

## Professor Larry May Will Give Keynote Address for Faculty Book Celebration

Due to unforeseen circumstances, Vartan Gregorian will not give the keynote address for The Center for the Humanities' fourth annual Faculty Book Celebration. Larry May, Professor of Philosophy at Washington University, has kindly agreed to speak. The title of his talk is "The Moral Writer." He will discuss the two tasks of the moral writer: to uncover the nature of morality as a matter of shared conscience, and occasionally to forge a new shared conscience. He argues that both tasks require that the writer appeal to personal experience as well as the accumulated experiences of others. He will draw on a wide variety of writers, including E.B.White, Hannah Arendt, Albert Camus, and Catherine MacKinnon. This promises to be not only an engaging talk but an important one, particularly in light of the moral issues of our time. Two other faculty authors will give short presentations about their new books.



Larry May is Professor of Philosophy at Washington University in St. Louis. He has a Ph.D. as well as a law degree. He has published five single-authored books: *The Morality of Groups* (Notre Dame, 1987), *Sharing Responsibility* (Chicago, 1992), *The Socially Responsive Self* (Chicago, 1996), *Masculinity and Morality* (Cornell, 1998), and *Crimes Against Humanity* (Cambridge, 2005). This last book is the first volume of a trilogy on the normative foundations of international criminal law. The other two volumes, in various stages of draft, are titled "War Crimes and Just Wars" and "Crimes Against Peace and Waging Aggressive War." He has also co-authored, or co-edited, 11 other books, most recently, *The Morality of War* (Prentice-Hall, 2006).

You are cordially invited to attend the fourth annual **Celebrating Our Books, Recognizing Our Authors** colloquium, which will be held on **Wednesday, December 7, 2005, at 4pm** in the **Women's Building Formal Lounge**. This event is free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served. For more information please call 314-935-5576, or visit our website at <http://cenhum.artsci.wustl.edu>.

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## The Fortune Cookie and the Feast

This is the time of year when many diets swerve off the side of the road and end up in multi-helping pileups. The many opportunities to put food in our bellies, however, ought also to become food for thought.

Although we have lost the primordial meaning behind the feasts we recognize (how many of us, for example, celebrated Thanksgiving by emerging from months of semi-starvation in urgent need of replenishing depleted fat reserves?), celebrations that revolve around food and overeating date back to prehistoric times. The feasts we attend at this time of year mark national, religious, and seasonal occasions whereby we symbolically relive experiences that bind us together in a common future.

Even on a daily basis, however, eating goes to the core of human culture. This was brought home to me in a very practical way when I was working at Chinese restaurants as a graduate student. Among the food items offered was one that was completely new to me—the fortune cookie. Although some historians have suggested that the inspiration for fortune cookies came from the 14th century, when Chinese soldiers slipped messages into moon cakes to help coordinate their overthrow of Mongolian invaders, fortune cookies have never been a part of Chinese food culture. The fortune cookie is entirely a U.S. invention, but just where in America these

cookies were first made is a matter for debate. One story says that Canton-native David Jung, a Los Angeles baker, began making cookies containing thin slips of paper bearing inspirational messages sometime around 1920. No matter when they began, you will rarely eat in a Chinese-American restaurant without receiving one at the end of the meal. The thing that amazed me was that, no matter how quiet the party at the table might have been throughout the meal, when the diners broke open the cookies to reveal their fortunes, they almost always took turns reading them aloud and sharing their thoughts. Thus, a group of people who might have left immediately after the meal had they been in some other kind of restaurant, often stayed and talked for another 20 minutes or more after the fortune cookie course. Hardly anyone considers who might have started this conversation, or that it might have been the person who wrote those fortunes.

A recent article in the *New Yorker* (June 6, 2005) identified one central character in the fortune cookie story. Donald Lau, a vice-president of Wonton Food, manages the company's accounts payable and receivable, negotiates with insurers, and—almost incidentally—composes the fortunes that go into the four million cookies the Wonton factory produces each day. Lau got the job simply because his English

was the best among the group that bought the baking company, and because the fortunes the company had been using needed updating. Lau admits that at first the writing came easily and he could crank out three or four maxims a day. But now, eleven years into his tenure as a fortune cookie author, he has run out of ideas and is recycling old fortunes. He has begun to worry that readers will notice that the cookies are in reruns.

Luckily, we no longer suffer the reruns of seasonal food shortages as did our ancestors. Our celebrations now, as the anthropologist Marvin Harris once noted, are “merely occasions for raising prior consumption levels from more than enough to far more than enough.” For some of us, however, the situations and conversations characterizing these seasonal gatherings will be similar to the recycled fortunes Mr. Lau worries about. There will be, as usual, too much to eat and drink, and there will also be the same people who tell the same stories over and over. Just as there will be those we genuinely look forward to seeing, there will be those who continue to irritate us. To experience these gatherings as mere reruns, however, is to miss the cultural core of such events because these gatherings are not reruns. Rather they are opportunities that give meaning to our lives by enabling the exchange of news and



Dr. Jian Leng

editor's notes

Continued...

stories about relatives in faraway places or ancestors long gone. We may also discover that others are experiencing life and its cycles and challenges in ways similar to our own. For our children, these reunions are even more important because they emphasize the significance of family and social connections in ways far more powerful than words. Even young children are made aware of belonging to a social entity larger than themselves, their siblings, and their parents. They are given tangible knowledge of themselves as parts of human lineages to which they, in time, will also contribute.

These seasonal rituals are special for yet another reason: more and more families no longer share meals at a common table but eat separately or on the run. This phenomenon presumably reflects the inescapable realities of modern life, but it also says something about the ties that bind us together and the values at the core of our culture. Children who end up eating most of their meals on their own will make it to soccer practice on time but will experience less family solidarity. Although it may seem like an endless series of reruns to children, it is not just the fact that sharing a family meal probably provides better nourishment, or that eating together teaches manners, it's the time spent sharing thoughts that matters.

So, whether it is a feast with a large group, or simply a small family meal, as we take our places at festive tables in the days ahead, we should welcome the opportunity to sit and talk a little longer than we might otherwise. We need to turn off the distractions of modern life for a while and connect with those around us. Perhaps we all need fortune cookies to break open to remind us to share our thoughts at these gatherings; the fortunes ought to be the messages inside our hearts.

All of us at the Center for the Humanities offer all our readers the very best of fortunes over the holiday season and the New Year.

*Jian Leng*  
Associate Director  
The Center for the Humanities



## Events in December

All events are free unless otherwise indicated. Book events are followed by signings. All phone numbers take 314 prefix unless indicated.

### Thursday, December 1

**Mystery Lovers' Book Club** discusses *Exit Wounds* by J.A. Jance, SLCL Headquarters, 1640 S. Lindbergh, 10am, 994-3300.

**Book Journeys Discussion Group** discusses *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel, SLCL Indian Hills, 8400 Delport, 2pm, 428-5424.

**Writers Workshop** at SLCL Grand Glaize Branch, Meeting Rm 1, 1010 Meramec, 7pm, 636-225-6454.

**Edna Campos Gravenhorst** signs *Images of America Series: Benton Park West*, Borders Sunset Hills, 10990 Sunset Hills, 7pm, 909-0300.

**University City Great Books Discussion Group** discusses *Money* and *The Rocking Horse Winner*, 6800 Washington, U City, 8pm, 994-7914.

**WU Writing Program** presents novelist **Scott Heim** reading from *InAwe* and *Mysterious Skin*, Hurst Lounge, Duncker Hall Rm 201, WU, 8pm, 935-7130.

### Friday, December 2

**Seth Raab, Reggie Poche, Jim Mense, and Trysh Brown** read from their works, Gallery 210, UMSL, 7:30pm, 516-6845.

### Saturday, December 3

St. Louis Writers Guild presents **Doris Mueller** with a Writing for Children Workshop, B&N, 9618 Watson, 10am, 821-3823. \$5.

**Living as a Writer Conference** takes place at the J.C. Penney Conference Ctr, UMSL, 8001 Natural Bridge, 12:30pm, 516-5974. \$39.

# St. Louis Li

**Joe Pollack** discusses *The Great St. Louis Eats Book*, Christopher's, 8151 Clayton, 1pm, 721-3637.

**Wm. Stage** signs *Pictures of People*, Borders, 6601 N. Illinois, 2pm, 618-397-6097.

**Laura Bradford** signs *A Jury of One*, Borders, 1320 Mid Rivers Mall, 2pm, 636-278-5000.

### Sunday, December 4

**Joe Pollack** discusses *The Great St. Louis Eats Book*, B&N, 13995 New Halls Ferry, 2pm, 830-3550.

**Wm. Stage** signs *Pictures of People*, Borders, 1519 S. Brentwood, 2pm, 918-8189.

**Lynn Rubright** signs *Mama's Windows*, Borders, 1519 S. Brentwood, 4:30pm, 918-8189.

### Tuesday, December 6

**Book Discussion Group** meets, SLCL, 6424 Scanlan, 10am, 781-2940.

### Wednesday, December 7

Poet and author **Constance Levy** presents **Poetry Workshop** for potential children's poets, Kennard Classical Junior Academy, 1921 Prather, 1:45pm, RSVP 991-1529.

**The Center for the Humanities** invites you to attend our annual **Celebrating Our Book** event, Women's Bldg. Formal Lounge, Varsity, 4pm, 935-5576.

### Thursday, December 8

**Murder of the Month Book Club** discusses *The House Sitter* by Peter Lovesey, SLCL Indian Hills, 8400 Delport, 3:30pm, 428-5424.

**Ethnic American Book Discussion Group** discusses *Madras on Rainy Days* by Sam Ali, SLPL Carpenter, 3309 S. Grand, 7pm, 781-6586.

**Weber Road Book Discussion Group** discusses *The Christmas Box* by Richard F. Evans, Auditorium, SLCL Weber Rd, 4pm, Weber, 7pm, 638-2210.

**Joe & Ann Lemons Pollack** sign *The Great St. Louis Eats Book*, Borders, 10990 Sunset Hills, 7pm, 909-0300.

**LBB and SLCL 2005 Westfall Favorite Author Series** present **Doris Keegan Goodwin** reading *Team of Rivals: The Political*

# terary Calendar

*Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, SLCL Headquarters, 1640 S. Lindbergh, 7pm, **RSVP** 994-9411.

**Barri Bumgarner** signs her new thriller *Slipping*, Borders, 15355A Manchester Rd, 7pm, 636-230-2992.

## Friday, December 9

**Great Expectations Book Discussion Group** discusses *The Dive from Clausen's Pier* by Ann Packer, SLCL Rock Road, 10267 St. Charles Rock, 10am, 429-5116.

**Joe Pollack** discusses *The Great St. Louis Eats Book*, Randall's Wines and Spirits, 10800 Lincoln Trail, 4pm, 618-394-9800.

## Saturday, December 10

**Joe Pollack** discusses *The Great St. Louis Eats Book*, MO Botanical Garden, 4344 Shaw, 12pm, 577-9400.

**Barri Bumgarner** signs her new thriller *Slipping*, Borders, 10990 Sunset Hills, 2pm, 909-0300.

**Wm. Stage** signs *Pictures of People*, Borders, 11745 Olive, 2pm, 432-3575.

## Sunday, December 11

**Don Critchlow** discusses his new book, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: a Woman's Crusade*, Borders, 1519 S. Brentwood, 2pm, 918-8189.

**St. Louis Writers Guild** hosts annual holiday party and readings—bring new or gently used book & finger food, 4-7pm, 821-3823.

**The Book Club** discusses *Celebration and the Roomby* Harold Pinter, 636-451-3232.

## Tuesday, December 13

**SLCL Grand Glaize Book Discussion Group** discusses *The Secret Life of Bees*, by Sue Monk Kidd, 1010 Meramec Station, 2pm, 636-225-6454.

**SLCL Cliff Cave Book Group** discusses *Light on Snow*, 5430 Telegraph, 2pm, 487-6003.

**SLPL Kingshighway Book Group** discusses **Mark Haddon's** *The Curious Incident of the Dog in Night-Time*, 2260 S. Vandeventer, 6:30pm, 771-5450.

**SLCL Headquarters Book Discussion Group** discusses *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer, 1640 S. Lindbergh, 7pm, 994-3300.

**SLCL Sachs Branch Book Discussion Group** discusses *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini, 16400 Burkhardt, 7pm, 636-728-0001.

**WU Foreign Literature Group** discusses *Snow* by O. Pamuk, West Campus basement, 7425 Forsyth, 7:30pm. [K8bri@wmconnect.com](mailto:K8bri@wmconnect.com).

## Wednesday, December 14

**Bookies Book Discussion Group** discusses of *Heaven Lake* by John Dalton, SLCL Oak Bend, 842 S. Holmes, 2pm, 822-0051.

**Boone's Bookies** discuss *The Color of Water* by James McBride, SLCL Daniel Boone, 300 Clarkson, 2pm & 7pm, 636-227-9630.

**SLCL Cliff Cave Book Discussion Group** discusses *Friday Night Out* (2pm) and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in Night-Time* (7pm), 5430 Telegraph, 487-6003.

## Thursday, December 15

**Book Journeys Discussion Group** features *Shoot the Moon* by Billie Letts, SLCL Indian Hills, 8400 Delpport, 2pm, 428-5424.

**SLCL Headquarters Book Discussion Group** discusses *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer, 1640 S. Lindbergh, 2pm, 994-3300.

**U. City Great Books Discussion Group** features *The Gentleman from San Francisco* and *Desire*, 6800 Washington, 8pm, 994-7914.

## Sunday, December 18

**WU Contemporary Fiction & Non-Fiction Reading Group** discusses *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: the Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* by Lynne Truss, 481-0730.

## Monday, December 19

**!Leamos!** Spanish Book Discussion Group features *Gata Encerrada*, SLPL Carpenter Branch, 3309 S. Grand, 7pm, 772-6586.

## Tuesday, December 20

**SLPL Machacek Branch Book Group** discusses *The Worst Noel*, 6424 Scanlan, 10am, 781-2948.

## Wednesday, December 21

**SLCL Sachs Branch Book Discussion Group** features *My Antonia* by Willa Cather, 16400 Burkhardt, 2pm, 636-728-0001.

**SLPL Barr Book Group** discusses *On Beauty* by Zadie Smith, 1701 S. Jefferson, 5:30pm, 771-7040.

**SLCL Oak Bend Book Group** discusses Tracy Chevalier's *The Girl with the Pearl Earring*, 842 S. Holmes, 7:30pm, 822-0051.

**SLCL Mid-County Branch** hosts a **Writing Workshop** designed for amateur writers, 7821 Maryland, 7pm, 721-3008.

## Thursday, December 22

**SLPL Schlafly Book Discussion Group** discusses David Baldacci's *Christmas Train*, 225 N. Euclid, 7pm, 367-4120.

## Tuesday, December 27

**SLCL Indian Hills Book Discussion Group** features *A Walk to Remember* by Nicholas Sparks, 8400 Delpport, 7pm, 428-5424.

## Wednesday, December 28

**SLPL Central Book Discussion Group** meets, 1301 Olive, Meeting Rm 1, 4:30pm, 539-0396.

## Thursday, December 29

**U. City Great Books Discussion Group** discusses *Red* and *Tales of a Burmese Soothsayer*, 6800 Washington, 8pm, 994-7914.

## Notices

**The Wednesday Club of St. Louis** is sponsoring an **original poetry contest**, submissions accepted until Feb 1. For details, go to [www.wedclubpoetrycontest.org](http://www.wedclubpoetrycontest.org).

**The St. Louis Short Story Contest** offers a grand prize of \$5,000 & publication by Clean Slate Publications. 3,500 word maximum, submissions accepted until May 19, 2006. For details, go to [www.stlshortstory.com](http://www.stlshortstory.com).

## Abbreviations:

B&N: Barnes & Noble; LBB: Left Bank Books; SLCL: St. Louis County Library; SLPL: St. Louis Public Library; WU: Washington University.

Check the online calendar at [cenhum.artsci.wustl.edu](http://cenhum.artsci.wustl.edu) for more events. To advertise, send event details to [litalcal@artsci.wustl.edu](mailto:litalcal@artsci.wustl.edu), or call 314-935-5576.