

# WRITING MATTERS

VOL. 10 NO. 2

Winter 2010

## ZAKES MDA is 2010 Fall Quarter Visiting Writer in Residence



**Zakes Mda**

The Center for the Writing Arts is proud to announce Zakes Mda as the Visiting Writer in Residence for Fall Quarter 2010. Mda will be teaching Writing 301: The Art of Fiction for the CWA and a literature course to cross-listed with the English Department.

Zakes Mda is a South African writer, painter, filmmaker and music composer. He has published sixteen books, eight of which are novels and the rest collections of plays, poetry and a monograph on the theory and practice of theater-for-development. His works have been trans-

lated into 20 languages, including Catalan, Korean, Serbian, Norwegian and Italian. They have won a number of awards including the Amstel Playwright of the Year Award, the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Africa, the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Legacy Award and designation as an American Library Association Notable Book. His novel *Cion*, set in southeast Ohio, was nominated for the NAACP Image Award. He commutes between the USA and South Africa, working as a professor of creative writing at Ohio University, as a beekeeper in the Eastern Cape, a dramaturge at the Market Theater, Johannesburg, and a director of the Southern African Multimedia AIDS Trust in Sophiatown, Johannesburg.

**Writing 301**  
**Fall Quarter 2010**  
**THE ART OF FICTION**  
Visiting Writer in Residence  
Zakes Mda  
Mondays and Wednesdays  
2:00-3:20 pm

**Applications for the workshop will be available online starting 3/8/10.**

The course is designed to guide you through the key aspects of narrative. The focus is on short fiction – its form and practice. You will examine its basic techniques and structure through an extensive analysis of student work and established models. Most of the class periods will assume a workshop format and focus on student work. You will be expected to do class presentations on the elements of fiction and on the model stories from our prescribed text. By the end of the course you should be able to write a conventional short story with round and flat characters, with adequate motivation and justification underlying their actions, and conflicts that develop in a narrative/emotional arc to a climax. This means that this class is not interested in pieces that are sustained only by voice or in open-structure stories. The focus is on the traditional narrative structure.

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WRITING ARTS  
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**2009/2010**

**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.*

**Reginald Gibbons**

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

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**Find out about our events on FACEBOOK.**

**Read our latest BLOG entries: Writing,  
Reading, Learning and Teaching**

<http://writing-arts-blog.northwestern.edu/>

**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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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/)

AN INTERVIEW

**Eula Biss** has been named a finalist for the prestigious 2009 National Book Critics Circle Award in criticism for *Notes from No Man's Land: American Essays*. She is currently an Artist in Residence at Northwestern University, where she teaches nonfiction writing, and she is a founding editor of *Essay Press*, a new press dedicated to innovative nonfiction. Her essays have recently appeared in *The Best Creative Nonfiction* and the *Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Nonfiction* as well as in *The Believer*, *Gulf Coast*, *Columbia*, *Ninth Letter*, the *North American Review*, the *Bellingham Review*, and Harper's.



**Eula Biss**

*As an educator, how do you hope to open the world of non-fiction writing to your students? What do like most about the genre of non-fiction?*

Literary nonfiction is not yet very circumscribed, despite recent efforts in that direction, and the many ambiguities of the genre – its vast span and diffuse boundaries and inherent contradictions – can be richly generative. This, the fertile indeterminacy of the genre, is the aspect of nonfiction that I most hope to foster in the classroom. I'm always trying to expand the realm of possibilities for my students, always trying to open doors rather than close them. This can be daunting, as students begin to see an endlessly open field unfolding in front of them, but it can also be thrilling.

*What do you enjoy most about teaching?*

Many of the same things that I enjoy most about reading – following the turns of a vibrant discussion and witnessing the movement of other people's minds.

*Do you have any advice for students*

*who are aspiring writers on how to pursue their dream? Is there a writer's credo you live by? Are there pitfalls they can try to avoid?*

Well, this is very Midwestern of me, but... work hard. The arts are plagued by this romantic notion of talent, which very often serves to obscure the role of hard work. Fantasies of genius and inspiration and divine intervention can all be pitfalls, as much as they can all manifest in some real way. I'm allergic to credos, for the most part, but I've always been drawn to Alice Walker's commandment: "be nobody's darling."

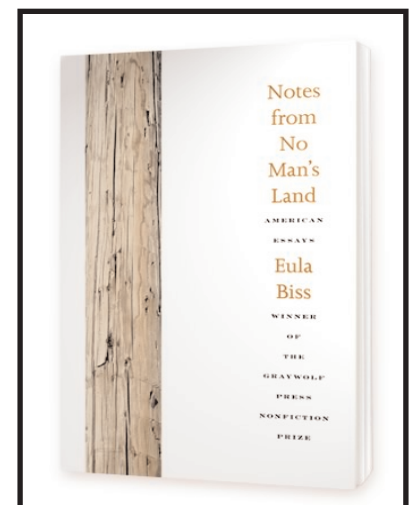
*Who are some of the literary icons you admired growing up as you discovered your passion for writing? As you've become a more seasoned and acclaimed writer who are your mentors now?*

Joan Didion has been my Virgil since I began to write. And my relationship with her writing has only grown more intense, more tortured, more fervid over time.

It's like a marriage. But there have been plenty of other writers, too – Anne Carson, James Baldwin, John McPhee. Some are even friends – Amy Leach, Robyn Schiff, and of course our very own John Bresland.

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

My most demanding project at the moment is motherhood, but this experience is becoming the impetus for a collection of medical essays – essays about pain, vaccination, and other bodily worries.



## 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?



### Daniel I. Linzer

Provost, Northwestern University  
Professor of Biochemistry, Molecular Biology and Cell Biology in Weingberg College of Arts and Sciences

**1)** *Knowledge & Money: Research Universities and the Paradox of the Marketplace* by Roger Geiger

**2)** *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* by Richard Holmes

**3)** I will look to see what new publications come from the Northwestern faculty.

**4)** Hmm, that is tough to name just one book. I am a big fan of Richard Powers (a former visiting writer in residence at the Center for the Writing Arts), and at the top of my list from his books are *Gold Bug Variations* and *The Time of Our Singing*.

**5)** Everything I read stimulates my thinking about how the University promotes scholarship, creativity, and teaching, not just from the content in what I read but from gaining insight into how people in different fields approach important ideas.



### Teresa K. Woodruff, Ph.D.

Thomas J. Watkins Professor of Obstetrics & Gynecology at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine,  
Professor of Biochemistry, Molecular Biology and Cell Biology in Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences,  
Chief of a newly created Division of Fertility Preservation and the Founder and Director of the Institute for Women's Health Research

**1)** A paper published this month by a stem cell biologist, Renee Reijo-Pera, is of high impact to our field-- it shows that oocyte development can occur from embryonic stem cells. This is an important first step in developing new strategies for women who are infertile and do not respond to normal hormonal interventions or who have been sterilized by chemo- or radiation therapy and were not offered fertility preservation options before treatment.

**2)** A.S. Byatt's newest book titled *The Children's Book*. I am a huge Byatt fan, especially an older book called *Still Life*.

**3)** *The Woman Behind the New Deal: The Life of Frances Perkins, FDR's Secretary of Labor and His Moral Conscience*, by Kirstin Downey. Frances Perkins was the first woman appointed to the U.S. cabinet and put in place the

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social security act, the minimum wage law, child labor laws and established the 40-hour work week -- among many other social reforms. She wanted to get universal health care passed but couldn't accomplish that goal (an issue that persists to this day). Also, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to Present*, by Gail Collins

4) *The Ovary of Eve*, by Clara Pinto-Correia and *The Egg and Sperm Race*, by Matthew Cobb

5) Every summer I publish a "Summer Reading List" for the laboratory. Last year we read books in the area of Global Reproductive Health. This years reading list is:

Fiction: *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley

Hot New Science: This will be selected in June

Humanities: *The Egg and the Sperm. How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles*, written by Emily Martin.

My summer reading list is published on my website and we will have discussions on Friday afternoons throughout the summer for anyone interested in the topic. <http://www.woodrufflab.org/>



### Dr. Michelle Wright

Associate Professor of African American Studies

1) For a book I am working on, *The Physics of Blackness*, I am looking at how our assumptions about time frame our notions of blackness, and how our original notion of time comes from the physicist Sir Isaac Newton. Of course notions of time in physics have since changed, so I am reading Brian Greene's *The Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time and the Texture of Reality*.

I've also been asked to write a review/analysis/commentary for the journal Qualitative Sociology on David Roediger's *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* and David Goldberg's *The Threat of Race*. My goal is to bridge how these two major social scientists construct notions of blackness to how notions of "blackness" operate in the Humanities. Of course, we should probably start with the way in which "race" is too often misused (including by me) as a synonym of "blackness," as if there are no other races in the world. Telling, huh?

2) I've been reading murder mysteries as well as Angela Davis' autobiography. As far as the murder mysteries go, I'm reading male authors from the frozen North--Icelandur Indridason, and now two Swedes, Kjell Eriksson and Ake Edwardson. Then I'll switch to the women, such as Karin Fossum. And I never read Davis' autobiography, so I think it's about time!

3) I have a grad student, Joe Jordan, who is trying to engage me on philosopher Henri Bergson's notions of time, so I have to read the books he recommends--Joe says Bergson is wonderfully clear to read and devoid of affectation, and that already rates him highly in my book!

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4) Well, historian and activist Howard Zinn just passed away, so it seems both appropriate and correct to say his ground-breaking *A People's History of the United States*. And my colleague, Professor Barnor Hesse, doesn't remember recommending this book to me, but I would swear that he was the one that put me on to John Perkins' *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*. Oddly enough, both Zinn and Perkins tend to produce wealthy white men as omnipotent and evil and all minorities as innocent and helpless, but I think both books underscore what we are rarely taught--that capitalism consciously and explicitly profits from poverty, and that yes, the addiction to ever greater profits does in fact lead otherwise intelligent human beings to devastate the sound economic and social foundation ALL of us need, rich or poor or in the middle, to make a living both now and decades from now. Too often, if you want to understand how evil operates in this world, look at who is making a profit from it.

5) Several, because to me they are all linked in one theme: Professor Richard Iton's *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, Saidiya Hartmann's *Lose Your Mother*, Robert Reid-Pharr's *Once You Go Black*, and Jennifer James' *A Freedom Bought with Blood*. All of them look at Africans and peoples of African descent as agents rather than objects of history, those who help frame time rather than remain victims of it--you see how it goes back to my book!

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## WRITING NEWS FROM AROUND CAMPUS



Article from *Chicago Tribune* 2009

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/ct-ae-coty-keller-1227->

Q&A from NU News Center with Reg Gibbons on: Writing and Teaching

<http://www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/stories/2010/01/gibbons.html>

## WRITING AND THE WEB

A new feature section that exams the world of writing and how it relates to the world-wide web and mixed-media writing.

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Our contributor for this issue is Charlotte Cabbage, the Humanities Coordinator and Subject Specialist for English, Comparative Literatures, Journalism, and the Performing Arts at Northwestern University Library. Ms. Cabbage currently oversees library collections in the Humanities, manages the English literatures, journalism and performing arts collections, provides in-depth research assistance to faculty and students, and instructs classes in research techniques. She also serves as a Fellow of Northwestern's Jones Fine and Performing Arts Residential College and is an adjunct professor in the Department of English.

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**Charlotte Cabbage**

*How has the internet changed (if at all) your writing and reading habits (webzines, journals, blogs, etc...)?*

The Internet has only changed my writing habits when I write for the web. New conventions and techniques continue to evolve in website design, and effective communication methods differ between web pages, blogs, social networking sites, etc. Writing for the web forces me to think much harder

about my target market. That can be difficult when ideally I'd like to create web sites that will be useful to the entire Northwestern community. In general good web-writing says more with fewer words, a not-always easy task. On the other hand my reading habits have changed quite a bit. Affiliation with a major research institution means that I may access literally millions of journal articles, newspapers, books, medieval manuscripts, scripts, poems, essays and more via the web. I scan through many more sources of information than was possible in the pre-Internet days. Because much of my job revolves around finding various types of data I use a variety of web sites in search of reviews, facts, articles and books. This not only hones my scanning skills, it adds to already large piles of articles and books that require a closer look. However, when faced with more than a few pages to read I still

prefer print, even for scanning.

*How has it tapped into your creativity and passion for writing?*

Because the nature of the Internet is to link a variety of data it suggests potential connections that can enrich writing. The Internet also provides amazing research tools. When one of those wonderful brainstorms descends suggesting a new link between one topic and another I can quickly ascertain if my assumptions are correct, if other research has already been done in the area, or if the topic has been so little researched it might be better off as someone's dissertation. Having so many web resources on hand frees time once necessary for research for concentrating on the writing itself. In another sense writing for the web has encouraged me to think more carefully about word choice. When trying to catch someone's attention in 4 seconds, and, if you

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succeed, in communicating in another 8, you really want that perfect phrase.

*Are there favorite writing links you'd like to share?*

The Poetry Foundation [www.poetryfoundation.org/](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/) produces a phenomenal site for both the study and enjoyment of poetry. They provide a learning lab, for those interested in the writing and writers of poetry. There are also over 8,000 poems free for the reading, and numerous links to all things poetic. Because part of my job is serving as the Northwestern's library liaison to the Writing Program, I created a Writing Resources for Students guide: <http://libguides.northwestern.edu/content.php?pid=67073>. A number of the resources are password protected for the Northwestern community, like the Oxford English Dictionary (<http://turing.library.northwestern.edu/login?url=http://dictionary.oed.com/entrance.dtl>) which is one of my favorite writing tools.

*For you as a specialist at the library, how has the internet changed how you work?*

Academic libraries support research, and the Internet has completely altered the face of research, which means it has profoundly changed the ways librarians work. I could

quickly prove, using an internet search engine, that many people have written widely on the changes the internet brought, and continues to bring, to libraries. Because the Internet allows access to ungraspable amounts of data and media I spend large amounts of time learning and communicating techniques to manage information overload.

One of the most telling changes about the internet and libraries is not just the way it has expanded library collections beyond physical boundaries, but that the internet tools allow undergraduates the ability to do types of research impossible for their tenured faculty 15 years ago. Early English Books Online (<http://turing.library.northwestern.edu/login?url=http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>) provides access to the majority of works printed in England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and British North America from 1473-1700. The physical copies of the books are located in libraries around the world. Since 1999 any member of the Northwestern community could examine a digital facsimile of these texts. But the greater difference for researchers lies in the ability to search on every word in 25,000 of those texts, a task only possible for machines. The same situation exists for

historical newspapers and journals. Computers are capable of searching through those millions of words for the occurrence of a name, an event, a thing, tracking history in very new ways.

*What do you see as the future of the web and writing in regards to library science?*

A pause while I polish the crystal ball—which, oh dear, remains cloudy. Since around 1998 every two years some evolution of the Internet has created a major change in the way librarians work. Right now mobile devices like the iPhone raise a new batch of questions that require a response from deliverers of information (one of the library's main functions). The current business models for the stand-alone e-book readers (Kindle, the Nook) do not take libraries into account. If we move to delivery of books strictly over the internet some new model will have to evolve. Looked at in broad terms, libraries will continue to organize, deliver and help manage information with the best tools we can find.



# SPECIAL EVENTS ON CAMPUS

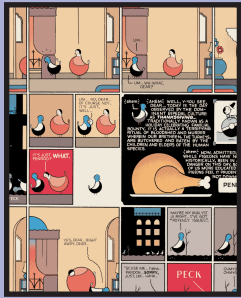
## Graphic Novel Event: Partnership of the Picture and the Word

WEDNESDAY, MAY 5, 2010  
6-7:30 pm

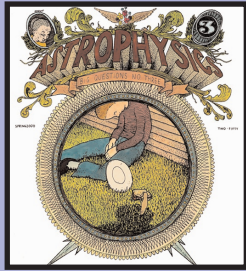
Block Museum of Art  
40 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston, IL 60208

Four of the most popular and interesting graphic  
novelists on the scene right now:

- Jeffrey Brown
- Ivan Brunetti
- Anders Nilsen
- Chris Ware



Chris Ware



Anders Nilsen



Jeffrey Brown



Ivan Brunetti

They will show and discuss their work. More details to come. Hold the date!

Sponsored by  
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