

For Poet, It's About the Journey

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For his next collection of poetry, English professor Peter Cooley is traveling to small towns around Louisiana to conduct interviews with folks about their thoughts post-Katrina and after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster. The working title for the new book is *Aftermaths*.



English professor and poet Peter Cooley is collecting narratives around Louisiana as fodder for new poems focusing on people post-Katrina and after the oil spill disaster. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Aftermaths will center on how people feel living in Louisiana at the present time. Whose voice will the poems take? Cooley hasn't figured that out yet.

"I am going to extend the personal into a larger context, to write about something other than just me, which is, of course, my favorite topic, as it is for the students," Cooley says with a chuckle.

[Cooley](#) is the author of eight published poetry books with two more accepted for publication, and his poems have been published in hundreds of literary journals. He writes about 300 poems a year, amounting to thousands of poems during his

lifetime.

Cooley is challenging himself with this new project. He is intentionally tackling “more socially conscious” poetry.

He admits that it scares him.

“Socially engaged poetry that is bad is really bad,” says Cooley, who has taught creative writing at Tulane since 1975. But taking poetry from the personal to a broader perspective is something he wants to tackle. For him, writing is a journey.

“As a writer, it's important not to get too comfortable. That's the whole point of doing it, isn't it? If you know what you want to say, why would you write a poem?”

Cooley's latest soon-to-be-published work, a three-part book of poems about the artists Rembrandt, Rodin and Michelangelo, necessitated trips to France and Italy during the past few years. The new project will keep him closer to home.

For the Louisiana project, he received a grant from the Awards to Louisiana Artists and Scholars (ATLAS) program of the Louisiana Board of Regents, allowing him to devote the coming academic year to it.