Daily Life

Award-winning writers and students share work at UConn's Long River Reading Series

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The first Long River Reading Series of the Spring 2026 semester occurred on Wednesday, Feb. 11, featuring readings from the University of Connecticut community.

This iteration of the Long River Reading Series, hosted by UConn's Creative Writing Program, featured readings from Liam Smith, Victoria Ifeolu and Leon Perniciaro at the Philip E. Austin Building's Stern Lounge.

After an overview of upcoming Creative Writing Program events from Luisana Duarte-Armendáriz, the graduate assistant director for the program, Smith read a selection of poetry work. One of Smith's poems, "Attempting Wallace Stevens in Terms of Ice-Hockey," recently won the Edward R. and Frances Schreiber Collins Literary Prize for poetry, which awarded $3,000.

Smith said he did not expect to win the award and encouraged anyone at UConn to submit their work to the various Creative Writing Awards offered each year in the fall semester.

Smith's poems blended intricately-captured emotions with vivid everyday scenes. Some of his poem titles and details were inspired by poetry from other writers, including Ocean Vuong, an acclaimed poet raised in Connecticut.

"Everyone writes in an amalgamation of all their influences," Smith said. "Every time I read a poem and I'm really affected by it, the first thing I try to do is write something similar."

Smith said he was nervous before the reading, anticipating an intimidating crowd. But the experience ended up being more relaxing than he expected, he said.

"I knew a lot of people in the crowd, which was good," Smith said. "Everyone there was super nice, I really enjoyed meeting the other people I was reading with."

The next reading came from Ifeolu, who is pursuing a master's at UConn that involves political science and studies of indigeneity, race and ethnicity. She has published multiple books of poetry and fiction that have won a variety of literary prizes.

Ifeolu read excerpts from the first two chapters of a novel in progress, titled "Embryo Burns." While still in development, the protagonist's voice and the story's medical emphasis was well-polished and came across clearly. After the excerpts, Ifeolu provided context for the rest of the novel with an overall synopsis.

The final reading came from Perniciaro, an English Ph.D. candidate at UConn and part-time faculty member of Quinnipiac University's Game Design and Development Program. He is also the editor of Haven Spec Magazine, an online science fiction and fantasy literary publication that specializes in stories and poetry relevant to a 21st-century audience.

Perniciaro read his short story, "To Taste Again That Bitter Tea," which was published in the literary magazine The Dread Machine in 2022.

Perniciaro's story was an immersive first-person narrative that revolved around a mysterious woman named Clara who always had a teapot on her head. Her unusual behavior, which only gets more erratic, created a constant sense of intrigue and led to an exhilarating ending.

Perniciaro's story was enjoyable and unlike what he typically reads for leisure and class, Ryan Krishna, a sixth-semester English and individualized major, said.

"Despite it being a written short story, it was very engaging to be read aloud due to the well-executed character and worldbuilding," Krishna said. "It was a great reading; I could not take my eyes off him as he was reading it."

After the featured readers, there was a brief intermission with snacks before an open mic portion of the event. A few audience members came to the podium to read their own poems.

The next Long River Reading Series will take place at 5:30 p.m. on March 25 at the Austin Building's Stern Lounge. It will feature readings from Ph.D. student Adam McLain and undergraduate student Kathleen Tumminello.



Graphic introducing the contest winners of the Long River Review. The first Long River Reading Series of the Spring 2026 semester took place on Wednesday, Feb. 11.
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New JFK Jr. drama series suffers from slow pacing

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The first three episodes of the new series "Love Story: John F. Kennedy Jr. and Carolyn Bessette" came out on Thursday, Feb. 12 on Hulu.

Produced by industry veterans Ryan Murphy and Nina Jacobson, among others, the show's bland dialogue and drawn-out pacing leave it falling short of their past projects.

The show follows the story of JFK Jr. and fashion publicist Bessette. The couple met in the summer of 1994, moving in together in the summer of 1995 and getting engaged later that year. They were married in 1996 and spent their marriage under intense media scrutiny, something that weighed heavily on Bessette both emotionally and professionally.

The couple was killed, along with Bessette's sister, when their plane crashed into the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Martha's Vineyard in 1999.

Despite the first episode including Kennedy Jr. and Bessette meeting for the first time, Kennedy Jr. asking her on a date and witnessing that first date all within an hour, the show feels slow-paced and dull for most of its runtime. There's not much action beyond the dialogue, and the conversations aren't interesting enough to make up for that on their own.

Actor Paul Anthony Kelly and actress Sarah Pidgeon, who portray Kennedy Jr. and Bessette, don't share much chemistry, making the show feel even more dull. It gets better as the first episode goes on, especially during their first date. Still, it maintains a quality of interest that would fall as a "C" or even "D" plot in a better show.

The most interesting parts of the first episode detail Kennedy Jr. failing the New York State Bar and putting his job as assistant district attorney in the Manhattan District Attorney's Office in jeopardy. Kennedy Jr. must deal with his failure in the face of the public as his misfortune becomes headline news. He is surrounded by reporters and photographers, even during his free time playing football in the park.

This intrigue is quickly abandoned as soon as Kennedy Jr. meets Bessette, as the focus of the show solely becomes their relationship. This leaves the prior part of the story as underutilized contextualization rather than a real plot point.

Bessette's interactions with Calvin Klein are also rather enthralling due to Alessandro Nivola's eccentric performance as Klein, but the scenes do little to aid the plot.

Either a documentary solely on Kennedy Jr.'s time after failing the Bar for the second time or show about Calvin Klein and Bessette's time would have been more compelling. Certainly, neither of those ideas would have required or deserved a nine-episode series.

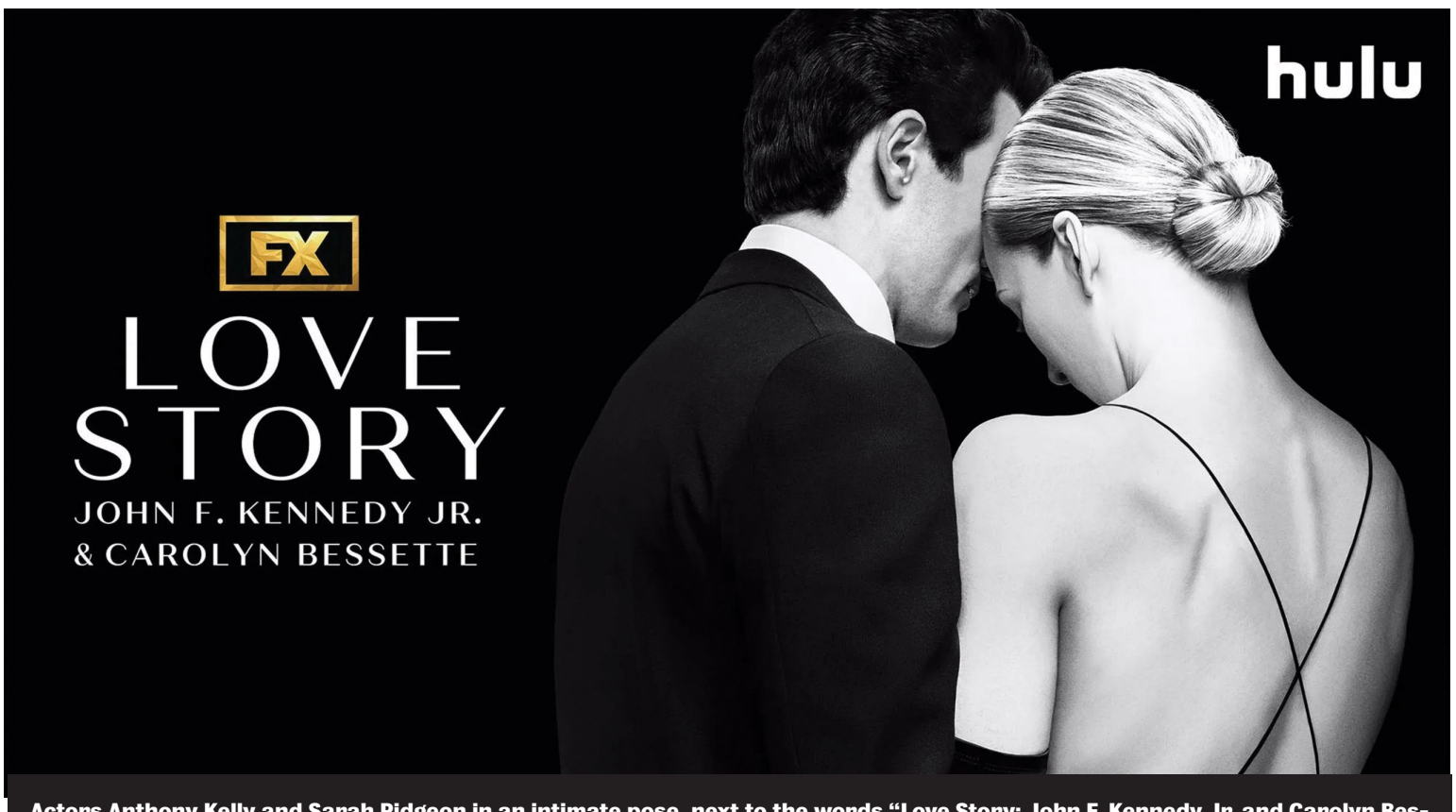
Even a documentary about the plane crash that killed them both would have been more interesting.

Why then, does this less intriguing concept require a full nine-episode series to do their story justice? There is no need for eight more episodes to bridge their first date with their deaths, which would make for a logical conclusion. Considering how much the creators packed into episode one of the slow-paced show, there are indicators that it might slow even more; a scary thought.

Rating:

★★½☆☆

2.3/5



Actors Anthony Kelly and Sarah Pidgeon in an intimate pose, next to the words "Love Story: John F. Kennedy Jr. and Carolyn Bessette," a new show. Kelly and Pidgeon play the titular characters in this show, which is produced by Ryan Murphy and Nina Jacobson.
PHOTO COURTESY OF @HULU ON INSTAGRAM