

# Creative writer addresses Lithuanian oppression from World War II

by Erin McCarty  
assistant news editor

Wendall Mayo, an accomplished fiction writer and recipient of this year's National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowship, spoke at Behrend on Tuesday, March 20.

Mayo began the reading by sharing a brief anecdote about how his good friend from high school, with whom he had lost contact, had just e-mailed him and told him that he had retired from the Air Force. This example of the swift passage of time set up the mood for the story which he read from his book, *In Lithuanian Wood*.

In this story, a Lithuanian grave-digger discovers the remains of Jews who were killed in the Holocaust. Obsessed with

knowing what these people were like and how they died, he extracts the bones of one man, upon whom he bestows the title of "Pretender." The grave-digger thinks of the dead man in this way because he is now nothing but bones, and nothing about who he really was can be determined from the study of those bones.

Nonetheless, the grave digger treats the bag of bones he carries as a friend, conversing freely with it and taking it on a tour of the town. Through the grave digger's sometimes comical, sometimes poignant interactions with his long-dead friend, a profound commentary is made on the nature of time and the connection between past and present.

"The past is a constant in Lithuanian thought," noted Mayo, "as it is in any country which has

suffered great oppression." The past, consequently, plays a major

role in the book from which this story was taken. "I write short

stories about history," Mayo says, confiding that this decision goes against the popular notion that stories should focus on the present and history should be left to novels.

Mayo took his inspiration for this story and the others in the book from his seven years of living in Lithuania as well as works from several Lithuanian writers and a number of poems about the Holocaust.

"Ninety-seven percent of the Jews in Lithuania were killed during World War II," Mayo pointed out. "There are only about 5,000 left." This particular story is deeply influenced by Shakespeare as well, most notably when the grave-digger holds the skull of "Pretender" in his hand and laments, "I knew you not at all."

The reading and question-and-answer period which followed lasted fifty minutes. Mayo stayed later in order to sign copies of his latest book, *B. Horror and Other Stories*, which was on sale outside the Lecture Hall.

The reading, which took place at 7:00 p.m. in the Reed Lecture Hall, was a part of Behrend's Creative Writers Speaker Series, which is funded by the Clarence A. Smith and Eugenie Baumann Smith Fund. Mayo was the second writer in the three-part series. The first was George Looney, a Behrend professor and poet, and the third is poet Stephen Dunn. The Creative Writing Speaker Series will conclude on Wednesday, April 4, with Dunn's poetry reading.



PHOTO BY BECKY WEINDORF

Wendall Mayo continued the Creative Writers Speaker Series on Tuesday with a reading from his novel, *In Lithuanian Wood*.

## What's up at Bruno's?



PHOTO BY BECKY WEINDORF

LEFT: A couple gets the hook-up at Tuesday's Singled Out. RIGHT: Student Ellen Vahey and her band East Avenue rock the Bruno's stage Wednesday night.



PHOTO BY ROB WYNN

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**The Beacon is also looking to fill the following positions for next year:**

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Many of these positions offer academic credit. Others pay stipends.

To express interest in any of these positions or in joining the *Beacon* staff next year, contact Jason Snyder, editor-in-chief, at [behrcoll5@aol.com](mailto:behrcoll5@aol.com) by Monday, April 9.

## Beacon Open House

Interested in becoming part of the Beacon staff?  
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Meet at 12:15 p.m. in the Wintergarden on Tuesday, April 3, 2001

The current *Beacon* staff will be on hand to provide information, answer questions, and give tours of the offices.

For more information, contact the *Beacon* Office at x6488 or [behrcoll5@aol.com](mailto:behrcoll5@aol.com).

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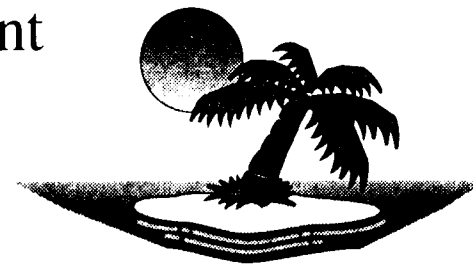
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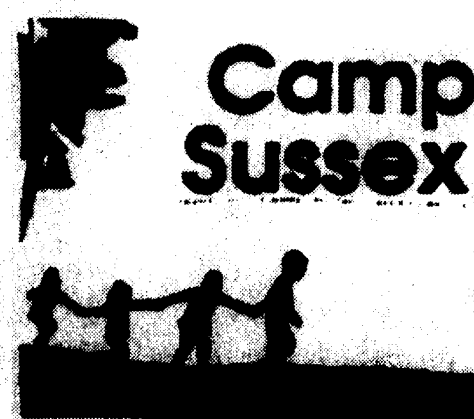
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