

# The Southern Gazette

Fall 2006

Southern Region, Sigma Tau Delta

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Convention  
2007

March 28-31  
Pittsburgh

Deadline for  
papers: Nov. 30



## Pittsburgh Highlights

Stephanie Emens

Okay, so I have to admit that at last year's convention in Portland, OR I was a little skeptical about having our 2007 convention in Pittsburgh. My mind conjured up images of smokestacks and hazy skies as I tried to imagine what the old steel town would be like. However, after visiting Pittsburgh for the fall Board meeting, I am happy to say that my initial assumptions were completely wrong. Pittsburgh is a charming and beautiful city with a lot going on...trust me, you'll want every second of free time you can muster to explore. The Pittsburgh Hilton is about as centrally located as one could get—in five

minutes you can be either chowing down on a "Pittsburgher" loaded with fries at Privanti Brothers, an inexpensive local hangout, or you could be savoring stuffed chicken at Palomino, a trendy and pricier upscale restaurant. If you hop on the metro to Station Square (it costs about 2 bucks round trip), you'll be faced with tons of tasty options, from the Hard Rock Café to a cozy sushi bar. And just when I thought the city couldn't get any cooler, we stumble upon a dancing fountain. What's that? Well, picture a normal fountain like you might see in a mall. It's in a large rectangular pool and the water comes out in multiple arcs and

plumes. Add a series of colored spotlights that cast a rainbow glow across the leaping streams of water. For the final touch, blast Guns N' Roses' "Welcome to the Jungle," and synchronize the water and the lights to the music. Voila: a dancing fountain. Trust me, this photo doesn't do it justice.



All the Cool Kids  
Were English  
Majors!

*Yep, these folks  
started it all with a  
major in English:*

Alan Alda  
Dave Barry  
Edward Burns  
James Cameron  
Johnny Carson  
Chevy Chase  
Tom Clancy  
Mario Cuomo  
Joan Cusack  
Matt Damon  
Vin Diesel  
David Duchovny  
Harrison Ford  
Jodi Foster  
Heather Graham  
Joseph Heller  
Don Henley  
Famke Janssen  
Stephen King  
Kris Kristofferson  
Tommy Lee Jones  
Arthur Miller  
Toni Morrison  
Paul Newman  
Conan O'Brien  
Joe Paterno  
David Hyde Pierce  
Christopher Reeve  
Sally Ride  
Geoffrey Rush  
Susan Sarandon  
Fred Savage  
Diane Sawyer  
Martin Scorsese  
Paul Simon  
Sting  
Steven Spielberg  
Dr. Seuss  
Clarence Thomas  
Emma Thompson  
John Updike  
Barbara Walters  
Sigourney Weaver  
Reese  
Witherspoon  
Renee Zellweger

*Updates from your SR and ASR*

It's been a busy few months here in Tuscaloosa! My schedule consists of homework, applying to grad school, and FOOTBALL. The football part isn't working out quite so well right now, but the Alabama/Auburn game is coming up, and no matter what people say that game is always up in the air. Roll Tide. In other news, I'm wrapping up my English major, and it's actually quite sad. I don't want to leave undergrad! Ok, maybe I do—but only a little bit.

The fall Board meeting was a blast—I got to know the SRs from the other regions quite well and I heartily encourage everyone to take the time to meet them! They are simply the best! And Pittsburgh—wow. What a neat city. I really hope everyone makes a real effort to go to Convention this year, because it is going to be amazing. We have some awesome speakers lined up, which I will get to later in the newsletter, and our hotel is great. And if you've read the opening column about Pittsburgh then you'll know it's one heck of a place. Hope to see you all—ahem, y'all (this is the Southern region, after all)—there!

Stephanie Emens  
Student Representative



Hello, Everyone. It has been a ferociously full semester here at the University of Alabama! (Roll Tide.) I continue to count down the days until we can all reunite in Pittsburgh. I am in the middle of readying myself and my undergraduate work to apply for graduate school. I am not shying away from melodrama when I say that I feel like my whole life depends on some of the things I am doing this semester. Alas, the future is always scary, but also exciting.

Still, there is always time to enjoy my current classes and to realize how much I love my major. Literature can be such a profound companion sometimes.

I am glad to have Sigma Tau Delta to share this passion.

I am hoping to continue to establish close relationships with our Southern neighbors. This organization can really be beneficial at times—especially when we are applying to graduate school or figuring out plans for the future. Through this next semester, I believe we could all benefit from this type of exchange of information and ideas.

Please, as always, feel free to contact either Stephanie or me with any concerns, questions, or news. We are always so eager to hear from you all! And again I cannot wait to see everyone in Pittsburgh in March!

Carrie Chappell  
Assistant Student Representative

## Southern Regent Roger Stanley reviews Michael Chabon's *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*

### Pittsburgh Fun Facts:

1. The view of Pittsburgh from Mt. Washington was voted as the 2<sup>nd</sup> most beautiful place in America by *USA Today*!
2. The Big Mac was invented in Pittsburgh.
3. Ranked among the cleanest cities in the US and the 17<sup>th</sup> cleanest city in the world!
4. Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum of Art opened in 1895 as the world's first museum of modern art.
5. Pittsburgh is second only to Venice, Italy for the number of bridges in a city—Pittsburgh has 700!
6. First World Series played in Pittsburgh
7. The first heart, liver, and kidney transplants were performed in Pittsburgh.
8. Pittsburgh is the only city rated among the five most livable cities in the US in the last three Rand McNally surveys.
9. Home to the first US movie theatre—1905.

Seniors, here's hoping your own post-graduation summer of '07 will not prove quite as dizzying as Art Bechstein's final undergraduate season, circa late twentieth century. Bechstein, protagonist of Michael Chabon's 1988 debut novel *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, has been compared by Jonathan Yardley in *The Washington Post Book World* with the fictional heroes of Salinger and Twain, to which annals I might add the great Southern novelist Walker Percy. Considerably north of Binx Bolling's environment, a bit northeast of Huck and due west of Holden, our upcoming Sigma Tau Delta convention host city is the setting for a poignant and often hilarious novel which retains the three classical unities within a decidedly contemporary milieu.

Chabon (*The Wonder Boys*) opens his novel in the not-so-merry month of May, just after Art Bechstein has been ditched by his girlfriend and has taken on a job at Boardwalk Books. Aspiring "to work in a true, old-fashioned bookshop, crammed with the mingled smells of literature and Pittsburgh blowing in through the open door," he settles instead for a nightmare of fluorescence and illiterate (if retail-savvy) fellow employees. Art also has one course paper to complete (think Freud), so the University of Pittsburgh library and the east Pittsburgh link in Boardwalk's chain provide a setting with a literary veneer. Mostly, he encounters potential friends and potential lovers of both sexes in these places, radiating out of them down Forbes Avenue and toward the Carnegie Mellon campus in evocative descriptions of a city much richer and funkier than its Rust Belt reputation suggests.

*The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* is not to all tastes in its sexual inclusiveness and the graphic nature of such scenes, but the reader can scarcely fail to identify with this protagonist on the cusp of grad school and/or so-called real life who fears "the unimaginable August that now . . . began to loom" near the novel's end. It is a tale of a season's heat and humidity spent in thrall to new friends and an old father, a shadowy mobster figure who periodically flies to Pittsburgh and treats his firstborn to lavish dinners at sterile high-rise hotel restaurants. Malaise and worse afflict Art Bechstein as he lights out for the territory of his birthright; cutting through the phoniness is, for better or for worse, his default setting.

So as you read Sharon Olds's verse in the months ahead, think about setting aside some time for Chabon's prose as well—the book is purportedly being filmed in Pittsburgh and slated for late 2007 release. Perhaps Chabon's character ultimately overcompensates for his "failure to encounter, to risk, to land [him]self in novel and incomprehensible situations" (as he states in chapter one), but by chapter twenty-three, you may not want this long hot summer ever to end.

## Carrie Chappell Reviews Carrie St. George Comer's *The Unrequited*

Carrie St. George Comer's first book of poems, *The Unrequited*, is a mesmerizing collection of realities. Her images are clear yet dreamlike, collected together by a voice that is authoritative and smooth. The sense of the "unanswered" is keen but rarely troubling because Comer's precision in writing affects a sense of the comfortably undefined.

Nickole Brown of Sarabande Books has dubbed Comer as a "lyric surrealist," which seems a fitting title for her published work that centralizes around the lyric voice of self but also the ambiguity of time, memory, and definitions of reality. She also incorporates a unique and endearing conversational tone with her audience. While some of the dialogue seems to refer to persons or selves exclusive the poem, Comer's audience vicariously experiences the tasks of questioning and answering. For instance, in the poem "Don't Let Me Forget You" Comer's inquisitive yet authoritative voice manifests in lines like "*Was it awful? It wasn't so awful. We watch it sleep, then we sleep.*" This tactic is indeed relative to her books focus.

Comer's consciousness in her poetry is intriguing and satisfying, as she tours her reader through scene after scene of vivid people and places but not abandoning the relationship with the unreal. She ends one poem, "Late Afternoon July," with a reference to a star, but this is more specific than mere poetic cosmology: "And as I turn to walk home/ in the tropical light, the house stands behind me/ like a quarry. A star hangs over that quarry." These lines represent Comer's understanding of time, place, and self as something between the real and the unreal, the exact and the obscure. Her language is beautiful and magical, evoking a bizarre sense of the line between the present and the past.

*Continued on the next page*

Comer's poetry is joy to read and an adventure to the mind. Her work is remarkably conscious and invigorating. She offers new hope to those struggling with those "unrequited" elements of living—the activity of the mind versus the activity of the heart. While there is little conclusion offered by her poetic questions, Comer's confident voice and manner do present a place for solace.

*Carrie St. George Comer was the recipient of the 2001 Black Warrior Review Prize in Poetry (a University of Alabama publication) and currently resides in Miami, Florida.*

Convention  
Speakers:

Sharon Olds,  
author of the  
Common Reader  
Strike Sparks



David Rakoff



Jim Daniels



## The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh

The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh is home to a permanent collection of over 500 works of art by Andy Warhol and other artists. The Museum is open every day except Monday, and admission is usually 10 bucks. However, if you go to the museum on Friday (they call them "Good Fridays") you can get in for a mere \$5.

*From the museum website:*

The Andy Warhol Museum is a vital forum in which diverse audiences of artists, scholars and the general public are galvanized through creative interaction with the art and life of Andy Warhol. The Warhol is ever-changing and constantly re-defining itself in relation to contemporary life, using its unique collections and dynamic, interactive programming as tools.

Located on the North Shore of Pittsburgh, The Warhol is one of the four Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh and is a collaborative project of the Carnegie Institute, Dia Center for the Arts, and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. Opened in 1994, the Museum features extensive permanent collections of art and archives on one of the most influential American artists of the twentieth century. It is also a primary resource for anyone seeking insights into contemporary art and popular culture.

**Don't forget to submit your papers by  
November 30th for Convention—you  
won't want to miss it this year!**