

## Inaugural poet visits Napa writers conference

Contributed by Editor  
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NAPA — Napa Valley College's Napa Valley Writers' Conference is pleased to welcome back poet Elizabeth Alexander — President Barack Obama's choice to read at his January inauguration — for its annual series of lectures and readings.

Warmly embraced during her last visit in 2007, the inaugural poet joins a lineup of notable authors at one of Northern California's most celebrated literary events.

Running July 26-31, the Napa Valley Writers' Conference, now in its 29th year as a premier writing workshop, again offers the community an opportunity to hear some of the leading poets and fiction writers in the country talk about their work.

"We are so pleased one of our favorite authors was selected for this honor," said Anne Evans, managing director of the conference. "This conference, the lectures and readings, are all about connecting the public personally with the writers, and vice versa, to give them a sense of the shared space that the writing provides. I think Elizabeth's performance at the inauguration demonstrates just how good literature can help build that sense of community."

With twice-daily lectures on the art and craft of writing at the Napa Valley College's Upper Valley Campus in St. Helena and evening readings at various venues throughout the valley, the conference provides a great opportunity for book-lovers to get in touch with world class authors.

Only the fourth poet ever chosen to read at an inauguration, Alexander rose to the occasion with her piece "Praise Song for the Day," which was recently released as a small chapbook.

Her five volumes of poetry also include "American Sublime," a finalist for the 2006 Pulitzer Prize.

Currently professor of African-American Studies at Yale University, she has also published critical essays in "The Black Interior" and "Power and Possibility," as well as produced a play "Diva Studies."

In recognition of her writing, she received the Alphonse Fletcher Sr., fellowship for work that "contributes to improving race relations in American society and furthers the broad social goals of the U.S. Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education decision of 1954."

Alexander will read July 28 at the Napa Valley Opera House, and she will be lecturing July 30 at 9 a.m. at the Upper Valley Campus.

Joining her on the conference faculty are a number of local and national favorites, whose voices complement the lush, elegant surrounds of wine country.

This year the event welcome poets of everyday insight and spiritual sensuality and fiction writers of power, versatility, and grace, Evans said, including:

— Carl Dennis, winner of the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for poetry for the quotidian revelations of "Practical Gods," and whose "New and Selected Poems, 1974-2004" traces the evolution of an illustrious career (reading July 26 with ZZ Packer at the NVC Upper Valley Campus in St. Helena; Lecture July 28 at 9 a.m.).

— Bay Area favorite Jane Hirshfield also returns, bringing the rich simplicity that characterizes all of her work, from the tight lyrics of "After" — chosen as one of the best books of 2006 by both the Washington Post and the London Financial Times — to the quasi-metaphysical essay collection "Nine Gates: Entering the Mind of Poetry" (reading July 27 with Robert Boswell at Rubicon Winery in Rutherford; Lecture July 29 at 9 a.m.).

— David St. John, a poet of the luxurious and surreal. A professor of English at the University of Southern California and author of nine volumes of poetry, including "The Face: A Novella in Verse and Study for the World's Body: New and Selected Poems," a finalist for the National Book Award (Reading July 30 with Antonya Nelson at the Robert Mondavi Winery in Oakville; Lecture July 27 at 9:00 a.m.).

— Robert Boswell, a writer as versatile as he is prolific, publishing stories, novels, essays, plays, as well as a cyberpunk novel that was a finalist for the Philip K. Dick Award. A respected teacher of craft at numerous creative writing programs, he has also recently published a new collection "The Heyday of the Insensitive Bastards" (Reading July 27 with Jane Hirshfield at Rubicon Winery, Rutherford; Lecture July 29 at 1:30 p.m.).

— Antonya Nelson, who infuses energy and intimacy into all of her works, and whose name is regularly found in the New York Times' yearly list of Notable Books. Her indefatigable production has yielded three novels and six short story collections, including this year's release of "Nothing Right" (Reading July 30 with David St. John at the Robert Mondavi Winery in Oakville; Lecture July 27 at 1:30 p.m.).

— ZZ Packer, who has been on everyone's radar since the appearance of her debut collection "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere." Respected throughout the Bay Area for her energy and style, Packer is currently working on a novel focusing on the migration of Buffalo Soldiers westward following the Civil War (Reading July 26 with Carl Dennis at the Upper Valley Campus in St. Helena; Lecture July 28 at 1:30 p.m.).

— British-born writer Peter Ho Davies, currently of the Creative Writing faculty at the University of Michigan. A writer of remarkable range, reflecting his Welsh and Chinese heritage and his transnational perspective, Davies has garnered attention on both sides of the Atlantic for his story collections "The Ugliest House in the World" and "Equal Love"

and his recent novel *The Welsh Girl* (Reading: July 28 with Elizabeth Alexander at the Napa Valley Opera House; Lecture July 30 at 1:30 p.m.).

The Napa Valley College Upper Valley Campus is located at 1088 College Ave., St. Helena.

The public is invited to attend the many readings and lectures presented by the faculty during conference week.

Advance reservations are recommended: advance tickets are \$10 for the readings and \$25 for the lectures; tickets sold at the door are \$12 for readings and \$30 for lectures.

Tickets for the July 28 reading with Elizabeth Alexander and Peter Ho Davies at the Opera House are \$15, and are only available through the Napa Valley Opera House box office at 707-226-7372.

For all other events, please call 707 967-2900 x1611 or email [writecon@napavalley.edu](mailto:writecon@napavalley.edu) .

For a complete schedule of readings and lectures, please visit <http://www.napawritersconf.org/events> .