

Williams wins Ruth Lilly Prize

By Arthur Dudley

PRINCETONIAN STAFF WRITER

C.K. Williams, a professor in the creative writing program, is the surprised recipient of this year's Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, a lifetime achievement award that carries a \$100,000 reward.

Despite receiving many prestigious awards, Williams said that winning the Lilly Prize "had never even crossed [his] mind" before he received the congratulatory call in the Boston airport a few weeks ago.

Williams won the Pulitzer Prize in 2000 for "Repair," the National Book Award in 2003 for "The Singing" and the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1987 for "Flesh and Blood." He has published nine collections of poetry, and plans to release his collected works in 2006.



C.K. WILLIAMS
Poet and professor of creative writing

"C.K. Williams is a master at dramatizing complicated psychological states, but he is also always equally concerned with the self's relation to the larger world," Christian Winman, the chairman of the selection committee and editor of Poetry magazine, said in a statement Wednesday. "He has created a signature style, which more and more seems a permanent part of our literature."

The Lilly Prize is administered by the Ruth Lilly Foundation.
See **LILLY** page 4

Poet Williams awarded \$100,000 Lilly prize

LILLY

Continued from page 1

tered by The Poetry Foundation, which publishes Poetry magazine. Williams' first published poem, "Sleeping Over," appeared in that magazine in 1964.

Paul Muldoon, Williams' colleague in the Creative Writing Program and winner of the 2003 Pulitzer for poetry, said in an e-mail, "C.K. Williams is one of the best two or three Americans now writing."

The Lilly Prize has been given annually since 1986 and is one of the largest monetary prizes given to poets. "It's sure a lot more money [than the Pulitzer]," Wil-

liams joked. Previous winners include Adrienne Rich, Philip Levine, Anthony Hecht and John Ashbery. Yusef Komunyakaa, who also teaches at Princeton, won the prize in 2001.

Despite his many accolades, Williams considers himself an accidental poet. "It was the last thing that was expected of me, and I was the last person anyone expected would do it. And then I found myself doing it," he said.

He spent his freshman year at Bucknell College playing basketball and was "basically depressed." He thought he would go into architecture, he told The Daily Princetonian in 2004, but switched to philosophy and finally to English. Williams finally

transferred to the University of Pennsylvania and started writing poetry after his sophomore year.

He now works out of a third-floor office in 185 Nassau with bare white walls, high ceilings and a seminar table.

An enthusiastic teacher of poetry and translation, he regards Princeton as his favorite university. He has taught graduate students at other institutions, including Columbia, University of California at Berkeley and Boston University, but prefers teaching undergraduates in an "enlivening and vibrant" intellectual community like Princeton.

He believes in the "traditional method" of teaching writing,

which he defines as helping writers find their artistic voices through reading.

"I give my students as many great poems as I can by as many great poets as I can," he said. "Some people need the tradition more, some people need it less. But every artist has to create a literary tradition of their own. You do it almost whether you mean to or not."

Williams writes every day, except when he teaches classes. With his collected works forthcoming, he is concentrating on essays instead of poetry. "I've stopped [writing exclusively poetry] for a while, which I almost never do. I'm ... trying to figure out where I want to go next."