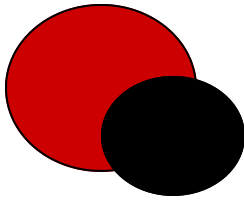


Spring 2007

# The Southern Gazette



Southern Region, Sigma Tau Delta



## Highlights from the 2007 International Convention in Pittsburgh, PA *Nellene Benhardus*

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After riding a trolley car up a sharp incline, I stood at the top of Mt. Washington and surveyed the city below. I looked at the three rivers and the various buildings and realized how naturally and historically beautiful Pittsburgh was. I had wondered how the “steel city” could compete with the “green” we had experienced in Portland (not to mention Powells!). However, between the gorgeous hills and rivers and attractions such as the Andy Warhol museum, beautiful architecture, and Station Square, I had to admit that Pittsburgh surpassed all my expectations.

The convention was at least as amazing as the city which hosted it. We were inspired by hearing hundreds of fellow Sigma Tau Delta members present outstanding critical essays and creative works. We had the privilege of hearing three guest speakers: Sharon Olds, David Ra-

koff, and Jim Daniels. The Southern region met together for its annual regional caucus on Friday afternoon, fun events such as the open microphone and bad poetry contest filled the evenings, and the entire event was concluded with the awards banquet.

As usual, the Southern region was well represented among the awards given this year. This year’s Southern winners included:

- Elva Bell McLin Senior Scholarship  
Sandra Shorey (\$2500)  
Columbus State University (S)  
Alpha Kappa Upsilon chapter
- Edwin L. Stockton Jr., Graduate Scholarship  
Megan Holt (\$2500)  
Tulane University (S)  
Alpha Beta Upsilon chapter

- Henry Regnery Endowed Scholarship  
Andrea Murphy (\$2500)  
Old Dominion University (S)  
Nu Upsilon chapter

- Regents' Scholarships  
Southern  
Melanie Greenwood (\$1000)  
Columbus State University (S)  
Alpha Kappa Upsilon chapter

- P.C. Sommerville Teaching Awards  
Jonathan Burgos (\$2000)  
Tulane University (S)  
Alpha Beta Upsilon chapter

- Original Poetry Awards  
2nd Place  
Nellene Benhardus (\$125)  
Union University (S)  
Theta Omicron chapter

- Outstanding Chapter Award  
Alpha Beta Epsilon chapter,  
Runner-up (\$175)  
Tulane University (S)



## Sharon Olds *Strikes Sparks* at Convention

—Lauren Coleman




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*I handed her my copy of Strike Sparks and said, "I appreciate your use of story-telling. It speaks to my humanity." She thanked me, and in her kind, composed manner said, "You'd be surprised how many people don't."*

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Sigma Tau Delta was honored to have American poet Sharon Olds share selections and insight from her latest collection of poetry, *Strike Sparks: Selected Poems* (2004). Even in the vast ballroom filled with bodies and low-lighting, Olds managed to weave an intimate and personable atmosphere. She opened with a somber reading of Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays," leaving the audience in reverent silence for a few moments before they burst into applause. The experience was almost spiritual.

After a brief pause, Olds transitioned from her solemn tone into a sultry drawl. "This is such a hot poetry city," she said of Pittsburgh, to a response of cheers and applause. Then, she launched into her poetry, reading "The One Girl at the Boys' Party," laughingly commenting that her poem was probably the first the appearance of a bathing suit with hamburgers and french fries printed on it.

Olds's poems often take on a personal color—a trait both criticized and admired by the literary world. The audience responded with the latter sen-

timent as she read "41, Alone, No Gerbil" in which her daughter prematurely abandons her new role of 'motherhood' at the repeated loss of her pet gerbils, finding out one of the cold hard truths of life—sometimes, "it sucks."

In several of her poems, Olds addresses the tenuous relationship she had with her father. "Natural History," fluctuates between childhood memories such as when her father asks a moray eel at the zoo, "How would you like a tasty girl?" and visiting her father's grave. Olds also approaches the topic of parent-child relationships in "The Clasp," where she describes the horrific "shock of the moment" upon grabbing her four year-old's wrist and clenching it tightly in dark chastisement. Olds's warm and comforting voice resounds with disdain as she recounts the experience.

Reflective as well, "Self Portrait, Rear View" tackled the humorous nature of body image. The poem depicts Olds observing her bottom in a mirror, playing with her cellulite. The women in the room laughed heartily, imagining

perhaps their own physical anomalies, even the tiniest imperfections, as Olds described her bottom as a jiggling mass that kept on moving after the slightest touch. Behind the laughter, though, lay the darker reality of women struggling with self-acceptance. Olds presented a humorous yet serious 'rear' view of what most women see as they age, provoking thought at the artful qualities of the human body.

Following the reading of her poems, Olds opened the floor for "a chat" as she called it—a question and answer session. A member of the audience inquired, "What's the best advice for a young poet?" to which Olds swiftly replied, "Take your vitamins." Olds encouraged young poets to take care of "your instrument, your mind." I had the opportunity of speaking with Olds after the reading at her book signing. Star-struck, I handed her my copy of *Strikes Sparks* and said, "I appreciate your use of story-telling. It speaks to my humanity." She thanked me, and in her kind, composed manner said, "You'd be surprised how many people don't."

## Chapter Activities

This past year, I had the privilege of serving as our local chapter's president. As I thought through our chapter's future year, I struggled to think of creative and varied activities in which we could participate. Granted, every chapter is different and has its own unique traditions and activities throughout a year. However, my recent plight caused me to realize that other chapters might be in a similar position. Below, I have listed just a few ideas for chapter activities.

### Appreciate your Teachers

We all love our English professors, but since we have moved out of the elementary school setting in which appreciation meant Christmas gifts and dandelions from the playground, we might fail to show that we care. This past year, a few members of our chapter created an "English Department Appreciation Day," during which we surprised our professors with a brunch during their departmental meeting. Other ideas might include making cards for professors and having chapter members sign their name with a personal message or hosting an event in honor of the professors.

### Celebrate an Author's Birthday

Shakespeare's birthday is a great time to get together and eat cake while celebrating one of the greatest playwrights in English history. However, it might be fun to throw a party for another author or poet as well.

T.S. Eliot was born on September 26, Oscar Wilde was born on October 16, George Eliot was born on November 22, Virginia Woolf was born on January 25, Sinclair Lewis was born on February 7, A.E. Housman was born on March 26, Harper Lee was born on April 28, and Robert Browning was born on May 7.



### Poetry or Creative Writing Reading

If your campus does not have a specific creative writing group which hosts a poetry or creative writing reading, think about creating a "coffee shop" night where students could spend time together while listening to one another read their creative works.

### Chapter Field Trips

Many areas have authors reading their work, literature-related plays or productions, or other literary events throughout the year. Going to a reading or play is not only a way to experience the literary culture of an area, but it also is a great way to grow closer to the members of the chapter.



## *The Moviegoer*: A Reading Suggestion from your Regent -Roger Stanley

As some of your semesters are coming to an end (though not quite at my own Union University, whose spring term extends through the third week of May!), I greet you with a summer reading suggestion, albeit in shorter form than my full-fledged review of Michael Chabon's *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* from the fall newsletter. I'll save a Louisville book recommendation for next time; the novel in question right now is 1961's *The Moviegoer*, by the Southern Catholic Walker Percy.

For its New Orleans references alone, this book deserves your attention. I don't mean this in some post-Katrina tribute way, for Percy's first novel is timeless and universal, despite its concrete reference to Mardi Gras and Lenten events in the life of protagonist Binx Bolling. I first started *The Moviegoer* while holed up one Halloween in the home of a crusty gentleman whose first command to me was "let's keep the porch light off and

hope we're not bothered by trick-or-treaters." This was fine by me, out on assignment for an in-home nursing service while taking a break between my sophomore and junior undergraduate years, caught in hiatus between my original pre-pharmacy major and my future major/avocation of English. I read and read—and have scarcely stopped reading and re-reading Percy since. As the hours passed, my patient hoping for no knocks on the door and me praying that his catheter would stay in place and no emergencies ensue, I experienced something akin to Walker Percy's own shift from his training as a medical doctor to a life spent reading the European existentialists and creating his own words in their wake.

Recently while in New Orleans for Jazz Fest, I took a turn north across the Causeway to Covington, LA, where Percy lived his final years. He's buried in anonymity in back of an abbey off River Road, with a plain flat

headstone adorned simply with the same cross inscription which other graves, mainly of Benedictine brothers, share. Binx Bolling doesn't die at the end of the novel, but his reflections on combating the "malaise" of our modern world via the "search" should strike chords in readers almost a half century later.

So don't fall into the age-old dichotomy of "beach books" vs. textbooks, escapism versus serious literature, this summer of all summers. *The Moviegoer* is a National Book Award winner and subject of many dissertations, but Percy also made the *New York Times* bestseller list and has had his six novels reprinted in trade editions for years. Happy reading, with a novel which crosses over boundaries and categories, which delights us as much as it continues to instruct us.

### A Couple of Notes . . .

**-Would you be interested in seeing your own article published in the next Southern newsletter? Begin thinking now of what you might like to contribute to the fall newsletter. Chapter highlights, book reviews, creative work, and all other English-related articles will be welcomed and considered. Send contributions to Nellene at s270642@uu.edu and put "Newsletter contribution" in the subject line.**

**-Remember that the 2008 Convention is in Louisville! Make plans now to submit critical or creative works and join us for yet another great year!**

## Summer Reading is Fun Again!



When I think of my summers growing up, I remember going to summer camp, playing with friends and neighbors, and spending afternoons swimming. Most of all, though, I remember reading. We use to get in the car, drive to the library, and spend an afternoon surrounded by books. Then, at the end of the afternoon, we would pile into the car again, drive our books home, and spend the next two weeks reading.

When I think of summers in college, I think of jobs, traveling, internships, and school.

It is easy to become distracted by the many things that have to be done in the few months between semesters. However, if you are anything like me, reading is still a favorite part of the summer months. This next summer, try and make time to read—not because it is required for a class, but because you enjoy it. To get you started, we have compiled a list of some favorites.



(Nellene Benhardus)

*House* by Frank Peretti and Ted Dekker

Dekker and Peretti take two couples, strand them in a Victorian house, and trap them in a psycho's twisted game in the backwoods of Alabama.

*House* is hardly high-brow literature, but packs enough suspense to keep you guessing until the last pages.

(Lauren Coleman)

*Gaudy Night*  
By Dorothy Sayers

Reading *Gaudy Night* after spending three weeks in Oxford is a singular experience, but even those who have only dreamed of visiting the city of dreaming spires can appreciate this novel. As part of the Lord Peter Wimsey mystery series, *Gaudy Night* explores issues of academia, women in the world of learning, and Oxford culture as it follows the haunting adventure of Harriet Vane.

(Nellene Benhardus)

*The Eyre Affair*  
By Jasper Fforde

What happens in an alternate universe in which the hottest crimes involve literary alterations and enthusiasts travel door to door to convince London that Bacon wrote Shakespeare? In this novel, Fforde mixes the world of science fiction with a world of literary allusions as Thursday Next attempts to save the original version of *Jane Eyre* from demise.

(Nellene Benhardus)

*Heart of a Dog* by Mikhail Bulgakov

Soviet satire, anyone? Written during the Stalinist regime, *Heart of a Dog* presents a horrifically absurd, yet hilarious story about a stray dog named Sharik who is transformed into a man in post-Revolutionary Russia.

(Lauren Coleman)

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## A Message from Nellene Benhardus, SR



When I attended the 2006 International Convention in Portland, I immediately fell in love with Sigma Tau Delta. I loved being with so many people who were filled with such creative ideas and using their creative power to do so many neat English-related things. Throughout this past year, our local chapter has become more and more active. Then, the Pittsburgh convention reminded me, yet again, of the amazing things that happen when English majors from all around the country gather together.

Needless to say, Sigma Tau Delta is one of the things about which I am very enthusiastic. Therefore, I am especially excited to serve the organization by representing the Southern Region. This next year, I look forward to helping as we plan the 2008 International Convention in Louisville and make other important decisions concerning Sigma Tau Delta.

However, I am also excited to help the South grow as a region. I hope to see communication between chapters increase as we move into the 2007-2008 year. Even from talking to other SRs and ASRs, there seem to be a host of opportunities for regional events.

If there is anything either I or Lauren can do to help you, or if you have any ideas, suggestions, or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us. We look forward to getting to know you as we serve this region!

## A Message From Lauren Coleman, ASR

Hello everyone! Let me begin by saying what an honor it is to have the opportunity to serve the Sigma Tau Delta community as your 2007-2008 Associate Student Representative for the Southern Region. I am currently a senior at Louisiana Tech University double-majoring in English and History. I am eagerly awaiting graduation, which will be in plainer view once I can maneuver around the stacks of research invading my computer room, as I'm sure many of you can relate. This summer I will take a brief hiatus from school, and then return to Louisiana Tech University in the fall to pursue an MA in English by beginning graduate work in 19<sup>th</sup> Century British literature. Although I am passionate about literature, the heart of my aspirations has, for many years, been teaching. Combining both loves—literature and teaching—into

a career would be the quintessential for me, and I anticipate the marriage of the two more than anything in my life.

This year was my first time to attend convention, and what an unexpected surprise it was! Pittsburgh exceeded all I imagined it would be—the buzz of a busy city, scintillating cuisine, and dizzying architecture that stretched upward for miles. I found this year's convention theme of 'confluence' to be quite fitting, actually. Inside of the Hilton, panelists presented their work in an atmosphere of quiet sophistication and regard. Meanwhile, vehicles busily zipped by outside, their colors a stark contrast to the vanilla interior of the hotel's presentation rooms. The greatest confluence, however, (as many of you well remember) was the Gospel revival simultaneously taking place on the other side of a thin ballroom partition

as our convention surged forward unapologetically. It was a match to be found in a Blakean reverie.

Above all else, I enjoyed sharing my first convention with Sigma Tau Delta members from around our nation. I regret that our time together was so brief, but am thankful for this opportunity to help serve with Nellene Benhardus to assist in bringing our region even closer together, as well as to collaborate with other regions in making next year's convention in Louisville, Kentucky a huge success. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please feel free to contact either Nellene or me! We would love to hear from you and to help however possible. Until we meet again next year, best wishes for a wonderful year!