

WRITING MATTERS

VOL.6 NO.3

Celebrating writing in all its forms at Northwestern University.

SPRING 2006

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Tell Me a Story

By David Abrahamson
 Director, NU Center for the Writing Arts,
 Charles Deering McCormick Professor of
 Teaching Excellence, Medill School
 of Journalism



Now that we've all returned, renewed and refreshed, from a much-needed Spring break, welcome back from the Northwestern University Center for the Writing Arts. And take heart; despite the occasional April chill, summer is just around the corner.

Perhaps it was the first suggestion of Spring, with all the different shapes and sizes of buds beginning to emerge on the trees that prompted the conversation, but I was speaking with a colleague recently about all the forms which writing takes: fiction, nonfiction, poetry, dramatic writing, lyrics, and so on. With all the current emphasis on media convergence, what came to mind, in contrast, was the concept of divergence -- the historical process in the evolution by which the different forms of writing differentiated themselves from each other.

Scholars of such matters speak of "phase changes," a term that correctly suggests a major transformation in the affairs of humankind. One such phase change was what experts call

the orality-scribal boundary -- the time in the cultural evolution of the human species when the spoken word made way for writing. Speech had been around for a long time; it may have first appeared as early as 100,000 B.C. But then, roughly 5000 years ago, the Sumerians of ancient Mesopotamia invented writing. The early efforts were limited to pictograms and wedge-shaped cuneiform impressions pressed into clay tablets, and more than a millennium would have to pass before an alphabet was devised. And that would mark an important turning point in the story of humankind, the end of pre-history and the beginning of history. "The achievement of the written word," the philosopher Loren Eiseley once wrote in his customarily evocative prose, "was the invention of a way to pass knowledge through the doorway of the tomb."

From the moment writing was invented, a new world was created. One way to think about this is to consider writing not as the result of an artistic process but rather as an assemblage of bits of information. In his book *The New Renaissance*, Douglas Robertson writes that human language contains roughly a billion bits of information. With the invention of writing, the total sum of information was multiplied a hundred-fold; there were, he estimates, 100 billion bits of information in the Alexandrian Library. And then in the mid-15th Century we experienced another phase change when the invention of the printing press took us through the scribal-print boundary. Soon the sum of available information would expand a million times, to a total of 100 quadrillion bits.

In considering this process of expansion, one is led to wonder about emergence of the different forms. It is

probably best to characterize the very first writing as nonfiction. Experts tell us that the clay tablets from Tell Asmar in Iraq are records of commercial transactions. But with the invention of the alphabet, first by the proto-Phoenicians and then later with refinements by the Greeks, it is interesting to note how rapidly divergence occurred, how quickly so many forms of writing which were not nonfiction emerged: narrative poetry; dramatic writing for the stage, both comedy and tragedy; and lyrical writing. What appears to be the unifying aspect of all of these is the use of writing to, quite simply, tell a story. In a sense, one can argue that writing's unique gift is not just to convey information -- though with all those bits it contains it certainly does that. Rather, it has the power, across time and space and through Eiseley's "doorway," to convey experience. And I suspect that that ability, to tell a story, is what makes it so very special.

As always, if there is any way that the Center for the Writing Arts can support you in your efforts to advance the commitment to -- indeed, celebration of -- writing in all its forms here at Northwestern, please don't hesitate to let us know.

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IN BRIEF: NORTHWESTERN WRITING NEWS

April 24, 2006

ORHAN PAMUK

"A Reading of His Recent Work"

Orhan Pamuk is the the author of *My Name is Red*, *Snow* and *Istanbul: Memories and the City* and winner of *Prix du Meilleur Livre Etranger*, the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade and the *Prix Medicis Etranger*.

6:00 p.m.
McCormick Tribune Forum

This is sponsored by The Northwestern Center for International and Comparative Studies and The Central and Southeast European Studies Consortium . The event is free and open to the public.

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

WRITING MATTERS

Editor: Stacy L. Oliver
Contributing Writers and Editors:
Landon Jones, Fern H. Patinkin,

PLANNING WRITING EVENTS THIS QUARTER? LET US KNOW!

Just a reminder that the Center's biweekly 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! ♦

STUDENT WRITING GROUP HAS A NEW WEBSITE

"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 of the workshops is contingent upon the regular attendance and input of every member. Through meeting twice a month it is possible for every member to be critiqued at least once per quarter. You can get more details at their new website: <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



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WHAT ARE YOU READING?

We asked the following writers, scholars, and lovers of literature 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!



Landon Y. Jones

Fall 2006
Writer in Residence

1) I actually do not make a distinction between books I read for professional reasons and those I read for pleasure. I just like interesting writing wherever I can find it.

2) *The Assassins Gate* by George Packer, a very well written, balanced, close-up

account of the early days of the Iraq occupation.

3) I have several books in a pile on my bedside table contending to be the next one that will grab me. They are: *Edmund Wilson: A Life in Literature*, by Lewis H. Dabney; *They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967* by David Maraniss; *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, by Charles C. Mann; and *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays* by David Foster Wallace.



Susan A. Manning

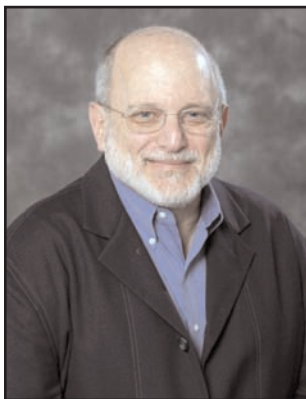
Professor of Dance,
Performance, and Theatre
Professor of English

1) *Kaiso! Writings By and About Katherine Dunham*, ed. VéVé Clark and Sara O. Johnson. Katherine Dunham was a dancer, choreographer, ethnographer, and social activist from the 1930s on. (She's still alive at age 97.)

Especially fascinating are her unpublished memoirs of her years from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s.

2) I'm reading *Kaiso!* at night, which means that it's for pleasure (as well as work).

3) Anthea Kraut's *Choreographing the Folk: The Dance Stagings of Zora Neale Hurston*, a manuscript under contract with the University of Minnesota Press. This study recovers her dance career and inquires into the complex reasons why we have not paid attention to this dimension of her work before now.



John Lavine

Dean of the Medill School
of Journalism.
Professor and Founder,
Media Management Center.

1) I just finished reading *Inventing Medill* by Alice Snyder and *IMC--The Next Generation* by Don and Heidi Schultz.

2) For pleasure, I am reading J.K. Rowling's latest *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* because I am about to see my grandchildren and I always enjoy reading a well told story.

3) Next, I will read Ken Bain's *What the Best College Teachers Do*. My list is enjoyable, but also predictable for a new dean.



Janine W. Spencer

Assistant Chair /French
Department of French &
Italian and Director,
Multimedia Learning Center
Weinberg College of Arts and
Sciences

1) Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, edition Quarto published by Gallimard in 1997;

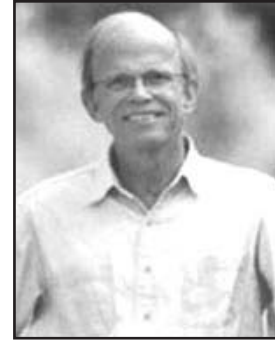
A first translation into English published under the title of *Realms of Memory*; a second translation by Mary Trouille under the title *Rethinking France*. I am reading the Gallimard edition, and comparing the two translations.

2) Alex Kershaw's *The Longest Winter* about the Battle of the Bulge. I was born in Belgium just at about the time when the battle took place. When I was a child, my parents would take an occasional Sunday drive to Bastogne, where there is an impressive memorial to the hundreds of American soldiers who died there.

3) *Consuelo and Alva Vanderbilt*, by Amanda Mackenzie Stuart.

NU'S CENTER FOR THE WRITING ARTS INTRODUCES 2006 FALL QUARTER WRITER IN RESIDENCE, LANDON Y. JONES

Landon Y. Jones, is the author of *William Clark and the Shaping of the West* and *Great Expectations*, former Time-Life editorial executive and chief editor of *People* and *Money* magazines.



LANDON Y. JONES

AN INTERVIEW WITH LANDON

What are the new projects you're working on right now?

I'm trying figure out what I'd like to work on next. You feel a little vulnerable, like a crab between moltings, but you have to keep sifting and sorting ideas. I keep a lot of folders, organized by subject. I throw ideas into them and try to watch to see which one will start to give off heat. In the meantime, I keep busy doing reviews and magazine articles to keep the machinery from getting rusty.

What sparked your passion for Lewis and Clark? When did you know you had write your book?

I grew up in St. Louis, where the story of Lewis and Clark was part of the background noise of my childhood. After I retired from *People* magazine, I got involved in the planning for the Lewis and Clark bicentennial. I discovered then, to my amazement, that there was no biography of William Clark. At first I felt unsure that I could write history. But a couple of more experienced writers – Scott

Berg and Robert Fagles – urged me to go for it. Their encouragement was all I needed to hear.

When you study a specific subject for so long do you feel it's hard to keep it fresh in your writing and at speaking engagements? How do you keep discovering the "new" in an old subject?

If the subject is a rich one, you keep peeling back and finding new levels of interest under the old ones. Then at some point you start to meet yourself coming back the other way; you know what someone is going to say even before you've finished asking your question. That's when it's time to start writing. But even after my Clark book was published, lecture audiences would ask good questions that forced me to further refine my ideas. I kept wanting to rewrite, even though the book was in my hands. And current events have a way of instilling "newness" into history. For instance, there are a lot of unsettling analogies between American expansionism into Indian country in the 1800s and the present war in Iraq.

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

Writing does not have a predictable

apprentice path, like becoming a lawyer or doctor. Every writer has his or her unique voice. So everyone has to find their own way. My general feeling is that young writers need to get their words into print, as often as they can and wherever they can. It doesn't need to be the *New Yorker*. It can be a shopping-center handout, or a blog. You simply need a comfortable place to find a voice that liberates you – where you can make words into sentences, and sentences into paragraphs, in full public view.

Who are some of the literary icons you admired growing up as you discovered your passion for writing? Who are some of the people you admire now?

I have always admired writers who use a vigorous vernacular, ranging from Mark Twain to George Orwell and E.B. White. I have been reading David Foster Wallace recently and enjoy his writing, which looks almost effortless but is in fact very difficult to do. John McPhee has greatly influenced me, as he has so many other writers. He first reports his subject exhaustively, then organizes with incredible care, and finally writes with detail, artistry, and wit. He asks a lot of his readers, but they are always rewarded because he has done the work.

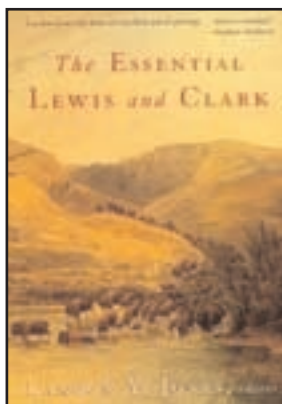
Any final comments you'd like to add about

Con't on page 5

**JONES
INTERVIEW
CON'T**

a topic I might have missed and you want our readers to know about?

I think the easiest thing for a young writer to neglect is organization and structure. I have always found that I cannot begin a piece of writing until I know what the last sentence is going to be. At least I know where I am going. I was watching the sport of curling at the Winter Olympics and thought that it feels a little like writing without an outline. You have an idea – you hope a good idea – and then you sort of push it ahead and hope for the best. It slides ponderously down the ice, and you are always scurrying around with a broom, trying to clear out obstacles and smooth the way for it. Sometimes it stops right where you want it to. Sometimes you wish for a bigger broom. ♦



**Writing 303
Fall Quarter 2006**

“ THE ART OF NONFICTION”
with Writer-in Residence
Fall Quarter 2006
LANDON Y. JONES
Mondays and Wednesdays
2:00-3:20 pm

*This course is open by application
only to undergraduates*

Course application:

This seminar teaches the advanced techniques of nonfiction writing. That is a craft. But the course is also about liberating your unique voice as a writer. Our goal will be to free you from awkward writing habits that too often constrict your natural voice. By the end of the term you should have developed the confidence to express yourself clearly and forcefully in a variety of genres on topics both within and outside the confines of your personal experience.

The course is writing-intensive. You will be assigned two pieces of 750-1000 words, as well as a final capstone piece of 1,500-2,000 words. In addition, there will be several short writing exercises of a page or two apiece. Your writing will be discussed in individual sessions with the professor every other week for a total of five conferences during the term.

The assigned reading will include exemplary examples of non-fiction writing by authors such as George Orwell, E.B. White, John McPhee, Joyce Carol Oates, Gretel Erhlich, Joan Didion, Richard Wright, David Foster Wallace, Richard Rodriguez, and Maxine Hong Kingston.

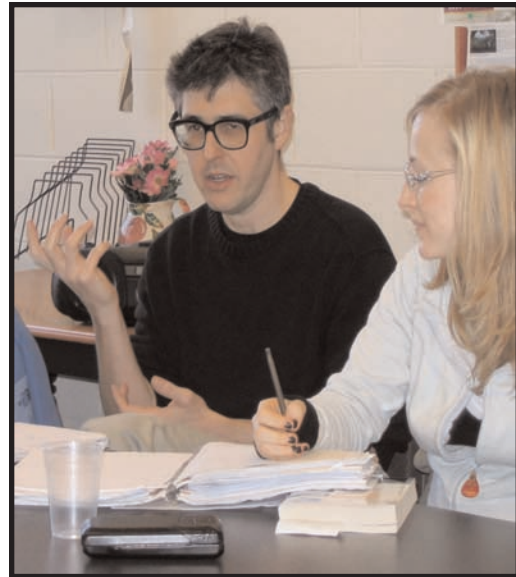
**APPLICATION DEADLINE IS
MONDAY, APRIL 10th by 5PM**

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/





Professor Martin Redish, reads from his new book *The Logic of Persecution: Free Speech and the McCarthy Era* at one of the Center's "Writers and Their Writing" events.



Ira Glass, host of NPR's "This American Life", was the special guest during Alex Kotlowitz's Writing 301 class.

Connecting to Northwestern

By Nicole Price Fasig

I was enjoying lunch at Norris with my good friend Kate Ward when I threw out a casual idea. "Why don't you start your own magazine?" I said. She had recently found herself short on writing gigs and, like any good Medill student, was eager to get back to work. Kate was frustrated though, because she had nowhere to turn. All the magazines we knew of at the time were incredibly niche-focused. Though they were all quality publications, neither Kate nor I fit into any of their constituencies.

"I will if you'll help me," she responded.

I had my hesitations. At that moment, the first thought that flashed through my head was the imminent demise of our idea. It seemed like all the odds were against our success. I assumed that there must have been a reason that no campus-wide magazine existed; the barriers were likely too difficult to overcome.

Despite our hesitations, Kate and I threw ourselves headfirst into the project. We met nearly every night and slowly began to piece our concept together. We drew ideas from all our favorite magazines and pondered aspects of student life we felt were overlooked by the mainstream campus media.

Our ultimate goal for the magazine evolved out of this ongoing discussion. The magazine's mission statement reads, "Nexus' objective is to truly be the Northwestern connection; students serving students in the interest of the greater community."

Now we just had to find the students. Kate and I visited Medill classes and placed announcements on the listserv. The response we received was overwhelming. Within a week and half, we had

assembled a staff of more than 40 and about a quarter of the volunteers were from outside Medill.

There were the inevitable pitfalls during the production of our first issue, but the staff worked hard and pulled it together by the end of the school year. The magazine came out in the fall of 2005 thanks to generous support from Medill, the provost's office and the office of student affairs.

Fittingly, our first feature highlighted "10 Students to Watch in the Upcoming School Year." The cover alone spoke to the confidence other students had in our publication and the amazing diversity we were hoping to chronicle on campus. Eight of our top 10 students showed up to the photo shoot, representing every segment of the student body we could find. The cover shot features an accomplished student filmmaker, an internationally acclaimed rock musician, a budding actress, a professional athlete, the student government president, a nationally recognized varsity athlete, a passionate music teacher and a world-traveling social entrepreneur. An award-winning scientist and an altruistic philanthropist rounded out the group within the magazine.

Nexus has nearly reached its first birthday and the magazine is still going strong. A poll in the second issue received more than 500 votes from dedicated readers and our third issue tackled important social issues on campus. As Kate and I prepare to hand the reins over to an eager new batch of editors, I find myself somewhat nostalgic already. The energy of a new project, along with the support of a passionate staff, has buoyed us the last year through frustrations and barriers, to reach ultimate success. ♦



Katrina vanden Heuvel, Editor-in-Chief of *The Nation*, during our "Conversation With" event.



Visiting assistant professor and poet, **Robyn Schiff** (far right) receives gifts and shares giggles with her students after the reading of *Worth*, her most current book of poetry during a "Writers and Their Writing" event.

New Lecture Series for Center Starts This Spring called:

“SO YOU WANT TO WRITE...”

The Center for the Writing Arts is proud to add another program to its repertoire of events held each year to showcase writing in all it's form across the campus.

The addition to the line-up is an event to be held once a quarter called, “So You Want to Write...” Each quarter an expert of a particular genre of writing will share their insights on how to write in that specific area. The first one is “So You Want To Write... Young Adult Literature.” Professor Barbara-Ann Gamboa Lewis will be the speaker, she is the author of *Pocket Stones*. Barbara-Ann will lead the audience through her process of how to make your idea for a young adult novel into a reality.

It's a real feat to write complicated



Professor Barbara-Ann Gamboa Lewis

subject matter in a simplified yet expressive way. Barbara-Ann Gamboa Lewis will share her insights and creative journey about writing and publishing *Pocket Stones*. You won't want to miss this event if you've ever thought of trying your hand at young adult literature.

This is a true story of childhood in the Philippines during World War II, told by a child of an interracial marriage. Despite family responsibilities “Pooh” has freedom to roam, with adventures both humorous and serious, as she struggles with right and wrong, joy and sadness, obedience and rebellion.

Barbara-Ann Gamboa Lewis was born in Manila, Philippines. World War II interrupted her formal schooling when the Philippines was captured and occupied by the Japanese Army. Ultimately, she earned her B.S. degree in Chemistry, and her Ph.D. in Soil Science, and is now on the faculty at Northwestern University's McCormick School of Engineering. She has three grown children and six grandchildren. She believes that children everywhere will identify with some of the experiences of the biracial child in this story, and thus relate better to children from different cultural backgrounds.

So please join us at the inaugural event of “So You Want to Write...” We're hoping to have future programs that showcase such writing subjects as: playwriting, translation, song lyrics, memoirs, and poetry just to name a few topics. Of course, we're always looking for suggestions, so feel free to contact us with your ideas.

WEDNESDAY,

MAY 24, 2006

“So You Want to Write... Young Adult Literature?”

with

Barbara-Ann Lewis



4:00 p.m.

**Mary and Leigh Block
Museum of Art
Pick-Laudati Auditorium**

This program is part of a campus-wide inter-disciplinary celebration of writing in all it's various forms, open to the public, sponsored by the Center for the Writing Arts.

**CWA 2006
SPRING QUARTER
CALENDAR**

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/

Monday, April 10, 2006
12 noon
201 University Hall, Hagstrum Room

Doris Garraway reads from "The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean." Garraway is a NU Faculty member and organizer of the October 2004 NU symposium: "The Haitian Revolution: History, Memory, Representation."

Monday, April 17, 2006
5:30 p.m.
Harris Hall, Room 108

Arthur Golden, spring quarter writer in residence, reads from his recent fiction.

Monday, May 10, 2006
4:00 p.m.
Harris Hall, Room 108

Arthur Golden, spring quarter writer in residence, will give a lecture entitled "Memoirs of a Geisha: The Making of a Novel."

Monday, May 11, 2006
4:00 p.m.
McCormick Tribune Forum

David Remnick, Editor-in-Chief of *The New Yorker* is the Medill School of Journalism Crain Series Lecture guest.

Monday, May 15, 2006
12 noon
University Hall 201, Hagstrum Room

Christine Froula, NU faculty member; Guggenheim and NU President's Fellow will give a reading from her current book "Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Avant-Garde: War, Civilization, Modernity."

Wednesday, May 24, 2006
4:00 p.m.
Mary and Leigh Block
Museum of Art
Pick-Laudati Auditorium

Barbara-Ann Gamboa Lewis, will give a special lecture on how to write young adult literature. She is the author of "Pocket Stones" as well as being a professor of environmental engineering at Northwestern.

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FOR THE WRITING ARTS
Stacy L. Oliver, Editor
Northwestern University
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Evanston, IL 60208-2215

