

# WRITING MATTERS

VOL. 9 NO.1

Fall 2008

## SPECIAL EVENTS ON CAMPUS



### Sefi Atta

Fall Quarter 2008 Visiting Writer in Residence for the Center for the Writing Arts

**Tuesday**  
**October 28, 2008**  
5:15 -6:15 p.m.  
Dittmar Gallery  
1999 Campus Drive, Evanston

Sefi Atta, author of *Everything Good Will Come*, reads excerpts from a selection of her short stories that were inspired by Nigerian newspaper headlines. The stories are narrated in a variety of voices: a Moslem woman who is sentenced to death by stoning under Sharia law; a boy who is crossing the Sahara to get to Spain; a drug mule who smuggles cocaine on a flight from Lagos to London; and a nanny in the United States who monitors a protest against an international oil company in her hometown in Nigeria.



### Margo Jefferson

Pulitzer Prize winner for criticism, former critic-at-large and theatre critic at the *New York Times*, contributor to *The Nation* and *Harper's* and author of *On Michael Jackson* and *Roots of Time*.

**Monday**  
**November, 24, 2008**  
12 noon-1:00 p.m.  
Fisk Hall, Room 311

Margo Jefferson discusses *The Eye of the Critic: Journalism and the Arts*

## 2nd ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL DAY OF WRITING

**Friday**  
**October 31, 2008**  
**11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.**  
Fisk Hall, Room 311  
Evanston campus



Our visitors from Austria, Israel, Jordan and The Philippines are currently in residence at the International Writing Workshop at the University of Iowa. The writers will present brief readings of their work in translation, and a discussion of literary cultures and literary practices will follow.

### Guest Writers are:

Tarek Eltayeb, **Austria**  
Yael Globerman, **Israel**  
Laila Al-Atrash, **Jordan**  
Gutierrez Mangansakan II, **The Philippines**

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WRITING ARTS  
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**2008/2009**

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Professor of English, Classics, and Spanish and Portuguese,  
and Co-Director of the MA/MFA in Creative Writing (SCS)*

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**WE MOVED**

The Center's new address is:  
**1860 Campus Drive, Crowe Hall 5-155**  
**Evanston, Illinois 60208**

phone, fax and email address are still the same:  
office phone: 847-467-4099  
office fax: 847-467-5199  
email: [words@northwestern.edu](mailto:words@northwestern.edu)

**Center for the Writing Arts Mission Statement:**

*The purpose of all CWA activities is to create, support and further undergraduate and graduate opportunities for the study of writing at Northwestern, both within CWA itself and across the university; to facilitate a continuing discussion in the university community about how best to foster and situate writing as a crucial part of a university education; to help coordinate the university's multifarious courses and programs in writing across departments, programs and schools; and also to welcome audiences from the metropolitan area to the rich array of public events on campus that are focused on writing.*

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

Just a reminder that the Center's biweekly e-mail announcement, *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 Events Digest*, please send an email to: [words@northwestern.edu](mailto:words@northwestern.edu) or call us at 847-467-4099.

**WRITING MATTERS**

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Editor: STACY L. OLIVER

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The Center for the Writing Arts presents a variety of distinguished writers from both on and off campus. For future events and an archival listing visit:

**[www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/](http://www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/)**

## DIRECTOR'S LETTER

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

In The School of Continuing Studies, in addition to the existing MA in Creative Writing, Northwestern University has a new terminal graduate degree in writing, the MFA. (The School of Communication's MFA in Writing for Screen and Stage, which is enjoying great success, is still a new program, so opportunities for graduate study in writing at Northwestern have been tremendously expanded in the last few years.) The MA and MFA programs in Creative Writing offer students a shorter and longer curriculum, in response to different personal and career goals of students of creative writing. (See descriptions of both programs at [www.scs.northwestern.edu/grad/cw/](http://www.scs.northwestern.edu/grad/cw/).) The MA and MFA in Creative Writing (registrar code MCW) are based on shared writing workshops and elective courses and on a common admissions process. Thus they really constitute one program that offers two different degrees. Students are admitted to the programs on the basis of the same standards, and may elect either the 10-course MA or the 18-course MFA. The MA/MFA has two Co-Directors. After the process of design, which I led, S. L. Wisenberg (whose new book *The Adventures of A Cancer Bitch* is forthcoming in March 2009 from

University of Iowa Press) and I have shared the tasks; Sandi has been especially helpful in our attention to student needs, filling out the adjunct faculty from among distinguished local writers, and designing our instruction of the teaching of creative writing, our publishing internships, and our new project, an on-line literary journal to be edited by MA/MFA students. The MA/MFA has what we believe is a unique design, intended to meet the various professional needs and interests, and different personal goals, of graduate students in writing. SCS is providing scholarship support to MFA students in the form of tuition remission for the last four courses of the degree program. The two programs offer students great flexibility in the timing of their progress toward completion of the degree, a year-round community of students and faculty, and the opportunity for those who are working full- or part-time to remain in their jobs while studying in the evening. The design of both programs is intended to merge some of the best features of both residential and low-residency programs.

While the MA/MFA is not a program of the CWA, it will benefit, we hope, from the CWA's capacity to coordinate communication and interchange between programs and schools. One new aspect of that capacity will already be apparent to those of you who are reading this newsletter on-line. We thank a team

of designers at University Relations--Christopher Garcia, Brian Byrne and Staci Roberts Beam--for the new CWA web site, and in advance we thank Bob Taylor, Director of Academic Technologies, and two of his staff--Harlan Wallach, Digital Media Architect Lead, and Chris Wallace, Digital Media Specialist Associate--for additional capacities that will be added in the near future. Faculty who teach writing at Northwestern, and other writers who teach and have been at Northwestern as visitors, will be posting commentaries, essays, and other writings related to the teaching and learning of writing, and about writing itself. By the end of fall quarter we hope to be adding new material frequently, and to be receiving comment from visitors as well. We will add more links of interest to writers, readers and teachers of writing, and over time more video and audio from the CWA itself and from other Northwestern departments and programs. We hope that faculty, students, prospective students (both undergraduate and graduate) and others outside the university who are interested in writing will find the CWA web site to be a very useful way of entering Northwestern's broadly distributed instruction, learning and discussion of writing.

## WHAT ARE YOU READING?

We asked these questions: 1) What scholarly/professional book or article are you currently reading? 2) What book are you reading at the moment largely for pleasure? 3) What is the next book you hope to read (for work or pleasure)? 4) What do you wish all your students would read? 5) Has any book you've recently read changed your thinking about your own work? and how?



### Peter Hayes

Theodore Z. Weiss Professor of Holocaust Studies  
History Department

- 1) *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust* by Alexandra Garbarini
- 2) *Barbarism and Civilization: A History of Europe in the 20th Century* by Bernard Wasserstein
- 3) *Middlemarch* by George Eliot
- 4) *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* by Tony Judt, and *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* by Paul Kennedy
- 5) *The Wages of Destruction* by Adam Tooze, a brilliant book that gave me a new framework for relating important conclusions that had occurred to me piecemeal.



### Phyllis Lyons

Associate Professor  
African and Asian Languages and Comparative Literary Studies, Japanese

- 1) *Narrating The Self: Fictions Of Japanese Modernity* by Tomi Suzuki
- 2) *Day of Atonement* by Faye Kellerman
- 3) Work: something about the "I-novel" debate in 1927 Japanese literary circles  
Pleasure: another murder mystery
- 4) *The March of Folly* by Barbara Tuchman; *Style In History* by Peter Gay
- 5) I'm working on the translation of a novel that seemed to me to be important to the larger study I'm doing; as I continue, I am more and more confirmed in its importance.



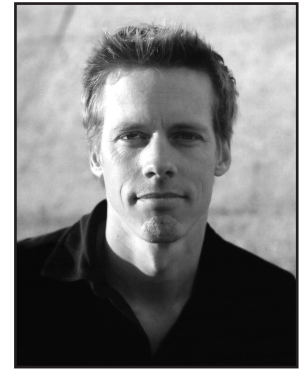
### Sarah M. Pritchard

Charles Deering McCormick University Librarian

- 1) A wonderful article just appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, by Robert Darnton, "The Library In the New Age" (the issue of June 12, 2008). Last year Darnton became the university librarian for Harvard University, and he is an historian who has a long record of scholarship about the role of books and publishing in the spread of ideas. I'm looking forward to what he has to say in this piece. He tries to assess the impact on libraries of digital technologies and massive scanning projects by putting this in the context of the history of the ways information has been com-

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NU'S CENTER FOR THE WRITING ARTS INTRODUCES  
JOHN BRESLAND, ARTIST IN RESIDENCE AT NORTHWESTERN



John Bresland

Currently an Artist in Residence at Northwestern University, John Bresland is a writer and documentary filmmaker. Several of his essays have aired on public radio, while his video essays can now be seen at *Ninth Letter* and *Blackbird* online. His print essays and poetry have recently appeared in *North American Review*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Minnesota Monthly* and elsewhere. In 2006 he was the recipient of the Tamarack Award for Fiction and a Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation fellowship, and has been twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

AN INTERVIEW

*As an Artist in Residence, what kind of courses do you plan on teaching? How do you hope to open the world of writing to your students?*

Creative Nonfiction is my meal ticket, writing it and teaching it. But I do have a secret agenda, and that's to expand the way people regard the genre. At this moment, the high priests of creative nonfiction are assembling anthologies with catchy titles suggesting an experimental product within; cutting-edge nonfiction, they say, the *Essays of Tomorrow*. But all of these volumes traffic exclusively in print. Which is strange, because nothing about the times we're living in suggests that the future of the essay—or fiction, for that matter, or even poetry—lies in print.

Print is the DNA of everything humans build, and language is the foundation of radio, film, pretty much all time-based media. But if today you were to walk into a thousand American living rooms, how many of those folks would be reading essays? My guess would

be about four. If I'm writing and teaching within a genre that's talking to four in a thousand, then it's time to expand the genre. Today, writers have more tools at their disposal than language alone. They've got images and sound to contend with. My nonfiction writing courses reflect that reality. My personal favorite is teaching the video essay.

The average writing student today, for the first time in history, has access to non-linear editing hardware—a video editing suite built right into her laptop. Now, all it takes for a freshman to produce a documentary is an out-of-the-box Mac, a camcorder, and the will to see an idea through to its resolution. To me, that's the future of creative nonfiction. The next American essay, while it may originate in print, is bound for the airwaves, for the screen. Because images and sound extend the reach of language, that essay will also be seen and heard. For most students, that's a thrilling prospect.

*What do you enjoy most about teaching?*

On days when I teach, a few hours before class, I like to go to some quiet café, order an unmanly coffee drink, and think about the limits

of what I know. I think about the chemistry of the students, about the things they have read and wondered about, and I try to figure out how I can help them. Teaching, in my opinion, is an inglorious occupation. But the pleasure of thinking hard on a regular basis is a supreme luxury, and putting those thoughts into action is immensely satisfying.

*Do you have any advice for students who are aspiring writers on how to pursue their dream?*

Get out of the country. One year minimum. It's like getting a whole new pair of eyes and ears. Here's another thing I learned from my wife: make friends. Really seek them out. Because friends will help you, and all writers need help.

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

When I was 19 years old I read *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. I then spent years trying to break Hunter Thompson's spell. His voice, that cannonball prose, was an intoxicant.

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Such a dangerous thing, when you are young, to think you can write the myths that define your era. Now that I'm old, my dreams dead on the roadside, I study the sentences of Don DeLillo, the elliptical scenes of Abigail Thomas, the open-hearted, sprawling essays of David Foster Wallace, who I'm really going to miss.

*Any new projects you're working on that you can share with us?*

A short nonfiction film about smartphones due out this winter. It's the first time I've worked with professional musicians on a score, a well-known band whose name I'm afraid to say out loud for fear of cursing the project. Anyway, their

music is so freakishly good, so unpredictable, that it elevates my game, changes the way I write, changes the way I think. That's probably the aspect of writing with video—the collaborative nature of it, the way it externalized the process of writing and thinking—that I enjoy the most.

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municated. By coincidence, while he was writing it we had contacted him about speaking here at Northwestern next year, a lecture to be co-sponsored by the Center for Historical Studies and the University Library. I also just started a related book, *Scholarship in the Digital Age: Information, Infrastructure and the Internet*, by Christine Borgman, a professor of information science at UCLA. She looks at the changing nature of scholarly communication, and in particular, at the ways digital information is used and data is shared (or not) in various different academic disciplines.

**2 and 3)** I only have time for pleasure reading on summer vacation or over the winter holiday! I keep up with what's being published by reading lots of book reviews, which is how most librarians cope with the flood of information. Then I have a stack of things I plan to read when I can get around to it; last summer I spent most of my time moving so I didn't even make a dent in my pile. But I have some great books I hope to read soon: *The Echo Maker*, by Richard Powers, which won the National Book Award in 2006. I've read several other novels by Powers and find him very compelling (for example *The Gold Bug Variations*, *Galatea 2.2*, and *Plowing the Dark*). Also *The Time Traveler's Wife*, by Chicagoan Audrey Niffenegger; and *Chaco Canyon*, by anthropologist Brian Fagan. Fagan was on the faculty at UC-Santa Barbara, where I used to work, and a very engaging writer and speaker; I've been to Chaco Canyon and am sure he has some great insights into that very intriguing place. I like the history of ideas, history of science, and philosophy, but those books require good attention to read (not during a weekend nap, for example) so they too are sitting in my stack. One I've been planning to read for some time now is *Metapatterns: Across Space, Time, and Mind* by Tyler Volk; I think he tries to show the interconnectedness of everything.

**4)** Since I don't teach here at Northwestern, I decided to think about this question as if it were, what book do you wish all library science students would read? There are two things I would recommend, for the same reason – they force you to rethink easy assumptions about the systems we take for granted in libraries. The ways that we organize information may seem neutral or universal but they are neither. This is a huge topic, but two examples help crystallize the issues. First is *The Book on the Bookshelf*, by engineer and professor of design Henry Petroski. He has a very readable history of the evolution of bookshelves and the physical aspects of library furnishing; and in the course of reading this, one comes to see that there is nothing automatic about these things we take for granted. Even the direction that books sit on the shelf has changed over history, and for quite specific reasons depending on who was using the books and who was allowed there in the first place. A more technical and theoretical approach is in an article by Hope Olson, "The Power to Name: Representation in Library Catalogs," which appeared in the Spring 2001 issue of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. Olson brings a feminist analysis to the nature of cataloging and classification and shows how library subject headings and numeric classification systems embed specific value systems that have evolved since the 18th century Enlightenment and that are loaded with sexist assumptions. We think that the Dewey Decimal System or the Library of Congress Classification are universal, abstract systems that arrange categories in a rational and impartial way; but a detailed analysis (by Olson and other scholars in this field) has shown otherwise.

## WRITING NEWS FROM AROUND CAMPUS

**The MFA in Writing for the Screen and Stage at Northwestern**, a two-year program offered through The School of Communication, was pleased to announce its first graduating class ('08). Recent notable student accomplishments include:

Sarah Gubbins' (MFA '08) full-length play *Fair Use* debuted in August at Steppenwolf's First Look Repertory of New Plays. Jenn Dobby (MFA '08) was named a Dramatists Guild Fellow, one of only five chosen nationwide. Maria Finitzo (MFA '08) was the recipient of the prestigious Chicago Award by the Chicago International Film Festival for her film, *Terra Incognita*, an exploration of the promise and peril of stem cell research. Toby Herman ('09) was awarded an Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Foundation Internship for the summer of 2008. Ben Viccellio's (MFA '09) play, *No More*, was one of four works chosen to be workshopped as part of WordBRIDGE Playwrights Laboratory, a national competition culminating in a residency at Clemson University. Erik Gernand (MFA '09), Jenny Hagel (MFA '09), and Ben Viccellio (MFA '09) were recipients of \$5000 production grants provided by Zach Braff, an NU alumnus, to support the creation of new short films.

For more information about the MFA program, please visit the web site at [www.write.northwestern.edu](http://www.write.northwestern.edu) or contact [write@northwestern.edu](mailto:write@northwestern.edu).

**The Weinberg College Writing Program** seeks to help all Northwestern students learn to write clearly, thoughtfully, and effectively. Every quarter, we offer undergraduate courses in expository writing (English 105, 205, and 305) and provide tutoring in the Writing Place, a campus-wide center located in the University Library. Current special projects include devising new courses and additional writing support to meet the particular needs of international students, graduate students, and students in the sciences and engineering.

To extend the reach of our contributions, the Writing Program often works collaboratively with other departments and programs, including the Weinberg College freshman seminar program and the McCormick School freshman program in engineering design and communication. Working with the Center for the Writing Arts, we have collaborated since 1996 in the teaching of Modes of Writing, a two-course sequence for freshmen that integrates the wide-ranging exploration of an interdisciplinary, humanities-based theme with instruction in academic research and writing. In winter and spring 2009, Modes of Writing (Writing 115-5,6) will again offer forty-five Northwestern freshmen the opportunity to explore "Time and Chance" as they work steadily over two quarters to advance their skills and experience as academic writers.

For further information about the Weinberg College Writing Program, please contact **Robert Gundlach, Director (1-7414; r-gundlach@northwestern.edu)**.

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**The English Major in Writing (Northwestern's undergraduate creative writing), a concentration within the WCAS English Department, teaches the writing of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction.** By asking students to examine poems and prose works with the eye of a writer, and by encouraging students to apprentice themselves, as energetically as possible, to the best literary models, the writing faculty hope to help promising artists in their craft, as well as to educate future editors, publishers, literary agents, teachers and discerning readers. Some features of this unique and rigorous undergraduate program include the intensive writing course sequence, the honors seminar and tutorial, and the opportunity for students to work with a number of superb visiting writers in addition to our continuing faculty.

Open House for prospective students: November 5, 2008 at 4:30 p.m. in the Hagstrum Room, University Hall 201

April 14-16, 2009 is the 2nd Annual Spring Writers Festival.

This year's Writers-in-Residence are:

Naeem Murr: Fiction

Claudia Rankine: Creative Nonfiction

Dan Beachy-Quick: Poetry

For more information on program and event details go to: [www.english.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/writingbroch.pdf](http://www.english.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/writingbroch.pdf) and [www.english.northwestern.edu/index.html](http://www.english.northwestern.edu/index.html)

**Writing 303**  
**Winter Quarter 2009**

**THE ART OF NONFICTION**  
with CWA Writer in Residence  
and Medill Senior Lecturer  
**ALEX KOTLOWITZ**  
Mondays  
2:00-5:00 pm



*This undergraduate course is open  
by application only*

This course will--through both reading and writing--explore the art of what is often called literary journalism, narrative nonfiction, or what

John McPhee calls "the literature of fact." The best of nonfiction narrative wields a fierce power, poking and prodding our preconceptions of the world, pushing us to look at ourselves and others through a different prism. What makes for a compelling story? (What tools might we borrow from fiction?) Why employ the use of narrative? How does it help form our view of people and events? We'll explore the craft of reporting and research which borrows from a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, history and sociology--and work with rigor and discipline on the art of good writing. We'll read nonfiction narratives--both books and magazine articles--on a host of subjects, ranging from war and poverty to the environment and sports. We'll work in this class as a professional writer might, from draft to draft.

There will be regular writing assignments, and students will be asked to craft a longer narrative on a subject of interest to them.

**APPLICATION DEADLINE IS:**  
**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER**  
**22nd by 5PM**

Applications are available online at:  
[www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/](http://www.northwestern.edu/writing-arts/)

Submissions are can be sent to:  
[words@northwestern.edu](mailto:words@northwestern.edu)  
OR  
brought to **The Center for the Writing Arts in Crowe Hall, Room 5-155 on the Evanston Campus**

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Stacy L. Oliver, Editor  
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