

# Nicholas Delbanco: A Literary Life

An Exhibit of Letters, Manuscripts, Photographs, and  
Books from the Nicholas Delbanco Papers

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7th Floor, Special Collections Library  
Hatcher South  
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## Nicholas Delbanco: A Literary Life

These items from the Special Collections Library's Nicholas Delbanco Papers have been brought together to celebrate the long and distinguished career of this poet, author, teacher, colleague, and mentor.

Nicholas Delbanco, currently the Robert Frost Distinguished University Professor of English Language and Literature, has also served the University of Michigan as Director of the M.F.A. Program in Creative Writing and as the Director of the prestigious Hopwood Awards Program. His upcoming retirement from the University of Michigan is not a cause for celebration, but his prolific and multi-faceted career certainly is. Drawn from approximately 50 linear feet of archival material in the Delbanco Papers, this exhibit is an attempt to illustrate this career using primary sources.

Born in London in 1942, emigrating to the United States at age six, and later attending Harvard and Columbia University, Delbanco began his teaching career at Bennington College before coming to Ann Arbor in 1985. Beginning with "Cripple at Tours," published in 1962 in *The Harvard Advocate*, quickly followed by the novel *The Martlet's Tale* (J.B. Lippincott, 1966), up through the recent *Dear Wizard* (University of Michigan Press, 2014), Delbanco has published over twenty-five books (novels, short stories, non-fiction, and one textbook), as well as hundreds of poems, essays, reviews, and articles. He has also taken on editorial duties for the collected lectures of the Hopwood Awards as well as for the works of several esteemed friends, including Bernard Malamud and John Gardner. Items from his youth through his more recent works are represented in the exhibited letters and manuscript drafts, alongside published works.

Awarded multiple honors, while teaching and mentoring at the University of Michigan, coupled with a history of helming internationally known writing workshops are testaments to Delbanco's teaching life as it ran parallel to his life as a writer. To be able to co-exist successfully, these two lives require a generosity of spirit, and as John Leonard wrote in *The New York Times*, a "world consisting wholly of words." The exhibit draws from the rich "teaching life" represented in the Delbanco Papers, including insightful comments on student efforts and his recommendations and support for future endeavors.

John Updike said of Delbanco that he “wrestles with the abundance of his gifts as a novelist the way other men wrestle with their deficiencies.” The author and teacher himself wrote an essay examining “the literary impulse, its despair and delight.” We hope that Nicholas Delbanco continues to wrestle, despair, and delight for many more years.

## Early Years

Born in 1942 in wartime London, England, Nicholas Delbanco emigrated to the United States at the age of six. Settling on the East Coast, Delbanco graduated from the progressive Fieldston School (Bronx, N.Y.) in 1959, followed by a B.A. from Harvard University in 1963, and an M.A. from Columbia University in 1966.

Throughout his academic career, Delbanco was writing, reading, and seeking out mentors like John Updike and Edmund Wilson in the pursuit of his craft. His obvious writing talent was awarded early on, but he also branched out into other creative endeavors such as directing stage plays. Humor, the lonely nomadic nature of existence, and skillful wordplay are all apparent in the earliest works of a lengthy and rich career.

- *Fieldglass 1959*

Fieldston School Yearbook  
New York: Comet Press, 1959

- Nicholas Delbanco

“Cripple at Tours”  
*The Harvard Advocate* 97, no. 2 (November 1962)

- Letter

Edmund Wilson, *The New Yorker*, to Nicholas Delbanco  
May 20, 1962

- Letter

Fred L. Glimp, Dean of Admissions, Harvard University, to Nicholas Delbanco  
May 8, 1963

- Program

Nicholas Delbanco, Director  
*Blood Wedding* by Federico Garcia Lorca  
 Loeb Drama Center, Harvard University  
 October 25–November 3, 1962

- Nicholas Delbanco

“A Director’s Intentions”  
*Dunster Drama Review* 2, no. 1 (October 26, 1962)

- Letter

David S. Smith, Coordinator of International Studies, to Nicholas  
 Delbanco  
 June 14, 1963

- Nicholas Delbanco

Manuscript fragments, ca. 1964  
 Columbia University, New York

- Nicholas Delbanco

“Rejoice (Sieven pohymbs tubey reddle wold)”  
*SILLO* 10 (Fall 1966)  
 Williamstown, Mass.: The Chapel Press

- Nicholas Delbanco

“What You Carry”  
*Bennington Review* no. 10 (April 1981)

## First Books

The author as a young man had a compulsion to write, filling notebooks with fragments and fully fleshed-out phrases and scenes. Published at the tender age of 24, the same year that he earned his graduate degree from Columbia, *The Martlet’s Tale* is a confident and mesmerizing retelling of the story of the wayward prodigal son. This first novel was followed in quick relatively succession by over twenty-five more books to the present day.

- 3 photos of Nicholas Delbanco  
1960s–1971

- Notebook  
Nicholas Delbanco  
“...there are many harmonies...”  
While traveling in Europe, 1961

- Notebook  
Nicholas Delbanco  
“Art is not mathematics...”  
Martha’s Vineyard, Fall 1965

- Notebook  
Nicholas Delbanco  
“Banality of love and all its repeated emotions...”  
Columbia University, New York City, 1966

- Nicholas Delbanco  
*The Martlet’s Tale*  
Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1966 (1st ed.)

- Nicholas Delbanco  
*The Martlet’s Tale*  
Mock-ups of the cover and epigraph (facsimiles), and table of contents

- Nicholas Delbanco  
*Consider Sappho Burning*  
Advance proofs; tentative publication date, March 1969  
New York: William Morrow & Co., 1969

- Nicholas Delbanco  
*Consider Sappho Burning*  
New York: William Morrow & Co., 1969

- Nicholas Delbanco

*News*

New York: William Morrow & Co., 1970

- Nicholas Delbanco

*News*

Typescript drafts, ca. 1969

- John Leonard

*Books of the Times*: “The Imagination of Blackness”

Review of *News* (facsimile)

*New York Times*, June 12, 1970

## Friends & Colleagues

From his school days up through his present day role as accomplished author/award-winning teacher/sage mentor, Nicholas Delbanco has become close to many writers. Of note were his relationships with John Gardner, who died tragically young, leaving Delbanco as the executor of his literary estate, and Bernard Malamud, who graced the campus of Bennington College during Delbanco’s tenure on the faculty. Gardner, in his review of *Possession* makes a point of lauding Delbanco’s “gift for mirth,” while Malamud empathizes, “I know how you feel. My advice is to simply not read reviews at this time,” after some less than laudatory early reviews. Also of note are letters from Raymond Carver and Richard Ford.

- Nicholas Delbanco

*Possession*

New York: William Morrow and Co., 1977

- John Gardner

“Delbanco Has Possession of a Rare Artistry”

Review of *Possession* (facsimile)

*Philadelphia Inquirer*, April, 17, 1977

- John Gardner

*Stillness and Shadows*

Nicholas Delbanco, ed. and Introduction

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986

- Typescript

Nicholas Delbanco

*In Memoriam: John Gardner*

Eulogy given at Gardner's memorial service

1982

- Photograph by Joel Gardner on back flap of dust jacket of *Stillness and Shadows* (facsimile)

John Gardner and Nicholas Delbanco

ca. 1979

- Letter

Raymond Carver to Nicholas Delbanco

November 28, 1986

- Letter

Richard Ford to Nicholas Delbanco

March 2, 1988

- Bernard Malamud

*Talking Horse: Bernard Malamud on Life and Work*

Alan Cheuse and Nicholas Delbanco, eds.

New York: Columbia University Press, 1996

- Letter

Bernard Malamud to Nicholas Delbanco

February 1, 1979



- Photograph

Bernard Malamud (seated second from the right), Nicholas Delbanco (directly behind), Arturo Vivante (seated first from left), and Stephen Sandy (in vest, standing)

Bennington College, English Department

1980/1981

## Books

An additional selection of the more than twenty-seven books written by Nicholas Delbanco, these published between 1978 and 2013.

- Nicholas Delbanco

*The Writers' Trade & Other Stories*

1st ed. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1990

- Nicholas Delbanco

*Group Portrait: Joseph Conrad, Stephen Crane, Ford Maddox Ford, Henry James, and H.G. Wells*

New York: William Morrow and Co., 1982

- Nicholas Delbanco

*Anywhere Out of the World; Essays on Travel, Writing, Death*

New York: Columbia University Press, 2005

- Nicholas Delbanco

*What Remains: A Novel*

New York: Warner Books, 2000

- Nicholas Delbanco

*The Lost Suitcase: Reflections on the Literary Life*

New York: Columbia University Press, 2000

- Nicholas Delbanco

*Sherbrookes*

New York: William Morrow and Co., 1978

## Literature: Craft and Voice

“Better readers make better writers. Bringing writers to students. Bringing students to writing” (nicholasdelbanco.com). Introducing a new, contemporary, multimedia approach to the teaching of writing, Delbanco and collaborator Alan Cheuse wrote and edited this 3-volume textbook over the course of several years. Care went into the selection of texts, using an intriguing mix of modern and classic poets, playwrights, and novelists, with commentary and critique provided by the expected scholars augmented by current, and sometimes local scholars such as Ralph Williams. The textbook author also draws on his skill as a teacher: pay attention to what you are saying and how you are saying it; what is the picture you are trying to paint; watch your spelling! And keep a sense of humor.

A compilation of the 3-volume set is also available in a 1-volume, well-designed book.

- Nicholas Delbanco and Alan Cheuse

*Literature: Craft and Voice. Volume 1: Fiction*

Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2010

- Nicholas Delbanco and Alan Cheuse

*Literature: Craft and Voice. Volume 2: Poetry*

New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010

- Nicholas Delbanco and Alan Cheuse

*Literature: Craft and Voice. Volume 3: Drama*

New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010

- Nicholas Delbanco and Alan Cheuse

Chapter 34: “William Shakespeare, A Case Study. With ‘A Conversation with Ralph Williams’”

*Literature: Craft and Voice. Volume 3: Drama*

- Page proofs with annotations and notes by Nicholas Delbanco

New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009

- Nicholas Delbanco and Alan Cheuse

Chapter 35: “Modern Drama. With ‘A Conversation Writing, with Arthur Miller’”

*Literature: Craft and Voice. Volume 3: Drama*

- Page proofs with annotations and notes by Nicholas Delbanco

New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009

Nicholas Delbanco and Alan Cheuse

- Chapter 16: “Going Further with Reading. Shakespeare and Leonard Cohen”

*Literature: Craft and Voice. Volume 2: Poetry*

Page proofs with annotations

New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009

- Nicholas Delbanco and Alan Cheuse

*Literature: Craft & Voice*

2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012

## Hopwood Awards

The Avery and Jule Hopwood Awards in Creative Writing were established in 1930 following the terms of Michigan alum and playwright Avery Hopwood’s will. Since the first contest in 1931, student writers have been drawn to the competition, which has a set of minimum requirements for manuscript submissions. Awards, including a generous sum of money, are given in drama/screenplay, essay, novel, short fiction, and poetry. Delbanco, the most recent Director in a very short line of directors has developed and nurtured the program, and its budding writers, up through 2014.

Delbanco has called upon friends and colleagues to deliver the famous Hopwood Lectures and has edited and published compilations of these talks so that the wisdom and advice of the seasoned and the published may be preserved for future authors.

- Avery Hopwood and Jule Hopwood Awards

75th Anniversary Program for the Hopwood Awards, 2005–2006

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2006

- Avery Hopwood and Jule Hopwood Awards  
Regulations for First-and Second-Year Students, 2005–2006  
Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2006
  
- Avery Hopwood  
*The Best People*  
Program for the play, directed by Phillip Kerr  
February 12–15, 1998  
Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1998
  
- Erin Diane Schwartz  
“Delbanco Keeps Rewarding Hopwood Legacy Alive” (facsimile)  
*The Michigan Daily*, February 13, 1998
  
- Letter  
Andrea Beauchamp, Assistant Director of the Hopwood Awards, to Nicholas  
Delbanco, not-yet Director of the Hopwood Awards  
March 15, 1984
  
- Nicholas Delbanco  
Typescript of introductory remarks for Hopwood Reader Jamaica  
Kincaid  
January 26, 1993
  
- Nicholas Delbanco, ed. and Introduction  
*Speaking of Writing: Selected Hopwood Lectures*  
Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990
  
- Nicholas Delbanco, ed. and Introduction  
*The Hopwood Lectures; Sixth Series*  
Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009

## Workshops

A peripatetic writing evangelist at workshops and retreats since the 1980s, Delbanco has been able to expand his teaching reach by helming courses at Bread Loaf Conferences (Middlebury College), Iowa Writers' Workshop (University of Iowa), Skagit Valley College Writing Center (Mount Vernon, Vermont), and the Nebraska Summer Writers' Conference (University of Nebraska, Lincoln).

- Nicholas Delbanco

Teaching a writing workshop

Skagit Valley College Writing Center, Mount Vernon, Vermont  
1980s

- Bread Loaf Writers' Conference

64th Annual Session

Brochure published by Middlebury College, Ripton, Vermont  
August 15–27, 1989

- Letter and manuscript

Eric Winick, founder of Yarn Audioworks, to Nicholas Delbanco  
undated

- “University of Delbanco”

Thank-you card made by students at the Nebraska Summer Writers' Conference Workshops  
June 18–24, 2005

## Family

Married to Elena Greenhouse in 1970, they are the parents of two daughters, Andrea and Francesca. Appreciative of the astonishing talent of Elena's father cellist Bernard Greenhouse, Delbanco went on to write about the Beaux Arts Trio, of which Greenhouse was a founding member, as well as a history of his treasured Stradivarius cello, the “Countess of Stanlein.”

- Photograph by Kelly Wise  
Nicholas and Elena Delbanco  
1980s

- Photograph  
Nicholas and Elena Delbanco  
ca. 2013

- Polaroid (facsimile)  
Andrea and Francesca Delbanco  
1980s

- Newspaper clipping (facsimile)  
Francesca, Elena, and Nicholas Delbanco  
date unknown

- Wedding Invitation  
Elena Carter Greenhouse and Nicholas Delbanco  
Pawlet, Vermont  
September 12, 1970

- Nicholas Delbanco  
*The Countess of Stanlein Restored: A History of the Countess of Stanlein ex Paganini Stradivarius Cello of 1707*  
London and New York: Verso, 2001

## Kudos

Reading like a list of awards that writers aspire to, the honors that Delbanco has received include the National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Award (1973 and 1982), a National Endowment of Composers and Librettists fellowship (1976), a Guggenheim fellowship (1980), a Woodrow Wilson fellowship, an Edward John Noble fellowship, the New York State CAPS Award, the Vermont Council of the Arts Award, and a Michigan Council of the Arts Award.

In addition, he has earned the heartfelt and personal kudos of his colleagues and administrators on the campus of the University of Michigan. Beginning with his appointment in 1985, Delbanco has accrued numerous teaching awards, a demonstration of his ability to “do” as well as “teach.” As an acknowledgment of his contributions and his important place in the literary world during his career at Michigan, he was named the Robert Frost Distinguished University Professor of English Language and Literature, the first Director of the M.F.A. Program in writing, and Director of that prestigious cradle of youthful literary genius, the Avery and Jule Hopwood Award Program.

- Photograph

U-M President Mary Sue Coleman presenting Nicholas Delbanco with the Distinguished University Professorship Award in 2006

- Photograph

Nicholas Delbanco (seated left), and fellow authors at the PEN/Faulkner Awards for Fiction  
September 30, 2002

- Letters of commendation and congratulation from philanthropist Helmut Stern, U-M Regent Phillip Power, and U-M President Robben Fleming

- Invitation to a reading marking Nicholas Delbanco’s appointment as the Director of Michigan’s M.F.A. Program  
1985

- Program

“PEN/Faulkner Awards for Fiction”  
Folger Shakespeare Library  
September 30, 2002

## Dear Wizard

In 2014, Delbanco published his most recent book, *Dear Wizard*. The satisfyingly hefty tome, tipping the scale at 752 pages, contains a careful selection of correspondence with his close friend, the late author and teacher, Jon Manchip White (“Wizard”). From the first formal, stilted letters in 1978 to the last dated 2013, there is wit, humor, rueful observations, pain and grief, wrapped in scholarship and outlandish letterheads. The Nicholas Delbanco Papers contains the full scope of this thirty-five year friendship.

- Nicholas Delbanco, ed.

*Dear Wizard: The Letters of Nicholas Delbanco and Jon Manchip White*  
Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014

- Nicholas Delbanco and Jon Manchip White  
Selected letters from the Nicholas Delbanco Papers  
1978–2009

- Also on display, publicity posters/flyers and album cover from the Nicholas Delbanco Papers

Thank you for coming to see this exhibition.

Check the Library’s websites for more information about our collections, exhibits (physical and online), and upcoming events:

[www.lib.umich.edu/special-collections-library](http://www.lib.umich.edu/special-collections-library)

[www.lib.umich.edu/events](http://www.lib.umich.edu/events)