

WRITING MATTERS

VOL. 9 NO.2

Winter 2009

SPECIAL EVENTS ON CAMPUS



Alex Kotlowitz

Winter Quarter 2009 Writer in Residence
for the Center for the Writing Arts

House of Secrets: Human Rights Storytelling

Monday
February 16, 2009

5:15-6:15 p.m.
University Hall, Hagstrum Room 201
1897 Sheridan Road, Evanston

Alex Kotlowitz is the award-winning author of *There Are No Children Here*, *The Other Side of the River*, and *Never a City So Real*. Contributor to *The New York Times Magazine* and public radio's *This American Life*. Alex Kotlowitz is renowned for his narratives of particular individuals whose concrete life experiences illuminate broad aspects of our nation's social and political landscape.

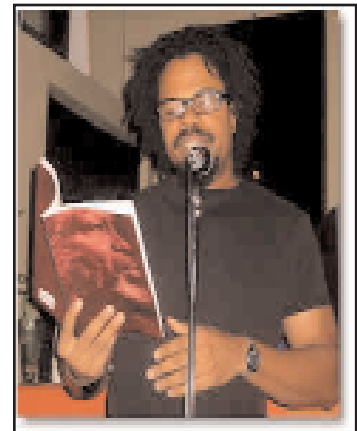
John Keene

Associate Professor of English and African American Studies
Director of the English Major in Writing

Writing Life@NU! Reading from his Selection of Works

Thursday
February 26, 2009

12:30-1:30 p.m.
University Hall, Hagstrum Room 201
1897 Sheridan Road, Evanston



John Keene is the author of the award-winning novel *Annotations*, and of the poetry collection *Seismosis*, with artwork by Christopher Stackhouse. He has published his fiction, poetry, essays and translations in a wide array of journals. Recipient of fellowships from the Artists Foundation of Massachusetts, the New York Times Foundation, Yaddo, and the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference, he has also won a 2003 Fellowship in Poetry from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and a 2005 Whiting Foundation Award in Fiction and Poetry. He teaches courses in fiction and cross-genre writing, African-American and Diasporic literature, aesthetics, and literary translation.

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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 or call us at 847-467-4099.

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/

WRITING MATTERS

Winter 2009 Vol. 9 No.2

Editor: STACY L. OLIVER

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AN INTERVIEW

Madden Swan and Willy Nast are both seniors and English Majors in Writing in Creative Non-Fiction. These two industrious students are the Co-Founders and Editors of *Prompt* magazine. *Prompt* is a student group affiliated with the English Major in Writing; above all *Prompt* supports the process of writing.

should start a literary magazine, and Madden decided to run with it. We began working on *Prompt* Fall 2007 when Madden and I were both juniors in the Creative Non-Fiction sequence of the Major in Writing. We spent most of the early part of the year laying the groundwork for *Prompt*. Fine-tuning our missions and goals, acquiring a staff, securing funding – things like that.



Madden Swan

Why was it important for you to start this magazine?

MS: When we were still figuring out what we wanted out of *Prompt*, I think all we wanted was to publish a good magazine. But along the way, we really got into the idea of a writers' community.

each issue of the magazine, there will be a theme – or “prompt,” hence the name – to which a portion of the material we publish will be dedicated. Basically, there are a lot of wonderful minds here on campus, and we want to do our part to encourage as many of those minds as we can to write.

What is Prompt?

MS: *Prompt* has two basic parts. The first is a student-run literary magazine affiliated with the English Major in Writing. We publish twice each school year. The second part is what we call a “community for writers.” We hold informal workshops in the hope of bringing writers on campus together.

WN: Right. One thing that we really wanted to do was bring writers all over this campus together. One thing that we both love about the advanced writing sequence, whether you're in fiction, non-fiction, or poetry, is that you get really close with your classmates because you're with them all year long. Over the year, you become very comfortable with these people and respect their opinions. That's one of the reasons we started the workshops – we wanted to create this sort of community for all Northwestern students.

How can students get involved with the magazine?

WN: We really encourage people to come to our workshops. That's the best way to get a sense of what we're all about. If someone out there is nervous about sharing their work with a group of strangers, they shouldn't worry. We're a supportive bunch, and quite laid-back. If you want to feel us out first, people without work to share are more than welcome to come by, observe, and get in on the conversation of other people's work.

How was it developed?

WN: The writing faculty suggested that students in creativ writing

Is it an official student group?

MS: Yes, we are an official academic student group because we are recognized by the Undergraduate Major in Writing. But we are not recognized by ASG.

We're also looking to get a staff together for the next school year. We really encourage anyone interested in becoming future staff to come check out our workshops first. You can find more information on our website.



willy Nast

What's your mission?

MS: Other than bringing writers together, we also want to encourage people to write and get them thinking about the process of writing. For

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What are your aspirations for the magazine? Where do you see it in five years?

MS: I'd love to see the community aspects of *Prompt* grow. I'd like to see more people coming to the workshops or using our online workshops. Beyond that, I'd love to see *Prompt* get into the hands of people that want to bring their own ideas to supporting a laid-back atmosphere to encourage the process of writing.

WN: I'd just really like to see students, from the writing sequence especially, continue to pick up *Prompt* in the years to come and pass it along to the next line of writers. I would like to see each group bring its own new ideas and fresh approaches to *Prompt*. As a student of writing, I think this is a really nice way to leave your mark at NU.

How do you pick pieces to publish?

WN: Well, we read the submissions, get the staff together, and start talking about the pieces we really, really like – which is probably more than we can publish. Then we start talking about the pieces we really, really, really like. We narrow it down from there.

What's the response been from the students?

MS: The response has been great. Last spring quarter we received some funding that we weren't expecting until the following year. Suddenly, we had three weeks to call for submissions, collect and read them, and publish our first magazine. We weren't sure if there would be a big enough response. But of course, the NU students came through. We received a lot of great submissions and were able to publish on time.

WN: The workshops have been

really great as well. While we haven't gathered a roomful of people, we have had great participation this fall quarter. A lot of people came more than one time, which really speaks to our idea of creating a community for writers.

Do you have a faculty advisor?

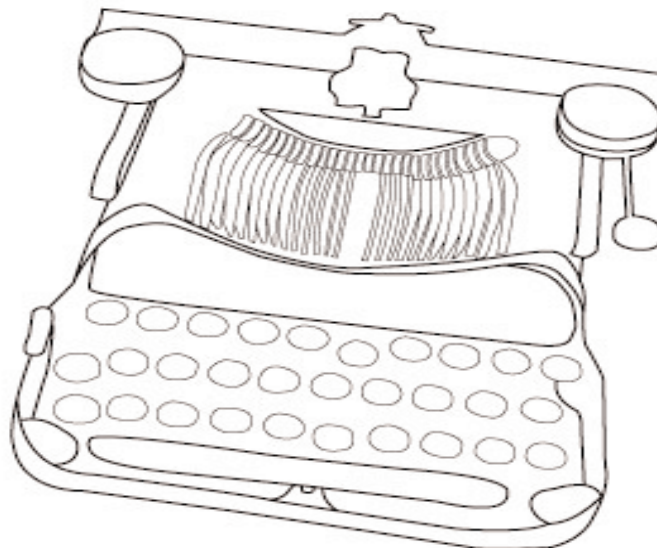
MS: Robyn Schiff served as our advisor last year. This year, Eula Biss has been our advisor.

How big is your staff?

MS: Right now, there's four of us, plus a layout designer and a website designer. So, six in all.

http://groups.northwestern.edu/prompt/prompt_mag.html

PROMPT
a community for writers



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? How?



Henry Bienen

President of Northwestern University

- 1) At the moment I'm reading Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, which is great. My wife urged me to read it during this trip to India.
- 2) I intend to read Reg Gibbons' poems, *Creatures Of A Day*, on return. They are at my bedside.
- 3) I've started to read Michael Lewis' collection of essays on the financial crisis. It does not change my mind, but it's full of good and useful selections.
- 4) I try to stay current on foreign policy by reading *Foreign Affairs* and I wish students would consistently read the issues. For professional more political sciency work I still get *World Politics*, which I used to edit, but I read into it rather than read through.
- 5) I have a huge bedside stack of novels, poetry collections and non fiction work and maybe after I'm finished here I can read more. Its Gresham's Law; I read too many memos. High on my list is recent work by my friend Joyce Carol Oates, who is always interesting .



Seth Lichter

Professor

Department of Mechanical Engineering

- 1) *An Introduction to Statistical Thermodynamics* by Terrell Hill
- 2) *Probability Theory: The Logic of Science* by E. T. Jaynes and *The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick*.
- 3) *The Ascent of Money* by Niall Ferguson
- 4) *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell and *Corelli's Mandolin*, by Louis De Bernières
- 5) *Prime Obsession: Bernhard Riemann and the Greatest Unsolved Problem in Mathematics* by John Derbyshire. Why are numbers so useful in providing a description of natural phenomena? This book gives insight into what numbers are, how they are generated, and how they are related to the physical world.

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Dave Tolchinsky

Department Chair, Department of Radio/Television/Film
 Associate Professor
 Director, Creative Writing for the Media Program
 Director, MFA in Writing for the Screen and Stage
 Co-Director, Program in Sound Design

- 1) I read the reviews in the *New Yorker*, *Sunday New York Times*, interviews in *Written By* (mag of the Writers Guild) and watch movies, TV shows, and plays.
 - 2) Recently finished two books that moved me: Per Petterson's *Out Stealing Horses* and Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Right now casually enjoying *The Yale Book of Quotations*.
 - 3) *The Book of Calamities: Five Questions About Suffering and Its Meaning* by Peter Trachtenberg and then *Deep Survival* by Laurence Gonzales. Related to my screenwriting: various books about gaming and online game culture.
 - 4) A. Mostly, I want my students to “read” a lot of movies (especially movies that represent a range of experiences, scopes, tones, characters, etc.) and then analyze each movie from a variety of perspectives: How is it structured? Why do we care about the character? How would you represent on the page what you see on the screen? What is flawed about the movie? Why was it financially or critically successful? How would you have pitched the movie? Why was it made?
 B. Christ, Noah, Job, Moses, Hamlet and whatever other archetypal characters/stories best describe a particular student’s vision of human experience, drama, the world.
 C. *Alternative Scriptwriting* by Ken Dancyger/Jeff Rush, because the authors lay out the rules of Hollywood and then pinpoint interesting ways filmmakers have broken those rules.
 D. *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* by Kristin Thompson. Because in her close readings of 10 works, she analyzes what screenwriters actually do, how what looks simple is surprisingly complex. And because she describes movies in four acts not three.
 - 5) Mostly movies usually affect me more than books: The ending of *A History of Violence* got me thinking about the complexity of simplicity. *Six Shooter* made me think about how problems are “nested.” I still think about the tone of *The Ring*, *Ju On*, *Donnie Darko*, *Batman Begins*, and *The Descent*. I still think about *You Can Count on Me* and *Fight Club* and how they are both actually romantic comedies. And I was intrigued to discover upon close analysis that movies like *Mulholland Drive*, *Memento*, *Spyder*, *Jacob’s Ladder* and *The Sixth Sense* actually follow a four-act structure. Again, complexity and simplicity meet. How can you break rules and follow rules? Embrace the box, fight the box.
- As to books, the last book that changed my thinking about my own work was *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* by Kristin Thompson. I had intuitively been thinking in four acts, not three, and seeing her analyses made it conscious. Although she doesn't write about it, Thompson got me thinking about the midpoint of screenplays. I now see the midpoint as the key to the whole work. Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* got me thinking about the relationship of my screenwriting to comics. And it gave me nightmares.

WRITING NEWS FROM AROUND CAMPUS



announces a new playwriting contest for undergraduate student sponsored by Dentyne

“REALationships”

Entrants are required to submit an original short play that incorporates Dentyne’s “REALationships” theme, of sustaining personal relationships within the age of technology.

The opportunity to participate in this contest is available exclusively to undergraduate students of Hunter College in New York City, New York; **Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois**; Stanford University in Palo Alto, California; and the University of California at Los Angeles in Los Angeles, California.

ALL FINALISTS receive

- * All-expense-paid trip to New York City
- * Professional performance of their work

GRAND PRIZE WINNER receives

- * \$7,500 cash prize
- * Year-long mentorship by MTC Staff

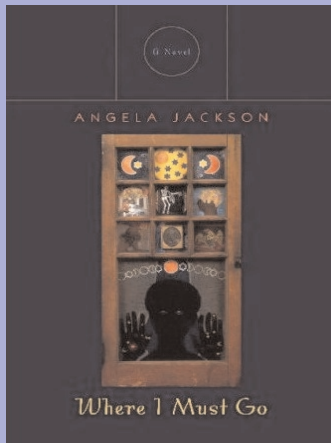
Submissions must be postmarked by: Monday, March 9, 2009

Sponsored by Cadbury Adams Company

Manhattan Theatre Club is one of the leading theatre companies in the United States dedicated to new and contemporary work. Under the longtime leadership of Lynne Meadow and Barry Grove, MTC-produced works have earned 16 Tony Awards, 5 Pulitzer Prizes, 45 Obies and 27 Drama Desk Awards, as well as numerous Drama Critics Circle, Outer Critics Circle and Theatre World Awards. Please visit www.manhattantheatreclub.org for more information.

Debut Novel from NU Alum Angela Jackson

Where I Must Go will be published August 2009



Lyrical, penetrating, and highly charged, *Where I Must Go* displays a delicately tuned sense of difference and belonging. Poet Angela Jackson brings her superb sense of language and of human possibility to the story of young

Magdalena Grace, whose narration takes readers through both privilege and privation at the time of the American civil rights movement. The novel moves from the privileged yet racially exclusive atmosphere of the fictional Eden University to the black neighborhoods of a Midwestern city and to ancestral Mississippi. Magdalena's story includes a wide range of characters -- black and white, male and female, favored with opportunity or denied it, the young in love and elders wise with hope. With and through each other, they struggle to understand the history they are living and making. With dazzling perceptiveness, Jackson's narrator Magdalena tells of the

complex interactions of people around her who embody the personal and the political at a crucial moment in their own lives and in the making of America.

Angela Jackson was born in Greenville, Mississippi, raised on Chicago's South Side, and educated at Northwestern University and the University of Chicago. Her *Dark Legs and Silk Kisses: The Beatitudes of the Spinners*, winner of the 1993 Chicago Sun-Times Book of the Year Award in Poetry and the 1994 Carl Sandberg Award for Poetry, and her selected poems, *And All These Roads Be Luminous*, are both published by TriQuarterly Books/Northwestern University Press.

WRITING MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTER FOR THE WRITING ARTS

Stacy L. Oliver, Editor

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