

WRITING MATTERS

VOL.7 NO.1

Celebrating writing in all its forms at Northwestern University

Fall 2006

CWA 2006 FALL QUARTER CALENDAR SAVE THESE DATES

NU FACULTY EVENTS



Professor Steve Lubet

Wednesday,
October 18, 2006

A Reading from
"Lawyer's Poker"

Noon - 201 University
Hall, Hagstrum Room



Rebecca Gilman

Wednesday,
October 25, 2006

"So You Want to
Know How to
Write...A Play"

4:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.
Mary and Leigh
Block Museum of
Art, Pick-Laudati
Auditorium



Professor Mary Kinzie

Monday,
November 13, 2006

A Reading from
"The Poems I am Not
Writing"

Noon - 201 University
Hall, Hagstrum Room

SPECIAL GUESTS COMING TO CAMPUS



Landon Y. Jones

Monday,
October 9, 2006

"A Reading from
Recent Nonfiction"

5:30 p.m.
Harris Hall 108



Margaret Talbot

Monday,
November 13, 2006

"Reporting on
Tomorrow"

Noon - Fisk Hall,
Room 211

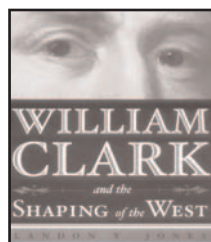


James McManus

Monday,
November 20, 2006

"Writing a Column:
Personal Voice, Public
Passion"

Noon - Fisk Hall,
Room 211



Landon Y. Jones

Wednesday,
November 15, 2006

"The Art (and Artifice)
of Biography"

5:30 p.m.
Harris Hall 108

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Please join NU's Center for the Writing Arts as we celebrate writing in all its forms by welcoming distinguished guests from both on and off campus. For complete calendar and recent additions visit: www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/

**IN BRIEF:
NORTHWESTERN
WRITING NEWS**

October 11, 2006

A reading by:

**Adrienne
Rich**

A Reading by award-winning poet and essayist Adrienne Rich, followed by a book signing. Co-sponsored by the Gender Studies Program and the American Studies Program.

Harris Hall Rom 107,
1881 Sheridan Road
7:00 PM - 9:30 PM

For more details contact
Barbara Phelan at 847-491-
3525.

To view our complete writing
events calendar,
please visit our web site:
[www.northwestern.edu/
writing-arts/](http://www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/)

WRITING MATTERS

Editor: Stacy L. Oliver
Contributing Writer: Rachel Aherin

**PLANNING WRITING EVENTS THIS QUARTER?
LET US KNOW!**

Just a reminder that the Center's biweekly electronic digest, *NU Writing Event Digest*, highlights NU writing events and reaches students, faculty, and staff via the Center's growing email list. If you know of an upcoming event related to writing, whether it be an author's visit, departmental program, or even an off-campus event involving NU students or faculty, please let us know! We will do our best to publicize all writing-related programming. If you would like to receive the electronic *NU Writing Event Digest*, please send an email to: words@northwestern.edu. You can also give us a call at 847-467-4099

Join the Student Writing Group!

"Twice" is Northwestern's only student writing group. It aims to gather writers of all genres together and engage in friendly critiques of non-academic work. The effectiveness depends on the regular attendance and input of every member. Meeting twice a month, the workshop makes it possible for every member to be critiqued at least once per quarter. You can get more details at: <http://groups.northwestern.edu/twice/>

"We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospection."
-Anais Nin

**NU CENTER FOR THE WRITING ARTS
ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS**

2006/2007

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DIRECTOR'S LETTER

By Reginald Gibbons
Director, NU Center for the Writing Arts,
Professor of English and Classics

This year the Center for the Writing Arts will sponsor, as in years past, our Writers in Residence; the special opportunities provided to undergraduates in the Modes of Writing course; and a number of events in which writers present their work--these include both Northwestern faculty and visitors invited by the Center in collaboration, this year, with the Medill School, the WCAS Departments of English and Classics, and other university units.

The purpose of the Center for the Writing Arts is to seek ways to further the study of writing as a core element in undergraduate education at Northwestern, and also to help coordinate both undergraduate and graduate access to such study, working with all undergraduate departments and programs and also with the new MFA in Writing for the Screen and Stage in the School of Communications (which welcomes its first cohort of students this fall), the Master of Arts in Creative Writing in the School of Continuing Studies, and other graduate programs.

I am very pleased to assume the directorship of the Center

this fall, and am grateful for the work of the former directors who established the Center's current programming, and I intend to explore--in collaboration with many faculty and administration colleagues--a number of new possibilities in the study of writing at Northwestern. Stacy Oliver, the Assistant Director, and I, welcome your suggestions for programming. Please contact us at: words@northwestern.edu.

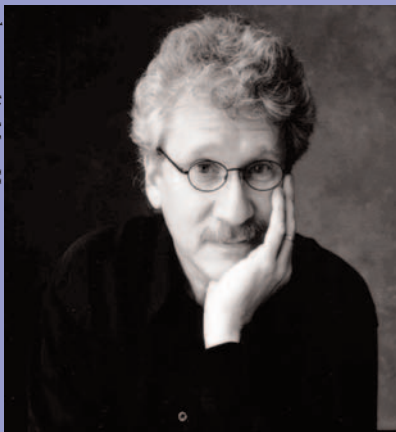
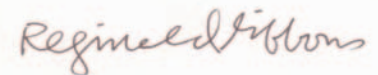


photo credit: Marc Hauser

REGINALD GIBBONS

Reginald Gibbons is Professor of English and Classics, and has published numerous works, including poetry, fiction, and translation; criticism; edited volumes on contemporary writing of the U. S., Mexico, and South Africa, the American poet Thomas McGrath, and twentieth-century poetry; posthumous editions of works of the American fiction writer William Goyen; and other books. From 1981 to 1997 he was the editor of Northwestern's literary maga-

zine, *TriQuarterly*. His edition of the autobiographical writings of William Goyen will be published in 2007 (University of Texas Press), as will his new book of poems (LSU Press). Gibbons is at work on a volume of translations, *Selected Poems of Sophokles* (to be published by Princeton University Press) and, with Ilya Kutik of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, a collaborative work (translations and essays) on Russian poetry. He is also currently a columnist for *American Poetry Review*.

WHAT ARE YOU READING?

We asked these questions: 1) What scholarly/professional book or article are you currently reading? 2) What book are you reading at the moment largely for pleasure? 3) What is the next book (work or pleasure) you hope to read? Here's what they had to say:



Dan McAdams

Professor, Education and Social Policy

- 1) *THE HAPPINESS HYPOTHESIS*, by Jonathan Haidt (University of Virginia).

It provides a wonderful review of recent research in social and personality psychology on happiness and meaning in life.

2) My book club is doing *THE ILIAD* right now (Fagles trans.). Recently, I finished the novel, *CLOUD ATLAS*, by David Mitchell.

3) Maybe not next, but real soon I want to read Zadie Smith's *ON BEAUTY*.



L. Catherine Brinson

Jerome B. Cohen Professor, Mechanical Engineering, Materials Science and Engineering

- 1) Rheological Measurements of the Thermoviscoelastic Response of Ultrathin Polymer Films, P. A. O'Connell and G. B.

McKenna, 18 MARCH 2005 VOL 307 SCIENCE.

2) *Harry Potter und der Halbblutprinz* (the most recent one, in German.)

3) For work, probably *Mechanics and Durability of Solids* by Olivier Coussy, Franz-Josef Ulm. I'm also proofing the draft of my own book, co-authored with my father, *Polymer Engineering Science and Viscoelasticity*, H. F. Brinson and L.C. Brinson.



Rebecca Gilman

Assistant Professor Radio/Television/Film Department

- 1) I suppose plays constitute my scholarly/professional reading. I just finished

rereading Clifford Odets' *Awake and Sing!*, which is enjoying a revival at Lincoln Center in honor of the hundredth anniversary of Odets' birth. I love good agitprop.

2) *The End of Faith* by Sam Harris, which is a very clear-eyed examination of the dangers of religion.

3) Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*. I visited Fairhope, Alabama this past spring, which is a utopian community founded on George's single-tax principle. I look forward to learning more about it.



Reginald Gibbons

Professor of English and Classics, Director of the Center for the Writing Arts

- 1) Several different works on poetry.

2) For a long time I've been

reading, taking it slowly, Victor Klemperer's extraordinary diaries of the Nazi years in Germany (a very large three-volume work.) I know that many people would not call this work something to be "read for pleasure," but to me it is a very deep pleasure to read such astute and moving witness of history, day-to-day human existence, suffering and survival.

3) Novels by Orhan Pamuk--I'm looking forward to reading all the available ones in English, over the next year.

STUART DYBEK, NORTHWESTERN'S FIRST DISTINGUISHED WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE

Stuart Dybek is author of three works of fiction: *I Sailed with Magellan*, *The Coast of Chicago*, and *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods*, and two collections of poems. He has received many honors for his work, including a PEN/Bernard Malamud Prize, a Whiting Writer's Award, several O. Henry Prizes and a Pushcart Prize. Dybek will teach in Northwestern's nationally renowned undergraduate English Major in Writing.

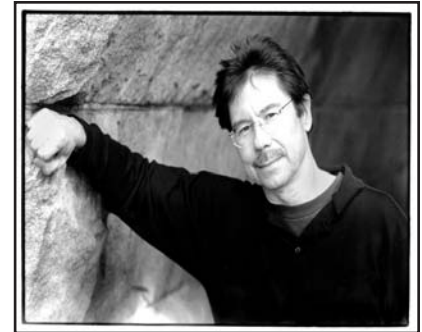


photo credit: Jon Randolph

STUART DYBEK

AN INTERVIEW WITH STUART DYBEK

You are NU's first Distinguished Writer in Residence. What kind of courses and workshops do you plan on teaching?

I actually taught at NU as a guest writer for the Center for Writing Arts some years ago and one of the courses I taught then is indicative of the kinds of classes I hope to have a chance to teach now that I am back at NU. I taught a class in creating images in written work, whether it be poetry or prose. The ideal course for me is a class that asks people to look at the craft of writing from some essential, I hope new perspective, one that engages the imagination as well as the critical mind. That's what I wanted that class in imagery to do. There's another kind of intelligence that an art like writing taps into, an intelligence other than the kind we can measure on SAT's and GRE's. Its only measure is in the written object, and the classes I'd hope to teach would ideally be an

invitation to that other kind of thinking.

What do you enjoy most about teaching?

I think of "teaching" writing as something very much akin to classes in the fine arts. Writing is active--doing--in the way that dance and acting and playing an instrument are doing. Writing is making something in the way that painting or photography are about making. I like working on the object. There's a kind of triangle there, between student, teacher, and object, that never fails to interest me. One can't really teach making and doing in large lecture classes. A one-to-one relationship is built into the enterprise of teaching creative writing.

Do you have any advice for students who are aspiring writers on how to pursue their dreams? Is there a credo you live by? Are there pitfalls they can avoid?

There are so many ways I might answer this question--read voraciously, keep a notebook, send letters, not emails, to friends.

One learns to write by writing, one learns to rewrite by rewriting.... The list could go on. If I limit myself to one sentence, I'd say: become alert to the craft of the art form you are working in--no matter what art that is--as that craft will in turn make you more alert to life. Is there a credo I live by? -- yes, I read its mantra in a James Farrell novel long ago. A character asks, "What makes good writing?" the answer given is "Life on the page." That's what I try for.

Who are some of the literary icons you admired growing up as you discovered your passion for writing? As you've become a more seasoned and acclaimed writer, who are your mentors now?

There's an obvious and yet mysterious connection between reading and learning to write. Does what a writer learns from reading other writing happen through imitation or some kind of osmosis? Probably both. There have been so many writers and books that have been important to me over the years it would be

Cont. on page 6

**DYBEK
INTERVIEW
CON'T**

hard to list them all and it always seems unfair or misleading to single out a few. Maybe a point worth making is that an influence on, say, writing a story isn't always another story. Poetry has been a strong influence on my fiction and to some lesser degree the reverse is true as well. And non-verbal arts like music and painting have been powerful influences on my writing. Among a few of

the writers that I have read and continue to reread over many years are Isaac Babel, Eugenio Montale, Italo Calvino, James Joyce, Eudora Welty, Ernest Hemingway--that entire American Twenties generation of poets and fiction writers, actually. In the last several years especially I have become increasingly interested in drama, and love seeing plays. I hope it has helped the dialogue I have been writing. The wonder of theater is one of the perks of living in the Chicago area, and cer-

tainly for a student attending NU. *Any new projects you're working on that you can share with us?*

I'm close--at least on some days it feels so--to having a new book of poems finished. I'm working on an interrelated collection of stories and prose pieces that don't quite meet the definition of stories. I'm hoping the shape of the whole is more like a crystal than like a yardstick.

Master's Tea Gives Students a Taste of Pastries, Literature and Arthur Golden

by Sarah Tompkins '09

Arthur Golden is not Japanese. He is not a geisha. He is not a woman. On May 15, the best-selling author of *Memoirs of a Geisha* explained his choice of first-person narrative with about 30 undergraduates at The Center for Writing Arts' first Master's Tea.

"A Master's Tea is a way for prominent guests to meet informally with students after the normal school day," said David Abrahamson, former Director of the Center for the Writing Arts. "It's a well known format at many East Coast universities, and, though I confess that the name sounds a little pretentious, we wanted to see if the idea could be transplanted to Midwestern soil."

Students were treated to bite-sized, colorful pastries as they discussed Golden's past as a journalist, the challenges of the novel and the transformations of the story into a movie. In the living room of the John



Arthur Golden chatting with students at inaugural Master's Tea event hosted by the Center for the Writing Arts.

Evans Alumni Center, students asked questions as faculty fellows from the residential colleges listened in the back.

Dagny Salas, a Medill freshman, said people benefited from the opportunity to bring up any topic in a casual atmosphere. "He's [Golden] sitting across the room," Salas said. "You can see him and feel what he is talking about. It was very intimate."

"The starting point for our thinking about this [tea] involved the Center's on-going effort to involve our Writers in Residence in the life of the university," said Abrahamson. Golden taught a course to 15 students during Spring Quarter. "Writers in Residence are here for a whole 10-

week quarter teaching a writing course, but we are always looking for ways for them to interact with students beyond the classroom," Abrahamson said.

Assistant Director of the Center for the Writing Arts, Stacy Oliver, said the CWA plans to build on the first Master's Tea. With Writers in Residence teaching during each quarter of the year, she said tea is a great way for students to meet notable guests of the university. "Tea is both formal and informal," Oliver said. "It has this old-world salon sort of feel to it. There isn't the barrier of a podium."

The discussion was friendlier than a classroom atmosphere. "The tea and pastries were delish," Golden said.

STUDENT VOICES: I Learned About Writing From That!

This column is dedicated to hearing firsthand from students their experiences of what's making them better writers: the agony or ecstasy of that one reporting or writing assignment that made the light-bulb go off over their head to say, "Ah, I learned how to write because of that!" Maybe it was a random experience, a freelance job, or a moment in their journey as a student. We'll find out here!

Our contributor for this issue is Rachel Aherin. Rachel is a junior majoring in Journalism in Medill.

It all started with a simple email, an answer to a request I never thought would come. I sat down one October evening, my inbox flooded with the usual messages. As I casually replied and deleted my way to an empty inbox, I read it. This standout email was from Dan Stoppelman, the trumpet player of Big D and the Kids Table, a seven piece Massachusetts ska-punk band I had been following for years. After reading it, I jumped up and down, screaming excitedly to anyone who would listen that I had gotten it. I had gotten the chance to interview the band when they toured through Chicago that November.

A sophomore at Northwestern University, I'd asked to interview the band for a class project. Though my experiences as a journalist started at my local and high school newspapers, this was the first assignment I was truly excited about. I'd climbed from behind my stacks of *Rolling Stone* and *SPIN* magazines

and come to Northwestern with the ambition of eventually being a music journalist. I knew this was my chance to prove I had what it took.

My assignment was to profile a person who had followed his dreams no matter the cost. The band was my first thought. I knew from their albums that even though Big D and the Kids Table had been around for a decade, they hadn't been signed to any big labels. Despite considerable crowds at their shows, they weren't making enough money for most of the members to have permanent roofs over their heads back in Boston. And after logging countless hours on the road, they were still left to play smaller stages in big cities and large festivals.

The night of the show came quickly upon me. I was fully prepped with my preliminary questions, extra pens and my digital recorder. After a slight ordeal with public transportation, I arrived at the Vic Theater in Chicago to pick up my press passes and meet the band. Dan met me outside before shyly leading me to the back of the theater, where I met bassist Steve Foote. We talked extensively about Big D's two hit albums, plans for upcoming recordings, and his three years of sleeping on the couches of any friends who would take him in. My interview with Steve was fantastic, but it wasn't all I had come for. I wanted to talk to the front-runner of the band, lead vocalist Dave McWane.

I was taken to a small dressing room deeper inside the Vic theatre. The room wasn't really a dressing room so much as a storage area for the venue, housing a stained loveseat that practically ate anyone who dared to sit on it, a mini-fridge, and a folding chair. It smelled of stale cigarettes and vomit, surely a scent permanently burned into the tiny room. It was here that I finally met



Rachel Aherin

Dave McWane. Dave was drinking cheap bottled beer followed by a highly caffeinated energy drink, and he spoke passionately about the band, his homelessness, their fans' generosity, and the meaning of being an artist.

Though that night is over and the story has long since been graded, I still look upon that interview as my beginning, the proof that I have what it takes to be the writer I want to be. I took a chance and won an interview that showed me hard work and a lot of passion will bring big success, even if it arrives in small packages. All of this thanks to one simple email.

Writing 303
Winter Quarter 2007

“ THE ART OF NONFICTION”
with Writer-in Residence
Winter Quarter 2007
ALEX KOTLOWITZ
Mondays
2:00-5:00 pm

*This course is open by application
only to undergraduates*

Course application:

This course will--through both reading and writing--explore the art of what is often called literary journalism, narrative nonfiction, or what John McPhee calls "the literature of fact." The best of nonfiction narrative wields a fierce power, poking and prodding our preconceptions of the world, pushing us to look at our-

selves and others through a different prism. What makes for a compelling story? (What tools might we borrow from fiction?) Why employ the use of narrative? How does it help form our view of people and events? We'll explore the craft of reporting and research which borrows from a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, history and sociology--and work with rigor and discipline on the art of good writing. We'll read nonfiction narratives--both book and magazine articles--on a host of subjects, ranging from war and poverty to the environment and sports. We'll work in this class as a professional writer might, from draft to draft. There will be regular writing assignments, and students will be asked to craft a longer narrative on a subject of interest to them. The course will be run as a seminar, so there will be an emphasis on critical class discussion.

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS:
MONDAY, October 16th
by 5PM

Pick-up and return completed application, writing sample and essay to:
Center for the Writing Arts
Kresge 4-315, Evanston Campus
OR
Email: words@northwestern.edu
You can also find the application online at:
www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/



WRITING MATTERS
NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTER
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