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About

NEWSROOM

TU awards 2010 Prize for Literature

Catonsville resident honored for her first book of poems, Stalin in Aruba

TOWSON, Md. (April 14, 2010)—Shelley Puhak, of Catonsville, Md., is the winner of the 2010 Towson University Prize for Literature. She received the \$1,000 prize for her book of poems, *Stalin in Aruba*, published in 2009 by Black Lawrence Press.

Puhak is Writer-in-Residence at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland. She earned an MFA from the University of New Orleans and an M.A. from the University of Delaware. In 2007 she received a Maryland State Arts Council grant.

Her poems have appeared Alaska Quarterly Review, Beloit Poetry Journal, New Delta Review, New South, Third Coast, and other journals. Her essays have been published in Fourth Genre and Road & Travel.

Stalin in Aruba—inhabited by popes and priests, dictators and daughters, Politburo wives and Nazi mistresses—explores how we resist and how we succumb to the banality of evil. Puhak says of her book, "I'm interested in the boundaries we create between ourselves and those involved in large-scale evil: we reassure ourselves that other people, people not at all like us, enabled the Holocaust, the Red Terror, the Bosnian and Rwandan genocides. What might we learn about ourselves if we eliminate that distance?"

Michael Downs, TU professor of English and a member of the Prize for Literature selection committee, described Puhak's poems as "daring, pushing boundaries of subject, form, language and imagery.

"They bear re-reading, opening up more and more with each turn, and they never settle for easy truths."

- Read "[The Führer's Girls](#)" from *Stalin in Aruba*. Additional sample poems from the collection are available at www.shelleypuhak.com.

Established in 1979 with a grant from Alice and Franklin Cooley, the Towson University Prize for Literature is awarded annually for a single book or book-length manuscript of fiction, poetry, drama or imaginative nonfiction by a Maryland writer. The prize is granted on the basis of literary and aesthetic excellence as determined by a panel of distinguished judges appointed by the university.