

The MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College
Public Schedule – Summer 2011

The public is welcome to attend the morning lectures and evening readings in fiction and poetry offered during the Master of Fine Arts Program for Writers' summer residency. Events last approximately one hour. Admission is free. The schedule is subject to change.

For more information, call the MFA Office: (828) 771-3715.

Readings will begin at 8:15pm
in the Ransom Fellowship Hall behind the Chapel, unless indicated otherwise.

READINGS

by MFA Program faculty and graduating students

Thursday, June 30 – 8:00pm

Adria Bernardi, Reginald Gibbons, Jeremy Gavron, Mary Szybist, Robin Romm

Friday, July 1

Robert Boswell, Mary Leader, Sarah Stone, Heather McHugh

Saturday, July 2 – in Gladfelter, Canon Lounge

Joan Aleshire, Susan Neville, Gabrielle Calvocoressi, David Shields, Stephen Dobyns

Sunday, July 3 – in Gladfelter, Canon Lounge

Tony Hoagland, Karen Brennan, Alan Shapiro, Alexander Parsons, Alan Williamson

Monday, July 4

Jennifer Grotz, Alix Ohlin, Maurice Manning, Kevin McIlvoy, C. Dale Young

Tuesday, July 5 – No readings

Wednesday, July 6

Debra Allbery, David Haynes, Marianne Boruch, Peter Turchi, Ellen Bryant Voigt

Thursday, July 7

Graduating student readings: Goldie Goldbloom, Tulora Roeckers, Kim Frank Kirk, Gil Soltz

Friday, July 8

Graduating student readings: Kate Greathead, Michael Gareau, Meredith Martinez, Jamaal May

Saturday, July 9 – 4:30pm, followed by Graduation Ceremony

Graduating student readings: James Herndon, Sarah Anderson, Sheree Kirby, Sara Slaughter

The schedule of lectures by Warren Wilson MFA faculty follows →

Faculty Lectures – Summer 2011
The MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College

All lectures will be in the Ransom Fellowship Hall behind the Chapel unless indicated otherwise.

Thursday, June 30
10:30am

MARIANNE BORUCH: Closely, at a Distance

Be warned and forgive: I'm a poet, not a fiction writer. Nevertheless, I'll be looking into the work of Flannery O'Connor, in part through the lens of her surprising friendship with Elizabeth Bishop, and definitely through the double, blink-again lens of their shared interest in visual art, the actual odd and obsessive *doing* of it and how that influenced how they *see* in their written work. If you read O'Connor's story "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" to prepare, that would be grand but not necessary. I'll be referring to a few others briefly ("The Artificial Nigger"—which she considered her best story—and the perennial anthology favorite, "A Good Man is Hard to Find," as well as "Revelation," one of the last stories she wrote). The poems by Bishop that I consider will be available in the handout. Meanwhile, any poem by Bishop haunts; any story by O'Connor is unnerving and mysterious and hilarious. So, a second warning: they can be addicting.

Friday, July 1
11:15am

**PETER TURCHI: All Around the World:
or The Myth of Linearity**

*Over the mountain
Down in the valley
Lives a former talk-show host
Everybody knows his name
He says there's no doubt about it
It was the myth of fingerprints
I've seen them all and man
They're all the same*

—Paul Simon

To call a story "overly linear" is to say it's dull, predictable, monotonous, without tension...yet as readers we search for, and as writers we try to provide, something sometimes called a "narrative line." How little narrative line is too little? How much linearity is too much? And didn't our junior high school math textbooks say that a line is, by definition, infinite? And straight? So why is the most famous diagram of "narrative line" a triangle? Why are narrative lines sometimes called narrative arcs? Is there one fiction writer in the world who has passed geometry?

If this lecture were a chapter in an 18th century novel, its contents might look like this: Starting Point: Defining the Line...Toeing the Line...(Crossing Those) Lines in the Sand...Slices from the Tapeworm of Time...Line Segments...A Brief Recognition of That Famous Triangle...Fragmentation and Collage...Labyrinths/Gardens of Forking Paths: Maybe I'm A Maze (By The Ways You Fool Me)...As Plane as the Nodes in Front of Your Face...What's Your Line?...And So We Come Full Circle: The End of the Line.

Many texts will be cited, no advance reading required.

Saturday, July 2
9:30am

**ALEXANDER PARSONS: Lasting First Impressions:
The Novel Opening**

The opening of a novel can be the first and last section an author writes and polishes, a focus of drafting that bookends the attenuated, crushing, stupefying, and illuminating endeavor of moving from the first to the 50th to the Nth draft of Your Awesome Novel. Books—especially a first novel—can feel demoralizingly amorphous or shapeless to the aspiring novelist. But an effective opening can suggest to the writer the whole of what is to follow in both subtle and direct ways even before the book reaches an early state of completion. It is true that a putative opening can end up elsewhere in a novel, or that the early opening may bear little resemblance to the final iteration, but nonetheless the drafting and redrafting of this section can guide the writer as she engages with structure, controlling metaphor, motif, tone, and many other defining aspects of the book.

In this lecture, then, we'll look at core samples, at openings in which we can learn to read and catalogue the many narrative elements in evidence and how these elements guide, shape, and encompass the broad span of the project. My hope is that you'll gain concrete notions about how to draft your own work and a sense, too, of how valuable it can be to return to that opening—or at least a particularly evocative passage—as you reshape draft after draft. After draft. After draft. Etc.

Required reading: None, though a familiarity with Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* wouldn't hurt, nor Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, nor Haruki Murakami's *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. Again, not a requirement for your listening enjoyment.

I will provide handouts.

Monday, July 4
9:30am

MARY SZYBIST: Strategic Concessions

This lecture will consider one common rhetorical tool poets use, often slyly, to construct their arguments: the concession. To concede something in a poem is a move toward vulnerability, and it is a risk that can have enormous pay-off. We will look to the example of Marianne Moore, Linda Gregg, David Lehman, Harryette Mullen and others to examine ways in which poets have successfully used concessions to reach, persuade, and move their readers.

A handout will be provided.

Friday, July 8
9:30am

JEREMY GAVRON: Whose Story Is It Anyway?

What if *The Great Gatsby* had been told from Gatsby's point of view (as Fitzgerald's earlier short story, "Winter Dreams," is told from the perspective of Dexter Green, an embryonic Gatsby) rather than Nick Carraway's? Or how about seen through Tom Buchanan's eyes? Daisy's angle, the story of a woman torn between two men, might have made a fair Jane Austen comedy of manners, or a Jazz Age Anna Karenina. This lecture looks at the choice of first person minor narrator and why it is essential to the telling of *The Great Gatsby* and other stories of larger-than-life/wondrous/elusive characters such as *Heart of Darkness* and W.G. Sebald's *The Emigrants*.

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Friday, July 8
10:45am

STEPHEN DOBYNS: Economy, Intensity and Ferocity:
Poems by R.S. Thomas

Seaside

And the sea opens its bag
On the sand. I didn't ask
To be born, screams the child
Paddling. The grown girl
Smiles, helping herself
To its trinkets. The men leer.
On the horizon the shark's
fin passes, a dark sail.

—R.S. Thomas from *Young and Old* (1972)

The lecture investigates how Thomas uses elements of form to create the illusion of tension, energy and emotion within his poems; and how they communicate the sense that the poems were written from an inability to remain silent. In addition, the lecture addresses how these methods changed over a fifty-year period.

Saturday, July 9
10:00am

HEATHER McHUGH: 1000-Year-Old Spunk and Spirit:
Su Tung P'o and Shmuel HaNagid

Geographically a world apart, the Chinese poet Su Tung P'o and the Andalusian poet Shmuel HaNagid wrote wonderful works in their respective languages—languages in which I can claim no fluency but poems for which I'm convinced fellow-artists anywhere in the world today can feel, through translations, essential affinities. These works supply occasions for reflection on the art of art itself—and I intend to reflect thereoff and thereon. I'll supply handouts.

Saturday, July 9
11:15am

ROBERT BOSWELL: The Man in the Water:
Sub-Aqua Commerce in Maximal Short Fiction

In dreams you can have the feeling that you've had this dream before, that you have this dream over and over again, and you know that it's really nothing that simple. You know that there's a whole underground system that you call "dreams," having nothing better to call them, and that this system is not like roads or tunnels but more like a live body network, all coiling and stretching, unpredictable but finally familiar—where you are now, where you've always been.

—from Alice Munro's "Five Points"

There are short stories in which the narrative seems to have this live body network, all coiling and stretching, unpredictable and familiar at once. This lecture will take a practical look at how to achieve such commerce in your own work.

The list of recommended stories is tentative and may grow or shrink as I continue working on the lecture. I plan to refer to my own struggles with this endeavor, which is why two of my stories are on the list; these are the least important for you to read.

Alice Munro: "Floating Bridge," "Friend of My Youth," "Wigtime," "Five Points," "The Progress of Love" and "Carried Away"; Lorrie Moore: "You're Ugly, Too" and "Community Life"; William Trevor: "The News from Ireland"; James Baldwin: "Sonny's Blues"; Anton Chekhov: "The Lady with the Pet Dog"; Robert Boswell: "No River Wide" and "City Bus"

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