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Far Field Retreat sparks writers' creativity

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Daily life sometimes gets in the way of creativity. For writers, carving out a chunk of time from a demanding work schedule to draft a piece can itself be challenging. Weekends are often eaten up by household chores. And even if a work is finished, it's not always easy to find other writers to share ideas.

But on May 15-18, Oakland University will offer its third annual **Far Field Retreat for Writers** – an on-campus program presenting great opportunities for writers to become inspired, learn from a variety of accomplished poets as well as fiction and non-fiction writers, spend entire days crafting a piece or two, and time to share those works with a supportive group of fellow writers.

"We have a wide range of attendees. Some have written poetry but never a short story. Some have published works and some haven't. It doesn't matter what your publishing credits are or aren't. What's important is that the students have time to write," said retreat faculty member and OU Special Lecturer in English Maureen Dunphy. "They come here every day for the entire day and the idea is for them to focus on themselves as writers and the work before them. The retreat can give students ideas on how to integrate writing into their lives."

Each of the six guest faculty members will conduct writing workshops, usually with 12 students, to create new works or polish older ones in a creative, interactive atmosphere. The retreat also features readings by faculty and writers; question and answer sessions with guest faculty; craft lectures and other sessions on the writing life; use of the university's recreation, library and computer facilities; and several group meals, including an opening evening dinner at **Meadow Brook Hall**. Workshop sessions will focus on the craft of fiction, poetry or creative non-fiction.

Dunphy and novelist Laura Kaischke each will conduct a fiction workshop. Allison Joseph, professor of creative writing at Southern Illinois University, and poet Gerry LaFemina each will conduct a poetry workshop. Poet and essayist Thomas Lynch will conduct a nonfiction workshop. Retreat Director Mary Ann Samyn, an OU alumna and assistant professor of English at West Virginia University, will direct sessions entitled "Discovering Essential Material" and "Pleasures and Challenges of the Writing Life."

"I teach at a number of different conferences and workshops, and the Far Field Retreat is one of my favorites," Dunphy said. "I'm looking forward to having a similar experience this year with really good writers and wonderful teachers. The faculty extend themselves to the students in a collegial way. We develop a close relationship with the writers in our workshops and in the dinners and other craft sessions. The students also often form writing groups among themselves afterwards."

"Interestingly enough, the retreats often turn me back to my own writing. I'm a teacher of writing at the retreats, but we work with the students as equals. I love to teach as much as write and am always thinking of ways to have people develop more successful ways of writing. It's also fun afterwards to hear from students who continue writing and may have had a piece accepted for publication."

Maureen Dunphy conducts workshops on Pelee Island, has led writing retreats in the Irish Hills, and co-directs the annual Clockhouse Writer's Conference at Goddard College. Her essay, "Getting There from Here," was published in "Peninsula: Essays and Memoirs from Michigan" and a dozen of her poems appeared as "Stardust from the Barn" in "Beyond the Lines: Writing What You Couldn't Say." She is at work on a collection of flash fiction.

Allison Joseph is the author of three collections of poetry: "What Keeps Us Here" (winner of the 1992 Ampersand Press Women Poets Series Competition), "Soul Train" and "In Every Seam." This year, Carnegie Mellon University Press will publish her next book, "Imitation of Life." Her work also has appeared in numerous anthologies, including "American Poetry: The Next Generation." She is the editor of "Crab Orchard Review" and serves on the Board of Directors of the Associated Writing Programs.

Laura Kaischke is the author of three novels: "White Bird in a Blizzard," "Suspicious River" and "The Life Before Her Eyes." She also has several award-winning poetry collections, including "Wild Brides," winner of the Elmer Holmes Bobst Award for an

Emerging Writer; "Housekeeping in a Dream," winner of the Amy Fay diCastagnola award; and "Dance and Disappear," winner of the Juniper Prize for Poetry. She has taught at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas and currently teaches at Washtenaw Community College.

Gerry LaFemina's "Graffiti Heart" received the 2001 Anthony Piccione Memorial Prize in Poetry. His other books include "Shattered Hours: Poems 1988-94," "Zarathustra in Love" and "Voice Lock Puppet," a collection of translations of contemporary Turkish poet Ali Yuce. A former recipient of fellowships from ArtServe Michigan and the Irving Gilmore Emerging Artists Foundation, he teaches at Sarah Lawrence College and serves on the Associated Writing Programs' Board of Directors.

Thomas Lynch is the author of three collections of poetry: "Skating with Heather Grace," "Grimalkin & Other Poems" and "Still Life in Milford." His collection of essays, "The Undertaking – Life Studies from the Dismal Trade," won the Heartland Prize for non-fiction and the American Book Award and was a finalist for the National Book Award. It has been translated into eight languages. A second collection of essays, "Bodies in Motion and at Rest," won the Great Lakes Book Award. He is an adjunct professor in the graduate creative writing program at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor.

Retreat Director Mary Ann Samyn is the author of three collections of poetry: "Inside the Yellow Dress," a 2001 green rose selection from New Issues Press; "Captivity Narrative," winner of the 1999 Ohio State University Press/"The Journal" award; and "Rooms by the Sea," a 1994 Wick Chapbook from Kent State University Press. She was a 2001 Creative Artist Grant recipient from ArtServe Michigan, and her poems recently won the 2002 Emily Dickinson Award from the Poetry Society of America and the 2003 James Wright Poetry Award from "Mid-American Review."

The cost for all workshops, on-campus housing, meals and readings is \$350. A \$300 commuter option also is available. A \$50 non-refundable registration fee must be submitted along with a completed registration form by Tuesday, April 15.

The Department of English also is providing retreat scholarships for up to four OU students. Scholarship winners will assist the retreat director in hosting the event. Scholarship applications must be received by the Department of English by 3 p.m. Friday, April 4.

For a registration form and more information on schedules, housing, meals and scholarships, visit the **Far Field Retreat** Web site or e-mail farfield@oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

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