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Author, Professor to Discuss Effects of Poetry on American Lives Oct. 25 at Cal Poly

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Joan Shelley Rubin, a professor of history at the University of Rochester in New York, will talk about her new book, "Songs of Ourselves: The Uses of Poetry in America" from 11 a.m. to noon, Thursday, Oct. 25, in Room 286 in Fisher Science Hall at Cal Poly.

Rubin's lecture will focus on how poetry reading has given meaning to the lives of Americans from various walks of life. Rather than presenting poetry as an abstract entity, Rubin shows how it is part and parcel of the democratic experience of Americans, said Cal Poly History Professor George Cotkin.

"Turn of the century immigrants memorized poetry as part of their introduction into American culture. Elites thought that poetry graced them with learning and sensibility. And poets attempted to meet the varied readings and markets for their work," Cotkin said.

Rubin's book has earned widespread critical acclaim. Robert Pinsky, former poet laureate of the United States, said, "Joan Rubin gives an understated but forceful history of poetry's readership, fads, attainments and allegiances in the United States." The New York Times Book Review called it, a "humane . . . literary history" that charts "the comfort, pleasure and emotional richness readers found in popular poetry."

Rubin is also the author of "Constance Rourke and American Culture" and "The Making of Middle-Brow Culture." She has been awarded numerous grants, including a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Her talk at Cal Poly is free and open to the public. The lecture is sponsored by the Cal Poly History and College of Liberal Arts. For more information, contact Cotkin at gcotkin@calpoly.edu or 756-2763.

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