Lynch from page C1

the region.

Participating authors include Elmore "Dutch" Leonard, Loren Estlemen, Tom Sullivan, Carolyn Hall and Jane Briggs Bunting.

With his brand of Twain-like homespun wisdom and knack for endearingly quotable phrases, Lynch has been cited by literary critics for his precision and clarity. And, of course, his ability to "turn a phrase."

Apparently, in his OU speech, "The Traffic in Language," Lynch will seek to clarify for an audience of fledgling and professional writers the path to improved poetic communication.

"For me, writing is separate from an intellectual pursuit," said Lynch. "It's all about writing for the acoustic pleasure of rhyme and meter."

Learning to write, according to Lynch, is foremost an exercise in learning to listen.

"My mother said, 'You have two ears and one mouth. Listen twice as much as you talk.'"

It's advice, he confesses, that *isn't always easy to follow.* Lynch impishly admits his love for blather. A hereditary condition, he said, handed down from generations of Irish storytellers.

Returning home

Raised in a house where "talk was the precious currency," Lynch easily recalls that contentiousness was a linguistic game among his grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles. As if speaking in voices from past generations, Lynch's poetry combines his love for conversation with an inherent sense of music.

Not surprisingly, when pressed to explain the "acoustic pleasure" of writing, Lynch recites several verses from the renown Irish poet William Butler Yeats.

And then, in a perfectly metered interpretation, Lynch invokes images of the northern lip of the county of Shannon in Ireland where his great grandfather emigrated in the late 1890s.

It's a place that he returns to for inspiration and for a poet's greatest tool – a sense of place.

In a small hut located on the land where his grandfather once farmed, Lynch worked on his current book of poems, "Still Life in Milford."

"My mother said, 'You have two ears and one mouth. Listen twice as much as you talk"

Thomas Lynch
Author

By the way, noted Lynch, the title is his dig at critics who can't get beyond the stereotype of undertakers. "Still Life," he said, isn't the obvious euphemism for a deceased body but a reference to an actual painting.

Lynch inherited the Ireland farm from his cousin, Nora Lynch. A place Lynch describes as: "A small house separated from the Middle Ages by two light sockets and a hot plate."

In late September, Lynch returned to Ireland to work on a book of poems in progress, tentatively entitled, "Bodies at Motion, and at Rest."

He stood and looked out the same window where his great-grandfather once observed the change of the seasons. And from his ancestors' view of the land, Lynch wrote:

"...here in these ancient remedial stones/where Nora Lynch held forth for ninety years/the last two decades of them on her own./Alone by the fire in the silence she/recited the everyday mysteries/of wind and rain and darkness and the light...She speaks to me still. If she speaks to you,/ready your best nib. Write what she tells you to."

For many who have watched Lynch emerge as a poet since the early 1980s, there's no separating the bard from the expert organizer of ritual and liturgy for the dead.

"Even though many people are distancing themselves from their backgrounds, the fundamental obligation is to care for our dead," he said.

The obligatory voice resounds with poetic precision.

Front-row seat

Since 1948, the Lynch family has built an impeccable reputation as funeral directors. Lynch's father, a one-time Marine who "wanted to serve his community," opened a funeral home in Birmingham and Royal Oak.

Since then, the business has grown to Milford, Walled Lake, Clawson and Plymouth.

Lynch moved to Milford after completing his degree in mortuary science at Wayne State in the early 1970s.

When he speaks of his success as a poet, he never fails to note his primary responsibility.

"People who don't read poetry in Milford will go and plunk down $20 (for a book) to support me," said Lynch. "Writing poetry for me isn't a hobby but my obligation is as a funeral director."

On the type of gray Monday that gives the beginning of the week a bad name, Lynch looks down from his second-story office at Lynch & Sons.

From below, the roar and rumble of motorcycle engines can be heard, revving in unison for a fellow motorcyclist killed in a head-on collision.

"Yeah, you could say I have a front-row seat to human nature," Lynch said as he fell back in his high-back leather chair.

Sitting amid an office filled with books of literature and consoling words for the bereaved, he considers the relationship between directing funerals and arranging words on a page.

"Being a better funeral director makes me a better writer, and being a better writer has made me a better funeral director."

For Thomas Lynch, it's all about reclaiming a fundamental notion that through family, ritual and poetry, the meaning of life presents itself.

Maybe there's something to Lynch's notion of poetry as the ultimate portable art form.

But more than likely, what has gotten the attention of so many people outside of Milford is Lynch's incisive view of the changing landscape.

"Maybe there is something to being at the existential toll booth."

Exhibit from page C1

artistic statements.

"Some artists might be apprehensive about entering other shows, but with 'Our Town' they're not as intimidated," said Danielle Bodine of Bloomfield Hills, a mixed-media artist who has two pieces in the show.

While many local galleries exhibit work of regional artists, the supply of artists simply overwhelms the supply of galleries. Few artists can afford to turn down an opportunity to exhibit and sale their work.

In the last several years, "Our Town" has both encouraged students and nonprofessionals while convincing professional artists that entering the exhibit wouldn't devalue their work.

Generally, established artists stay away from art fairs because of the retail atmosphere and what they perceive as low standards.

"A lot of people who hesitate about going through a gallery will go through 'Our Town,'" said Nancy Thayer, one of the area's finest abstract painters, whose work is featured in the latest issue of *American Painting.*

Actually, it was Thayer's idea to select Thomas Lingeman, chairman of the department of art at the University of Toledo, as juror of the exhibit. Lingeman is the first juror of "Our Town" from outside the area. Thayer also serves on the exhibit's executive council.

To make the show even more attractive to attract professional artists, Thayer persuaded Lingeman to offer a one-person show at the Toledo Art Museum featuring the top artist in "Our Town."

Ironically, Thayer's large-scale evocative paintings were not selected for the show. Several people associated with the selection process admitted to "being embarrassed" by the omission of Thayer's work. And rightly so.

Can an exhibit that purports to represent the "art of the community" achieve its objective when one of its best artist's work isn't presented?

Thayer remained philosophical about the conundrum.

"Regardless of the quality, it is art from our community," he said.

Conversations from page C1

scope, Dubuffet's work is more grounded than the abstract expressionists, and more substantive than the frivolous pop art chicanery.

Klein admires Dubuffet as a draftsman with an impeccable eye for composition. And as an artist who saw the relevance in exploring the possibilities of graffiti and the art of children, unaffected by the artifice of "civilized society."

From Dubuffet to the primitivism of Basquait is a logical connection in the recent history of art. But how far has the 20th century evolved in five decades?

Klein, whose gallery specializes in 20th-century American and European art, contends that he's had many important shows, but can't think of one exhibit that could compare.

When pressed to explain why Dubuffet has such an impact on him, he can only point to how it makes him feel.

And that alone is too often overlooked in today's art. It's not just pretty pictures, escapism and entertainment. Art, as Dubuffet taught, is about authentic feeling.

In the days when Congress is planing impeachment hearings about the president's sexual affair while the U.S. can't manage *a coherent strategy to stop* the slaughter in Kosovo, there seems to be a need to reexamine the message in Dubuffet's work.

You can almost hear the drip, drip, drip of coming to grips with the moral hollowness of our times.

And for a moment, you might be struck by the notion that the practice of denial has gone on too long.

Auction from page C1

autographed drum sticks from his days with Seger to raise funds for the state affiliates of organizations founded by the Kennedy family to help people with disabilities.

In addition to Martin and his band Jam Pact, Boyz II Boyz will perform under the direction of Birmingham musical therapist Margaret Hull. Hull's weekly sessions with the duo is one of the Very Special Arts programs providing opportunities for children and adults with disabilities to grow through the arts. Special Olympics provides year-round sports training and competitions for persons with mental retardation.

Lora Frankel, Very Special Arts Michigan director hopes to build name recognition for the organization by associating it with Special Olympics. Although the group celebrates its 25th anniversary next year in Los Angeles, Frankel said when mentioning Very Special Arts she still receives blank stares of non-comprehension. Proof is the auction. This is the third for Very Special Arts yet the last in 1995 raised only a few thousand dollars.

"We're a very well kept secret," said Frankel. "Many people know about Special Olympics but not Very Special Arts. We work quietly in the schools and provide mini-grants."

Frankel and Olds have been hard at work securing items for the auction. According to Olds, donations are down because artists are tired of being the ones who are always asked to give so he's still looking for works anyone might want to donate. The money raised from the auction will support programs such as an exhibit by professional artists with disabilities set to tour the state beginning in March 1999.