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Political poet brings in full house

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Political poet Calvin Trillin finished off the Eagleton Institute of Politics' "It's ALL Politics" lecture series to a full house in the Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum on the College Avenue campus.

Trillin spoke Tuesday night about his various works of political satirical commentary.

"My connection with politics and writing is basically in commentary in a disrespectful manner," he said.

Trillin's discussion covered everything from parking in New York — the topic of his book "Tepper Isn't Going Out" — to the difficulty of rhyming in the realm of politics.

Trillin said he did not have any poetic influences, claiming he does not read "grown up" poetry.

His poetic commentary is not strictly limited to politics, but everything else has been crowded out by his interest in politics, he said.

"I think politics in general is interesting," he said. "I used to write about other things more, but politics has kind of soaked it up."

Occasionally, he covers topics he described as "more serious."

For example, Trillin said he was outraged when film director Roman Polanski fled to France in 1978 hours before being formally sentenced for allegedly raping a 13-year-old girl. His French citizenship protected him from deportation.

Felice Schrage, a University alumna, said Trillin's work is not the kind of literature she usually likes reading.

"I had read his stuff in The New Yorker before," Schrage said. "I'm a more serious reader, a New York Times type of reader, but it was very good. He's very witty, very funny."

Eagleton Institute Director Ruth Mandel said the lecture was so popular they were forced to turn people away. The room was filled to its maximum capacity at 170 people, Mandel said. There were 60 people on the waiting list before they closed it.

"We could have filled a much larger room," she said. "But Rutgers is difficult. There aren't that many big spaces, and they're booked way in advance. We could have doubled the size, and he would've had an audience."

Through the lecture series, Eagleton attempts to expand past people directly involved in the political realm and into the rest of the world, Mandel said.

“Eagleton often hosts elected officials, government officials, political leaders, and this year we were looking for an opportunity to stretch out and make connections,” she said.

Mandel said everyone is part of the political world.

“We were looking for people who are talented and who make observations about our society and our culture and who give us a little insight,” she said.

Trillin’s popularity stems from his humor, Mandel said. Guests were enthusiastic because they were looking forward to the opportunity to laugh.

“Politics is very difficult in this moment. There’s a lot to be concerned about, so it’s nice to step back and see the irony and the humor in it,” she said. “Especially at this moment, I think everyone’s looking for something to laugh at.”

