



- TRICIA HOMER '04 IS MISS U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
- THE VALUE OF TEACHING A FAILED NOVEL
- THE SCIENTIFIC UNCERTAINTIES OF GLOBAL WARMING
- PROFESSOR DISCUSSES NEW NOVEL ON TODAY SHOW
- A TASTE FOR ACTION MOVIES WAS HONED AT WESLEYAN

Rocking Out to the Beat of Hope

An effort by a group of Wesleyan students to provide humanitarian aid to the Darfur region of Sudan succeeded beyond their wildest dreams.

By David Pesci

In November the popular online iTunes Music Store offered a benefit album of original songs performed by internationally known artists. The album quickly became a best seller, generating \$100,000 in less than a month. All the proceeds are going to relief efforts aimed at war-ravaged refugees. It's an impressive, admirable venture. Even more impressive is that five college students, four of them Wesleyan seniors, conceived and produced the entire album this past summer.

The album is titled *ASAP*—the Afrobeat Sudan Aid Project—and the proceeds will go directly to humanitarian aid for the people of Darfur, Sudan.

"As the genocide in Darfur continued to escalate during the summer and became increasingly visible in American media, we realized that we had the opportunity to galvanize these inherently political artists toward assisting in the crisis," says Eric Herman '05, a co-producer of the album.

The album came together when Herman, Jesse Brenner '05, Adam Tuck '05, David Ahl '05, and Joe M.F. Wilson, an N.Y.U. student, were working on a film documentary about the burgeoning Afrobeat music scene in New York City.

"As the summer progressed and the scope of the documentary widened, we

began brainstorming about a more immediate project we could get out there," says Brenner, also a co-producer of the album. "Afrobeat was the perfect sound to mobilize people into action."

Herman was well aware of the Afrobeat genre. A music major, he had

with some of the Afrobeat musicians they had been filming and had worked with in the past to see if they could make the disc a reality.

"Those artists signed on immediately and offered their help in recruiting others," says Herman. "In a short amount of time, we had virtually all the major artists in Afrobeat involved in the project, representing four countries" (United States, France, Great Britain, and Nigeria).

Ahl came on as a co-producer and sound engineer. Tuck did the graphic

through his nonprofit organization, True Majority. Cohen then personally contacted Apple's iTunes Music Store and convinced them to both host the album—making it the first charity album ever offered on iTunes—and give it a prominent spot on the iTunes Music Store homepage.


The recording sessions were completed during the fall and the album debuted on iTunes Nov. 23, 2004.

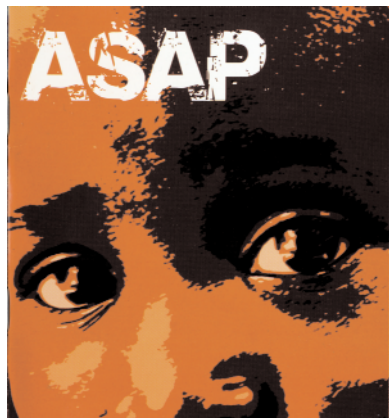
"The first day on iTunes was incredible," says Tuck. "My album cover was sitting on the front page of iTunes next to U2 and Britney Spears. I could not believe it."

The album quickly shot up to #1 on iTunes World Music Chart and hit #26 in overall album sales during its first week.

The artists on the album's 12 tracks include Afrobeat's greatest star, Tony Allen, and the genre's founder, Fela Kuti. The music is upbeat, and to a neophyte listener sounds much like a fusion of SKA, reggae, and jazz, with politically-tinged lyrics.

The *ASAP* album remains available through iTunes, as well as at www.modiba.net. The documentary film on African music in New York—which begat the CD project—will be released in 2005.

"It's all been very exciting," says Herman. "There is no cause that is more dire and in need of support than helping the victims of Darfur genocide. Through this project we are in a position to offer great music to the world while saving lives in the process. What more could we ask for?" 



"THE FIRST DAY ON ITUNES WAS INCREDIBLE," SAYS TUCK. "MY ALBUM COVER WAS SITTING ON THE FRONT PAGE OF ITUNES NEXT TO U2 AND BRITNEY SPEARS. I COULD NOT BELIEVE IT."

spent time in Africa studying the music. He and the album's co-producer, Wesleyan senior Jesse Brenner (a philosophy major), also had written about Afrobeat music, reviewed concerts, and reported on it for National Public Radio.

Their ideas for a benefit CD quickly began to coalesce. Herman and Brenner began using their contacts

design for the album. Ahl's father, an attorney, helped them create Modiba Productions, an L.L.C. (limited liability corporation), for the project. A friend, Aaron Thaler '05, who is the godson of Ben Cohen of Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, introduced them to Cohen. He immediately championed the project and helped the students underwrite the production costs





**MISS U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
INTELLECT CLINCHES THE TITLE**

“My mother has called me ‘Miss Universe’ since I was 2,” admits Tricia Homer ’04 with a laugh. She is now just one contest away from the possibility of making this title her own, worldwide.

In November, Homer was crowned Miss U.S. Virgin Islands, eligible to compete for the Miss Universe title at a pageant to be held in Bangkok, Thailand, May 30. The government major at Wesleyan had begun pageant competition in her teens, winning the title of Queen at her high school. At Wesleyan, she pursued dance (always her passion, she says) as well as African American studies and spent a language-acquisition

semester in Mexico. She led a government seminar in her senior year and spent another semester in Morocco, where she studied French and Arabic languages, as well as the role of women in third-world economic growth.

After Commencement, she decided to prepare for the Miss U.S. Virgin Islands competition, aware that she could use this high-profile position to promote youth arts education.

The contest featured six segments, including a personal interview covering a wide range of current topics, an introductory speech stating her goals, and an impromptu question-answer session. Winning those three segments earned her the “Miss Intellect” title. When she won

the cultural costume segment, she clinched the title. Now, Miss U.S. Virgin Islands finds herself making about five public appearances a week—as well as embarking on fundraising projects for the trip. Her hope, she says, is to see lots of Wesleyan faces in the audience, cheering her toward her Miss Universe dream.

**WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY PRESS
NATIONAL BOOK AWARD**

Last November, *Door in the Mountain: New and Collected Poems* by Jean Valentine, published by Wesleyan University Press, was awarded the prestigious National Book Award. At the Press, the announcement was a cause for celebration. Director Suzanna Tamminen ’90, MALS ’94, was the book’s editor; Visiting Artist Keiji Shinohara designed the cover. Tamminen offered this account:

On Wednesday, Nov. 17, at 9:57 p.m., I sat in the kitchen at my home computer and logged onto the National Book Foundation home page. They had promised to post the winners of this year’s National Book Awards by 10 p.m., and I was eager to see if one of our books by Jean Valentine, which was nominated in the poetry category, had won. Many months earlier, when this book was just heading into production, I predicted that it would win a major award. Of course, editors always champion their authors, but in this case I felt especially strongly; not only was the work deserving, but the author is simply one of the sweetest people I’ve ever met.

I first read Jean Valentine’s poetry as a Wesleyan undergrad. I remember sitting on the floor in the stacks at Olin Library reading her early books, *Pilgrims* and *Ordinary Things*, and marveling at the weight of emotion carried in the simplest of lines. Her poems are direct, often dreamlike, and always opening out to the ineffable, to the mysteries at the heart of life, so that to read her works is to open oneself. Their

grace, and beauty, and humility is sometimes breathtaking, but you have to be quiet enough to hear them. She doesn’t force anything; there is no sense of her trying to captivate. She steps out of the way and allows the poems to come through.

When I was first reading her work, I was often stymied by my inability to “figure out” the poem—I could feel its power, but what did she really mean? The aspect of Valentine’s work that I appreciate most is that it has helped me to become a different kind of reader. I no longer have to master a poem, I can simply be in it. In this sense, I think I have always read Valentine’s poetry as a kind of Zen teaching (even though she herself makes no such claims for her work). In 1998, I read a new manuscript by Valentine which included “Mare and Newborn Foal.” I love this poem, which changes each time I read it, so subtly are the tones of grief and hope, love and submission interwoven:

MARE AND NEWBORN FOAL
When you die
there are bales of hay
heaped high in space
mean while
with my tongue
I draw the black straw
out of you
mean while
with your tongue
you draw the black straw out of me.

That same evening at 10 p.m., I hit the refresh button and as the screen filled, there was Valentine’s book, with the lovely cover art by Keiji Shinohara conveying all the delicacy and immediacy of the poetry. She won! I did a victory dance by the kitchen table and then, as a tribute to Valentine, for a few moments I simply sat and let it be.

PICK OF THE SYLLABUS

What is Real in Fiction?

Khachig Tölölyan, Professor of English,

selects *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut Jr.



real aerial bombing by the Allies of Dresden, a defenseless German city where more people may have died (around 135,000) than at Hiroshima, and on the other hand, instantaneous voyages to a planet named Tralfamadore, where little green creatures construct a zoo for two naked earthlings, a man and a woman, an Adam and an Eve?

The first is subject matter, an extra-textual reality that I must contextualize for my freshmen: There was no military need to obliterate this beautiful and undefended city in the final months of the war in Europe. Why and how the decision to do so was reached, why and how it was almost erased from the collective memory of World War II, how it was brought back and has remained a subject of controversy—these are weighty issues we briefly discuss.

Yet within Vonnegut’s fiction, the Tralfamadoreans are as “real” as Dresden. Before magical realism, there was science fiction and fantasy, and Vonnegut made a living writing versions of these; he made the world his imagination summoned into being as textually “real” as the world the young Kurt experienced in February 1945, in Dresden. Vonnegut is a midwestern German-American who remained very conscious of his family’s origins in the post-1848 liberal German immigration to the United States; an infantryman, he was captured in the winter of 1944 and shipped to Dresden, where he was housed with other prisoners in an unused slaughterhouse and witnessed the firebombing and its aftermath.

Teaching *Slaughterhouse-Five* also obligates me to unpack the book as a collection of genres, each of which

joins a specific kind of subject matter to a particular kind of perspective and narrative voice. The novel calls attention to itself as an autobiographical memoir. But whereas too many contemporary texts commodify memories of trauma and congratulate themselves for their virtue in doing so, Vonnegut’s novel does the work of ethics without the melodrama of piety and self-congratulation. It is also a testimony written before the genre of Latin American *testimonio* emerged, a testimony that is indignant but learns to manage its indignation, because its author knows that he cannot afford to lose its intended large and youthful audience by turning fatally solemn. It succeeds, but at some cost to its esthetic integrity; consequently, it enables me to show students that in art as in life, achievement has costs that only the very greatest manage to hide or dispense with.

At yet another level, this is a war novel that functions as a critique of Allied historiography and of postwar collective amnesia, but a critique that always remains aware of what Germany did, not only to Jews, homosexuals, and gypsies, but also to Russian prisoners of war and to bombed Dutch and English cities. But the history the book addresses is not just that of World War II. When it was published in 1968–9, the book was a political intervention in the present: It was written after Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*, in the half-decade (1968–1973) when World War II was, to use Christina Jarvis’s term, “Vietnamized” by writers like Vonnegut and perhaps Thomas Pynchon. Vonnegut’s protagonist has a son who serves in the Special Forces in Vietnam. He uses this and other means to make his novel a quasi-allegorical critique of an ongoing war.

Still another history that the book enacts is literary history, namely the emergence of postmodernism in the United States. Vonnegut refers to debates about “the exhaustion of the novel” that prompted the embrace of postmodern narrative techniques. He

is witty, prescient, and uncannily slippery as he creates a narrative that sidesteps the “rules” of traditional narrative, yet does not become postmodern in the styles of John Barth, or Thomas Pynchon, or Raymond Federman and Kathy Acker. Vonnegut is also interested in how novels think. He reflects on fiction’s claim that telling stories is an important way of criticizing the real and its desire to avoid the consequences of such criticism. In this context, I sometimes raise the question of free speech and the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie.

Students at Wesleyan and elsewhere like “enthusiasm” in their faculty. When I teach *Slaughterhouse-Five*, my students notice that my enthusiasm for discussing the issues the novel raises is not matched by my appreciation of the book as a whole. They are puzzled that I feel uneasy about the novel’s failure to be as great, or greater, than the sum of its parts, to create an esthetic totality. It offers experiences—visceral, intellectual, and ethical—that engage students and to which contemporary criticism condescends at its own peril. But the intriguing and rewarding dilemmas the book creates for itself require that Vonnegut find a way of uniting what he bundles together: genres, histories galore, questions about the status of the real, episodes of great comic and tragic power. He fails. I teach the book because it is such a wonderfully instructive “failure” and also because my own persistent failure to teach it to my full satisfaction keeps me alert to the enormous difficulties that any author faces when dealing with historical subject matter that he or she cannot or does not want to render as history. This impulse to address and use the real, be it historical past or current history, without becoming historiographic, to turn subject matter into subjectivity, is at the heart of the development of fiction, and Vonnegut’s book lets me get at how hard and great the task is for authors and readers both. 🍷



Tricia Homer '04 is Miss U.S. Virgin Islands

**SHASHA SEMINAR
GLOBAL WARMING AND
SCIENTIFIC UNCERTAINTY**

Melting glaciers and disappearing polar ice are two tangible signs of a virtually undisputed phenomenon—the earth is warming. Yet scientists cannot give policy makers the certainty they seek about how much warming, when, and with what consequences.

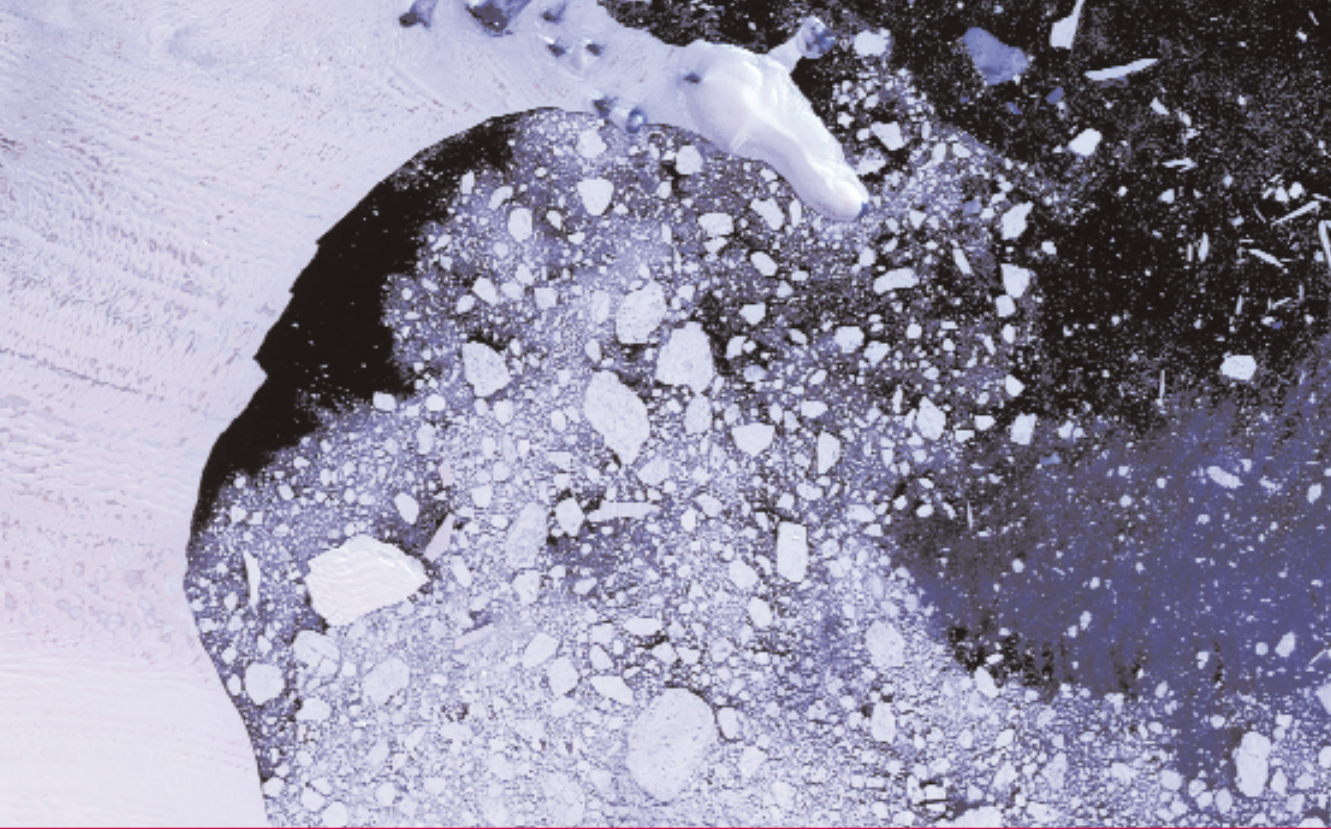
Participants in the third annual Shasha Seminar for Human Concerns, endowed by James Shasha ’50, gathered in November to consider the implications of this scientific uncertainty. Their topic was “Saving the Planet: Environmental Decision Making in an Uncertain World.” Among the possibilities they considered is one that ought to keep policy makers awake at night: an acceleration in the rate of global warming that would lead to catastrophic rises in sea level and major disruptions in agriculture.

Jerry Melillo ’65, codirector and senior scientist at the Ecosystems Center of Woods Hole Marine Biological Lab, said his own research raises warnings about this scenario. In experiments conducted in a small forest, he has shown that as the average temperature of the ground rises, soil loses its capacity to absorb carbon and releases more to the atmosphere, where it traps heat.

His work underscores one of the greatest concerns of climate scientists who worry that our limited understanding of the ways that the land and oceans absorb and release greenhouse gases may mean that surprises are in store.

Yet scientific uncertainty does not imply ignorance. “We know a lot,” says Melillo. “That fact, very often, is lost.” We know that carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased by 31 percent during the past 1,000 years; that the global mean temperature increased by 0.6 degrees Celsius in the 20th century; and that, as a result, precipitation is increasing in mid to high latitudes.

Most scientists believe that the earth’s temperature will rise another 1.5 to 6.0 degrees by 2100. That’s a big range, in climatic terms, and a great deal depends on the outcome. Scientists



A Landsat image of the Antarctic Larsen Ice Shelf reveals the impact of global warming as ice breaks away. (Provided by the National Snow and Ice Data Center.)

are unable to be more precise because too many unanswered questions remain regarding the role of natural phenomena such as clouds, which shade the earth but also absorb heat, and the oceans, which have extremely complicated patterns of heat uptake and a vast capacity to absorb carbon dioxide.

Scientific uncertainty does not excuse policy makers from the responsibility to act, insists Wesleyan Professor of Economics Gary Yohe, a leading authority on the economic impact of climate change. He is the co-author of a paper recently published in *Science* arguing that we need to approach global warming just as Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan handles monetary policy: through risk management. Yohe advocates an initial \$10/ton tax on carbon emissions (equal to a nickel tax on gasoline) as a way of responding prudently to the risk of global warming. “Modest but persistent hedging,” he says, “maximizes our flexibility and prevents doors from closing.”

Yohe has no illusions about the political palatability of his suggestion. Policy makers use scientific uncertainty as an excuse to avoid taking action, aided by

contrarians who have hired PR firms to assert that global warming is not a problem. The public may also be confused, he says, because some areas may have consistent temperatures or even may cool while the earth as a whole is warming.

Government agencies, by their nature, are prone to postpone making policy decisions about global warming until more information is available, noted Marc Eisner, professor of government at Wesleyan. In addition, public opinion is volatile. In 1990, for instance, 75 percent of the U.S. population identified themselves as environmentalists, but by 2000 that figure had slipped to 47 percent.

The impact of global warming on agriculture is a significant uncertainty with high stakes. The Shasha Seminar keynote speaker, environmental activist Vandana Shiva, argued that we should respond to the risk the way nature responds to uncertainty, through diversification.

Shiva, who founded the Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology in India, said that specialization makes species particularly vulnerable to climate change. She decried

large-scale monocropping supported by extensive fertilizer and pesticide applications. She advocates—and practices on experimental farms—reverting to ancient practices of intercropping, in which the failure of one crop need not be catastrophic.

Can changes to agriculture keep pace with global warming? Diversification and intercropping may not help areas of the world that see precipitation drop as a result of global warming. Sara Hoagland ’78, associate director of the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Environmental Resources at Stanford University, cited the direct link between water and famine. Even now, 825 million people worldwide are chronically undernourished. Climate change easily could worsen the disparity between the developed and the developing world.

Participants had a chance to set policy in a mock town meeting that involved a golf-course developer’s application for a site in a coastal area expected to experience sea-level rise. The exercise was like the real world in at least one respect: a lot of disagreement and no easy answers.

**LETTERS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3
UNUSUAL POLITICS
HIGHLIGHTED 1934**

To supplement your article on “Politics as Usual,” one of the high points—if not *the* high point—of Wesleyan student political interest came during 1934 when Wesleyan students and faculty held a weekend “Parley” to discuss political philosophies. The Hon. Hamilton Fish spoke for the Republicans, H. Gordon Hayes for the New Deal Democrats, Norman Thomas for the Socialists, and Scott Nearing for the the Communists. This event followed the 1932 election, when many speakers came to campus. Perhaps a sequel to “Politics as Usual” might be called “Politics as Unusual,” because I doubt whether there’s been that much student political activity on campus before or since.

KNIGHT ALDRICH ’35
Charlottesville, Va.

A LUNCH RECALLED

My wife, Thelma, and I had the privilege of lunching several years ago (at John Hickenlooper’s Wynkoop Brewing Company) with Susie and Bill Wasch ’52 and others planning our 50th Reunion. Bill had asked John to stop by the table and say hello. Someone asked him if he was considering the idea of running for mayor, whereupon he began a 20-minute “statement” about Denver and its great future—that he had been to a number of other cities to look into mayoral things and yes, he was considering running.

Well, the rest is now history, and he has been a very refreshing and forward-looking leader for the city, as Tori Peglar ’96 very well described in her article (the only problem was timing: The article was obviously written prior to the November election, in which a large majority favored the FasTracks mass transportation system).

My wife and I also attended the Wesleyan gathering at the home of Michael

Bennet ’87 when President Bennet was here in Denver (when he presented a proclamation from the Middletown mayor praising John’s accomplishments while at Wes). A great evening!

PETE GABEL ’52
Denver, Colo.

BUTTERFIELD CARED

I also enjoyed the article about Vic Butterfield and was interested in the recent letter from Howard Wetstone ’46. It is noteworthy that he also became a physician.

I elected to come to Wesleyan rather than join my brother at Harvard because (although I had been saving for my education since the age of 11) I knew without a scholarship I would not make it all the way through medical school with what I had been able to put away and hoped to earn in the future.

Accordingly, I arrived at Wesleyan in 1951. Unfortunately, my room was between two bathrooms with the pay

phone outside. In addition, I had difficulty adjusting to a number of the classes. I presumed this was my fault and just studied harder and harder. The teachers seemed to presume that I was not studying.

One day I was called to see Vic. I feared this was my doom. Instead, he asked me how I was doing financially, was my scholarship enough, or did I need any jobs to help supplement my income? I told him I was selling sandwiches in the dorms and also working as a bartender at the fraternity parties.

I knew both of these things probably were not legal, but President Butterfield certainly inspired telling the truth, so that’s what I did. He smiled and said, “Okay, but if you need any other jobs, you let me know.”

I was elated to find that there was at least one member of the staff—its leader—who really cared about students.

JAMES E. SHEPARD ’55, M.D.
Tiburon, Calif.

WESLEYAN WRITERS CONFERENCE JUNE 19–24, 2005

EXPERIENCED WRITERS AND NEW WRITERS ARE BOTH WELCOME

- Novel
- Short Story
- Fiction Techniques
- Memoir
- Poetry
- Literary Journalism
- How Writers Make a Living
- Publishing

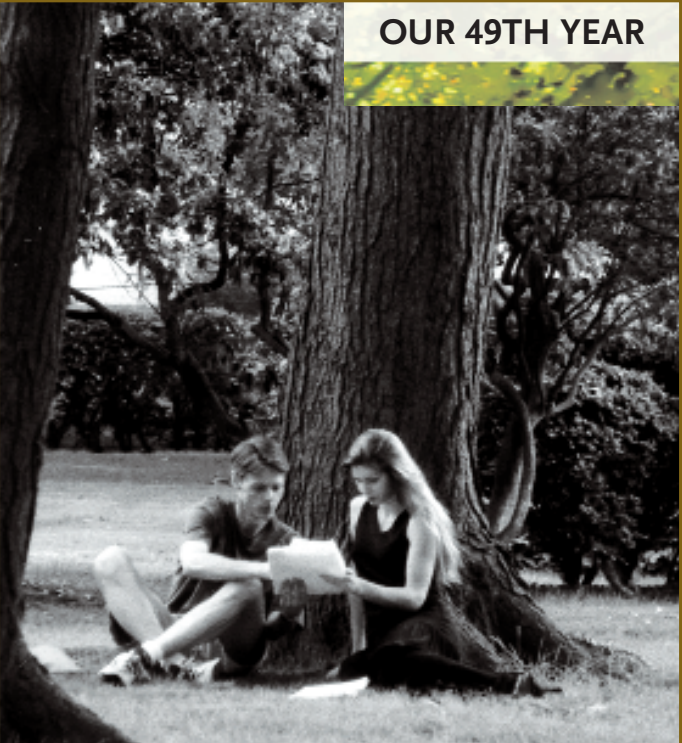
**SEMINARS
LECTURES
READINGS
MANUSCRIPT CONSULTATIONS
PUBLISHING ADVICE**

FACULTY:
Robert Stone
Philip Gourevitch
Lis Harris
Roxana Robinson
Jonathan Schell
Matthew Sharpe
Elizabeth Willis

AND WESLEYAN ALUMNI:
Amy Bloom
Maggie Nelson
Allison Lorentzen
Matvei Yankelovich
and many others, including editors and agents

(860/685-3604) WWW.WESLEYAN.EDU/WRITERS

OUR 49TH YEAR



FELLOWSHIPS AND SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT
ANNE GREENE, DIRECTOR, AGREENE@WESLEYAN.EDU**