

SPECIAL  
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INTEREST:

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Minneapolis  
Conference**
- **A Tourist's  
Guide to  
Minneapolis**
- **Exploring the  
Southern  
Gothic**
- **Reflections on  
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# The Southern Gazette

SIGMA TAU DELTA HONOR SOCIETY

FALL 2008

## SR Offers Thoughts on Minneapolis, Service

### A Message from the SR, Sawyer Halbrook



Hello and  
greetings  
from Sawyer  
Halbrook,  
Student

Representative for the Southern Region. This newsletter, almost in its entirety, will be devoted to the International Conference, which will be held in Minneapolis this year. While I would love to relive every moment of the break out meetings as well as the board meetings, I shall find some way to refrain for the sake of the newsletter devotees. It is necessary, however, to point out the importance of individual chapter activity throughout the Southern region, and submission to the spring conference. Submission will be much easier this year, as it is entirely electronic. That is, of course, in addition to the oldey but goldey pony mail route, of which we have all endured.

Furthermore, the website [www.english.org](http://www.english.org) has undergone quite a makeover, thanks to some serious overtime by literary computer geeks. The site is a valuable tool pregnant with such intelligence as access regional/national newsletters, featured conference speakers and biographies, submission information and guidelines, any updates to the conference agenda, as well as scholarships and awards—utilize this website, it is an entire world of reassurance and accurate dates!

One of the more exciting things discussed during my recent stay in Minneapolis was that of an international book drive. I must confess, I do not have all the detailed minutia in concern to such an undertaking by Sigma Tau Delta, but the sheer existence of such an effort is enough to light a fire in all of our guts. So here's the skinny, guys and gals, Better World Books is an aid organization that gathers old or used texts and other miscellaneous

books, and delivers what is most useful to impoverished areas. Now, nothing as of yet is set in stone, but we have been negotiating opportunities--just please be on the lookout for future references to this project, when we as SRs and SAs have more information to offer.

Considering the very fundamentals of my nature, I base a great deal on volunteer work--volunteer work in relation to the needs of others, or the bigger picture, and the way it allows one to funnel all things human and real into a something that may help another to do or become a doer. Now, while on this topic, I would like to introduce a wonderful service opportunity, which all chapters should investigate. Featured later in this newsletter is an article by one A.J. King, a Louisiana Tech Sigma Tau Delta member, who has found a way to marry the love of literature with the spreading of literacy.

# My Gothic: An Essay By Micah Hicks

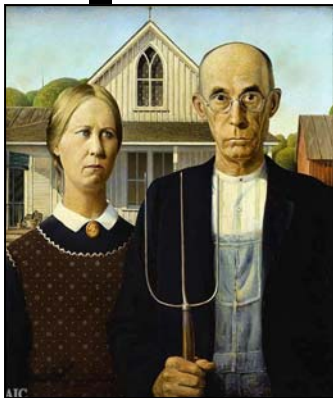
By: Micah Dean Hicks, Sigma Tau Delta Student Advisor

One thing that I've found as I talk to other Sigma Tau Delta members is that many of them have a fierce loyalty to their home city or state. People will often tell me about their city's publications, coffee shops, bookstores, and local restaurants. When they ask me about where I'm from—a very small town in Southern Arkansas—it's difficult to find nice things to say. My town doesn't have a single real bookstore.

If I want to eat somewhere particularly nice (and by that, I mean a chain), I have to drive at least an hour. Recently a friend pointed out to me how much I hate on Arkansas. It's sort of a hobby, talking on how much my state sucks.

My friend's comment got me thinking about my state and the South in general. I have to admit that even though my area doesn't have as much access to the cool stuff other places do—I have to drive five hours to get *Swift* soda—there are many things about the South that I do like. I like the accents and the landscape. Most of all, I love the literature. Though I'm envious of other parts of the country sometimes, it was no contest when it came time for me to do my Senior project: I was going to write about the Southern Gothic (SG).

One of the things I had to do as part of my project was to decide exactly what the SG was. Scholarship on it can be a little fuzzy. Lots of things get called Southern Gothic with no explanation of what that means (though the word "grotesque" comes up a lot). The term is not as specific



and clear as one might like it to be, so a big part of what I did was to create a working definition of the genre. For my purposes, a work had to include the following things in order to be considered Southern Gothic: damaged characters, decaying settings, and a tone of utter stagnation.

That's a very shortened form of my criteria, but you get the idea. The interesting thing about my research is that the Southern Gothic doesn't necessarily have to be Southern! Joyce Carol Oates, a New Yorker, is considered a writer of SG by many critics. Moreover, just as Southern Gothic is not restrictive to the South, it can also be found outside of Literature. Often it's a palpable feeling. You can go into some small towns and damn near breathe it.

Like Oates' inclusion into the genre, towns that have a Southern feel aren't restricted to the South. Gaiman's book, *American Gods*, has places that give off this kind of feeling.

Roadside attractions in his novel, inspired by actual stops all over the country, seem useless and dead, existing only for the sake of being freakish (though his Gods have uses for these places, even if we do not). Not all of these places are Southern, but the South has more than its share of them, in both *American Gods* and in actuality.

This was underscored for me over the summer when I drove from Ontario,

California back to Arkansas. So many little towns along the side of the highway looked like they were rotting: tin peeling back from roofs, houses completely weathered of their paint, dead cars, trash-filled front yards, orange gravel and high, yellowed grass. I never saw people in those places. A feeling of failure rose off of those towns. Progress didn't seem thinkable. Occasionally I'd see weird things, like inflatable dinosaurs on top of school buses on top of mesas. Sometimes I drove past more menacing omens like Quemada, the black fields that burned.

Even though the Southern Gothic isn't confined to the South, we do seem to have more of it here. So while my home may not boast as much culture and refinement as other areas, we do have something. We have communities that have been clawing their way to a slow death almost since they were established; some of us came from those places or live there still. We have people who take pride in a history of genocide and hate. We have old buildings that we let sit and rot because they have always sat and rotted.

Ours is a heritage of the Gothic.



## THE MINNEAPOLIS EXPERIENCE: A CELEBRATION OF THE ARTS



### A Message from Southern Regent Roger Stanley

While Sigma Tau Delta fall Board planning meetings seem to allow little time for getting out of the hotel (other than the group lunches and group dinners), I made a point on Saturday afternoon and evening to venture forth via public transit to a couple of funky neighborhoods off the beaten downtown path. St. Paul offers sites related to F. Scott Fitzgerald's former residency there, and the great poet John Berryman ("Dream Songs") is buried somewhere in Mendota Heights, by the banks of the Mississippi. Still, Minneapolis proper offers these opportunities for lovers of the arts:

The southbound bus down Chicago Avenue passes through a largely residential cool commercial district called Parkway, anchored by the Parkway Theatre. Weathering a rainstorm inside Sovereign Grounds Coffee House, I studied the marquee and had my choice of a recent documentary on the renegade film director Roman Polanski or a reprise of an Elvis Presley feature from the 60's. By the time the skies cleared, Amazon Books on the corner of Chicago and 47<sup>th</sup> had closed for the day, but it was nice in this cyber age to note the "We Order Any Book Available" sign and the Book Sense Independent Bookstore sticker on its precipitation-streaked windows.

Inside Sovereign Grounds, my "for here" coffee cup boasted a "Plug Into Your Local Library" motto across it, and the friendly owner went to great lengths to explain his homegrown brewing process and run through the pastry options, all made from scratch by his wife. The usual block, block and a half of bars and restaurants surrounds these businesses before the avenue gives way to private homes once more, but I couldn't help focusing also on the quaint Twin Cities Tennis shop, with a life-size image of the now retired Justine Henin fronting the establishment--chain retailers seemed miles removed.

After the Polanski, I made my way back downtown and took in a preview performance of the Arthur Miller play A View from the Bridge at the fabled Guthrie Theatre. The auditorium was huge, but it was only the number two venue out of three, a long sold-out adaptation of Little House on the Prairie (presumably sans Michael Landon) gracing the main stage. A fifteen-dollar rush ticket did me right--make sure and see what's playing at the Guthrie (named after famous Italian director Tyrone Guthrie) in March, for it opens right onto the River and features murals of famous playwrights just outside its entrance.

For you popular music fans, the downtown venue called First Avenue/7<sup>th</sup> St. Entry (thus capturing the street corner of its locale) is your best bet. I missed my favorite, Lucinda Williams, by a month or so, but there is an early show and a late show seven nights a week there. The oddly named Electric Fetus is the Twin Cities' record store of best repute, a bit away from downtown but sure to offer up some prime picks in the new and used bins. It's a cut below Ear X-tacy of Louisville, but it rocks.

Conference chair Gloria Hochstein, a native Midwesterner, can fill you in further on the Walker Art Center and other possibilities, but trust your Southern Regent to say Minneapolis is an artsy town, waiting for a Southern invasion in late March 2009. Hope to see y'all there.



# Beyond the Reflection: Musings on the Life of a Fish

## A Message from the ASR, Lauren Coleman

For non-vampiric reasons, I have a general disdain for mirrors. Let it be known that while I do not blame the Monday-morning mirror for reflecting those heavy black bags (from lack of sleep) that no under eye cream can touch, nor do I begrudge my vehicle's passenger side-mirror lettering "Objects in Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear" for reminding me that the post-collegiate working world—blue lights and sirens flashing—is hot on my tail, mirrors and I are not the best of friends. These concerns are best left for inner contemplation and the gnashing of teeth in private. Understandably, when faced with writing a piece decidedly on "Reflections," the theme of our upcoming convention, I was stuck.

Then, I considered a return to nature. While the mirror is now the object of choice for narcissists and teeth-checkers alike, bodies of water previously reigned as the main reflective means. However, I'd like to look beyond the mere reflection to what lies locked within the watery surface.

As a child, I spent my summers in the North Louisiana countryside with my mother who lived just outside the limits of the "I'm-surprised-it's-on-the-map" village of Doyline, where one of my greatest delights was feeding the catfish living in our cozy pond tucked underneath the green glow of the midday tree canopy. Each day, I gripped a plastic pail with shift-sloshing catfish feed, and trekked the half mile from the house to the pond.

During a feeding one lazy day, a streak of white beneath the murky green-brown ripples caught my eye. I peered closer into the folds of the muddy pool to see, sure enough, an albino catfish. My eyes glittered in wonder at the unique fish, the pride of the pond. Shortly thereafter, I began leading small guided tours of the pond for my friends, free-of-charge, but not unconditionally. I swore my friends to secrecy; in their eyes, I was a god—or the closest thing to it. One girl had a new bike. Another girl had a shiny new collection of pogs.

But I / had the albino catfish.

Alas, I could not hold onto my fishy claim to fame, but such was destiny.



I wish I could tell you that the albino catfish found a nice ladyfish and set up a few schools, but instead, he disappeared after a mid-April Louisiana gullywasher, and with it, so dimmed my joy.

Beyond the reflection lurked a truth that I could observe but never own.

## ATTENTION SOUTHERN REGION:

Submit your **POETRY, SHORT STORIES, LITERARY ARTICLES, CHAPTER NEWS, BOOK REVIEWS...or anything you imagine!**

**For the Spring 2009 issue of the Southern Gazette. Longer submissions should be between 500 and 700 words, and should be mailed to the upcoming SR and ASR—to be elected at the Minneapolis Conference March 26-28, 2008. Don't pass on this great opportunity for publication!**

# Fuller, Gaiman and Perry to Speak in Minneapolis

## ALEXANDRA FULLER



Memoir:  
*DON'T LET'S GO TO THE DOGS TONIGHT: An African Childhood.*  
 (Random House 2001)  
 Winner: Booksense Non-Fiction Book of the Year 2003  
 Winner: Winifred Holtby Memorial 2003

Memoir:

*SCRIBBLING THE CAT: Travels with an African Soldier* (Penguin Press 2004)

Winner: The LETTRE ULYSSES AWARD FOR THE ART OF REPORTAGE 2005.

Non-Fiction:

*THE LEGEND OF COLTON H. BRYANT* (Penguin Press 2008)

A 2008 Book Sense Pick

## NEIL GAIMAN



Books include:

*American Gods*  
*Good Omens*  
*The Sandman: Book of Dreams*

Graphic novels include:

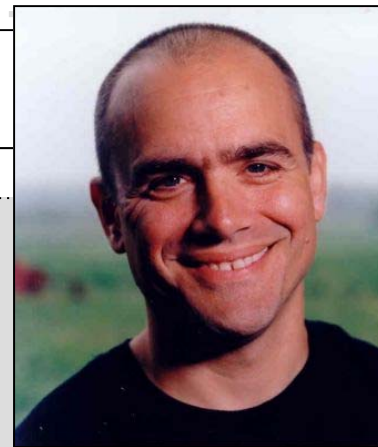
*Black Orchid*  
*Signal to Noise*  
*The Sandman: Volumes I-X*

Theater works include:

*Mr. Punch*  
*The Wolves in the Walls*

## THE COMMON READER: SNAG YOUR COPY TODAY!

Michael Perry's *Population: 485 - Meeting Your Neighbors One Siren at a Time*, a collection of essays based on his experiences as a volunteer EMS in the small town of New Auburn, Wisconsin, has been selected as the 2008-2009 common reader. While the common reader celebrates the works of our featured speakers by establishing a shared text for members, it also promotes a focus on fostering literacy and a love of literature within our communities. Sigma Tau Delta offers \$150 for the best convention presentation that features the common reader in any genre. Visit <http://www.sneezingcow.com/> for more information on Perry's *Population 485* and his other works.



# Sigma Tau Delta Poetry Submission

## “Night Scene” by Deborah Regan

city where the tattered lamps in bars  
lie unperceived

& the darts miss the marks in  
my forehead, the scarecrow lying in vodka  
channels me, keeping patrons out  
and it in.

& not that I can function here...  
hostility of light plays  
on green bottles,  
inverting what dilated pupils imagine

& the sad people in their baseball hats  
deer musk, rifles propped on the bar  
(another caste)

& this a way station  
to a fixed, lunar point.

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Deborah Regan is a Sigma Tau Delta alumna from  
the University of Alabama in Huntsville.



# SIGMA TAU DELTA

INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH HONOR SOCIETY

# Making Time to Make a Difference

**By: A.J. King, Rho Gamma Chapter  
LA Tech student in Journalism, Spanish, and  
English**

Sometimes, I think there is never enough time in the day, even for the most necessary things like eating, sleeping, or breathing, but every week, I make time for something that is very important to me. I tutor elementary students of mostly Mexican descent in English once a week at Farmerville Elementary in Union Parish, La. I and a handful of other volunteers make the drive every Tuesday from Ruston to Farmerville to work with our students. We're a small organization on Louisiana Tech's campus, but we're part of something larger, of Manna Project International and of serving our community.

For me, it was a matter of seeing a need in the Union Parish community, specifically Farmerville, and knowing I could help. Even though speaking Spanish isn't required, it helps. (Can you speak English? Great! You can help!) I already had a sympathetic ear to the language and culture, and the more I've worked with these children, the deeper my commitment gets. Not only has this small, grassroots organization allowed me to use my skills for something other than homework, but it has strengthened my compassion for others.

It's not just working with the children; the bonds between volunteers are all the greater for our once-weekly adventures to Farmerville. Spending about two hours a week with someone in a car makes for quality time to get to know them, and because of that, we're all better friends. We've founded our friendship on a common interest and a passionate commitment to our students.

Although I didn't realize it at the time, we volunteers are role models for these children. They look up to us-- literally since they are half our height and figuratively because we are college students and have succeeded in a higher education. We're able to work with our students more closely than their teachers and fill in the gaps of their language skills while also exposing the children to parts of the American culture with which they may not

have had any contact. It's a privilege for me to be able to bridge communities-- Spanish-speaking and English-speaking, Ruston and Farmerville, Louisiana Tech and Union Parish. It's a privilege for me, to know I'm making a difference, however small it may be.



For more information, visit: [mannaproject.org](http://mannaproject.org)



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