

The MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College Public Schedule – July 2014

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

For more information, call the MFA Office: (828) 771-3717.

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

READINGS by FACULTY

Wednesday, July 2– 8:00 PM

Ellen Bryant Voigt, Lauren Groff, C. Dale Young, Laura van den Berg

Thursday, July 3

Charles Baxter, Heather McHugh, Peter Orner, Dan Tobin

Friday, July 4

Robert Cohen, Brooks Haxton, Caitlin Horrocks, Rodney Jones, Debra Spark

Saturday, July 5—Gladfelter, Canon Lounge

Debra Allbery, Christopher Castellani, Jennifer Grotz, Peter Turchi, Maurice Manning

Sunday, July 6—Gladfelter, Canon Lounge

David Haynes, Daisy Fried, Kevin McIlvoy, Alan Shapiro, Sarah Stone

Monday, July 7—no readings

READINGS by GRADUATING STUDENTS

Tuesday, July 8

Jennifer Buchi, Catherine Grossman, Franklin Morris, Laura Maher

Wednesday, July 9

Todd Harris, Hannah Armbrust, Christy Stillwell, Rachel Brownson

Thursday, July 10

Jennifer Murray, Francine Conley, Somayeh Shams, Laura Swearingen-Steadwell

Friday, July 11—4:30 PM, followed by Graduation Ceremony

Kerrin McCadden, Amanda Peppe, Noah Stetzer, Emily Sinclair

The schedule of lectures by Warren Wilson MFA faculty follows →

Faculty Lectures – Summer 2014
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Friday, July 4
9:30 AM

SARAH STONE: Strategic Opacity

An imaginative work (a play, novel, story, poem, or some hybrid construction) needs to embody, rather than explain, its world and people. Stephen Greenblatt uses the term “strategic opacity” in discussing Shakespeare’s approach to character motivation, and we’ll use this idea as a jumping-off point to explore mystery, narrative obstructions and surprises, subversions of linearity, unexpected authorial and character choices, and the difference between a situation and a predicament. I’ll provide handouts with passages from works of fiction, plays, and a few ghazals, but if you have a chance, please take a look at the suggested texts for this lecture: Jamaica Kincaid, *At the Bottom of the River*; Joy Williams, *The Quick and the Dead*; and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Saturday, July 5
9:30 AM

DAN TOBIN: John Donne at the Odeon

Associative, architectural, metaphorical, logical, demotic, allusive, emotional, intellectual, sexy, saintly, tightly discursive, immoderately wrought, John Donne’s poetry epitomizes the need to embody conflicting temperaments in the astonishingly vital contraption that would be a poem. As one lover of his work states, the art Donne ultimately seeks is nothing less than an approximation of “God’s action” of restoring “all this fragmented creation back into its original All.” For a poet there is no headier game, no greater degree of soul-embroiling difficulty. In this lecture I will look at how the poet’s creative action shapes two of Donne’s great poems, “The Canonization” and “Holy Sonnet 14,” and will investigate how both achieve what novelist John Barth called (in our latter day context) “the writer’s investiture in as many aspects of the text as possible with emblematic significance.” I will also look at one or two contemporary poems that achieve a similar breadth and depth of investiture. Finally, I will venture some thoughts on how poetry at its most vital achieves coherence even in our “dissociative” time where one world, one art, appears to have shattered into many—a trajectory nascent in Donne’s own fractious milieu.

**Saturday, July 5
10:45 AM**

LAUREN GROFF: Horror Vacui: On Gaps, Spaces, and Silences

In 1951, John Cage entered the anechoic chamber at Harvard University, expecting to hear silence. Instead, as he later wrote, "I heard two sounds, one high and one low. When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation." This experience led to 4'33", Cage's famous three-movement composition in which the musicians are explicitly instructed not to play their instruments. The result is perhaps not music (arguable!); the result is also, marvelously, not silence. The gaps in a text—the pauses, rests, caesurae, silences—are empty of words, but they're full of resonance, the vacuum filled instantly by the reader's swift comprehension. During this lecture, we'll be questioning various examples of white space, elisions, pauses, negations and things left unsaid. It's not required, but may be useful, to read Jesse Ball's *Silence Once Begun* beforehand. Texts provided in-class will likely include those by Marguerite Duras, William Faulkner, Georges Perec, and Jenny Offill, among others.

This talk will consider what wave-watching can tell us about the powers of poetry and the shaping of story, what the physics of wave motion can tell us about the action of imagination, and how what moves us in a poem, and why, is connected to how it moves, and whose boat it rocks.

**Thursday, July 10
9:30 AM**

DEBRA SPARK: Surprise Me

Surprise is the "satisfying shock" that poet Peter Harris says he craves in art. I long for the same. I'm hungry for good old-fashioned plot surprise. Also formal invention, character revelation, and the more high-minded variety of the unexpected: language that truly distills the nature of the real to let me see or know (as the writer Joan Wickersham puts it) what I didn't even know I needed to see or know. Surprise can be an antidote to boredom, a gift of the subconscious, or welcome strangeness. In fiction, we often think of surprise in terms of other craft elements. Is the language fresh? Are the characters (per E.M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*) round, i.e., surprising yet convincing. I'll try to look at surprise as a separate "element" of art, something to pursue lest you be accused of writing a well-conceived, linguistically adroit, finely executed and perfectly dull novel or short story. No reading required, but I will likely mention the following books: Suzanne Berne's *The Dogs of Littlefield*, Dan Chaon's *Stay Awake*, Pam Erens's *Virgins*, Lily King's *Euphoria*, Lore Segal's *Half the Kingdom*, Howard Norman's *I Hate to Leave This Beautiful Place*, Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch*, and Joan Wickersham's *The News From Spain*. What else? I'll surprise you.

**Thursday, July 10
10:45 AM**

MAURICE MANNING: Nature and the Possibility of a Moral Imagination

These days we tend to experience nature with a little n—we regard it from afar, as if we're outside of it. What if we returned to regarding Nature with a capital N and decided to take it seriously? What does Nature have to teach us, and how can Nature instruct the human imagination? Can our deep intimacy with Nature make us better artists? This lecture will consider the work of several writers but will focus on Edward Thomas and Robert Frost. Handouts of poems and selections of prose will be provided.

**Friday, July 11
10:00 AM**

DAISY FRIED: Ice Queens & Hotheads: On Extreme Tones

French cats don't purr. They go *rronrron*. Francis Ponge famously despised the *ronron poetique*—the poetic purr of French poetry. We know what he meant—English poetry has its own purr, hoarse contented words in which all such poems, no matter what they mean, sound licked lusciously into shape. What are the alternatives? In a 1915 letter, Robert Frost writes to a friend, “You can get enough of those sentence tones that suggest grandeur and sweetness everywhere in poetry....I have tried to see what I could do with boasting tones and quizzical tones and shrugging tones (for there are such) and forty eleven other tones. All I care a cent for is to catch sentence tones that haven't been brought to book. I don't say make them, mind you, but to catch them... They are always there--living in the cave of the mouth” Jeers, rants, outbursts, abrasions, whispers, fades, invective and froideur. Who are some model hotheads & ice queens? Where are the cave tones? Have they discovered how to avoid the *ronron poetique*? Why would anyone want to? And forty eleven other considerations in search of tonal immoderation. Handouts will be supplied.

**Friday, July 11
11:00 AM**

CHARLES BAXTER: Fugitive Subjectivity and Toxic Narratives

What happens within a story when there may be no one to whom a story can be told, or the story itself is somehow unspeakable? A condition that I'm going to call "fugitive subjectivity" (subjectivity that has no outlet) may arise, along with narratives that, because of something shameful or painful in them, may feel toxic to the person trying to tell them. In both cases, the act of storytelling *within* the story has become extraordinarily difficult because of its toxicity. The reader him- or herself may be the only person ever to hear the tale. I want to draw on a number of examples, including a scene from James Joyce's play *Exiles*, and possibly Paula Fox's novel *The Widow's Children*, Cheever's "The Country Husband," and Munro's "Child's Play." A non-literary but exemplary text is O. J. Simpson's *If I Did It*. Handouts will be provided.

course, Keats--a couple of generations earlier--did a similar thing, throwing himself into his studies at Guy's Hospital in London only to find that he was deeply elsewhere amid and beyond personal tragedy and public distress, using his dissection skills and fearlessness to surprise and ground and lose himself in poems.

How even to think about such transformation--a hard, workaday life flash-forwarding to literature, be it great or on-and-off mediocre? And what is "diagnosis" vs. "healing"? And how does a poem manage the former without the intention-ridden, self-congratulatory heavy hand of the latter. And why bother? Handouts provided on the spot, but it is more than fine and perhaps even useful to advance-read Keats' odes, sonnets, and his remarkable letters, plus Conan Doyle's first successful effort, *A Study in Scarlet*, and talk among yourselves.