



This past summer West Virginia Wesleyan College launched its Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. The program offers three areas of specialization: fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. A low-residency degree, students come to campus twice a year.

The Summer 2011 Residency

During the 2011 Summer Residency, students took part in a variety of lectures on such topics as the “epic” poem. Students also attended evening craft talks from poets and fiction as well as nonfiction writers. The residency featured acclaimed writers from all over Appalachia. The term included a panel moderated by Dr. Irene McKinney, featuring poet Maggie Anderson, poet and Appalachian story-teller Diane Gilliam, and poet John McKernan in a discussion focused on several aspects of regional writing.

SUMMER EVENTS

The program kicked off with a Literary Festival on July 2, 2011, featuring readings by a number of distinguished writers from all across Appalachia. These events were free and open to the public.

“Our students seem to feel very strongly that they are regional writers with a national audience”

Dr. Irene McKinney, Program Director



An Interview with student Vincent Trimboli

What drew you to the MFA here at Wesleyan?

I received my BA from Wesleyan and enjoyed my time in school. Although I was a Theater major, I had taken a creative writing class as my final two electives hours. Last year, I was guest lecturing for a freshman seminar class at our local college on WV coal history and wanted to give the students a more visceral feeling of what it was like to live in those times. I contacted Dr. Mac and asked if she knew any poems that might do just that. In her email she told me about the new MFA program and said she thought it would be a good fit for me, so I decided to take the leap and go for it. Wesleyan has always had a sense of community that I look for in education, and that, combined with a faculty and administration I respect, made it seem like a perfect program to continue my education.

What part of the Summer Residency did you enjoy the most?

I loved the sense of family that we developed being on campus. It was strange to be there with no other groups, but it caused our cohorts to get very close. We spent all of our time together, if it be in class, at meals or even in our free time. We spent evenings bouncing ideas off one another, playing music, going out on the town and creating some strong writing.

Is there any part of program that you find exceptionally challenging or difficult to manage?

I think the most difficult part of the program thus far has been managing my time while away from campus. It is a pretty condensed educational experience, and balancing that and everyday life was a challenge at first. But after a month or so, you realize that you just have to put time aside to write. I think it has made me a stronger artist, realizing that we deserve/must take time aside from the everyday to create.

In addition to the campus residency sessions, Wesleyan's degree program offers the opportunity to complete an intensive, faculty-led field seminar in Ireland in place of one residency.

Jellyfish and the MFA

By Shauna Jones

“Writing is not life, but I think that sometimes it can be a way back to life.”

— Stephen King, *On Writing*

Jellyfish propelled me to Wesleyan’s MFA program. It’s true. I served for fifteen years as a counselor in juvenile residential institutions where mutual love existed between most students and me. Occasionally, a jellyfish—embittered about teaching “those” kids—invaded, but she was easy to dance around. During the last two years, though, pessimistic educators, inappropriate behavior staff and double-talking politicians bloomed into a toxic colony that slowly suffocated my creativity and joie de vivre. The MFA launched at the right time.

Within thirty-six hours last November, I received a job at Wesleyan and acceptance into the MFA. My husband, Greg, hugged me and said it was inevitable I’d return to academia. He made it sound like I was revisiting an old flame; in some ways, the residency bore that resemblance. Entering the English Annex felt like walking into a familiar embrace. Although my home is two miles from Wesleyan, I stayed in Fleming Hall, a choice that paid for itself many times over in convenience, focus and camaraderie. During one workshop, a professor invoked, “Let us drown, but let’s drown in the ocean.” A challenge...an encouragement. Days and nights blurred together in a cycle of reading, writing and connecting.

Après-residency? Withdrawal—tears—laughter—mini-breakdown—support—breakthroughs—growth—self-doubt—self-confidence—reading—re-reading—writing—revision, revision, revision—anticipation for the upcoming residency. Bring it.

WINTER RESIDENCY READINGS

❖ Friday, December 30, 2011

Keynote Speaker

Denise Giardina

7:30 pm, English Annex 21

❖ Sunday, January 1, 2012

Faculty reading

9:00 am, English Annex 21

❖ Wednesday, January 4, 2012

Featured Reader

Ann Pancake

7:00 pm, Nellie Wilson Lounge

❖ These events are free and open to the public

Words from Faculty Member Dr. Eric Waggoner

The best part of the long, hot(tish) summer of 2011 for me was teaching in the inaugural session of Wesleyan's MFA program. From a completely self-interested standpoint: sitting in the lecture room of the English building, listening to my colleagues talk from their collective wealth of experience about language and what it can do, revived me as a teacher in ways I can't fully express. From a more altruistic standpoint, being able to watch a dozen students grapple in deep and profound ways with the challenges that come from wanting to push their talents reminded me that language matters in everything we do to make sense of our lives. I saw people work to push their comfort levels. I saw the seriousness of purpose with which the students accepted the challenges of advanced study. I heard people work through serious questions about why they wanted to pursue this degree at all. I overheard conversations in the dorms, in the dining halls, and in the classrooms about why they felt this was a meaningful process to put themselves through. And I was reminded why I teach. Because when we all come together with our different personalities, backgrounds, and histories, how important are the things we can push each other to try; how bright are the things we can accomplish.

Winter Residency's Featured Reader: Ann Pancake

Fiction writer and essayist Ann Pancake is scheduled to be the featured reader at the Winter 2011 Residency. Pancake is a West Virginia native and the author of the novel, *Strange as This Weather Has Been*, which was a finalist for the 2008 Orion Book Award, and won the 2007 Weatherford Award. In 2000, she won the distinguished Bakeless Award for her short story collection *Given Ground*. Her reading will take place on the evening of January 4th, in the Nellie Wilson Lounge of Benedum Hall at 7:00 pm. This event is free and open to the public.

Winter Residency Courses

31 December 2011

Ekphraisis: Poems About Art – Doug Van Gundy

Ekphrasis isn't only about pictures, of course, but is a rhetorical device by which one art form is used to explore, examine, or comment upon another (Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and Auden's "Musee de Beaux Arts" are two famous examples.) Participants will read and discuss examples of ekphrasis poems, examine the relationship between the artwork and the corresponding, and then draft and workshop their own ekphrastic poems.

2 January 2012

Defense of Genre Fiction – John Saunders

What possibly could a writer of prose—much less a poet—learn from reading genre fiction, particularly detective novels and short stories. One is, after all, seeking a Master of Fine Arts! I hope the answer to that question might be "a great deal."

I am asking you to read three selections or works. The first is ten pages or so from Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, written in 1929, rather early in her career. A medical doctor in an English village narrates the action that focuses on the workings of "the little grey cells" of Hercule Poirot. The second is a novella/short story by the inimitable Raymond Chandler, "The Red Wind." Philip Marlowe, the greatest—

Perhaps—of American detectives, threads his way through the dangers of L.A., in the thirties. You can find the complete text of the story by googling the title. The third is a novel by Kate Atkinson appropriately entitled When Will There Be Good News?,

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published in 2008. Set in contemporary Scotland, the novel features a veritable cornucopia of corpses. It is indeed a delightful and bloody work.

I cannot predict, of course, what you may think of these works. I would not assign them if I did not think them stylistic relevant or good—very good. I do hope that you will take note of aspects of fiction and language that are critical to good writing. What, for example, distinguishes Christie's prose style? What about Chandler's? Atkinson's? What role does atmosphere play in the various works? What can a poet, for God's sake, learn from any or all of these three?

I choose Atkinson for several reasons. I think she is currently the best writer of detective fiction in English. When Will There Be Good News meets all the tests we ask good novels to pass. How long has it been since you painfully worried about an orphan and a dog?

Point of View – Richard Schmitt

Note first that 1st person *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is Mark Twain's greatest triumph, not 3rd person *Tom Sawyer*. In this class we will examine ways to provide the distance necessary to transform personal experience into a fiction that stands on its own. The heart of the matter is more than a switch in pronoun or gender; we want to be able to write in 1st person if that is what the story calls for; we want to make the character someone like us if that is what the story needs. We will strive to understand ways we might ultimately be able to tell stories wholly invented and very much like our own personal stories.

4 January 2012

The Little Magazine – Mark Defoe

A look at the phenomena of the small or little magazine – its history, influence, and role in American letters. Students will be asked to explore this important element of the publishing world, with attention to three selected journals and to present their findings to the class in short critical and analytical papers and reports.

The New Irish Literature – Devon McNamara

The pronounced change in Irish writing in the last two decades: the presence of an international sensibility, the breaking of silences, a more flexible political, even religious, resonance invites us to see contemporary Irish literature against Ireland's vexed and brilliant literary past. New Irish poets, playwrights, fiction writers – Eavan Boland, Maeve McGuckian, Mary O'Malley, Martin McDonagh, Conor McPherson, Roddy Doyle, William Trevor – are involved in an intense dialogue with the renowned writers of the past.

5 January 2012

Prose Style – Eric Waggoner

This seminar course focuses on the art and structure of clear, stylish prose writing. This class is designed to encourage students to think of prose writing as a “made thing”—an artifact that is, in its ideal form, the product of an artist's conscious, intentional design, and which may therefore be evaluated according to how well that design achieves its end goals of clear articulation and aesthetic effect. Session one provides an overview (or, for some students, a review) of the principal elements of syntax and grammar—the parts of a sentence, the function of parts of speech within a sentence, and the principles of mapping and diagramming sentences—in order to help students gain (a) a deep understanding of how well-made sentences work structurally, and (b) the functional vocabulary with which to express that understanding. Session one, in other words, discusses grammatical structure as the ordering system by which language achieves the goal of direct and clear communication. Session two addresses “style,” defined as a writer's unique, privately-developed treatment of language for aesthetic ends. Session two, in other words, discusses style as the end result of a writer's intentional application of the techniques by which any piece of writing succeeds in achieving the goal of artistic expressiveness.

7 January 2012:

Ultra-Talk – Irene McKinney

We will explore this current direction in poetry, through the work of its most prominent poets: David Kirby, Barbara Hamby, Denise Duhamel, Albert Goldbarth, and others. Ultra-talk is an expansive form, filling the page margin to margin, following up side issues and sudden thoughts, incorporating all kinds of “non-poetical” material, and creating a sense of space and freedom, and loose, delighted movement.