

The MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College Public Schedule – January 2020

*The public is welcome to attend the morning lectures and evening readings in fiction and poetry offered during the Master of Fine Arts Program winter residency. Events last approximately one hour. Admission is free. The schedule is subject to change. PLEASE NOTE: The winter residency will be held at **Blue Ridge Assembly** in Black Mountain, NC, not on the Warren Wilson College campus.*

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

Readings will begin at 8:15 PM in the **Region Room** of **Blue Ridge Center** at Blue Ridge Assembly, 84 Blue Ridge Circle; Black Mountain, NC 28711.

READINGS by FACULTY

Thursday, January 2

Lesley Nneka Arimah, Carolyn Ferrell, Vanessa Hua, Jason Schneiderman, Solmaz Sharif

Friday, January 3

Kaveh Akbar, Jeremy Gavron, Sally Keith, Dominic Smith

Saturday, January 4

C.J. Hribal, Sandra Lim, Antonya Nelson, Dan Tobin

Sunday, January 5

T. Geronimo Johnson, Martha Rhodes, Marisa Silver, Connie Voisine

Monday, January 6

Gabrielle Calvocoressi, Liam Callanan, Matthew Olzmann, Lauren Groff

Wednesday, January 8

Debra Allbery, Dean Bakopoulos, Marianne Boruch, Laura van den Berg

READINGS by GRADUATING STUDENTS

Thursday, January 9

Jonathan Hadas Edwards, Erin Osborne, Robert Matthew Taylor

Friday, January 10

Sonja Johanson, Steve Lane, Hannah Markos

Saturday, January 11 ~ 4:30 PM, *followed by Graduation Ceremony*

Sarah Cypher, Maggie Ray, Amanda Shaw

The schedule of lectures by Warren Wilson MFA faculty follows →

The MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College

Faculty Lectures ~ January 2020

All lectures will be in the **Region Room of Blue Ridge Center at Blue Ridge Assembly.**

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

The schedule is subject to change. Please check www.friendsofwriters.org for updates.

Saturday, January 4
9:30 AM

**KAVEH AKBAR ~ Crushed Glass and Medusa's
Veil: Exploring the Revelatory Break**

In his *A Year with Swollen Appendices*, Brian Eno talks about experiencing the crack in a blues singer's voice or the static of a grainy film as being "the excitement of witnessing events too momentous for the medium assigned to record them." If we accept as American writers that our medium, the English language, is one of the deadliest colonial weapons ever invented, then its breaking becomes a political urgency. How do we undermine our language's inherent corrosiveness, turn a violent technology against itself to speak to things—doubt, sex, identity, justice, rage—it would rather us leave unspoken? This lecture will discuss writers—including Robert Hayden, Jean Valentine, M. NourbeSe Philip, and Jos Charles—who use revelatory breaks in idiom, form, and syntax to render with clarity what is too urgent, too momentous, for mere rhetorical speech.

Saturday, January 4
10:45 AM

**JEREMY GAVRON ~ James Joyce's Refrigerator, or,
Thirteen Ways of Looking at Lists**

List making helped conjure writing out of the primordial soup - and may be returning it there in the shape of the BuzzFeed listicle. In between, lists have crossed from ledgers, journals and refrigerator doors into literature in a whole list of ways. This lecture will take an idiosyncratic look at some, mostly contemporary, examples of lists as literary tools and forms. Texts will include Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*, Lara Pawson's *This is the Place to Be*, and Debbie Urbanski's "An Incomplete Timeline of What We Tried" (short and available on the net), as well as probably some Lorrie Moore, Susan Sontag, Toni Morrison, and Guy Gunaratne.

Sunday, January 5
9:30 AM

**C.J. Hribal ~ The Reasonably Unreasonable:
The Work of Rachel Ingalls**

Most people at a certain point in their writing studies have read Flannery O'Connor's dictum about how stories work being dependent on gestures that are "both totally right and totally unexpected" (this can apply to poetry as well). Earlier in the same essay, she talks about "a reasonable use of the unreasonable" (ditto for poetry). One can see how these two ideas might work together. As an introduction to the work of Rachel Ingalls (part of my series of lectures on under-read writers), we'll look at perhaps her best known work, the novella *Mrs. Caliban*, particularly in terms of how she renders the unreasonable reasonable (the protagonist does fall in love with a six-foot-tall, green-skinned amphibian named Larry, after all—fans of the film *The Shape of Water* take note). We'll look at how the fanciful, the magical, the exaggerated, the outlandish—i.e. the unreasonable—both can be made reasonable and throw the "ordinary" human emotions (love, loss, grief) into greater relief (to say nothing of how it allows her to write about gender politics, male privilege, the complexities of female friendship, and a whole host of other subjects). *Mrs. Caliban* will be the main text, but some of her other work, and some poems by other writers, will be discussed as well. If possible, please read *Mrs. Caliban* ahead of time, but handouts will be provided.

Sunday, January 5
10:45 AM

SANDRA LIM ~ Repetition

What kind of imaginative space opens up in poems when they are fueled primarily by repetition? We will reflect on ideas about repetition and get a feel for its powers by looking at different instances and schemes of reiteration or reprise in various poems. We will look at poems and/or portions of poems by Thomas Hardy, Gertrude Stein, Sylvia Plath, Harryette Mullen, and Marilyn Chin.

Monday, January 6
9:30 AM

MARIANNE BORUCH ~ Silence and the Trouble Gene

Poets, even those disguised as fiction writers, most certainly carry the trouble gene, that tiny lens and/or magnet somewhere in the body's bewildering chain of being. (Probably the brain, or maybe lost somewhere else in the nervous system.) And as writers we lean into our microscopes or binoculars to use this gene toward our highly questionable ends.

Which is to say, this lecture orbits the crucial emptiness (hesitation, wonder, ignorance, a *what the hell?*) in any serious encounter with words, ideas, images, meaning. And how the trouble gene kicks in to open, solve, or make things worse. Various small true stories that make up the lecture might bring something to this (counting on analogy here), might *mean* bigger though I can't say for sure. I *can* promise a foreign tour group's annoyed near-seizure of a Days Inn front desk near Niagara Falls, the inadequacy of language, how cochlear implants work, flashes of life in a Trappist monastery, and a way to unpark a hopelessly hemmed-in car on a moonless very foggy night. Plus there will be time to befriend a few actual poems. How silence and trouble in life or in poetry mix is something I will never quite understand.

You come too.

Enroute we will look briefly at work by Langston Hughes, Robert Frost, the long-forgotten Archibald MacLeish, Whitman and Dickinson, shards from Adelia Prado, Thomas Merton, George Oppen—all winged or walking creatures.

This lecture will end in silence or in trouble. Perhaps both.

Zero prep. Handouts will serve as flying buttresses during the lecture and/or as party favors to take home.

Monday, January 6
10:45 AM

LESLEY NNEKA ARIMAH ~ The Breadth and Purpose of Speculative Fiction

Speculative fiction has often gotten the short end of the stick in serious literary study even as well-respected works of fiction—both contemporary and classic—teem with characters and scenarios that are ostensibly out of this world. This lecture considers the full breadth of speculative literature (it is more than spaceships and dragons—not that there's anything wrong with that) and posits a distinct and important literary purpose speculative fiction fulfills that realistic fiction does not.

Friday, January 10
9:30 AM

LAUREN GROFF ~ The Anxiety of the Influence of *The Anxiety of Influence*

The literary critic Harold Bloom (RIP, 2019) was most famous for his 1973 book *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, in which he argues that artists struggle Oedipally against their precursors; he goes on to frame his argument with a lot of Freudian jargon. This lecture (not unironically) will take a look at the assumptions underlying Bloom's theory, will draw on the examples of writers like Anne Carson and Mat Johnson to offer an alternative vision of an artist's attitude to her precursors.

**Friday, January 10
10:45 AM**

**JASON SCHNEIDERMAN ~ How a Sonnet Turns:
From a Fold to a Helix**

Most of us are taught to think of the sonnet as having a two-part structure, built around a turn, or in Italian, the *volta*. The introduction of the divided self enacted through the sonnet is often seen as the beginning of our own modern period, and coincides with the first English language poems composed for the spoken voice. And yet that folding motion at the turn is only part of the story. In considering sonnets from a variety of time periods, I will argue that the sonnet's motion doesn't turn just once, but rather forms a spiral that carries the reader through. Picking up from Nabokov's idea of the Pushkin sonnet as a spinning top, I will trace multiple craft concerns through the sonnets, including syntax, lineation, sound, and rhythm. The sonnet's compression has made it a perfect vehicle for exploring internal conflict, and this lecture will open up onto ways that the sonnet might usefully rethink the turn as a spiraling, rather than hinging, motion. No prior reading required.

**Saturday, January 11
9:30 AM**

**MATTHEW OLZMANN ~ What You Know of the
World Is Wrong: Some Thoughts on the Nature of
Surprise**

In "The Figure a Poem Makes," Robert Frost famously wrote, "No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader." Since then, generations of poets have quoted this in order to celebrate the necessity of surprise. This lecture plans on doing that exact same thing. After quickly accomplishing that, we will hopefully ask, "But what exactly is surprise, how does it actually work, and why is it even important? *What does it actually do?*" We'll be thinking about surprise from two directions: 1) how it's created, and 2) how it might then shape a reader's experience of the work at hand. This could change between now and the time when I actually finish writing the lecture, but at this point, I think we'll be looking at poems by Rainer Maria Rilke and Lucille Clifton. I'm also thinking of short stories by Tania James and Denis Johnson. There will be a number of other readings as well. No reading required beforehand.

**Saturday, January 11
10:45 AM**

**DEAN BAKOPOULOS: The Reason Life is So
Strange: Some Thoughts on Options**

In this lecture, I'll explain the all the reasons that life is so strange (h/t to William Maxwell's "The reason life is so strange is that so often people have no choice.") After that, we'll examine the energy that options, or a lack of them, can bring to dramatic narratives and confessional poems. You don't need to read anything ahead of time, but we'll likely look at excerpts from the novels *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid, *The Lost Children Archive* by Valeria Luiselli, *Salvage The Bones* by Jesmyn Ward, and *Convenience Store Woman* by Sayaka Murata, as well as poems by Danez Smith, Paige Lewis, Louise Gluck, and Agha Shahid Ali. You don't need to read all these texts ahead of time, because some of this is subject to change. Let's keep our options open.