

WRITING MATTERS

VOL. 7 NO. 3

Celebrating writing in all its forms at Northwestern University

Spring 2007

CWA 2007 SPRING QUARTER CALENDAR

SAVE THESE DATES

NU FACULTY EVENTS



INNA NARODITSKAYA
Musicologist, School of Music

Monday,
April 16, 2007

A Reading from
Music of the Sirens

12:30-1:30 p.m.
University Hall,
Hagstrum Room 201



CRAIG LAMAY
Author, former editor
and reporter, Medill
School of Journalism

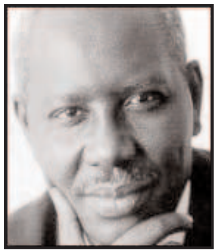
Wednesday,
May 16, 2007

A Reading from
*Exporting Press
Freedom*

12:30-1:30 p.m.
University Hall,
Hagstrum Room 201

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SPECIAL GUESTS COMING TO CAMPUS



BOUBACAR BORIS DIOP

Monday,
April 9, 2007

A Conversation with
Senegalese Author and Activist
About the Politics of Writing

12:30-2:00 p.m.
Kresge, Room 2-245



JULIEANNE EHRE
Artistic Director, Greasy Joan & Co.

Wednesday,
April 25, 2007

"A Conversation about
Contemporary Adaptations and
Productions of Classic Plays"

12:30 p.m.-1:30 p.m.
Commons Room, 2nd floor
Theatre & Interpretation Center
1949 Campus Drive

So You Want to Write... A Song

Thursday, May 10 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Lutkin Hall

700 University Place



Alice Peacock



Krista Detor



Dylan Rice

Do you have an idea for a song but just don't know how to make it come alive? Have you always wondered how people "make it" in the music business?

Join these talented singer/songwriters, who are making their musical mark nationally and internationally, as they share their journey and process for writing songs, getting them published and, most important, getting them heard. There will be Q & A, plus performances by each artist.

Please join NU's Center for the Writing Arts as we celebrate writing in all its forms by presenting a variety of distinguished writers from both on and off campus. For complete calendar and recent additions visit:

www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/

**NU CENTER FOR THE
WRITING ARTS
ADVISORY BOARD
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**New NorthbyNorthwestern Online Magazine
Winning Acclaim**

North by Northwestern is NU's focus is campus life, culture and entertainment. We report the truth, tell stories and have fun. The website recently won seven regional Mark of Excellence awards from the Society of Professional Journalists, including 1st place for Best All-Around Independent Online Student Publication and 1st, 2nd and 3rd place for Online Opinion & Commentary.

The idea of NorthbyNorthwestern came alive the summer of 2006 because some students wanted to do online journalism and there was no place for it at Northwestern. As their site states, "This is a site where we can talk about what's actually on our minds, share our passions and have a conversation with our readers."

There is an open forum section for poetry and fiction. A welcome space for people not only to have their work posted, but receive comments as well. To learn more about this student run outlet for creativity go to:

<http://www.northbynorthwestern.com/>

**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 or call us at 847-467-4099.

WRITING MATTERS

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Editor: STACY L. OLIVER

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

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

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

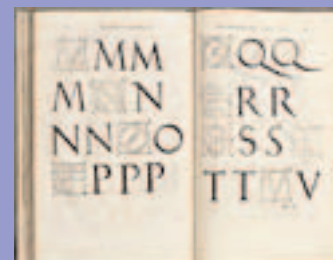
The CWA Visiting Writer in Residence in fall 2007 will be Ed Roberson. Roberson is one of the most eminent of African American poets. He moved to Chicago three years ago after retiring from Rutgers, where, while creating a unique and remarkable body of work, he served as an administrator for many years. In 2004-05 he gave a poetry reading at Northwestern with poet Cecil Giscombe, sponsored by the English Department. This year during winter quarter he taught a graduate poetry writing workshop for the MA in Creative Writing in the School of Continuing Studies. Roberson is the author of seven volumes of poetry, including *Voices Cast Out to Talk Us In* (which won the Iowa Poetry Prize); *Just In: Word of Navigational Change: New and Selected Work*; *Atmospheric Conditions* (winner of a National Poetry Series award); and last year, *City Eclogue*. He has received a Lila Wallace - Reader's Digest Writer's Award. Roberson will teach two undergraduate courses--a CWA workshop in poetry writing and a course in African American poetry of the 1960s for the

English and African American Studies departments.

The CWA Visiting Writer in Residence in spring 2008 will be Mary Anne Mohanraj. A Sri-Lankan-American fiction writer, Mohanraj is the author of three collections of short stories--*Torn Shapes of Desire*; *Silence and the Word*; and most recently, *Bodies in Motion*, which was named a USA Today Notable Book and has been published in translation in German, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian and Serbian. She will teach two undergraduate courses--a CWA workshop in fiction writing and a course in Asian American literature for the English Department.

I am especially glad that CWA can make these two writers accessible to more undergraduates through the courses they will teach for African American Studies and English. The perspectives of writers on literature are valuable to all students for the insight that writers may bring to the formal practices and choices implicit in a work of literature, the situation of the artist in history, and the competing moral, aesthetic and social values of a literary culture. In general, providing more student access to the CWA Visiting Writers is one goal among several that I

have set for the next two years. These include making CWA a site of faculty discussion that will help create more opportunities for undergraduates to take writing courses outside their own schools, and for graduate students to do likewise and to form active communities of interest among themselves. Also, I hope that CWA can facilitate an ongoing faculty planning process for enhancing student opportunities to study writing at Northwestern and creating interdisciplinary course offerings in writing. I hope to make CWA's programming somewhat more international, too. I welcome suggestions and interest from faculty and students across the university.



WHAT ARE YOU READING?

Before we knew that Tad Brennan would be leaving Northwestern this quarter we asked him 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? 4) What do wish all your students would read? 5) Has any book you've recently read changed your thinking about your own work? and how? All those who know Tad will greatly miss his presence at Northwestern, and wish him well in his new academic home.



Theodore Brennan

Associate Professor

WCAS, Department of Philosophy

1) The last few days I have been re-reading *Die Stoische Modallogik*, by my old friend Susanne Bobzien. It is an excellent and meticulous reconstruction of the ancient Greek Stoics' theories of propositional logic, tense-logic, and modal-logic (the logic of necessity and possibility). After I read it the first time, I spent several years lobbying my colleagues at Yale to hire Susanne, and I'm glad to say that they eventually took my

advice--she is now a member of the faculty there. (It probably helped that her second book was in English!) It's a difficult book on a very technical topic, so I need to re-read it whenever I teach it in a seminar, as I am now doing with my grad students.

2) I just finished reading *Harding's Luck*, by E. Nesbit. This is an out-of-print, unjustly neglected sequel to Nesbit's better-known book *The House of Arden*. Nesbit is the greatest of all children's authors. The entire genre of children's magical fantasy, including Edward Eager, C.S. Lewis and J.K. Rowling, takes its start from her. Yes, Lewis Carroll should get some credit, and I do love him, but he really has very few direct progeny (*Phantom Tollbooth* is about the best case). Nesbit's progeny populate the entire fantasy genre (*Harding's Luck* itself is a direct model for Norton's *Bedknob and Broomstick*). Her *Treasure-Seekers* series also made major contributions to the realistic ensemble comedy of scrapes and escapades, exemplified by Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* series, Enright's *Melendy* series, and Hilary McKay's brilliant *Exiles* trilogy. Twain should get some credit here of course, as well as Rudyard Kipling (*Stalky & Co.*), but Nesbit was the giant. It baffles me that no one has reprinted *Harding's Luck*--I had to get it by interlibrary loan!

3) The new *London Review of Books* has a review by my friend Myles Burnyeat of two recent books on the ancient Pythagoreans. His review reminded me that I want to set aside some time to give a proper read to Walter Burkert's classic 1962 study of Pythagoreanism, translated into English as *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*.

4) I am having a delightful time teaching a freshman seminar about the Fifth Century Enlightenment. We are reading a sampling of the best things ever written--some Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Herodotus, Thucydides, Aristophanes, and so on. The students are enjoying it, and much of it they find immediately accessible. But I do wish they knew their Homer better! I had assumed that most of them would have read one or both of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in high school. The next time I teach the course, I will make sure to assign those two texts at the beginning.

5) Re-reading Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* is a revelation to me. I last read it decades ago as a freshman at Reed College, and found it tedious and irksome. I was simply too young and immature at the time to appreciate it (but the freshmen here at Northwestern are taking to it immediately--it's just a better quality of student). Now I am astounded at its richness, and I see that I must study it seriously, and incorporate it into my thinking about ancient philosophy. It needs to go into the active rotation of books that I read and re-read every few years.

ED ROBERSON, Visiting Writer in Residence for Fall Quarter 2007 Teaching the Art of Poetry

Ed Roberson is the author of seven volumes of poetry, including *Voices Cast Out to Talk Us In*, winner of the Iowa Poetry Prize; *Just In: Word of Navigational Change: New and Selected Work*; *Atmosphere Conditions*, a National Poetry Series winner; and his most recent book, *City Eclogue*. His honors include a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writer's Award.

INTERVIEW WITH ED ROBERSON

What sparked your passion for writing, specifically poetry?

Maybe for a lot of young poets the spark is love or some other deep personal emotion. For me it was the wilderness. Not a conceptual Nature, but the inconceivably real and impersonal Wilderness. The jaw-dropping scary one.

Awe. I liked the shut-you-up awe. I still look for a poem that stops the world for an instant. I was on a data collecting expedition, so of course I didn't stay stopped dumbstruck; I had to keep records. My records just happened to turn out to be poems.

As an educator, what do you look forward to sharing with the students about the art of writing?

When I was young, someone annoyed at my quietness snapped at me: "You really enjoy your head, don't you!" Even though I'm still puzzled by people's fear of imagination, my answer is still proudly, "Yes, I enjoy it." I'd like my students to feel this pleasure, this confidence in their mental

pleasure.

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

Most writers usually answer "the advice question" by telling young writers to read a lot, but we forget to tell them not to read just for the information, just for the 3 by 5 index card. Read for the art of the work, for the wholeness the work accomplishes beyond itself.

It's all a pitfall, your poetry is what you crawl up out of the pit with, and even that news is not going to save you from the next one. In other words, don't try to avoid the inevitable. It's OK. You can't know everything.

You were quite the adventurer, literally, from climbing mountains to doing research on fresh water systems in Alaska's Aleutian Islands. How did that affect your writing? How do you remember all the intense feelings you're having in the moment of adventure and conjure them later in your work?

I sort of still feel those things and see them in the present. I think it's the metaphoric mind that keeps your life from disappearing into



ED ROBERSON

not having happened, into oblivion and meaninglessness. I have a poem about getting undressed and the weight of the belt buckle slithering the belt I'd just taken off over the edge of the chair – seeing it out of the corner of my eye and jumping halfway across the room. It was decades ago that I nearly stepped on that adder, but it's still with me. I like the idea that it is with me, part of me in the company of my earlier life. Poems are that kind of company.

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

That one is too difficult to answer because the names and the poems are always changing. Moving to Chicago has really stirred up the pot.

If you can share this with us, what are some new projects you're working on now?

I've just sent out a manuscript of poems that deals with image; images can shift like individual

Cont. on page 6

**ROBERSON
INTERVIEW
CON'T**

birds inside a flocking relation to each other. I also have another manuscript almost ready that deals with illness. I work on more than one thing at a time

Any final comments you'd like to add about a topic I might have missed and you want our readers to know about?

There needs to be a wider appreciative recognition of the many varieties of good poetry being written these days. We sometimes tend to hold up what is different as the example of what not to do. But there is an even more insidious kind of limiting. Black people are always sensitive about the monolithic image society holds

them to. Since all black people fall within this narrow range, there needs to be only one of them in sight to represent them all. Poetry often faces this same reductive reading. There is one good language poet on the shelves, one experimental poet, one black poet, one cracker barrel, etc. One of everything is still only one, and that's all anybody has to read! That's not good for anybody.



**Writing 302
Fall Quarter 2007**

THE ART OF POETRY:
Revision and Experimentation
with Visiting Writer in Residence
ED ROBERSON
Mondays and Wednesdays
2:00-3:20 pm

*This course is open by application
only to undergraduates*

**Applications are due by
April 16th at 5 p.m.**

For an application and more details
go to:
www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/

**STUDENT VOICES:
I Learned About
Writing From That!**

This column is dedicated to hearing firsthand from students about their experiences of what's making them better writers: the decisive effect on them of that one reporting or writing assignment that made the lightbulb go on over their heads so that they could say, "Ah, I learned about writing from that!"

**Our contributor for this issue is
Loka Ashwood, a senior in the
Medill School of Journalism**

When I come to the point that every word I'm putting down on the page is an agonized representation of what I want to convey, I know that I've written something that is honest and important, at least to me.

I believe that's why I fell in love with journalism. Journalism made me realize the potency that each word can carry. The turn of a phrase or the choice of a verb can dramatically change what a sentence conveys and the rhythm it carries. Before I started writing for local papers in high school, I enjoyed wordy essays about the farm, my stuffed animal and why

my brother was mean. My parents always glorified my work, regardless of its quality, and that encouragement combined with the impassioned political discussions at supper every night led me to journalism.

After four years at Northwestern, my writing has sharpened. I can get to the point quickly and when I can't, it's usually because I don't have enough confidence in what I'm writing about. That journalistic drive to burrow down to the source of an issue has proven more challenging than I imagined. Some issues are

cont. of page 7

continued from page 6

innately complicated, or appear innately complicated until I sort out what's going on and make sense of it.

One topic that I haven't quite figured out has to do with my upbringing. My parents farm in west central Illinois, and before I came to Northwestern, I didn't realize my lifestyle was an anomaly. I grew up amidst the woods, my recreation was building forts out of sticks, I savored the smell of harvest, and the rainfall was either a blessing or a curse – and not depending on the shoes I wanted to wear for the day. The longing I felt for home, coupled with the strong academic community surrounding me, drove me to write in a freshman composition course about payments farmers receive to keep them in business. I was passionately pro-farmer, and as you can imagine, my paper glorified farmer subsidies.

But something seemed to be missing. I hadn't gotten to the core of why farmers need subsidies. Of course they need the money, but what changes had driven farmers from being a self-sufficient group to a crippled community dependent on government support?

That maddening question led me to work for the national farm broadcast show, U.S. Farm Report, during the summer of my freshman year and part-time during my sophomore year. Through the show, I had the opportunity to see the nation-wide decline of farmers first hand, the domination of large-scale agricul-

ture, and the bittersweet warmth of a passing generation of elderly farmers. I witnessed the panic of a new generation of industrial farmers and the fear of corporate agricultural powers, both in the newsroom and the field.

Writing for broadcast made me acutely aware of how my words sound out loud. Briefness took on a new meaning. But I also realized how visually powerful my stories became and how my words could work in harmony with clips on the screen. The addition of a new medium offered a challenge and opportunity. My skills sharpened, my information mounted, and my voice strengthened.

Back in the classroom, history professors afforded me the opportunity to probe the end of agricultural societies through independent study. The topics that emerged were fascinating: the rise of an industrial elite, the domination of the state, and the massive flight of rural people from the countryside to the city. Due to professors' guidance, I applied for and received an Undergraduate Research Grant to study the massive sociological changes in Ireland from a rural society to one of the richest countries in the world.

Although I was mostly collecting information through literature analysis and farmer interviews, I continued to write while I was in Ireland. I returned to the states amazed by the rapid changes in Ireland and acutely aware of the research and writing that still needed to be done on the country. I had a lot more work to do.



Loka Ashwood

Through blind Irish luck, I'll have the opportunity to do it. The Irish are as interested in rural decline as I am, and through a PhD fellowship, I will be researching and writing about farmers at the National University of Ireland in Galway until I have a doctorate, I hope. I never saw that coming.

But it makes sense. To me, it's not the medium that matters, but the topic, the story, and the idea. Wherever I have the chance to get the news out there, get to the bottom of an issue, or probe a problem, I'll take it. Writing is a marvelous craft. And liberating. I've learned it can take you anywhere.



What Are You Reading?



Robyn Schiff

Artist in Residence in Creative Writing
Department of English

1) Because we've been looking at some Marianne Moore poems in one of my classes, I've been spending a lot of my time thinking about her work. There's a passage in her early poem "To a Stiff-Winged Grasshopper" that I keep returning to: "As I unfold its wings, / In examining it for the first time, / I forgot the war. "

2) I've also been reading *American Genius: A Comedy*, by Lynne Tillman, and poems by Pimone Triplett and Emily Wilson.

3) This summer I'm going to re-read W.G. Sebald's books

4) I wish all my students would read W.G. Sebald's *Rings of Saturn*. There's also a moving essay by the poet Mary Ruefle called "Someone Reading a Book Is a Sign of Order in the World" that I recommend. There's a link to it on the Academy of American Poets website.

WRITING MATTERS
NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTER
FOR THE WRITING ARTS
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