

## **Fisher Fellowship 2002-2003**

**Maurice Manning, Assistant Professor of English - "TWO OUT OF THREE: Completing Two Manuscripts of Poetry."**

Abstract:

The title of my Fisher Fellowship proposal is Two Out of Three: Completing Two Manuscripts of Poetry. When I was working on my first book, Lawrence Booth's Book of Visions, I tried to make it a complete package, a unified collection. Since I have been at DePauw, I have been working on two other manuscripts. The first, titled A Companion for Owls: D. Boone's Commonplace Book, is a fictionalized journal written in the imagined and exaggerated voice of Daniel Boone. In this manuscript I present Boone as a man who is bound to the natural world, as well as someone who is aware and fearful of what rapid settlement will mean to the frontier: the exploitation of natural resources, the exploitation of people, and, ultimately, a severing of that essential bond to the natural world—the bond to the mysteries of Creation replaced by the far colder bond to the rationalism of government and economy. As is the case with my first book, I have thought the Boone manuscript should be a self-contained work. Work on a third manuscript, which is called Bucolics, has, however, led me to realize that I am actually trying to construct a poetic trilogy, three separate books that examine an individual's relationship to the natural world. Each book looks at that fundamental relationship from a different perspective and each book employs its own emphatic style in terms of voice, form, and most of all, language. As I see it, the trilogy moves from a high and outlandish sense of artifice, to a more careful and restrained sense of artifice, and finally to a near absence of artifice. This trajectory represents, for me, a process of distillation: the subject matter and the language get increasingly condensed so that the final poems, the Bucolics, are as close to pure utterance as possible. The conflict, or source of tension in each leg of the trilogy moves from a struggle with family and culture, to a struggle with history, to a struggle with the existence and presence of God.