

WRITING MATTERS

VOL 4 NO 1

Celebrating writing in all its forms at Northwestern University.

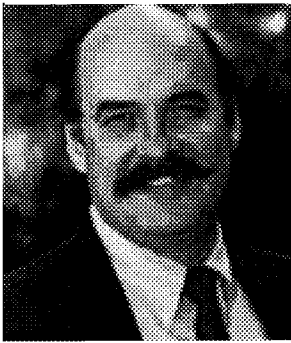
WINTER 2004

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

A busy fall at the Center

By David Abrahamson

Director, NU Center for the Writing Arts
and Helen G. Brown Research Professor of
Journalism, Medill School of Journalism



Greetings from the Northwestern Center for the Writing Arts! This is the first edition of our newsletter of the 2003-2004 school year, and we have

much to report.

Perhaps the news of the most immediate currency concerns our new staff and our new location. This past summer we had the good fortune to be joined by Jessica Belle Smith as the Center's assistant director. Jessica—who earned undergraduate Phi Beta Kappa honors in English and Creative Writing, as well as an M.F.A. in Poetry and Nonfiction, from the University of Michigan—came to us from an acquisitions editor's position at Arcadia Publishing, a Chicago book publisher.

In her second week on the job, Jessica did a wonderful job overseeing the relocation of the Center when we moved from the charming but less-than-centrally-located house on Dartmouth Place near Tech to our new offices in Kresge Hall.

Moving into a portion of the space formerly occupied by the Spanish and Portuguese department on the northwest corner of Kresge's fourth floor, the Center now enjoys new offices which not only are somewhat better suited to our mission, but also comfortably situated near

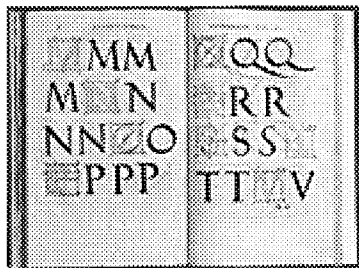
many of our "stakeholders," including many of the University's humanities departments. If you have a moment, please stop by Kresge room 4-315 and say hello.

In the program area, "Modes of Writing," our much-praised two-quarter freshman seminar, is again being offered in the winter and spring terms. We are delighted to announce that Ken Seeskin (Philosophy), former Center director, has reprised his well-received "The Bible and its Transformations" version of the "Modes," joined by Bob Gundlach (Linguistics), Marcia Gealy and Jim O'Laughlin of the NU Writing Program as writing seminar instructors.

As you perhaps already know, the Center's Writers-in-Residence fall quarter were W.S. Di Piero of Stanford University, who taught a poetry course, and Alexander Stille of *The New Yorker*, who taught a class in narrative nonfiction. Both visiting writers gave well-attended public presentations, both on campus and, at the kind invitation of Dr. Francesca Valente of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, during a special celebratory event in October in downtown Chicago. Winter quarter, Alex Kotlowitz, author of *There Are No Children Here* and *The Other Side of the River*, has returned to the Center to teach a course in nonfiction writing.

Rounding out the programming of fall quarter, the Center also helped organize and/or publicize a number of writers' visits to campus. These included Robert Olen Butler (Pulitzer Prize-winner for *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*); former NU Writer-in-Residence and Pulitzer Prize-winner Tracy Kidder; Larissa MacFarquhar of *The New Yorker*; and Dave Eggers (*A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*).

All in all, it was an encouraging start for the Center, and if there is any way that we can support you in your efforts to advance the cause—indeed, celebration—of writing here at Northwestern, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us. •



PLEASE LET US KNOW ABOUT NU WRITING EVENTS!

The Center for the Writing Arts is dedicated to promoting and celebrating writing in all its forms at Northwestern University. If you know of an upcoming event related to writing, whether it be an author 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 writing-related programming on our web site and via our growing listservs. Recently, we've helped publicize visits by authors Eric Schlosser, Alice Sebold, Chang-Rae Lee, and Dave Eggers. Don't forget to give us a call! #467-4099

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www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/

NOW PLAYING AT A CLASSROOM NEAR YOU!

WINTER QUARTER 2004

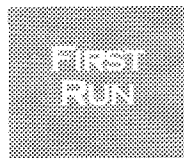
**WRITING WOMEN'S LIVES
PROFESSOR FRAN PADEN
GENDER STUDIES 391**

"Writing Women's Lives" is a highly interactive course in which students work towards the common goal of illuminating women's lives. Readings include biographical writings and reflective works. In conference with the professor, each student develops a research project involving primary sources, usually unpublished works that are located in museums, libraries, or family collections. The shape of each student's work will be determined by his or her training and interests. For example, though many students choose to write nonfictional narratives, others may work in performing arts, fiction, poetry, video, or media. Interested students are encouraged to consult the course web page linked to the Gender Studies site, <http://www.gender-studies.northwestern.edu/courses/index.htm>, and to look at projects completed by former students, available for browsing in the Gender Studies office. ♦

WRITING MATTERS

Publisher: David Abrahamson
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 Loka Ashwood
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 Lauren Murrow
 Special thanks to Professor Frances Freeman Paden, W.S. Di Piero and Alexander Stille for their contributions and time.

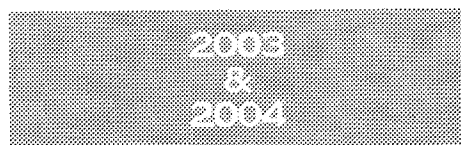
**IN BRIEF: NORTHWESTERN WRITING NEWS
SCHOOL OF CONTINUING STUDIES AND NU PRESS BEGIN
2004 WITH EXCITING INITIATIVES ALREADY UNDERWAY**



This fall, Northwestern University Press and the Medill School of Journalism announced they would begin commissioning books for a new imprint under the general editorial direction of David Abrahamson, Medill's Helen G. Brown Research Professor of Journalism. The multi-volume historical series, "Visions of the American Press," will approach such topics as the "New Media Frontier" and the "Rise of Community Newspapers," and will reach as far back as Milton and the Enlightenment. Abrahamson and NU Press Director Donna Shear also seek to reprint important titles that may no longer be available. The first books are expected to be published in early 2005.

The School of Continuing Studies, in collaboration with The Graduate School, began offering a part-time Masters of Arts in Creative Writing program in fall 2003. The 10-course M.A. curriculum in creative writing features concentrations in fiction, creative nonfiction and, beginning in fall 2004, poetry. A "Professional Graduate Series" has also been created for students desiring a more concentrated program of workshops. The inaugural class of 12 students is growing quickly due to rolling admissions, and SCS expects overall enrollment to double in the program's second year. Please visit www.scs.northwestern.edu/grad/cw for more extensive information. Questions may be directed to Cary Nathenson, Associate Director of Academic Programs, at c-nathenson@northwestern.edu. ♦

**NU CENTER FOR THE WRITING ARTS
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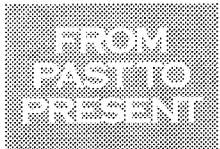
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RECENT CENTER ALUM RECALLS HOW NU FOSTERED HER WRITING CAREER

It is true: Only after a student finally leaves school are the most important lessons learned.

By Amy Merrick, MSJ 2000



Even when I was little I had the writing bug, so bad that I couldn't care how strange it made me in the eyes of my friends. When most kids were mastering reading, I was writing stories about cats and dogs on my mother's cast-off yellow notepads. Instead of playing with my Barbie dolls, I used them as the inspiration for an elaborate narrative about teenage orphans (no curfew for dates with Ken, total freedom to tool around in the pink Barbie convertible).

In 1997, I took a creative nonfiction course at the Center for the Writing Arts with Alex Kotlowitz. He is the author of, among other things, *There Are No Children Here*, a book about two brothers growing up in a Chicago housing project. I'm told it's unusual to get into two courses at the Center, so it must have been my rabid enthusiasm (begging, salivating) that got me squeezed into the second class, a fiction seminar the following year with Sara Paretsky, who writes the V.I. Warshawski mystery series.

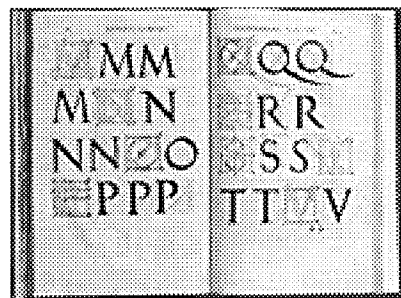
Mr. Kotlowitz was thoughtful and articulate, a rigorous reporter whose work was so thorough that when he read one of his passages, it was nearly impossible to discern that he had not observed a certain scene, that he was relying on someone else's eyes and his own pointed questions. Ms. Paretsky dressed elegantly and brought us rugalach, and would pass

out copies of her scratched-up drafts to demonstrate how she had evolved a scene or improved the prose of a page. They showed me how deeply writers of both fact and fiction are engaged with the world. For Mr. Kotlowitz's class, I spent hours with a hallmate who was trying to recover from anorexia. For Ms. Paretsky's course, I spent hours on the beach overlooking Lake Michigan, describing a blue sky that labored to match

THEY SHOWED ME HOW DEEPLY WRITERS OF BOTH FACT AND FICTION ARE ENGAGED WITH THE WORLD.

the air in an Edward Hopper painting, bright and saturated. They taught me to treat my characters—both real and imagined—with compassion.

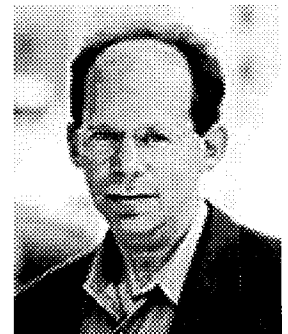
The most joyous thing about being a writer is writing. The hardest thing about being a writer, when you get



SARA PARETSKY right down to it, is also writing. "It's none of their business that you have to learn how to write," Hemingway

said. "Let them think you were born that way." I had thought that my often futile chase to round up my ideas, my occasional stupefaction when faced with an in-class writing assignment, betrayed a lack of ability. Until Ms. Paretsky told us she sometimes filled the first few lines of her computer screen with gibberish, just to overcome the paralysis of a blind, blinking cursor and until Mr.

Kotlowitz talked about the circle of friends with whom he shared his unfinished writing. They did not erase my self-doubt; I still froze the day I was supposed to read my short story in class and refused to go on, embarrassed by sentences that suddenly appeared artless and overwrought. But they helped me reckon with my fears.



ALEX KOTLOWITZ

Today I write for one of the largest newspapers, and I have a drawer full of short stories and the beginnings of a novel that I try to harass into life. Those writing classes, in cloistered library study rooms and upstairs meeting areas on Dartmouth Place, are where I learned that the struggle to catch the words is worth everything. ♦

2004
CALENDAR
OF
EVENTS

January 2004–March 2004

Author and journalist **Alex Kotlowitz** returns to Northwestern as a distinguished Writer in Residence teaching Writing 303, "Telling Stories: The Art of Narrative Nonfiction."

February 23, 2004

12:00 PM - 1:00 PM
1845 Sheridan Road; Fisk Hall 211
Pulitzer Prize-winner Dorothy Rabinowitz on "Advocacy Journalism: Setting the Record Straight."

March 1, 2004

12:00 PM - 1:00 PM
1845 Sheridan; Fisk Hall 211
Pulitzer Prize-winner Rick Lyman on "America, The Movie: The Press and Popular Culture."

March 1-5, 2004

**English Department
Writer in Residence**
Fiction writer Carolyn Cooke
March 3, 2004 4:30 PM
University Hall 201
March 4, 2004 7:00 PM
Harris Hall 108

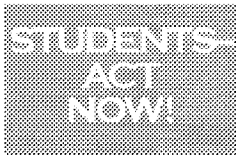
Please check the Center's website for updated listings:
www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/

Also useful is the Literary Studies calendar: <http://aquavite.northwestern.edu/cal/public/calendar.cgi?id=118>

UPCOMING WRITING OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDERGRADUATES

Publication, internships and awards offer students a chance to take their writing skills and talents beyond NU campus.

By Nathan Eddy, MSJ 2006



Offering undergraduate students the chance to submit any essay

topic in English, American or comparative literature between 1,750 and 3,000 words in length is the **Norton Scholar's Prize**. There is no cover fee, although applicants must submit a cover letter from a nominating teacher. Only one essay may be submitted. Deadline is April 16, 2004. First prize is \$2,500 and four runners-up will receive \$1,000 apiece. For more info, visit the website at: www.wwnorton.com/college/english/scholar/scholars2004.html.

For students interested in internships, **Chicago-based Bridge Magazine** offers four-month-long opportunities three times a year. Active internship duties include copy editing and magazine production, as well as individually tailored responsibilities. Students interested in this non-credit internship should contact Elzbieta Foeller-Pituch (efp@northwestern.edu), or log onto Bridge's website at: www.bridgemagazine.org/online/magazine/internships.php for more information. Students interested in submitting work should check out the submissions page for more information.

Whitewater Review, a new undergraduate journal seeking to

publish the best in student writing, is accepting submissions. There is no reading fee, and submissions to the bi-annual journal are accepted at any time. Visit the website, www.iue.edu/whitewater/index.html, to view current student works and submission information.

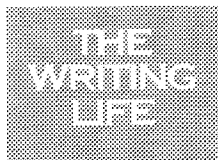
The Stony Brook Short Fiction Prize 13th Annual Award 2004. Only undergraduates enrolled full-time in American and Canadian universities and colleges for the 2003–2004 academic year are eligible for the prize. Submissions of no more than 7500 words must be accompanied by proof of the participant's current undergraduate enrollment and a permanent address, phone number and email address. No electronic submissions accepted and no other entry form is required. Manuscripts will not be returned. The 2004 winner will receive \$1,000. Submissions must be postmarked by March 1, 2004. See website for complete guidelines. <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/CAS/fiction.nsf/pages/eligibility>

For **NU-specific** writing scholarships and publication opportunities, visit the English department's website for a complete list of nearly 20 different essay, creative writing and poetry awards! More information can be found at www.english.northwestern.edu/resources/writing.html ♦

WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE ALEXANDER STILLE EXPLORES THE USEFUL PAST

As a teacher, this regular New Yorker contributor believes that students must free themselves from journalistic formulas.

By Lauren Murrow, MSJ 2006



While reading over the applications for his narrative nonfiction class, award-winning author Alexander Stille didn't look for accomplished writers or well-developed style. Instead, he simply sought signs of "a lively intelligence at work." Stille is the author of three books and a contributor to *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times* and *The New York Review of Books*. His latest book, *The Future of the Past*, explores the modern threats to cultures and monuments around the world.

A graduate of the Columbia School of Journalism, Stille worked as a freelance correspondent in Italy for *U.S. News & World Report*, *The Boston Globe* and the *Toronto Globe & Mail*. His first book, *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian-Jewish Families Under Fascism*, won the prestigious Los Angeles Times Book Award for the best work of history in 1992.

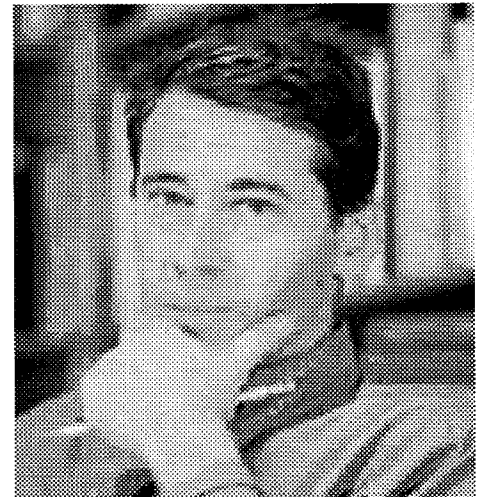
"After *Benevolence and Betrayal*, I vowed I'd find an easier way to write a book," says Stille, recollecting what he calls various "crises of confidence" and dozens of rewrites. "I haven't found it yet." His second book, *Excellent Cadavers: The Mafia and the Death of the First Italian Republic*, was published in 1995.

A journalist, novelist and teacher, Stille tries to impart his passion for telling stories. In his class, writing is broken down into a deconstructed process. He assigns manageable

exercises that will progress into large projects.

"[Students] should free themselves of conventional journalistic formulae, ready-made phrases and stale language," he says. "I want them to try and see their work fresh, so that every word in a story is alive and doing important work for the piece."

Stille is often surprised by his students' unique approaches to writing assignments. "Not only do they respond to what I tell them, but they go beyond my teaching by bringing



ALEXANDER STILLE

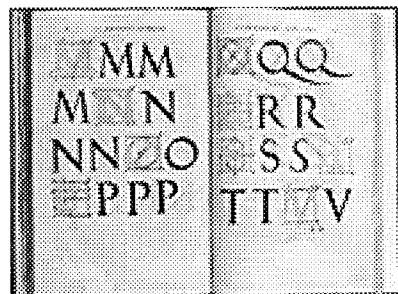
something of their own perspective into their work," he says. "It turns out different and better than what you would have imagined." ♦

A STILLE READER...



In the city of Rome the physical remains of the past are everywhere—a living palimpsest where the many layers of twenty-seven hundred years of history exist side by side in strange juxtaposition. As cars whiz by the ancient Republican temples and the art deco theater in the Largo Argentina, you wait for the bus near

the spot where Julius Caesar was assassinated. A few blocks away, faces of long-dead Romans stare out from the facades of modern buildings decorated with old sarcophagi, and a block of twentieth-century shops curves gently, conforming to the shape of the ancient amphitheater on whose foundations it stands. In the basement of a modern pizzeria there is a large sundial that kept time when the emperor Augustus ruled the world. I found these remnants of the past, living so gracefully and casually in the midst of everyday life, strangely comforting. They change your sense of time and your place in the world, making the ups and downs of the present seem smaller, while also making you feel a part of a much larger continuum. The city has seen every possible form of human glory, folly, and depravity—has witnessed emperors who declared themselves

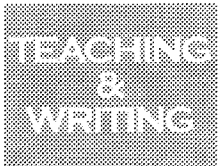


Continued on page 8

NU FACULTY MEMBER PADEN SHARES HER WORK AND SCHOLARSHIP

For this professor of gender studies and writing, even theaters and rehearsal halls can make great classrooms.

Interview by Loka Ashwood, BSJ 2007



Frances
Freeman
Paden
(Fran), Associate
Director of
Gender Studies

and College Lecturer in the Writing Program and Gender Studies, has been at Northwestern since 1989. Educated at Rhodes College in Memphis and the University of South Florida (B.A.), she received both her M.A and Ph.D. from Northwestern University. Growing up in the South, Paden attended segregated schools, organized the children in her neighborhood to put on plays and produce a newspaper, and went on to work for civil and women's rights, in addition to teaching writing and performance. Today, Paden is regarded as one of Northwestern's great educators and mentors. She spoke with Medill first-year student Loka Ashwood on her rich and varied career.

What means the most to you about your work?

I find it exciting to draw on my experience to integrate research, performance, and teaching. At Northwestern, I've had wonderful opportunities to develop courses and programs, work with students on substantial writing projects, and explore new ways of thinking about performance. We talk a lot about process in my classes. I enjoy an ongoing collaboration with Bob Gundlach and my colleagues in the Writing Program, as well as with the students and faculty in Gender Studies. It also means a lot to me to have been a master at Hobart, the Women's Residential College, for four years. Most recently, I had a riveting experience acting in Patrick

Johnson's play, *Nevah a Cross Word*, the story of his grandmother's life.

What honors and/or awards have you received?

Some of my work has brought recognition: grants for developing curriculum and advancing research, a residency fellowship at the Ragdale Center for Artists and Writers in Lake Forest, Illinois, and, at Northwestern, the Pathbreaker Award from Women in Leadership, the Distinguished Service Award from the Organization of Women Faculty and the Charles Deering McCormick Distinguished University Lecturer award.

Which do you prefer: acting, directing, or writing?

For me they work together. Writers draw on many of the same strategies that actors do. As a director, I always tampered with scripts, so I never got far away from writing. My passion is for teaching, and I can do that in many different venues, including theaters, rehearsal halls, conference rooms, and classrooms.



FRAN PADEN

Who has had the greatest effect on your work?

Some very wonderful teachers, including, most notably, Wallace Bacon, Robert Breen, and Lilla Heston, all professors in the Interpretation Department (now Performance Studies) when I was a student at Northwestern. But the greatest influence has been my family—my birth family and my Evanston family—Bill, Catherine, and Will. They've always encouraged me to take risks, be tough, stay open. I try to pass those values along to my students.

Who is your favorite actor/director/writer and why?

I think immediately of some very dear friends—Peter Amster, Barbara Becker, Frank Galati—who embody all those things, but also of two poets who were my mentors, though I never knew them personally—W.H. Auden and Audre Lorde. Both distinguished themselves as artists and as courageous critics of culture.

What would you like freshmen to take away from your Autobiography and Culture class?

I want them to pay close attention to design—in memoirs and in lives. To think about how lives get constructed and memories get made, including their own.

What stimulated your interest in gender studies and what do you hope to accomplish through your teaching of the subject?

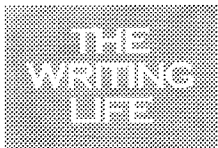
The gender system, along with other social constructions such as race, class, and ethnicity, has taught us to think in terms of fixed categories of identities. That kind of thinking precludes attention to process, to change, to fluidity. Gender Studies teaches students to theorize gender, to question categories and assumptions. I hope my students find the methodology as intellectually exciting as my colleagues and I do.

See page 2 for a description of Paden's 2004 winter quarter course, "Writing Women's Lives."

WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE W.S. DI PIERO CHALLENGES YOUNG POETS

Requiring students to imitate the work of celebrated American poets teaches them more than poetic style.

By Jessica Belle Smith, Assistant Director of the CWA



WS. Di Piero returned to NU's Center for the Writing

Arts this fall to teach "The Art of Poetry: American Imaginations," a course offered during his last residency in the fall of 2000. His students called the course "brilliant" and "challenging." It's no wonder: Di Piero structures his course around the intense study—and imitation—of the work of six modern American poets, including Robert Frost and James Schuyler.

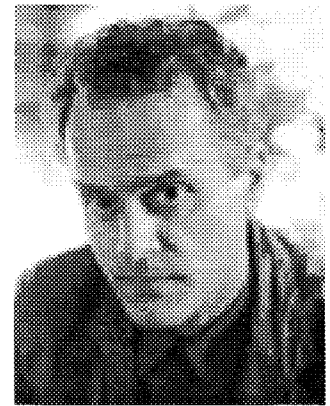
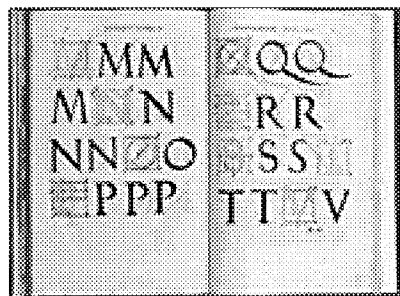
"Imitating good poets can teach students how to write good sentences and to develop their skills in making ... a persuasive music, a rhetoric," Di Piero believes. But the purpose of his course, which enrolled 14 students in the 2003 fall quarter, is not merely to teach specific poetic skills. In fact, Di Piero assumes "[none of his students] is going to become a poet, which is a different order of life enterprise." Rather, his students read and write under the learned guise of great writers to "get a sense of how that imagination operates...to define or articulate that quality of imagination."

Di Piero himself has been called "one of our most American poets" and is the award-winning author of six volumes of poetry, three collections of essays, one play and three Italian translations. Di Piero also writes a regular column on the visual arts for the *San Diego Reader*. Currently on the English faculty at Stanford University, Di Piero taught briefly at

Northwestern in the 1980s, during which time he met fellow Northwestern poets Mary Kinzie and Reginald Gibbons, as well as Alan Shapiro and Paul Breslin. Di Piero recalls their "vivid, ongoing, conversation(s)" that continue to this day.

READ ENOUGH OF A STRONG
POET'S WORK
AND YOU GET A SENSE
OF HOW THAT
IMAGINATION OPERATES.

Di Piero will return to Stanford this winter to lead poets in the prestigious Wallace Stegner Fellowship program. He is making final adjustments to a recently-completed collection of poems entitled *Brother Fire*, which will be published by Knopf in 2004 and from which he read to a crowded house in Harris Hall on November 20th. Not unexpectedly, students from his course were in attendance, eager to hear more from this great American imagination. ♦



W. S. DI PIERO



TUXEDO, NEW YORK

Wind on the water and green things
on that water. The lakeside woman
puts the colors from her hands
upon the lake that's coming into life
under her hands, while birds call
and cry though shaking oaks above
the dragonflies, green dragonflies
kissing tips of reeds, motes,
water lilies, whatever sits in the scene.
She looks out and paints the scene
while voices from branches across the lake
flee through the cedars to stop
at the water restless on her easel.
Yellow jackets change the air
around her head. Her paper hat
flies in the wind. Water bugs draw
circles around lily pads and nothing
is apart from any other thing.
The bullfrogs make their bronzed noise,
then motorboats afflict that noise,
flesh appears on far white banks
while the woman at her colors watches,
moves her brush and finger as if it's she
changing for real the sky's face
moving on the water, the pictured water
that doesn't stir, or live, and is our life.

from *Skirts and Slacks*
(Knopf, 2000)

STILLE EXCERPT

Continued from page 5



gods and holy men dressed in sackcloth who crawled up marble staircases on their bare knees. It has been ravaged and rebuilt numerous times and survived with something of its soul intact. Amidst the din of tourists, street vendors, quarreling neighbors, motorini gunning their engines, women putting out their laundry, children playing soccer in the square, the massive, harmonious forms of the Pantheon and St. Peter's Basilica loom in the background. And as you bathe in the happy, noisy confusion of the present, the great pagan temple and the central church of Christianity remind you that the important things

in life are few, diminishing the sting of the ephemeral worries that crowd our minds from day to day. There is nothing fussy or museumlike about the city: the past coexists comfortably and gives way to the needs of the present. The city's extravagant, crum-

I FOUND THESE
REMNANTS OF THE PAST
IN THE MIDST OF
EVERYDAY LIFE
STRANGELY COMFORTING.

bling beauty is so abundant that it lies about you everywhere in pieces: you take a wrong turn and stumble on an exquisitely carved Corinthian column

lying on the pavement at the end of an alley, abandoned to the care of a family of cats. As you are walking on a summer evening through the city center, someone having a party casually opens the shutters of the upper window of a grimy sixteenth-century building in order to let some air into the room and smoke a cigarette; you look up and see a perfectly preserved Renaissance fresco on the ceiling - a scene of angels and a winged cupid floating on clouds against a sky of lapis lazuli—and hear the tinkling of glasses and the sound of laughter. Then the shutters close again. It is just another private home in Rome, like hundreds of others, one you have never seen before and will probably never see again. ♦

From *The Future of the Past* (Picador Press, 2002)

WRITING MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTER
FOR THE WRITING ARTS
Jessica Belle Smith, Editor
Northwestern University
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