



RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
Office of Communications and Public Relations
Press Release
September 16, 2016

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2016 Recipient of Pulitzer Prize in Poetry to Visit Ramapo College

MAHWAH, N.J. – Peter Balakian, the recipient of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry, will present a lecture and a reading on Thursday, October 6 in the Trustees Pavilion at Ramapo College of New Jersey. The events are scheduled for 4 p.m. and 7 p.m., respectively.

The Gross Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies and the Readings Program of the Salameno School of Humanities and Global Studies are co-sponsoring Balakian’s visit, his third to Ramapo College. In addition to his poetry that concerns a wide variety of topics, he will discuss his prose work that chiefly deals with the Armenian Genocide.

Peter Balakian is the author of several collections of poetry, including *Ozone Journal* (2015), winner of the Pulitzer Prize; *Ziggurat* (2010), which wrestles with the aftermath and reverberations of 9/11; and *June-tree: New and Selected Poems 1974–2000*. His poems have been widely anthologized, including in the 1985 *Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets*, and have been translated into several languages. He has published essays on poetry, culture, and art in numerous journals, and is the author of *Theodore Roethke’s Far Fields* (1989). He earned a B.A. from Bucknell University, a master’s from New York University, and a Ph.D. in American civilization from Brown University.

The son of Armenia parents, Balakian grew up in Tenafly, New Jersey. As a child he heard scraps of his grandmother Nafina’s past—Balakian credits his love of writing to her storytelling and imagery—but he didn’t discover the Armenian genocide of the early 20th century until he read *Ambassador Morgenthau’s Story*, the memoir of the U.S. ambassador to Turkey during that period. Balakian’s memoir of his quest to learn more about his family’s connection to the genocide and diaspora, *Black Dog of Fate*, won the PEN/Martha Albrand Prize for Memoir and was a *New York Times* Notable Book. *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America’s Response* received the 2005 Raphael Lemkin Prize. He translated, with Nevart Yaghlian, the Armenian poet Siamanto’s *Bloody News from My Friend*, a cycle of poems inspired by letters

that Balakian's grandfather, a doctor, wrote to his parents while he tended survivors in the wake of a 1909 massacre. Balakian also edited the Armenian Genocide section of the Norton anthology *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness*.

Influenced by poets as diverse as Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Pablo Neruda and the 10th-century Armenian poet Gregory of Nareg, Balakian uses poetry to explore, in his own words, "the parameters of consciousness in our particular time." Acknowledging the challenge in writing poetry steeped in the political, Balakian notes that "it is always necessary to keep aesthetic issues free from polemics and simple politics. Poetry should never be editorial. Poetry must be faithful to the richness of language, poetic form, and the complexity of experience. But the political sphere should deepen a writer and make his or her work larger, richer, and morally resonant."

Reviewing *Sad Days of Light*, James Dickey observed, "At last, poetry about genocide that is truly, in every thrust, pause and detail, real poetry. Mr. Balakian's bloodlines from Armenia are blazing here; the language is incandescent with rage, grief, helplessness and love. This is an extraordinary book, and Mr. Balakian's an extraordinary talent." The 2016 Pulitzer Prize citation remarked that *Ozone Journal* includes "poems that bear witness to the old losses and tragedies that undergird a global age of danger and uncertainty."

Balakian has won the New Jersey Council for the Humanities Book Award and an award from the Academy of American Poets, as well as fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. He cofounded and coedited *The Graham House Review* with Bruce Smith from 1976 to 1996 and was awarded an editing grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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Ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as fifth in the Best Regional Public Universities North category, Ramapo College of New Jersey is sometimes mistaken for a private college. This is, in part, due to its unique interdisciplinary academic structure, its size of approximately 6,000 students and its pastoral setting in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains on the New Jersey/New York border.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include nursing and social work. In addition, Ramapo College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels. The College also offers eight graduate programs as well as articulated programs with Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New York Chiropractic College, New York University College of Dentistry, SUNY State College of Optometry and New York College of Podiatric Medicine.

