stamp on a ceremonial occasion was difficult but rewarding.

"The poem's pretty large and democratic," said Covino, while driving to a writers conference during the university's spring break last Friday. "It's much broader than some of my own poetry tends to be. It was a real challenge creating something that is more about reaching out to a larger community."

His poem, "shepherd shaman wizard," is designed to be read vertically or horizontally and will be performed with students enacting parts of the work visually in a broadside. Collaborating with students on the piece was important to Covino; their insights, enthusiasm and energy led

Marking/C2



Poet Peter Covino's poem, "shepherd shaman wizard," composed for the inauguration of URI President David M. Dooley on April 8, can be read horizontally, as above, or vertically. Covino collaborated with student Krystine Ritzen on the image poems.

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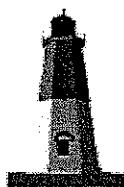
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His poem, "shepherd shaman wizard," is designed to be read vertically or horizontally and will be performed with students enacting parts of the work visually in a broadside.

Collaborating with students on the piece was important to Covino; their insights, enthusiasm and energy led him in new directions as the poem evolved.

"Because President Dooley had worked in Montana, I kept coming back to this mantra of harnessing the big sky of Montana and uniting it with our Ocean State," Covino said. "So that's one of the themes running through it, this idea of harnessing. I like the resonance of that word with the title of the poem and the president's role as an agent of change, someone who will need steadfast patience, vision and even a little bit of magic to negotiate all of the intense challenges ahead."

One student, Krystine Ritzen, who took an avant-garde poetry class with Covino and will be interning with him next fall, was instrumental in developing the poem, which Covino said changed radically from first to final draft. Ritzen recruited a friend, a graphic artist, and together with Covino they worked on a visually graphic representation of the poem that features elements such as "a great eye and a tree with roots that turns into a cloud." On a visual and literary level, the poem alludes to archetypes - shepherd, shaman, wizard - noted for their artistic sensibilities, active curiosity and visionary qualities.

Other ideas that Covino wanted to get across were the notions of witnessing a new era and the role of poetry as a means for radical insight.

"The word 'radical' has resonance not only in poetry and politics but also in the scientific community," said Covino, who noted that its etymology comes from the root of roots. "In math, you have square roots. A radical in science is also a charged particle. So I played around with that idea a bit."

In the vertical form of the poem, the structure is 12 four-line stanzas, but there are distinctions depending on how the poem is read. As one example, Covino removed a line from the vertical version but left it in the horizontal form to emphasize the rhythm. A draft of the poem will appear in the inauguration program but high-quality paper reproductions featuring the latest iteration of the visual graphic will be sold for \$10 apiece to support URI's READ/WRITE lecture series, Summer Writing Conference and other projects.

"We have a scholarship committee formed for the first time for the summer writers