

# WRITING MATTERS

VOL. 5 NO. 2

Celebrating writing in all its forms at Northwestern University.

WINTER 2005

## DIRECTOR'S LETTER

### *Special opportunities for Northwestern students.*

By David Abrahamson

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



**G**reetings from the Northwestern Center for the Writing Arts, and warmest wishes for a promising start to your Winter Quarter!

It is, as you no doubt know, the mission of our Center to encourage — indeed, celebrate — writing in all its forms here at Northwestern University. There is, however, one specific element in the Center's charter which we are always seeking new ways to fulfill. It concerns the fact that, while we seek to serve the broadest possible constituency within the university community, our target audience is, indisputably, the Northwestern undergraduate student.

Since the Center's founding a decade ago, it has worked hard to accomplish this end. In the curricular area, we have long enjoyed a measure of success. For example, our "Modes of Writing" two-quarter freshman seminar, organized by Professor Bob Gundlach, director of the NU Writing Program and typically taught with either Slavic's Professor Saul Morson or Philosophy's Ken Seeskin as the principal lecturer, has been very well received. Similarly, our Writer in Residence program with its upper-level undergraduate offerings will feature Alex Kotlowitz's narrative

nonfiction course this winter and a class by fiction writer Peter Ho Davies in the upcoming spring term.

Looking for further ways to help undergrads to deepen their interest in and appreciation of the writing crafts, the Center has launched a new program to allow groups of students to meet with visiting writers. Called "A Conversation With..." the new series offers a venue for students to interact—informally yet substantively—with the writers. The format is simply an hour of conversation, comment and questions, and, for those that might benefit, examples of the writer's work are available in advance. In early January the first participant was Christine Schutt, 2004 National Book Award finalist and NU Press author, and by all accounts both Christine and the students had a most rewarding experience.

As another new program to involve undergrads in the efforts of the Center, we recently organized a Student Advisory Group. Under the guidance of WCAS Writing Program's Jim O'Laughlin and Medill's Patti Wolter, we recruited a number of past student participants in Center programs to serve. Coming from a variety of NU schools and representing a range of viewpoints, their enthusiastic contribution of ideas has already proven invaluable. I can attest that, from sitting in on a few of their meetings, it is clear that a passion for the written word is very much alive. And as the dawn of the New Year fades and the temperature drops, this is a truly warming thought.

In closing and as always, do let us know if the Center for the Writing Arts can support you in your efforts to enhance writing here at Northwestern. ♦



CHRISTINE SCHUTT

## ARE YOU PLANNING WRITING EVENTS FOR 2005? LET US KNOW!

Just a reminder that the Center's biweekly digest, *Writing at Northwestern*, highlights NU writing events and reaches students, faculty, and staff via the Center's growing listserv. 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 all writing-related programming. If you would like to receive the electronic *Writing at Northwestern*, please send an email to [words@northwestern.edu](mailto:words@northwestern.edu). And don't forget to give us a call! #467-4099

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

## IN BRIEF: NORTHWESTERN WRITING NEWS

❖ **Aleksandar Hemon**, a fiction instructor in NU's Master of Arts in Creative Writing Program at the School of Continuing Studies, was a 2004 recipient of a MacArthur "Genius Grant." The Chicago-based foundation awarded him \$500,000 over the next five years to assist with his writing endeavors. Hemon's published work includes *The Question of Bruno: Stories* (Vintage, 2001) and *Nowhere Man* (Vintage, 2004). ♦

❖ NU's Department of English hosts two award-winning writers this February. **Rebecca Brown**, author of nine books of fiction and nonfiction and currently teaching at Goddard College in VT, will present public lectures and readings at NU February 8-11, 2005. **Dana Levin**, a poet and Director of Creative Writing at the College of Santa Fe, will be on campus February 22-25, 2005. For more information, call 847-491-7294 or visit [www.english.northwestern.edu](http://www.english.northwestern.edu). ♦

### WRITING MATTERS

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Special thanks to Victoria Fine.

## LANDON Y. JONES ACCEPTS INVITATION TO JOIN CWA AS 2005 FALL QUARTER WIR

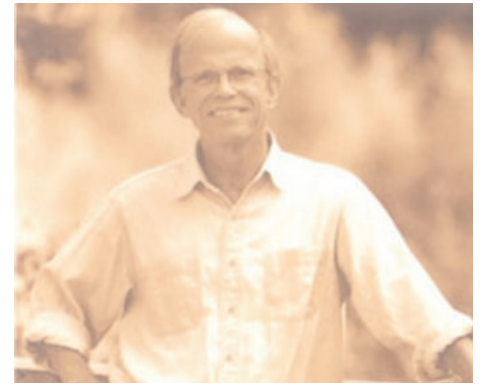
*Celebrated journalist spent 37 years with Time, Inc. and authored book on the "Baby Boom," a phrase he coined.*

FALL  
QUARTER  
2005

Soon after graduating from Princeton University,

Landon Jones became an intern for *Time* magazine. Jones spent the remainder of his successful career editing and writing for *Time*, *Life*, *Money*, and *People* magazines. Jones is the author of *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom*, as well as *The Essential Lewis and Clark* and, most recently, *William Clark and the Shaping of the West*.

He is known as the first to officially identify and study the influential post-WWII generation he called the "Baby Boomers." Jones has taught writing at Princeton University and



LANDON Y. JONES

recently served as Vice President of the National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. Jones will teach a course on "The Art of Prose: Narrative Nonfiction." More information will be available this spring through the CWA. ♦

## NU CENTER FOR THE WRITING ARTS ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

2004  
&  
2005

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## NU'S CENTER FOR THE WRITING ARTS INTRODUCES 2005 SPRING QUARTER WRITER IN RESIDENCE, PETER HO DAVIES

*Award-winning fiction author and director of the University of Michigan's MFA program will teach, read, and enchant.*

Peter Ho Davies, author of two short story collections, *The Ugliest House in the World* (1998) and *Equal Love* (2000), joins Northwestern University in the upcoming Spring Quarter to teach a course in the "Art of Fiction." Born to Welsh and Chinese parents, he was named by *Granta* magazine in 2003 as one of twenty "Best Young British Novelists." His short fiction appears regularly in *Harper's*, *Ploughshares*, *Atlantic Monthly* and other publications. For information on applying to Peter Ho Davies course, please visit the Center's website: [www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/](http://www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/). Application deadline is Friday, January 28, 2005.

*The following is an excerpt from "Small World," which appears in Equal Love.*

### AN ORIGINAL EXCERPT

There's something about the childishness of it, the nostalgia of it, the ridiculousness – he catches one of his belt loops on the hand brake, she pushes the cigarette lighter in with her toe – that makes it seem less serious, not like faithlessness, not like betrayal, not like sex, at least not until it's over and the car windows are fogged and they pull their clothes on again. Or perhaps having started, neither of them has the heart to stop.

Afterward, they sit side by side, staring at the snow melting on the windshield. Her hair clip rests on the dash where she must have tossed it, the long curving teeth interlocked, like the fingers of folded hands. He holds the steering wheel and tries not to think. There is a hollow feeling in his stomach. He recognizes this. It's a tendency he has to make a bad thing worse, to tip accident into tragedy, jump before the fall. Every

so often a breeze stirs the trees above them and a sudden shower of snow thumps hollowly onto the roof. Finally she says, "Well, that's one way to sober up." She needs to get back to her kids, and he starts the engine.

On the way, he says "Unfinished business," and she says, "Yes," and what they both know is that it isn't unfinished anymore.

At her place she sits beside him for a few moments before going in. Wilson tells her he hopes it all works out. She nods. "The worst of it . . ." she says after a second. "The worst of it is that I always wondered about my parents. You know, when we were kids. I wondered about them, worried about them splitting up. They fought. A lot. When I was very young. Less when my sisters came along, but still sometimes with real hatred. It's one of the reasons I was drawn to you, I suppose. To see how bad it was. Only now," she says, "I wonder if they stayed together for us, my sis-

ters and me. If we kept them together." She pulls her coat around her. "I guess it's not ridiculous I feel. It's guilty."



PETER HO DAVIES

She looks across at him and he shakes his head.

"Parents," he says.

"And now I am one." She picks up her bag from between her feet, finds her keys. "If you don't want to turn into your parents, don't have kids, right?"

Cars shush past them on the pale street, snow piled on their roofs, six, eight, ten inches deep, like white luggage.

"Hey," he says quickly. "You know, I've always meant to ask." He actually blushes. "About us, what happened?"

She plumps the bag on her lap, tells him she can hardly remember. "There was a fight. My mother and me. She thought you were dangerous, thought I'd get pregnant."

"What about your dad?"

"Stayed out of it, but then he always let her do the dirty work." She shrugs. "I told them I loved you" – and hearing her say it still gives him a strange shrill – "but even as I said it, I knew it wasn't true. In love with something, maybe. In love with love, but not each other."

Wilson lets it go. He isn't so sure, but he lets it go, and besides, they've had sex and it hasn't changed anything after all these years. He can still hear them when they lay together, him telling her he loved her, her telling him back.

*Con't on page 6*



## MEDILL SOPHOMORE TORY FINE LANDS PUBLISHING DEAL FOR HER NOVEL

*Set in 1940s Ireland, the young adult novel Folklore is student's first—but not last—literary effort.*

By Nicole Price Fasig, BSJ 2007

### STUDENT WRITING

**S**ophomore Victoria Fine never set out to write a book. It just

happened.

"I didn't tell myself I was going to write a novel," she said. "I just told myself I was going to finish the story. It just came out novel length."

Not only did Fine complete 200 serendipitous pages of fiction at the tender age of 15, she also received an offer of publication late this November from Royal Fireworks Press, a small publishing house based out of Unionville, N.Y. that specializes in children's educational books and young adult novels.

After completing the novel, Fine sought representation. She bought a copy of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Publishing* and sent out her manuscript. Fine heard back from Andrew Whelchel, her current literary agent and a member of the National Writers Literary Agency. Whelchel is based out of Colorado.

Even though Fine had no trouble finding an agent, she had less luck when it came to looking for a publisher.

"People don't want to publish young writers," Fine said. "There's a lot of stigma against them."

She explained that she believes many older editors feel threatened by ambitious young writers and their accomplishments.

While she began as a fiction writer, Fine now finds herself drawn towards the realm of nonfic-

tion. A journalism and international studies major, Fine sees no conflict between the demands of fiction writing, her passion, and the demands of nonfiction, her vocation. "I feel I need both in my life in order to be a complete writer," she said.

While the two forms of writing do differ, it's not as much as one would think, according to Fine.

"It's important to keep as close to

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"PEOPLE DON'T WANT  
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the truth as possible [in fiction], especially as a young writer," she said, "because I felt like I didn't have enough experience with the world to write about something I don't know about and pull it off effectively."

Fine's novel, entitled *Folklore*, is set in 1940s Ireland. She described the plot in a profile that appeared in the *Daily Northwestern* last February. The



main character is torn between defending her grandmother's school (a revolutionary institution attempting to reconcile children from the warring factions in the north and south) and leaving her small town to pursue her dreams in the big city.



VICTORIA FINE

Fine was inspired to write the book after visiting Ireland at the age of 14, she told the *Daily Northwestern*. She started writing what she thought would be a short story and completed the entire novel two weeks before her 16th birthday.

Currently, Fine is working on a non-fiction book, a travel guide to Europe for college students. This project sprung from her interest in the continent, although she has not traveled within it extensively.

Fine's most recent project, however, is a second novel she began a month ago. This particular undertaking is in its fourth incarnation; Fine has written three other versions, only to scrap them all. She said that the lessons she learned from the previous drafts have improved each subsequent effort.

Fine tries to write for at least one hour a day, but often finds herself with little time. She usually can put pen to paper for one good hour a week. Fine gets the bulk of her writing done during the summer.

She explained that her goal-oriented nature was the key to her success. It was the deciding factor that pushed her to finish the novel, a feat that most young writers only dream of.

Determination is the key to publication, Fine explained, especially when trying to promote a finished product.

"Be really persistent," she said. "Get your foot in the door and then move on with your life." ♦

## NU'S STUDENT PUBLICATIONS: MORE THAN *THE DAILY NORTHWESTERN*

*Students find writing opportunities outside the classroom in a variety of on-campus magazines and newspapers.*

By Nathan Eddy, BSJ 2006

### CAMPUS WRITING LIFE

Northwestern University is widely known for the Medill School of Journalism and most students on campus pick up the student-produced *Daily Northwestern* at least a few times a week. However, for students looking for a different venue in which to publish, several publications at NU provide exciting opportunities for blossoming writers. Be it filmmaking, alternative current events stories, creative writing, or conservative newswriting, there are a host of publications actively seeking student contributions. Overall, the publications featured here reflect a sense of entrepreneurial creative energy that both enriches and energizes campus life.

- *The Northwestern Chronicle*, founded in the spring of 1992, is one of the country's longest-running conservative college weeklies. No stranger to controversy, in 1998, the 12-page publication gained national attention when it fought the student government's de-recognition and won the right to publish. From articles on North Korea to freewheeling opinion pages rallying against the liberal slant of campus politics, *The Chronicle* tackles issues that get students' blood pumping. For information on contributing to the publication, visit the website at [www.chron.org/tools/viewsect.php](http://www.chron.org/tools/viewsect.php).

- For students with an eye for aperture and film, *Day for Night* magazine, a biannual publication that features interviews, essays, and film reviews, is a perfect opportunity to break into the world of writing. Sharply packaged and written and edited exclusively by Block Cinema student volunteers and other student contributors, *Day for Night* offers students interested in film a great chance to see how a magazine is put together.

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### CINEPHILES, REPUBLICANS, POETS, FEMINISTS: THE MANY VOICES OF NU'S STUDENT PUBLICATIONS.

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Andy Garland, a senior film major, says he writes for the magazine because "it allows for legitimate discussion of a topic without the context of a mandatory academic assignment." It helps that Block, which not only funds and distributes the magazine, also manages to get its writers great interview opportunities with industry pros such as actor Christopher Walken and screenwriter Charlie Kaufman. New writers take heed: While a background in film is not necessary, a love of movies is. Students interested in working on the magazine should send an email to [blockcinema@northwestern.edu](mailto:blockcinema@northwestern.edu).

- Not every student writer wants to be penned in by the confines of factual reporting. *Helicon*, the university's literary publication, is a professional-looking book loaded with student writing, artwork, and photographs. The magazine also hosts periodic poetry readings at cafés around Evanston. Always eager for fresh voices and new staff, *Helicon* offers excellent prospects for the budding writer. There is no submission limit and the writer profiles are a nice bonus. Beware, however: If you fail to submit your own, your short biography is at the mercy of the editors. [www.northwestern.edu/groups/helicon](http://www.northwestern.edu/groups/helicon)

- The newest student publication hit campus newsstands in the spring of 2004. *The Passenger*, edited by journalism major Graham Webster, celebrates the world of non-fiction writing and features content such as interviews with musicians, young entrepreneurs, and stories like "Life Lesson No. 114: Jail Not Sweet," a piece about spending four days in a rural Colorado jail. Dorothy Kronik, a journalism major and an editor at the magazine, says, "Northwestern students and collegians all over the country need a quality publication in which they can read actual articles, not just captions." As the website further illustrates, *The Passenger* aims to be "the journal of a generation that doesn't know whether it's a generation at all." Submissions are encouraged. The second issue is scheduled for publication in early 2005. Check out the magazine's website for more information: <http://iamthepassenger.com/>

For more publications, such as the NU's feminist voice *juice* and Christian magazine *Mustardseed*, visit <http://groups.northwestern.edu/?category=10&search=>◆

## PETER HO DAVIES' EXCERPT FROM *EQUAL LOVE*

For information on his NU residency, visit our website: [www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/](http://www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/)

**"SMALL  
WORLD"  
CON'T**

"We're so unoriginal," he'd said, and they had laughed. She looks

tired, exhausted.

"I've made things worse," he says, but she waves him off. "Just not better, huh?"

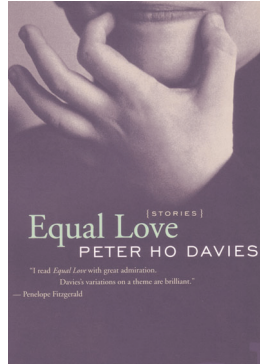
"You know," she says, looking at him sideways, "you don't have to compare everything. Your wife, me, our parents. Not everything's comparable."

"Right," he says.

"I'm happy," she says. "In my marriage. With my children. Really."

He's quiet.

"Children don't fuck up marriages," she says. "Grownups do."



You didn't fuck up your parents' marriage. Just don't fuck up your own."

"That's a little ironic," he says.

"And you're a shit

to say so."

"She's pregnant," he tells her back, and she stares at him for a long beat.

"Motherfucker," she whispers.

There's a moment of stillness – the engine ticks off slow seconds – then they both burst out laughing,

fall against each other, shaking.

"You've never done this before," she says when she catches her breath. "Have you?"

He wipes his eyes, shrugs.

"Well, take it from me, it's not the end of the world. Sex isn't the only thing holding you together. Some people fight more when they have kids. You know why? Because they can."

She leans over and kisses him chastely on the cheek. So that's it, Wilson thinks. It occurs to him that he has been looking for some kind of out, but now he knows he's going to have to carry this night, swollen as he feels with it, forever. ♦

