



Hollins Names Acclaimed Canadian Author to Creative Writing Chair

Roanoke, Va. – Hollins University has chosen one of Canada’s most revered authors to serve as the school’s first Distinguished Chair in Creative Writing.

Wayne Johnston, whom the Toronto *Globe and Mail* called, “the most prodigiously talented novelist [Canada] has produced since Mordecai Richler,” will come to Hollins this fall. He returns to the university where he was Writer-in-Residence in 2002.

"Wayne Johnston's body of work and accompanying literary acclaim would be hugely enviable if he were a writer near the end of his career," said Pinckney Benedict, associate professor of English at Hollins and head of the search committee to fill the chair. "That he's young, energetic, artistically ambitious, and with his best years of writing doubtless still ahead of him: these things make his accomplishments to date damn near miraculous. We're delighted to welcome such a dynamic colleague to Hollins."

Johnston has written six novels and one work of non-fiction, all of which have garnered critical praise and captured several awards. *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, published in 1998, was a shortlist nominee for Britain’s most prestigious literary award for fiction, the Booker Prize. In its review, the *New York Times* said, “This prodigious, eventful, character-rich book is a noteworthy achievement: a biting, entertaining and inventive saga.... a brilliant and bravura literary performance by Johnston.”

(more)

In 2002, the *New York Times* selected Johnston's next novel, *The Navigator of New York*, as one of its Notable Books of the past year, calling it, "An ambitious, stately, far-flung and sometimes sly account of back-stabbing polar exploration . . . enjoyably exotic."

Johnston's hiring caps a remarkable year for the discipline that *Creative Writing in America* called, "pound for pound, the most productive writing program in America." In the fall of 2003, Hollins introduced a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing, giving graduate students more time in the university's intense and productive atmosphere. Since then, Hollins has received the largest number of applications in its history for the creative writing program, whose alumni include Pulitzer Prize-winners Annie Dillard and Henry Taylor, Lee Smith, Madison Smartt Bell, Tama Janowitz, and John McManus.

Annie Dillard once said of Johnston, "His books are beautifully written, among the funniest I've ever read, yet somehow at the same time among the most poignant and moving."

The Hollins Distinguished Chair in Creative Writing is a new, fully endowed position at the university. It is geared toward an established writer of prose who would further the stature of Hollins' signature academic program through the teaching of graduate and undergraduate students.

###

Press Contact: Jeff Hodges, director of media relations
(540) 362-6503
jhodges@hollins.edu

April 28, 2004