

**Sabbatical Report**

***From the Other Side of the Teacher's Desk:***

***My Year as a UCLA Student***

**School Year 2006-2007**

**Pamela J. Arterburn**

**Submitted to the Mt. San Antonio College**

**Salary and Leaves Committee, Sept. 4, 2007**

**UCLA: List of Classes Completed and Grades Assigned**

**Pam Arterburn**

**Sabbatical Year, 2006-2007**

University of California Los Angeles  
The Division of Continuing Education - UCLA Extension

Enrollment History for Pamela Arterburn  
As of 09/03/2007 04:32 PM  
\*\*Not an official UCLA Extension Transcript\*\*

**Courses:**

Discipln	Course No.	Course Title	Reg#	Begin Dt	End Dt	Grade	Units	CEU	Credit Status
ENGLISH	X 401.11	Describing Setting So Your Reader Won't Skim It to Get to the Good Part	S9194	06/09/2007	06/10/2007	A	1.50	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	X 410.1	Discovering and Creating Timeless Themes: A Weekend Seminar	S8912	06/02/2007	06/03/2007	A	1.50	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	X 404.90	The Literature of Fact: Writing Creative Nonfiction Based on Reportage, Research, or Personal Experience	S9437	05/19/2007	05/20/2007	A	1.50	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	X 401.30W	Writing the Personal Essay: A Two-Day Workshop	S9462	05/05/2007	05/06/2007	A	1.50	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	X 401A	The Essential Beginnings: An Introductory Creative Writing Workshop	S9503	05/03/2007	06/07/2007	A	2.00	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	X 431.15	Writing the Short-Short Story	S9431	04/17/2007	06/05/2007	A	2.50	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	X 463.5	Advanced Workshop in Poetry	S8854	04/11/2007	06/27/2007	A	3.00	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	X 401.39	The Art of Creative Nonfiction	S9675	04/10/2007	06/12/2007	B	3.00	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	X 446.126	Building a Good Foundation: A Two-Saturday Experiential Workshop for Aspiring Novelists	S7737	03/17/2007	03/24/2007	A	1.50	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	X 446.15	The Writer's Workout: Techniques for Stronger Writing	S5473	01/23/2007	03/13/2007	A	2.50	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	X 423.31	Intermediate Poetry Workshop	S7756	01/17/2007	03/21/2007	A	3.00	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	X 405.10	Dealing with Powerful Emotion without Sappiness or Cliché	S3952	12/02/2006	12/03/2006	Withdrawal	1.50	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	X 425.21	Creating Memorable Characters: A Weekend Workshop	S3798	11/04/2006	11/05/2006	A	1.50	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	X 411.14	Facing the Challenge of Memoir Writing	S3956	10/14/2006	10/21/2006	A	1.50	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	XL 134A	Creative Writing: Short Story	S3649	09/27/2006	12/13/2006	A	5.00	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade

ENGLISH	XL 133A	Creative Writing: Poetry	S3826	09/26/2006	12/12/2006	A	5.00	N/A	Credit/Letter Grade
ENGLISH	701.1	Plot and Tension in the Novel: Keeping the Reader Tied In	S2008	07/08/2006	07/08/2006	Not For Credit	N/A	N/A	Not For Credit

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**Certificates/Sequential Programs:**

<b>Project ID</b>	<b>Program Title</b>	<b>Candidacy Date</b>	<b>Award Date</b>
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You have not enrolled in any Certificates/Sequential Programs.

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If the course is numbered in the 800 series and the CEU column is populated with a value greater than 0.0, the student satisfactorily fulfilled the requirements for the class.

If "withdrawal" appears in either the Grade or Credit Status columns, or if Credit Status is set to "Do Not Record" the record will not appear on your official transcript.

## Introduction

Last academic year, I was lucky enough to be granted a sabbatical leave by the Mt. SAC Salary and Leaves Committee. The year became an experience that changed my life in many ways. First, this was the first time I have not worked since I was eighteen years old, so I had to adjust to being a full-time student and devote my time to my studies rather than to the demands of a job. Second, it brought me back into the classroom as a student and let me see first-hand what that experience is like. I learned about the craft and teaching of writing in ways that inspired me to be a better teacher and writer, and I learned how frightening it is to share my work in class with my peers. Finally, it gave me hundreds of handouts, assignments, lecture and exercise topics to use in my work at Mt. SAC. And now, as I compile all the materials of the past year together into a report, I have the chance to review this wonderful year and create a final project based on what I learned.

Organizing my Sabbatical Report was challenging. My first thought was to list and discuss each class one by one, but separately, but I took a total of fifteen on-campus classes last year, so I decided that the result would be choppy and overly long. Then I thought about organizing it by academic periods, but since I took courses in various writing genres every term, such an approach would be disjointed and lacking in continuity. Finally, **I decided to organize my report by genres: poetry, fiction and non-fiction, and to focus on the specific classes that made the greatest impact on me.** This approach worked well and allowed me to consider the courses within each genre as parts of a whole.

Each of the three sections, poetry, fiction and non-fiction, begins with a brief narrative section in which I discuss the course and summarize some lecture notes.

Following this are two additional parts: first, course handouts; second, examples of my own writing. I include papers that have been marked by my instructors along with drafts, revisions, and additional writing assignments.

And so, I invite you to share my sabbatical journey, a year at UCLA, which allowed me to reclaim my spirit, and reexamine my life and work, and feel moments of joy that can only happen when place, purpose, and inspiration align as perfectly as do the planets.

**Revised Sabbatical Proposal**

**Submitted to the Salary and Leaves Committee**

**July 16, 2006**

Pam Arterburn

July 16, 2006

To: Members of the Salary and Leaves Committee: John Nixon, Chair; Ginny Burley; Ralph Eastman; Ralph Greenwood; Jim Ocampo, and John Vitullo

Regarding: Pam Arterburn, Request to Modify Sabbatical Proposal for 2006-2007 School Year

Dear Members of the Salary and Leaves Committee,

Thank you for recommending me to the Board for a year-long sabbatical. I am looking forward to becoming a student again and spending time focusing on learning more about writing. The proposal you approved stated that I will attend UCR and work toward an MFA in Creative Writing. I would like to modify that and change the school to UCLA and its Writers Program, and I will work toward a certificate in Creative Writing, General Studies.

I am not a published writer with a body of work at this point, and because I stated that my main goal is to become a better teacher of writing, I was not accepted to join Riverside's MFA program. UCR accepts published writers who just want to write. I am a teacher; I do want to write, but this sabbatical is also supposed to energize me and give me something I can bring back to the classroom. Unfortunately, I was led to believe differently about UCR at the outset, but the more I discussed my plans with other professors, the more I questioned UCR as the right choice for me. After investigating all the programs in Southern California, I found the one that is a perfect fit.

**The Writers Program at UCLA** offers a wider variety of courses with a broader base. These are 400-level courses offered through the Extension Program, and the Creative Writing General Studies Certificate Program requires that students take a variety of courses within specific writing disciplines. Here is the official description of the certificate program from UCLA's website:

**Certificate in Creative Writing: General Studies**

For UCLA Extension students who prefer a structured course of study, the Writers' Program offers certificate programs designed to provide perspective, knowledge, and training in dynamic writing fields. The breadth and depth of the coordinated, sequential offerings allow participants to define and pursue career goals, select courses keyed to their interests, discover or develop their potential for professional growth, and acquire necessary skills. Courses may be taken in both the traditional classroom setting and/or online. Some courses may not be available online. (Please call an advisor for more information.)

This program was designed by the Writers' Program in consultation with representatives from the UCLA Extension instructional staff, the UCLA English Department, and the Southern California literary community. The curriculum offers opportunities to study broadly in all areas of creative writing, including fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, and writing for children. It also provides a thorough knowledge of current editing and publishing practices, and offers insight into the business of creative writing, including marketing, the manuscript submittal process, etc. Instructors and guest speakers are published writers and active professionals recognized for their leadership and achievement.

Candidates who have completed their course work are entitled to work one-on-one with a writing instructor on a final project. The consultation (a value of up to \$1050), includes one reading of their

manuscript (300-page maximum) by a Writers' Program instructor, four to eight pages of notes, and a 1 1/2 hour meeting.

Certificate candidates may take a one-day unlimited-enrollment Writers' Program course for free each quarter that they are enrolled.

Students must complete a total of 36 units from the Creative Writing section of the Writers' Program and must receive a grade of "C" or better in each course in order to fulfill requirements. The pass/no pass option is not acceptable. Courses may be taken in the classroom or online.

21 units are required from the five areas below, with a minimum of one beginning, one intermediate, and one advanced level course in any one area. Fifteen units of elective courses are required from any of the subject areas of creative writing, including the five core subject areas:

1. Fiction
2. Nonfiction
3. Poetry
4. Playwriting
5. Writing for Young People

The total cost of the program, including course enrollment fees and materials, is approximately \$4,300-\$6,200 depending on the specific electives undertaken. Cost estimates do not include incidental costs such as parking fees or copying fees. In some cases, books may be required. The candidacy/application fee is good for three years and is nonrefundable; renewable at \$50.

Candidacy Fee/Application Fee: \$ 200

Candidates successfully completing this program are awarded a certificate bearing the seal of the University of California. "Successful completion" is defined as earning the grade of C or higher in all constituent courses of the curriculum, unless more rigorous requirements are stated above. The repeat of courses is permitted.

To establish candidacy in, or to apply for admission to this program, [click here](#).

Open Enrollment or Apply for Admission?: Open  
 Federal Financial Aid Available: No  
 Extension Grant Availability: Yes  
 Estimated Duration (Full Time): 1.5 year(s)  
 Internships Available: No  
 All courses available online: Yes  
 Program ID: CF506

Please note: candidacy and application fees are not transferable or refundable.

## Here is a sampling of the Fiction courses offered in the Writer's Program:

### **NEW COURSE**

**Find Your Story and Start It Off Right: A Two-Saturday Workshop for Aspiring Novelists**

X 446.87 English 1.5 units \$230

Thriller, romance, literary fiction--no matter what kind of novel you plan to write, at some time early in the process you should be able to answer the deceptively simple question: What's your story? What kind of tale do you intend to spin for the people who buy and read your work, yearning to escape for a while from their everyday lives? Once the answer to this question is fixed in your mind (subject to change, of course, as the book takes shape), you face the equally challenging problem of hooking your reader in the first few pages so that he or she doesn't lose interest. Hence this course. By means of lecture-discussion, in-class writing, and small-group interaction, you learn how to convert your basic idea into a coherent storyline and plot-plan, then draft an opening that captures your reader's attention and holds it fast.

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**Choices Characters Make: A Workshop on Developing Engaging Fictional Characters**

X 412.20 English 3 units \$375

In fiction, the choices characters make affect their relationships and determine whether or not their dreams are realized or thwarted--and in the process give us the story and keep us engrossed. This course helps students know their characters--the people they care about, the choices that confront them, and the literal and metaphorical places that form and direct them. Through weekly exercises participants develop their characters fully with the goal of writing (and possibly revising) a short story or a chapter of a novel. Also included are selected readings of writers as diverse as Willa Cather, Charles Baxter, Michael Cunningham, Eudora Welty, John Cheever, Stuart Dybek, Elizabeth Spencer, Ian McEwan, John Rechy, William Goyen, and Gail Tsukayama. *Enrollment limited to 20 students.*

**The Art of the Lie: Life Stories into Fiction**

X 462.22 English 1.5 units \$230

This course investigates ways of transforming your real-life stories into powerful fiction. What's the difference between anecdotes--important to you alone--and strong, autonomous fiction that affects readers who don't know or care about you? What are meaningful sources for your own fiction? During both days of the workshop, we explore ways of choosing and presenting the life stories that most define you, most stimulate you, and most silence you. Through discussions and writing exercises, we also pay particular attention to character development, point-of-view, and dialogue as techniques of fiction. The goal is for each student to leave the course with the foundation of a story based on personal experience, as well as with tools for developing other such stories. *Enrollment limited to 20 students.*

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**NEW COURSE**

**Memoir Into Fiction: Writing the Autobiographical Novel or Story**

X 404.50 English 1.5 units \$230

What do Ernest Hemingway, Jonathan Franzen, and Pam Houston have in common? Each of these writers has written fiction by drawing heavily from his or her personal experiences. This course is designed for writers whose personal stories inform their work but who are reluctant to tell their story in memoir or who are uncertain how to create fiction out of true events. Participants learn how to make informed choices on the technical, emotional, ethical, and legal standpoints of borrowing from real life. They also tackle how to create characters and develop plot lines that steer comfortably clear of true events and real people while at the same time evoking their truth and essence. This is an ideal course for those interested in learning the craft and technique of writing autobiographical fiction, as well as

unraveling the significance of their own stories and discerning the levels of risk in the telling of them. *Enrollment limited to 20 students.*

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**Far beyond Google: Research Methods and Interviewing Techniques for Writers**

X 460.91 English 1.5 units \$230

This course shows writers how to find information fast. Through exercises and lectures from experts, students receive practical tips on how to tap into the vast network of available reference sources. They learn how to surf the Internet like a pro, and go far beyond Google to access the free and low-fee online databases used by investigative journalists; where to find special libraries that house unique collections; and how to unearth the wealth of secrets contained in public records, institutional archives and collected by government agencies. In addition, writers learn everything they need to know about the art and craft of interviewing: locating sources, getting subjects to agree to talk, handling tough sources, and structuring interviews to elicit the tangy morsels that no one else has. *Enrollment limited to 25 students.*

The program description (first added section, above) explains the types of courses required for the certificate, which takes an estimated one and a half years to earn. Students complete **36 units from the Creative Writing section of the Writers' Program, fifteen of which are elective units from one of these areas: fiction, nonfiction, poetry, playwriting, and writing for young people.** In addition, there is a minimum of **one beginning, one intermediate and one advanced course** in any one area.

**Sample course description from the Nonfiction area:**

Biography and Autobiography: Ten Steps to Writing Lives

X 401.55 English 3 units

The art of writing about an individual's life—be it your own or someone else's—requires the ability to shape a compelling story from a mass of details, patience and tenacity to do thorough research, and both objectively, about and passion for the subject you've chosen. Taught by eminent biographer Anne Edwards, this workshop guides you to choose and evaluate the viability of your subject, flesh your story and portrait, write a professional proposal for an agent or publisher, and be prepared to continue working on your project after the course ends. Topics include strategies for obtaining hard-to-get information, interviewing techniques, finding one's own voice as well as that of your subject, and keeping the thrust of the subject's life in focus.

**Sample course description from the Poetry area:**

Poetry Writing: Beyond Beginning

X422.32 English 2 units

For those with knowledge of contemporary poetry, this workshop provides close reading of student poems with detailed feedback. The focus is on free verse, but in addition introduces the basic forms—the sonnet, sestina, and villanelle—which have once again

become part of so many contemporary poets' repertoire. So that participants can gain a sense of where they fit in, we also look at some poetry of Southern California.

(This is a Thursday 7-10 class that meets for six consecutive weeks at Occidental College.)

**Sample course description from the Playwriting Area:**

Introduction to Playwriting  
X 402.1 English 2 units

This course is designed to develop the writer's individual theatrical style through the writing of a one-act play. Students explore the dimensions of writing for the stage through key areas of craft, with an emphasis on dramatic structure. They also focus on dramatic tension (behavior, action, and the spoken word) and character—fulfilling theme through the depiction of characters with distinct voices and histories.

Instructor: Tom Jacobson, MFA, playwright whose most recent plays are *Sperm* (Circle X Theatre Company), *The Orange Grove* (Playwrights Arena), *Bunbury*, and *Ouroboros* (The Road Theatre Company). Mr. Jacobson is the co-literary manager at Boston Court Theatre in Pasadena and was a literary manager at Celebration Theatre. He is a founder of Playwrights Ink and is on the board of the Cornerstone Theatre Company.

**Sample course description from the Young Adult Area:**

Finding Your Voice in the Young Adult Novel  
X 471.7 English 2 units

Designed for those ready to take a serious stab at writing the young adult novel, this course focuses on establishing your book's voice and how to sustain it by determining who is telling your story, why he or she is telling it, and to whom. You explore narrative possibilities until you find the right fit for the story you wish to tell, and by the end of the course, have an intimate understanding of your narrator and characters' likes, hates, strengths, weaknesses, habits, and passions. Through lecture, exercises, and guest speakers, the course goal is to be well on your way through the first chapter of your young adult novel in your character's unmistakable voice, with attention to plot and pacing.

Instructor: Amy Goldman Koss, award-winning author of several novels for young adults and middle-grade readers including *The Cheat*; *Strike Two*; *Stranger in Dadland*; *The Girls*, which was an ALA Best Book for Young Adults and an IRA Young Adult Choice, and *The Ashwater Experiment*, a School Library Journal Best Book of the Year. Ms. Goldman Koss's forthcoming books are *Poison Ivy* (Roaring Brook Press) and *Side Effects*.

I am unable to state at this time which courses I will take during the Fall, Winter and Spring quarters, because the Fall catalog does not come out until August 9, 2006, and the information about specific courses offered will not be available until then. However, I have obtained information through the Program that courses in the areas listed above will be offered each quarter. I will take only classes that apply to the Certificate Program in Creative Writing General Studies as outlined above; the total units will be the equivalent of 24 semester units for next academic year. My preference is to take classes on campus, even though online classes are offered. Should I be required to take any online courses for the certificate, I will check with the Committee first to make sure this is acceptable.

When I enroll in the Writers Program and sign up for classes on August 9, 2006, I will submit to the Committee a list of the courses I will take during the Fall quarter. I will do this after the application date for Winter and Spring courses as well.

Because of the incredible variety of courses, the impressive credentials of the instructors, and the focused plan involved in the certificate program, I believe that the UCLA Writer's Program offered through the Extension Program is the best possible match for me.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to study, to learn, and to improve my writing and my ability to be an even better teacher here at Mt. SAC.

Sincerely,

Pamela J. Arterburn  
English Department  
Mt. San Antonio College

**Sabbatical Report, Part One:**

**The Poetry Classes**

**Beginning Poetry**

**Intermediate Poetry**

**The Master Class**

**Instructor: Suzanne Lummis  
UCLA: Fall, Winter and Spring  
2006-2007**

## Part One: Poetry

During my year at UCLA, I took three poetry courses: Beginning, Intermediate, and Master Class levels, all with the award-winning poet and professor Suzanne Lummis. She is part of one of Los Angeles' founding families, and the Lummis House in Mt. Washington still stands as a testament to her grandfather's impact on LA history. Suzanne's classes helped me visualize myself as a poet, and through her handouts, lectures, poetry assignments and in-class critiques of student writing, I found a new understanding of the craft and the impact of a well-written poem, and I learned about contemporary Los Angeles poets. We read our own work along with the works of many others; we attended readings, met poets and listened to them discuss their works. My class notes, which I have summarized below, reflect the passion and intensity of the experience and the poets I came to know and respect. By moving chronologically through the three courses I took with Suzanne, I will try to give you a sense of her incredible skill as an instructor and a mentor.

### **Summary of Notes with My Comments: Introduction to Poetry, Suzanne Lummis**

This was my first class at UCLA, and I remember how intimidated I felt on the first night. My notes that night simply begin with "Poetry Class Reading List," because we were to name a contemporary poet to report about at the end of the class. Many of the names were new to me: Yusef Cunanyakaa, Tiana Blackburn's book, "The Apple that

Astonished Paris,” Martine Espada, Steve Kowitz, whose book “The Gods of Rapture” is a translation of Hindu love poems from the Sanskrit. I knew some names, including Billy Collins and Galway Kinnell, but my classmates’ knowledge of contemporary poems was extensive. The course requirements included writing and revising four poems, which would be critiqued in class, a final project, and a memorized poem.

### **First Poetry Lecture, Beginning Poetry Class:**

Universal Elements of Poetry—Topics and Principles. When revising your poems, look at the language. This can flatten out or become melodramatic. As you look at your poems, look for where you can’t see, taste, smell, touch, hear. Often your language will flatten into the general. Poetry is not the **what**. It’s the progress—how the poet does what he or she does. How it all unfolds before us. This gives us a language, a beginning to use.

At this point, she turned to the handout and gave us an assignment for the following week. We did an in-class writing exercise, a sequence poem, and here is mine:

It’s TV dinner night, Friday, 6 pm.

No salmon patties tonight, lukewarm spinach with vinegar and sugar,

Stewed tomatoes to eat with a spoon.

Inside the shiny tray, turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes,

Corn and cherry cobbler all fit neatly in tinfoil.

No home cooking tonight!

My first attempt at poetry turned out to be a critique of my mother's home cooking, but I had begun. She discussed persona poems in which the "I" involves putting yourself in a situation as a character that is not you and telling his or her story. It relies on empathy and begins to resonate with a part of yourself.

**Suzanne Lummis' Insights:**

--Poetry can be wild, not logical.

--In a story poem, you don't have to tell the whole story. In "Double Indemnity," the audience is aligned with the killer. This is moral ambiguity—good people are capable of evil.

--If an image seems pushed, it stops working.

--Noir Motif: imagine Venetian blinds streaking the walls, the world split into black and white. The effect is unease, disorientation.

--Los Angeles writers must know Raymond Chandler, must read The Big Sleep, Farewell my Lovely, The Long Goodbye.

--Never forget how valuable a utilitarian title can be.

--Your title should be as interesting as a line of poetry. It can be descriptive. Robert Creely said that "Form is always an extension of subject matter." You have a subject, and then you discover the form; the Bauhaus school of Architecture's motto is "Form Follows Function." Don't use garish ornamentation unless it serves the function of the building.

--Symbols are not terribly interesting in contemporary poetry.

--We turn to poetry because we want to be carried right into the source of the knowing.

--We turn to poetry to get past the general to the specific.

**Recommended Poetry Books to Own:** (I now own several of these)

Lawrence Raab, The Collector of Cold Weather, The Assassin's Fatal Mistake,  
see "Attack of the Crab Monsters," the best persona poem in the language.

Western Wind

Poems of the American West

Steve Kowitz, The Gods of Rapture

Patricia Smith, Big Talk, Big Town ("Doin' the Louvre")

Ted Kooser: Any book.

Margaret Atwood, Morning in the Burn House

Angels in America

Stand Up Poetry

Western Wind

The Making of a Poem

**Summary of Class Notes with my Comments, Intermediate Poetry, Suzanne**

**Lummis: The Second Course in the Poetry Sequence**

This class once again began with students naming their favorite poets, and again my list of poets to read expanded: Stephen Dunn, Sharon Olds, David St. John, Bob Hicok, Laurel Ann Bogen, Frank O'Hara, Lynn Emmanuel, Charles Harper Webb's "Hot Popsicles," Wislawa Szymborska, Ginger Andrews, Czeslaw Milosz, Laura Riding, who later married Robert Graves and disavowed all of her poems, Donan Laux, Ann Carson,

Mary Oliver, Jane Kenyon, Amy Gerstler, Ron Koertge, Philip Levine, Ruth Stone, Patricia Smith.

**Intermediate Poetry Class Lecture Notes, excerpts:**

Being a poet is a continuing conversation about poetry. When poets get together, they don't usually talk about the problems they're having writing their own stuff. Mostly it's trivial shop talk—magazines, contexts, etc. It's a rich conversation about poets you love, found, hate, have ideas about. At that point you find that people know the names.

Ezra Pound wrote "The Don'ts"—the defining manifesto of modernism. William Carlos Williams loved America; he trusted in American poetry as defining the new movement. Pound moved the poetry of the day toward conversation, the vernacular. He was entranced by Chinese poetry, Roman Catullus, the Greeks. Catullus complained about high society Romans. Pound saw that poetry can "talk." Regarding the image, note as you read how much of poetry can be heard, touched, seen, smelled—when tangible words come in, the language itself becomes intangible. Modern novelists laid out modernism: Hemingway, James Joyce, Faulkner. Pound inspired Ginsberg.

There is a tightrope between melancholy and sentimentality.

In Scottish history, rat-rhymers would come to your barn and curse the rats out.

Lynn Emmanuel breaks through ordinary language and creates a new kind of vocabulary; she packs in a kind of rage. Look at your own poems, and avoid predictable language.

Roethke was doing something larger than life. He was a mystic—a madman (in and out of institutions—bi-polar). He was breaking down the membrane that separated

him from the other world that surrounds us, that we can't completely participate in. "In a Dark Time" describes his descent into madness (she then recites the entire poem from memory). The mid-century poets were almost all alcoholics—most of them were crazy. Drinking was romanticized; they suffered from untreated alcoholism: Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Theodore Roethke, James Wright.

**In-class exercises from Suzanne Lummis' Poetry Classes:**

1. Which figures larger in your life, water or fire? Write three memories from the beginning, middle and current parts of your life. Choose one and turn it into a poem.
2. Set a poem in a place where you can put your feet down. We need a place, a situation. Go sit somewhere. Look around and tell what's there. Tell me the truth. If you get the details right, it will be poetry.
3. Think of a moment that you've always remembered—something dramatic but not big. You don't even know why you remember it. Tell this memory to the person sitting next to you. NOW, take the other person's memory and write a poem about it as if it happened to you. Make it real. Use elements from your own life.
4. Start with a figure, person or an animal. All we know is it's a living creature. Take the time to think. First part: give a few lines of description to whatever figure calls to you. Tell something about the nature of it—the key elements that we need to know, the things we need to know about it. Second part: This figure is in a landscape or environment. Tell about that. Third part: This figure is engaged in an activity or confronted by a situation. Describe this.

5. Pick a place (park, restaurant) where things are going on around you. Write what you see, hear, perceive, without turning it back on yourself (“I remember the time I . . .”). How does this connect to “The Waste Land”? There are layers and tiers of poetry, but Eliot is looking at and describing London.
6. Create a notebook of stanzas and pieces of poems you’ve written that don’t stand alone. It’s a poetry scrapbook. This is also like “The Waste Land”—portions of other poems fit in.

### **Poetry: The Master Class, Suzanne Lummis, Third Course in the Poetry Sequence**

This, the final course in UCLA’s poetry sequence, was a more demanding course in terms of Suzanne’s expectations of us and the class assignments. The course was loosely designed around T. S. Eliot’s great poem, “The Waste Land,” and our task was to take it apart and understand how it came together, and we were to do this by taking his techniques and trying them out in poems of our own. We also read Babel, an amazing book by Barbara Hamby, which is cutting-edge stuff, full of humor, wit, lush language and images. For the final project, I chose poems from Hamby’s book and did an analysis of her use of language. The course also focused on an important term which we found defined in an article by Federico Garcia Lorca of the same name: “Duende.” It is the Spanish idea of what the “muse” is, not the classic Greek notion. He is (personified as) a goblin who grabs you with a fiery possession. There is a danger of inviting that into yourself, and the class became quite focused on the duality of the danger/pull of duende.

### **Lecture Notes, Master Poetry Class**

Discussion of Craft: The Opening Line. You don't have the opportunity to wait. The opening line must grab the reader or you've lost her. It's like stepping into the light from behind the curtain. You're ON. But it's not just for the reader; it's for you. If the poem isn't strong at the beginning, the poem will be weak overall. The first line sets the standard and gives the poem a sense of authority. This voice can be created in just a few lines within a poem:

It's dark on purpose  
so just listen.

Lawrence Raab

The opening sentence can be long, but it must be clear, and you can't lose your focus. It sets the mood and atmosphere.

Metaphor: Once you've created one, you have to be true to the metaphor.

Muriel Sparks explains what it means to be a writer this way: "You must understand that everything happens to the writer. Everything is recovered, nothing is lost, and amazement goes on forever."

What Eliot is saying is to put yourself in the service of the art. See Eliot's description of the objective correlative, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of one particular emotion. Pound described it as a vortex, the funnel through which emotions are channeled.

Frost was Auden's counterpart in America and wrote about society and civilization. He went to other countries for periods of time and returned to New England at the end of his life.

Begin to think for the rest of this class about poems that are not personal or memories. Be aware that there is no limit on where poetry comes from. It's not always backward looking or inward. Think of Auden and Eliot. They wanted to write about the human predicament, like In Memoriam. It's about what is absent from the world now that Yeats is gone. Auden doesn't comfort us. Eliot's attempt to capture some sense of the purpose of civilization and human-kind was a grand effort, like a collage. Is there something in your work to go back to? Be ambitious. You can trick yourself into writing a poem with a larger scope.

**The following notes come from a lecture Suzanne gave about Eliot's "Prufrock."** I include them in their entirety to demonstrate her ability to bring the student into a classic poem by imposing the impact it made at the time onto today's reader. This makes the poem fresh and new. Because I teach this poem in my literature classes, I learned to see it in an entirely different light based on this lecture. These are my notes:

**How do you see Prufrock?** Is he a sad, pathetic character? He suffers from an excess of consciousness over **being**. He sees the wholeness of everything along with the losses. There's this great vacuum of space, as if he's done everything there is to do. He fritters his time away, yet nothing is accomplished. What does he "dare"? What's the matter with this guy?

Eliot was only 23 when he wrote Prufrock. He's not the 40 year old main character. Perhaps he was thinking about what middle age will be like.

This poem came along and overturned everything. This is the poem that stood at the gateway of modern poetry. This was such a jolt to the people who were reading warmed-over nature poetry. The French Symbolists were writing about urban blight with a sense of distance and detachment, and he understood that there was another way to think about poetry and to control the language. Pound was busy telling other poets about modernism and saw Prufrock. He said, here's a poet who figured modernism out without his (Pound's) help. He began to sing Prufrock's praises and got Eliot published in Poetry magazine.

So the reader of the day is like "a patient etherized upon a table," and from that point on, the poem puts people through severe shocks. Genius is not genius because it sits alone and is not influenced. It takes from other talents and moves forward. Eliot was not writing about London—it was St. Louis or Boston. He's not abandoning rhyme. Pound was telling people to stop rhyming, not Eliot, because he was so good at it. Here, it makes things hard, gritty, real—anything but pretty. His image, "eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase," has never been improved on. The poem did what poetry now doesn't do very well—it seems to be the poem that defined the modern problem. In Boston, New England, they looked to England for civilization. What should we understand about the people circling around him? The world he's in has everything to do with his predicament. The people ("arms lying about the chair. . .")—what does he want? ("downed with light brown hair") He wants a pure beauty, but the hair (animal, impure) is there and turns him off. He wants an untainted, pure beauty. Brackets capture the quality of actual conversation—the feeling of somebody talking, having a second thought—it breaks down the rigid forms of poetry. Brilliant—how he modulates between

conversation and incredibly heightened, inspired poetry. Polite society is highly ritualized. There are boundaries (Howl, for example, was banned in Boston). These boundaries you can't cross, places you don't go, questions you don't ask. Society wants to impose a sense of order. People are dangerous. Prufrock wants a violent spiritual breakthrough—poured into the molten heart of truth. It would be such a severing between him and everything he knows. Construction: "I have known them all"—everything in his world rotates around the same crap. What if he explodes? "Would it be worthwhile. . ." if one should say, "that's not what I meant." He wants to rip off the façade. But that's not the world he's in. He's not pathetic but tragic, locked into a world he's too big for. He's not the poet warrior, not Hamlet, a man of action, who tore the kingdom apart. Who is "the fool" in Hamlet? Polonius. He's not the hero, but this old guy full of baloney. His world is monotony. The poem has an opiate-like sleepiness. The end-Prufrock is a great poet trapped in untenable circumstances. He has perception but lacks will. This is the dawn of Eliot's expression, desire and hunger for something above and beyond the mundane ugliness—a yearning that is spiritual, a longing for rhapsody, fantasy—an otherworldly beauty. Something beyond all this. It's a black and white world. Tragedy—he sees the shallowness of this world and can imagine some other world where the nobility we admire is lived. "I do not think they will sing to me." He's locked out of it, and it's lost to him. This poem is still fresh and contemporary. It's not stuffy, archaic, forced, or artificial.

**What Suzanne Lummis Taught Me:**

1. Poetry is a fine art worthy of much study.
2. To write a poem is to engage in an active journey toward truth.
3. It's important to know your contemporary poets and classic writers as well.
4. Good poems never lie; we should tell the truth and it will be enough.
5. A great teacher does not strive to entertain. She respects her students enough to know that they are in the class because they want to learn. She sits down and does not try to entertain her classes or rely on fancy computer programs or presentations.
6. A great teacher approaches the material with her students, and together they embark on a path of discovery and understanding that elevates and inspires both the learner and the instructor.

**Poetry Class Handouts**

**UCLA 2006-2007**

**Introduction to Poetry  
Intermediate Poetry  
The Master Class in Poetry**

**Instructor: Suzanne Lummis**

Contemporary Poetry: A few notes, a couple examples

Though the poetry of our times falls into many stylistic schools and sensibilities, with groups of poets carrying on lively arguments about what should be paid attention to, all dedicated, accomplished poets strive for a language that's compelling, surprising and lively, and, or, an engaging and distinctive voice. And nearly all have come to some agreement about how these qualities might be achieved.

. Details and specifics bring energy into the language. Generalities—the easiest way of working and therefore often the province of new writers just learning—contain no striking information, no sharply recorded memories or observations, and so produce a bland effect.

Don't try to be philosophical. Don't directly describe an emotion.

. Attention to the five senses and the language of the physical world opens poets—in fact, all writers—to an unlimited vocabulary and infinite possibilities. On the other hand, abstract nouns (Time, Life, for example, which often appear capitalized in the work of poets just starting out) contain no energy—unless packed in among striking images and details. Often generalities function like a sort of cliché, allowing the poet to gesture towards some large condition without really naming it or finding a fresh approach. Feel your feeling as you describe.

In poetry, as in all art, the how often winds up as important, or even more important, than the what. In other words, the method, the writing itself, might matter more than the subject. Readers savor poetry line-by-line or sentence-by-sentence, stanza-by-stanza. Therefore, while it doesn't seem as if much could be made of a bouquet of poppies delivered to a woman in a hospital bed—in fact, it might lend itself to sentimentality or conventional prettiness, Sylvia Plath exerts on the world her own way of seeing. And there's nothing sentimental about it.

Sylvia Plath  
POPPIES IN JULY

"a poet who could almost turn language into a drug"

Poppies =  
Opium

danger in the safe

Hell flames - way more specific

Little poppies, little hell flames,  
Do you no harm? - like 19th cent nursery rhyme  
off-kilter syntax

You flicker. I cannot touch you.

I put my hands among the flames. Nothing burns.

Hallucinatory - waiting for something to happen

And it exhausts me to watch you

Flickering like that, wrinkly and clear red, like the skin of a mouth.

They extract something from her

A mouth just bloodied.

Little bloody skirts! ← rolls metaphor into something else + we are with her.

incredible specificity. nothing wasted. Everything hits the bulls-eye

There are fumes that I cannot touch. - Frustration - it's impossible to touch fumes.  
Where are your opiates, your nauseous capsules?

If I could bleed or sleep! — a cry! greatest in contemp poetry!!  
If my mouth could marry a hurt like that! ← Poet's desire for unity w/ ultimate intensity, even if it kills you.

Or your liquors seep to me, in this glass capsule,  
Dulling and stilling.

Anesthetized - wants to reach core of emotional power - you can almost feel the drug running through her veins.

But colorless. Colorless.

Note: Plath makes skillful use of sentence fragments but—for right now—best to write in complete sentences.

repeated words touch mouth bloody

In his book *De/Compositions* the venerable poet W. D. Snodgrass took 101 good poems, mostly from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and “ruined” them, basically rewrote them in unimaginative language that destroyed both the imagery and the rhythm, or the pace, to show readers what qualities belong to poetry, what makes it poetry.

Here's one of his “De/Compositions”.

W.D. SNODGRASS'S FLATTENED-OUT VERSION OF ELIZABETH SPIRES' "GLOBE"

3 My Father's Values in the World

—de/composed from Spires

My childhood was lonely and cursed by poverty.  
 I was depressed by confinement and lack of freedom  
 caused by the absence of parental care in the home  
 which relegated me to the care of unfamiliar substitute-parents,  
 especially one old lady who was a real sourpuss.

Our home situation was dingy

and constricted.

The furnishings were uncomfortable  
 which made me feel irritated.

We had no small luxuries which could light up your life.

The only beauty-touches were some dumb plants  
 and a fancy centerpiece from our affluent period.

Consequently I passed my time

Feeling that people's lives were insecure

and subject to threat from the smallest things.

I sought pleasure in cheap, popular entertainments.

I tried prematurely to assume adult roles but my amusements  
 displayed my anxiety that adults were unstable and untrustworthy.

I felt differently about my father, though; I really loved him so much.

He was stern but hard working and reliable.

Besides, sometimes he brought me presents.

My life literally revolved around him.

I never knew what he had in store for me

but I felt I could trust him blindly.

He just gave me the whole world.

THE ORIGINAL

Globe

—Elizabeth Spires

I spread my game on the cracked linoleum floor:  
 I had to play inside all day. ← *Flattest line (general*

The woman who kept me said so.

*extension of the image* } She was middle-aged, drank tea in the middle of the day,  
 her face the color of dust layered on a table.

A high window let in alley light  
 to a two-room apartment.

Sofas and chairs bristled like hedgehogs  
 and made the back of my legs itch.

No red flowers on the windowsill. No radio.

Just waxy vines drooping over the tables,  
 a dome clock dividing time into fifteen-minute parcels.

What did I do all day?

Made card houses so frail

I had to turn my breath the other way.

Or colored the newspaper comic strips,  
 or wobbled across the floor in my mother's old pumps  
 with the aplomb of somebody drunk.

Enter my father at 5:15, dark and immediate,  
 finished with his shift at the factory.

He was hiding something behind his back.

He turned as I circled him,

keeping whatever it was out of sight.

*Close your eyes and hold out your hand—*

I touched a globe slotted on top for coins,  
 my hand shadowing the continents

Here's another detailed-filled poem, this one by Gary Soto. Notice, not all poems must be about the "self" or things recalled or witnessed by the poet. Here the poet imagines himself into the being of another man, a man confronting a singular situation.

The word "time" appears in this poem, but not as a windy abstraction. Not only does the poet use it in a specific way towards a particular end but he seems to transform "time" into a tangible thing: "He wrote this much in his notebook. He whittled away time, tapping his pencil on his thigh."

Gary Soto  
MORTGAGE

Tone - consistent

The dead man lay with a plum in his throat. His left hand  
Held a pen, its vein of ink nearly gone.  
His right hand gripped his mortgage papers.  
Water dripped in the kitchen sink. But that was no clue,  
Neither were the worn slippers on his feet.  
The Detective tipped back his hat. He had seen the dead  
In many postures and this fellow was nothing new.  
He had seen the dead lodged in chimneys,  
The adulterous dead caught in the outstroke of lovemaking.  
Drowned men sunk in rivers and buoyed up with their bellies full  
Of moonlight and murky water. Yes,  
After many years, the Detective understood the map of bloodstains  
And the victims starved by justified fear. That's how he saw  
Those who succumbed on a wet Thursday. It was Thursday now,  
Though dry. A crime was involved. The Detective,  
Breathing on a window, noted a splotch the size of a newborn's head.  
But that evidence would fade soon. So would the last pinprick  
Of red in the man's red cheek. The Detective knelt  
And rolled the man's head back and forth—no, no was the answer.  
He wrote this much in a notebook. He whittled away time,  
Tapping his pencil on his thigh. Time had stopped  
For this man, age forty-nine, on the floor. That his fingernails would continue  
Was a given. But how would he claw his way out of the morgue,  
Once he was fitted on a tray and rolled into darkness?  
And what if they turned him onto his belly  
And they dislodged the plum pit? It was an open-and-shut case  
That he lived and died, and had signed on the line  
At Dot.Com Savings and Loan. The wind whistled  
When the door opened. The men with latex gloves were here,  
Wiser by one more day: don't suck a plum pit  
With a pen in one hand, a thirty-year mortgage in the other.

Dark  
Witty poem -  
NOT Gary Soto  
Like a novel -  
Prose-like  
compressed  
sentimentality.  
Stripped bare -  
"that's just the way  
"he is" - lesson.

Has word "time,"  
but NOT as a  
windy abstraction!

There's no word  
you can't use -  
just avoid their  
pitfalls.

Poetry can  
have humor.

great word - "inspired"  
Poets make us  
see ordinary  
things differently

THE MYSTERY OF THE LINE – UCLA Extension – S. Lummis

In the age of free verse, the one unarguable difference between contemporary poetry and prose is “the line,” by which the poet can control the appearance of the poem on the page, pacing, and how the reader receives the information or “news” of the poem. No one owns the last word on how to break the line, and some poets appear to break lines with no logic at all. However, skillful line breaks can reinforce the purpose and mood of the poem.

*The End-Stopped Line*

ends with a period or comma, bringing the reader to a stop or a hesitation.

A poem with many end-stopped lines often achieves a rather emphatic, declarative quality. Usually, in this case, the poet is not attempting elegance of language or an obviously “poetic” manner.

In the following, the poet deliberately undercuts the old-fashioned poetic tradition of praising sunsets with exalted imagery. The end-stopped lines accompany the stolid, workmanlike progress of the reporting. Notice, too, how the many “to be” verbs reinforce the pedestrian quality.

Speaking of sunsets,  
 last night's was shocking.  
 I mean, sunsets aren't supposed to frighten you, are they?  
 Well, this one was terrifying.  
 People were screaming in the streets.  
 Sure, it was beautiful, but far too beautiful.  
 It wasn't natural.  
 One climax followed another and then another  
 until your knees went weak  
 and you couldn't breathe.  
 The colors were definitely not of this world, ...  
 (from *Never Again the Same* by James Tate)

Poems with short lines, many <sup>single</sup> syllable words and end-stopped lines can achieve a blunt, aggressive sound. This fragment comes from an early book of mine.

In one side of his mouth  
 he chews the carbon end of the match.  
 He speaks to you from the other.  
 His leather suit is studded with magnets.  
 The tattoo on his arm says  
*Love Me Then Leave Me.* ...  
 (Opening lines of *Love*)

*The Enjambed Line*

breaks at a place where there's no natural pause, no period or comma. Sometimes poets use enjambed lines to achieve speed; the reader must hurry forward to grasp the meaning, to get the “news”. And, sometimes – as in the poem below – it's not speed but an unimpeded quality that's important, the impression that one sensation flows into the next.

(Enjambed Lines Cont'd)

(The opening of *What Dying Was Like* by Lynn Emmanuel)

First I lay down  
and then my senses began their climb  
into the dark above me. Seeing, hearing  
leapt away like goats I saw once in that hill  
town in Tuscany, or like the day I stood and looked  
on the Mediterranean's voluptuous and wrinkled bed,  
now I gazed down on the immense miniature of this  
landscape: the chimney of the throat stove in,  
the collar of the larynx undone, even the knotted  
grain of thumbprint was worn away. Good-bye thumb,  
and wrist, licked back by all the tiny hungers of ants  
to the bare tree shape of bare bone. ...

Most important, though, the method of line-breaks must not become predictable to the reader. It's next to impossible – or, at any rate, unadvisable – to write a longish poem with all end-stopped lines or all enjambed lines. To avoid monotony, most poets keep varying the line-breaks:

I wait; I don't go. He will come, the one  
who waited for me each day  
at the edge of the schoolyard.

I wait. And I am bitten thin  
by waiting. And I grow  
dense with luggage and time.

He will come, though  
he may never come, who wrote his name  
by drawing a spear borne in a heart.

In this life, this is how  
one must wait, past despair,  
the heart a fossil, the minutes molten, the feet turned to stone.

(Opening of *Here I Am* by Li-Young Lee)

Notice how often the enjambed lines create a moment of both suspense and suspension. "In this life, this is how ..." *How what?* On an unconscious level, the reader experiences a split-second of wondering, and this series of suspensions and revelations in the skillful poem becomes one of the pleasures of the form.

## UCLA EXTENSION WRITERS' PROGRAM—S. Lummis

Syllabus

Intermediate Poetry

2007

Text—Required: *Poems of the American West*, ed Robert Mezey  
(Everyman's Library Pocket Poets, Knoph)

Final requirements for last class: 1) Three poems that have been discussed in class then revised.  
2) Memorized poem (from a recognized, publishing poet) to be recited. 3) Come prepared to discuss a poem you've selected from the anthology, one we haven't gotten to in class.

## WEDNESDAYS

- Jan. 17            Introductions and evolving of Reading List  
                      Course Overview  
                      Craft Lecture: *Ezra Pound and the Rise of the Modern Poem*  
                      In-Class Exercise: Fire or water?
- Jan. 24            Discussion of class poems
- Jan. 31            Discussion of class poems  
                      Discussion of *American West* poems, the oldest and newest in the book: Frost's and Gary Soto's (**Each student will bring in one additional poem by Frost and Soto**)
- Feb. 7             Continued discussion of class poems  
                      Anthology poems: Tribal Poems, Peter Everwine
- Feb. 14            Craft lecture: *The Rise of the Contemporary: James Wright / Poetry in Translation*  
                      Anthology poems: James Wright and Zbigniew Herbert (**and students bring in one other Wright and Herbert**)  
                      Continued discussion of class poems  
                      (Take home exercise)
- Feb. 21            Discussion of student poems  
                      In-Class exercise
- Feb. 28            Discussion of student poems  
                      Anthology poems: Theodore Roethke, Lynn Emanuel
- March 7            Craft Lecture: *The Urban Poem and the New Nature Poem*  
                      Anthology poems: Charles Bukowski, M. Scott Momaday
- March 14          Discussion of new class poems and some revisions, as time allows.
- March 21          Final poems due, memorized poems, student discussions of their selected poems.

Poetry Liaison Person: Cece Peri—[ceceperi@aol.com](mailto:ceceperi@aol.com)

## The Rise of the Contemporary Poem

UCLA Extension Writers' Program  
S. Lummis

By the mid-50s' poetry had becoming increasingly intellectual in its subject matter and reference points; it had departed from the directness and clarity Pound advocated near the beginning of the century. T. S. Eliot had wandered far from the image-based poetry his mentor extolled, and even Pound himself had pretty much stopped following his own advice. (Later he'd regret this, calling his epic *Cantos* "a failure.") Robert Lowell reigned as the most admired and influential American poet: "Here Charlemagne's stunted shadow plays charades/With pawns and bishops whose play-canister/Shivers the Snowman's bones, and the Great Bear/Shuffles away to his ancestral shades..." (from "Napoleon Crosses the Berezina").

In the underground or alternative poetry worlds, Frank O'Hara in New York and The Beats in San Francisco began challenging the status quo. However, in the all-important academic mainstream other new influences took hold and changed the course of American poetry as profoundly as Modernism had decades earlier. Robert Bly's translations from the poetry of other languages introduced American readers to literary styles that captured two contradictory forces; they seemed both more realistic yet more dreamlike. Some of the Spanish language poets had this quality. And, the Eastern European poets, whose countries had suffered Nazi occupation, brought a new immediacy into the art form. Of these poets, Wislawa Szymborska would eventually receive the Nobel Prize for literature.

On the American front, the respected poet James Wright's 1959 release would become a cornerstone for the new sensibility, *This Branch will Not Break*. Here Wright abandoned the sonnets and formal schemes to embrace a simple but luminous language—a language Bly described as "the deep image" and that Wright called "the pure clear word". Also, this poetry had an intimacy, a quality of personal revelation, honesty, which had seldom—if ever—been seen in American or European poetry. It would set the stage for the next literary movement, "Confessional Poetry".

### A Blessing — JAMES WRIGHT

Just off the highway to Rochester, Minnesota,  
Twilight bounds softly forth on the grass.  
And the eyes of those two Indian ponies  
Darken with kindness.  
They have come gladly out of the willows  
To welcome my friend and me.  
We step over the barbed wire into the pasture  
Where they have been grazing all day, alone.  
They ripple tensely, they can hardly contain their happiness  
That we have come.  
They bow shyly as wet swans. They love each other.  
There is no loneliness like theirs.  
At home once more,  
They begin munching the young tufts of spring in the darkness.  
I would like to hold the slenderer one in my arms,  
For she has walked over to me  
And nuzzled my left hand.  
She is black and white,  
Her mane falls wild on her forehead,  
And the light breeze moves me to caress her long ear  
That is delicate as the skin over a girl's wrist.  
Suddenly I realize  
That if I stepped out of my body I would break  
into blossom.

The Rise of the Contemporary Poem—UCLA Extension, S. Lummis  
page 2

Though as a child Wisława Szymborska loved to watch trains—her family lived by a train station—she never left Poland. When the Nazis occupied Poland in WWII she attended illegal classes and joined an underground theater where she worked as a prompter. Early on she embraced Communism but later became disenchanted with this and all strict political ideologies. While she acknowledges her poetry is now essentially apolitical she adds, "Apolitical poems are political, too." In 1996 she became one of those few women poets to receive the Nobel Award for Literature, which greatly expanded her popularity around the world.

Wisława Szymborska  
**The End and the Beginning**

After every war  
someone has to clean up.  
Things won't  
straighten themselves up, after all.

Someone has to push the rubble  
to the sides of the road,  
so the corpse-laden wagons  
can pass.

Someone has to get mired  
in scum and ashes,  
sofa springs,  
splintered glass,  
and bloody rags.

Someone must drag in a girder  
to prop up a wall,  
Someone must glaze a window,  
rehang a door.

Photogenic it's not,  
and takes years.  
All the cameras have left  
for another war.

Again we'll need bridges  
and new railway stations.  
Sleeves will go ragged  
from rolling them up.

Someone, broom in hand,  
still recalls how it was.  
Someone listens  
and nods with unsevered head.  
Yet others milling about  
already find it dull.

From behind the bush  
sometimes someone still unearths  
rust-eaten arguments  
and carries them to the garbage pile.

Those who knew  
what was going on here  
must give way to  
those who know little.  
And less than little.  
And finally as little as nothing.

In the grass which has overgrown  
reasons and causes,  
someone must be stretched out  
blade of grass in his mouth  
gazing at the clouds.

***Eliot and the uses of literature as sources for poetry***—S. Lummis  
UCLA Extension Writers' Program

A good deal of contemporary poetry mines the literal facts of poets' lives for material. The following are examples of poetry that spring from, or make use of, literary sources, but each poet transform the material in a way that suits his purpose.

Here, the lines in *Purgatorio* 5 link directly to those in *The Waste Land*:

Siena me fé/disfecemi Maremma                      Trans.: Siena made me/ Maremma undid me.  
— Dante, *The Purgatorio*

Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew  
undid me....  
The Waste Land, lines 293-4

And the following involves a far greater leap. The connection is subtle, but we feel the echo of the earlier lines—an echo not of language and style but of meaning and implication. Eliot quoted this passage in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," then again in another essay. Clearly it spoke to his concerns, his perception, and probably his emotions.

Does the silk worm expand her yellow labours  
For thee? For thee does she undo herself?  
And Lordship sold to maintain Ladyship  
For the poor benefit of a bewildering minute?  
— *The Revenger's Tragedy*

*Datta*: what have we given?  
My friend, blood shaking my heart  
The awful daring of a moment's surrender  
Which an age of prudence can never retract  
-- *The Waste Land*, lines 402-5

Then, Donald Justice drew inspiration—and the powerful building block for a villanelle—from Eliot's words, not from his poetry oddly enough, but his criticism—criticism that's often said to be "academic" and "dry". But is it? Or, rather, is it always? With Eliot's phrase Justice turned out the most relentless, hard-hitting poem he'd ever write.

The phrase appears in Eliot's essay "The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism," in a discussion of Mathew Arnold's statement that "no one can deny that it is of advantage to a poet to deal with a beautiful world". Eliot, who differed with Arnold on some his views, counters with that assertion Justice seized upon to commemorate the Unknown Poet. Incidentally, Eliot concludes this passage of his essay with a rather withering remark, "The vision of the horror and the glory was denied to Arnold, but he knew something of the boredom."

*Eliot and the uses of literature as source for poetry*—S. Lummis  
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 Page 2

Donald Justice

IN MEMORY OF THE UNKNOWN POET, ROBERT BOARDMAN VAUGHN

--But the essential advantage for a poet is not to have a beautiful world with which to deal,  
 it is to be able to see beneath both beauty and ugliness; to see the boredom, and the horror,  
 and the glory.

-- T. S. Eliot

It was his story. It would always be his story.  
 It followed him; it overtook him finally—  
 The boredom, and the horror, and the glory.

Probably at the end he was not yet sorry,  
 Even as the boots were brutalizing him in the alley.  
 It was his story. It would always be his story,

Blown on a blue horn, full of sound and fury,  
 but signifying, O signifying magnificently  
 The boredom, and the horror, and the glory.

I picture the snow as falling without hurry  
 To cover the cobbles and the toppled ashcans completely.  
 It was his story. It would always be his story.

Lately he had wandered between St. Mark's Place and the Bowery,  
 Already half a spirit, mumbling and muttering sadly.  
 O the boredom, and the horror, and the glory.

All done now. But I remember the fiery  
 Hypnotic eye and the raised voice blazing wit poetry.  
 It was his story and would always be his story—  
 The boredom, and the horror, and the glory.

EZRA POUND: The Life, The Influence, The Poetry—UCLA Extension Writers' Program (S. Lummis)

The following excerpt from *The Encyclopedia Americana* introduces us to the scope of Pound's mind and the impact of the thrust of his ambitions, as well as his enduring influence on Modern, then Contemporary, poetry. It also points up some problems with his legacy.

**POUND, Ezra** (1885-1972), American poet, who was the most controversial literary giant of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From his short-lived career as a teacher of Romance philology at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Ind.—a position from which he was fired after a few months on suspicion of moral turpitude—until his incarceration 40 years later for allegedly treasonous activity -- Pound was continually embroiled in controversy. For example, in 1949 he was awarded the Bollingen Prize for poetry, causing an outcry of indignation matched only by that of his supporters who, a few months before his death, he was denied the Emerson-Thoreau Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Science by reasons of his anti-Semitism and fascism.

Even apart from his eccentric, if not treasonous, ideologies, Pound's poetry and poetics, though admired and emulated by many, continue to be roundly condemned by others as willfully obscure. There is little question, however, that he stands with the most influential figures of modern literature.

**Significance.** Pound's influence on the course of literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was profound. He, more than anyone else, defined and determined the direction it was to take, largely through the force of his own personality. There is scarcely a significant literary movement that did not feel his effect, from imagism to vorticism and beyond, and there was scarcely a major writer he did not befriend and encourage when few others would.

Pound's early encouragement of Frost, Hemingway, Eliot and Joyce is a matter of record. No less so is his influence on the elder figures of his day, notably Ford Madox Ford and Yeats. But one suspects that his true legacy lies—however ironic it may seem in the light of his stormy life—in the pervasive and positive effect he had on American culture. Pound exiled himself from the United States the better to see it for what it was, its strengths as well as its weaknesses. His vision, faulty or impaired as it may have been at times, described for us the era in which we live. DANIEL R. BARNES, *Ohio State University*

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Pound on Pound: In his later years Pound wrote:

"I knew at fifteen pretty much what I wanted to do. I resolved that by thirty I would know more about poetry than any man living, that I would know the dynamic content from the shell, that I would know what was accounted poetry everywhere, what part of poetry was 'indestructible,' what part could not be lost by translation and—scarcely less important—what effects were obtainable in one language only.

Areas of Pound's influence upon style and aesthetics:

- 1) His writings in London and Paris in the teens and 20s defined, in fact, insisted upon, a new vision and new possibilities for the poetry of the new century. Protesting the "boiled oatmeal consistency of the mannered post-Victorian and Edwardian poets, he evolved, with the help of the poet H.D. and Pound's friend Richard Aldington, the essay "A Few Don't's, (first printed in *Poetry* 1:6 (March 1913). This became the foundation of the Imagist Movement—the movement itself brief-lived but not the impact of its central ideas. The "Don'ts" essay included three major directives:
  - a.) Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective.
  - b.) To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
  - c.) As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome.

And, the Pound rallying cries *Go in fear of abstractions* and *Make it new!* echoed through the last century into the present one, despite efforts by different schools to supplant them.

- 2) No other literary figure of his century was quicker to recognize the genius of writers whose work leapt ahead of the tastes of their age but who—with help from Pound—went on to shape the tastes of their age.

James Joyce on his early difficulties: "*Dubliners* was rejected by 40 publishers, three times set up, and once burnt. It cost me about 3,000 francs in postage, fees, train and boat fare, for I was in correspondence with 110 newspapers, 7 solicitors, 3 societies, 40 publishers and several men of letters about it. All refused to aid me, except Mr. Ezra Pound.

3. He challenged poets, and those passionate about poetry, to explore the full history of the art in their own language and also the poetry of other language and cultures. This present a rather fresh idea to the self-referential literary world of early 20<sup>th</sup> century London. Pound's exploration of Chinese poetry (as well as the Italian poets and 14<sup>th</sup> century French Troubadour poets) paved the way in the 1950s for a sudden interest in translations, with Robert Bly and Kenneth Rexroth as two of the principal activists and spokesmen for this blossoming.
4. Though Pound's epic endeavor, *The Cantos*, has been judged by many to be a failure, and finally by Pound himself, many of his earlier poems achieved a kind of perfection—a synthesis of formal beauty and control combined with a direct, nature, sometimes even mischievous, voice. And even some of his artistic failures influenced and inspired poets far and wide, including Allen Ginsberg who found Pound's approach to poetry liberating.

#### Mitigating Facts:

Against all these fine things the literary world, and readers, must set—on the other end of the scale—Pound's eventual madness, a very disagreeable form of madness. His obsessive anti-Semitism culminated in his incoherent ranting on Fascist radio during WWII. At the conclusion of the war the Allied forces took him prisoner and held him in what he would later call "a bear cage" where he observed other prisoners being executed. At some point during this episode he suffered either a breakdown or a stroke, from which he never fully recovered.

Upon his return to the States writers and poets appealed to the courts to declare the fallen giant of poetry insane rather than a traitor, and so avert his execution. Pound spent the next 12 years (age 60-72) in the "hell-hole" of St. Elizabeth's asylum. Many poets—astonishingly even some Jewish poets—made pilgrimages to meet him. Elizabeth Bishop's stunning "A Visit to ST. Elizabeth's" conveys her impression of Pound in these surroundings.

In order to appreciate how surprising the following poem seemed to early 20<sup>th</sup> century readers it's helpful to know how translations from the Chinese (or anywhere) sounded up till that moment:

And now Spring beckons with verdant hand,  
 And nature's wealth of eloquence doth win  
 Forth to the fragrant-bowered nectarine,  
 Where my dear friends abide, a careless band  
 (Li Po trans. by L. Cranmer-Byng)

The above appears in Eliot Weinberger's introduction to "The New Directions Anthology of Chinese Poetry". He goes on to note:

This was no surprise; in 1909, America's most innovative poet, Ezra Pound, was writing like this:

Autumnal breaks the flame upon the sun-set herds.  
 The sheep on Gilead as tawn hair gleam  
 Neath Mithra's dower and his slow departing,  
 While in the sky a thousand fleece of gold  
 Bear, each his tribute, to the waning god.

Six years later, in 1915, here was Pound:

For a moment she rested against me  
 Like a swallow half blown to the wall

ADVANCED POETRY WORKSHOP—UCLA Extension,  
S. Lummis  
(Wednesdays, Ten Weeks)  
*Syllabus 2007*

Texts: *Selected Poems T.S. Eliot* (with “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and  
“The Waste Land”)  
*Babel* by Barbara Hamby

Final projects: Three revised poems, three memorized poems, 500-word paper  
(approximately two double spaced pages) discussing either a single  
volume of poetry or an overview of a poet’s work.  
(Or an alternative paper, which I’ll explain in class).

#1: Wednesdays April 11

Introductions, Overview of Class, Craft lecture (“The Opening Line”), In-class  
exercise and discussion of selected results.

April 18

#2 Discussion of “Mine Own John Berryman” by Philip Levine. Discussion poems  
evolved from previous week, or, alternatively, poems students consider their “worst”  
(but are nevertheless invested in).

April 25

#3 Discussion of Eliot’s “Tradition and Talent” and “The Love Song...” Continued  
discussion of student poems. Preparation for “The Waste Land”.

May 2

#4 Moderated discussion involving students’ own discoveries, puzzlements or  
fascinations pre-background, supporting scholarship and scholarly analysis.  
Conversation about possible choices for linked or sequence poems. First related  
take-home exercise/project. Continued discussion of student poems.

May 9

#5 Various revelations concerning content and evolution of “The Waste Land”.  
Second related take-home exercise/project. Continued discussion of student poems.

#6 May 16

Third related take-home exercise/project. Handout of Lorca’s “The Play and Theory  
of the Duende” Continued Discussion of student poems.

#7 May 23

“...Duende” – also, 500-word papers as needed. Continued discussion of student  
poems.

#8 May 30

Discussion of Babel and introduction of Hamby's earlier work. Continued critique of student work.

JUNE 6, 2007 UCLA Extension Writers' Program Instructors' reading, which the Extension asked me to participate in. We must make up the class, but this will also give people extra time to work on papers and final poems.

#9 June 13

Time will be devoted to student poems and discussion of any questions regarding papers.

Final class date: To be determined by group.

THE POETRY SOCIETY OF AMERICA

*presents a*

W.H. AUDEN CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION



Wednesday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007, 7:00 P.M.  
 Billy Wilder Auditorium, Hammer Museum  
 10899 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA

*with*  
*(in order of appearance)*

STEPHEN YENSER    EAVAN BOLAND    MICHAEL RYAN    SANDRA GILBERT    NICHOLAS JENKINS

Introduced by ALICE QUINN.



[www.poetrysociety.org](http://www.poetrysociety.org)

# From The Gods of Rapture

Even now  
 though they sever  
 my soul  
 from my body  
 I brood  
 on her fragile  
 forbidden  
 beauty,  
 that wild pheasant  
 whose dance  
 scattered  
 the pollen  
 of delicate  
 flowers.  
 May she  
 whom I will not  
 meet again  
 in this world  
 & for whose  
 love I am  
 borne to my grave  
 be my fate  
 in the next life  
 as well.

*after Bilhaṇa*

Let the flame of my passion  
 glow in the eyes of my beloved.  
 Let it illuminate our path.  
 Let the liquid  
 of which our bodies are composed  
 be at once the river refreshing us  
 & the well  
 at which we quench our thirst.  
 Let our spirits be the air  
 we breathe  
 & thru which we move  
 till we are no longer ourselves,  
 & I lie by my beloved's side  
 in the earth.  
 Let our dusts be one.

*after Govindadāsa*



**Poetry Assignments: My Work**

**Pam Arterburn**

**Part One, Poetry Section**

Pam Arterburn

Creative writing poetry

October 3, 2006

A Snodgress-ization of "Poppies in July" by Sylvia Plath

**Ted Sends Flowers**

Ted sends me poppies in the hospital.  
He knows how bright flowers upset me.

I want to throw them out the window  
But they are out of reach.

You insensitive wretch--  
Poppies give me freaky thoughts.

I'd love to slap your mouth, Ted,  
And draw some blood.

Your poetry stinks like bad cheese fumes.  
Drugging me won't make you any better.

I wish I'd never married you,  
Unfaithful pig. Major asshole.

Your little trick with poppies won't work.  
You can't make me quiet

Or kill me. Forget it.

### Resistance is Futile

A switch is thrown and anger lights up.  
Out of nothing, no fire, not a black spider  
Your heart heats up, sparks jump out  
Lighting on my hair, my clothing,  
An ember here, a mosquito ablaze  
Stinging and jumping lighting on me  
Until I sit in the center of the fire ring,  
Surrounded by huge flames,  
With your black eyes sparkling at me  
From beyond, from the darkness, the  
Eyes of obsidian, a taxidermist's prize--  
They look so human.

You glare at me, watching, groping,  
Trying to determine the damage,  
What you have done this time--  
This time, it always comes back.  
My heart shrinks to heat, draws  
Back from the flame, slides down a long  
Corridor, into that one room you  
Never can unlock.

And then I begin the long journey  
Back to you. I don't want to go.  
Dark creature, part monster  
You wait in shadows, luring me  
With sweets, with dripping sugars  
With your hands, your sweet mouth  
Your warm body, your blood.

November 21 2006

First Wind, Then Fire

The night the fire came  
down my street, the wind  
came first. It scattered  
junk mail like paper airplanes  
roof planks like jets  
trash can lids like floating galaxies,  
and frayed Barbie  
clothes, no longer glamorous,  
ripped from tiny stewardesses  
zipped along behind.

Loading the cars we ran screaming  
Don't forget the hamster!  
Did you find the white cat?  
Where is the wheelchair tray?  
Did you find the dog yet?

I looked up only once.

Rushing along above me  
dirt snowflakes, falling  
scoops of embers like comets,  
now in the lawn, on the  
wooden deck,  
on the shake roof like  
strands of Christmas lights thrown  
onto the carpet

The next day, creeping home, afraid  
to find nothing, it was all there.  
Even the cat waiting on the step,  
insulted to be so dingy.

The bougainvillea was all we lost,  
singed and wiry. I let it stay.

Then yesterday, two pink flowers  
blinked on the deck in the warm breeze.

Penelope dreams of the suitors

Pam Arterburn  
Original Poem

She dreamed they were a flock of geese  
That came to eat the grain beside her house--  
"And I delight to see them." But an eagle  
With great wings and a crooked beak swoops down,  
Breaks their necks, then soars away. She cries  
With her women because the geese are dead.

She asks a traveler, a guest to interpret this dream,  
unaware he is the Master Improviser,  
Her very own Odysseus, in disguise.  
She tells him of the suitors,  
The young men from good families in town  
who wouldn't leave her house  
Until she chose one as her husband.  
She decided to string them on by weaving  
On her loom all day, vowing to marry one of them  
When the shroud is done. At night she unwove it.  
This trick worked for three years.

As year four began, they caught her unraveling one night.  
Does she turn them out? No.  
"I had no choice but to finish it," she tells her guest.  
She asks him if she  
Should give in, choose one and marry him, a nobleman, perhaps, lavish  
In his gifts. To find the best one, she creates: a competition among them to  
See who can string Odysseus' bow and shoot an arrow  
Through twelve axe heads. For him, this was no challenge.  
He tells her the idea is good, and she asks him to sleep there on her floor

**First Revision:**

Pam Arterburn

**Penelope Gives In**

You see, dear, the suitors wanted me.  
 All day long they'd bring me fruit, wine,  
 Sing songs about me, line my path with petals.  
 And the compliments!  
 Whenever I passed their way,  
 They'd bleat at me like horny sheep.  
 Athena visits me in dreams, tells me  
 You'll come back. I don't believe her.

**Second Revision****Penelope Admits Nothing**

*Who sends an arrow  
 through iron axe-helve sockets, twelve in line?  
 I join my life with his, and leave this place, my home.*  
 Penelope, "The Odyssey"

It's right after Odysseus and Penelope reconnect, after he stops tricking her and fooling everyone, right after he's killed all the suitors.

They're in the bedroom, talking.  
 Homer leaves the room for a few minutes to sign for the removal of the bodies.  
 Odysseus peeks outside. They're finally alone.  
 He has to talk quickly.

"Penelope," Odysseus whispers, "Tell me now. would you really have married the suitor who strung my bow?"

"Oh for God's sake.  
 Homer came up with that contest.  
 You'd been gone so long,  
 and he needed a sex angle to make the story sell.  
 The suitors were just lying around; the plot was going stale.  
 He blamed Athena, said it was her idea."

"Answer my question."

"I'm glad you're back, but really, I didn't expect you."

Write  
 the  
 room  
 rather  
 than  
 reconnect

bad word

Needs more  
 pressure

Heightened  
 naturalism -  
 like writing for  
 the stage

Who is this  
 narrator?

Slack

Still looking  
 for a twist

That sea route doesn't take three years to cross.  
 I figured you were getting some somewhere,  
 but I knew you missed me.  
 When I decided you were dead, I wanted to move on.  
 You told me to do that, remember? Before you left?"

"I remember. But I never thought you would."

~~"Then you shouldn't have gone away from me."~~

Oh no, dear, I never would have married"  
 She fingered a ring she'd sewn into her gown, a gift from one young suitor.

A noise in the outer hall brought Homer back.

Cue the embrace.

*And so she too rejoiced, her gaze upon her husband,  
 Her white arms round him pressed as though forever.*

← Twist -  
 "Oh no, dear,

Make Penelope  
 the life of the  
 poem - what  
 she went thru -  
 what was in  
 She is telling  
 a friend -  
 confiding in  
 us through her

lying on rocks or a foam

little package - open it up.

**Penelope Breaks Down**

she did wait.

She tried to wait for him, tried to be good, but he'd been gone so long. He might be dead, and the suitors just wouldn't leave.

They stayed three years, eating her food, drinking her wine, admiring her silken hair, her eyes.

She had to put them off. So she wove all day, vowing to pick her new man when the weaving was done.

They caught her one night at the loom, undoing that day's work, and demanded a decision. What was she to do? So she told them that The man who could string Odysseus' bow and shoot an arrow through a dozen axe handles would win her hand in marriage.

Odysseus returned in disguise, cunning, the master improviser. He wanted blood. She invited him in and told him of her dream, <sup>my</sup> A dozen geese arrive to eat the grain beside her house.

An eagle with great wings and crooked neck swoops down, attack, and breaks their necks. She mourns because they are dead. She cries.

When her husband finally kills the suitors, the story surrounds Odysseus once again. Homer says Penelope is glad Her man is home. He does not say she puts flowers on the shallow graves of her suitors, dreams of them as geese again, keeps Antinoos' ring around her finger.

Pam Arterburn #2

Pronouns: Tell it from her POV. The "I" is Penelope. Personae poem. Gives me freedom to make this world real. She was there.

This is in the book! Let Penelope tell it! Like a journalist-probing.

More "oddity of detail."

Brian - describe the suitors.

pecked  
The way Homer tells it, I was glad my man was home.

Confusion - if suitors did bad thing -  
Let us see the progression of her emotions

Fill out (SL)  
"Let's hear the inside story! Homer's not going to tell it."

flat line

Save this to end with -

re more interesting - look for ancient Greek traditions - crypts, etc.

I How

Pam Arterburn

Colleen - what is his age? size?

Play w/ line breaks.

Forward momentum - limit end stops.

Lang too stripped down. Reader longs for more.

(a stranger)

Reader lacks knowledge of the life & attachment.

Challenge:

Tough subject. Doesn't make this nice for the reader.

Roland - didn't find enough David emotion - More actions. speaker can do more.

We need to

See into the mind of the

"I" a little more.

Good - limiting myself to describing actions. Smart.

Ceci - Night time (breathing trouble?) Is this a spot - ✓ or not?

Emotions so buried.

Arrive at this sooner.

My Son Jack  
SL opening line - don't open with this. Nothing is happening.

Does not push the poem forward. Lang just sits there. Needs to save info.

The lazy boy is old and fraying - it's Jack's chair.

Pillows propped around him keep him stable.

His knees do not bend. RISE. More emotion, urgency, pressure.

He's sitting up so he won't choke; he doesn't know to swallow.

Jack's head bobs up and down even though he's sleeping.

I listen to him breathe.

It's not right.

I grab him with both hands, swing him around and plop him into my lap

He startles, and his arms, straight out, begin to shake.

Jack's eyes open and his head falls back onto my chest.

We are face to face, but his blue eyes stare beyond me. The iris fans like tiny feathers and his black pupils shrink When I turn on the light.

I call his name. "Hey Jack--" He smiles, perhaps because he knows it's me, or maybe it's just a sound.

Panic? →

what helps breathing?

EXTEND this moment. all the mystery is there.

Say breathing is ok. (in relief.)

Sophisticated Reader will extrapolate the larger mystery that exists

Poem doesn't have to do a lot.

Introduce situation, then come to the point. Reader can start w/ one understanding + go to a complete one.

Stanzas - small, end-stopped, make it choppy.

Pam Arterburn  
Master Poetry Class, Revised Poem

When Jack Had a Cold

I listen to him breathe, and it's not right.  
He's snorting, gasping, taking too long  
between breaths. Grasping his waist,  
I lift him fast, pivot, turn,  
try to balance his weight,  
and he lands in my lap.

I prop him in an old Lazy Boy chair  
with pillows, and when his head falls  
to his chest, he snorts, coughs,  
stops breathing for a moment,  
and I repeat the ritual again.

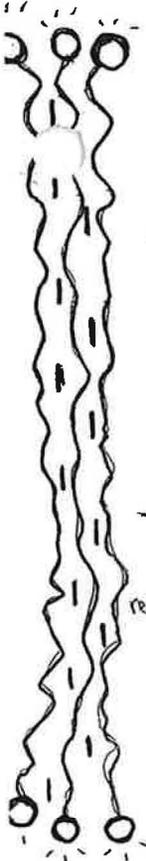
During the night he and I try to sleep,  
but the light is too bright, and the television  
that keeps him calm makes me dream  
of strangers, people who reach toward me  
with hands outstretched. I have nothing

for them. Jack starts to choke and I  
wake up, not forgetting where I am,  
why I am not in bed. I see him struggle  
to take a breath, this child I did not want  
to feel pain, to struggle, to cry.

The dog licks Jack's thin leg; it does not  
bend, and his muscles don't respond to  
Any mental command. I'm not sure he knows  
it's me any more than any other voice.  
I rock the chair with my hand from the  
couch where I lay, trying to fall asleep.

Prom Night at My House

Pam Arterburn



1 The other girls wear ~~pink~~ silk and ride in limos,  
 but tonight I google "buy straight jacket" for Katie.  
 3 She wants a costume to ~~match~~ <sup>become</sup> Pirate Miles,  
 A character she drew, her identity in a cyber-world  
 where goth kids meet and make new friends online.  
 The other girls like shorts and strappy sandals.  
 7 Mine prefers Hot Topic, despises Gap, ~~and Macy's~~,  
 Lives in grays and blacks, and sometimes reds,  
 Has Nine Inch Nails, not hip hop, on her ipod.  
 Her favorite color: gray. "Decay," her favorite word.  
 Tonight the other mothers tie bows on wrist corsages  
 We're at Barnes and Noble, searching for Nietzsche  
 to find just where he said that "God is Dead."  
 We buy the book, ~~The Antichrist~~, and go home.

But Katie <sup>watches me google</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>sits</sup> ~~where~~ "buy straight jacket."

Fit an adjective in to describe stores. "Cheerleader" Hollister make stores more vivid

she thinks the word decay is beautiful.

Drop 1 line

Brian's comment: The girls / rather than "the other si-si"

Colleen: Use "other girls" + not the other girls.

L 2  
↳ while <sup>for</sup> Katie, I google "buy straight jacket."

### **The Night the Neighborhood Caught on Fire**

**Pam Arterburn**

The noise woke me up—  
 a fast sound like wind but faster,  
 angry, rushing like a river or a jet engine,  
 the motor gearing up, up, just before takeoff.

I awoke to a neon glow out the window  
 and jumped up on my bed,  
 cheering the fire on, screaming Go! Burn!  
 while my dull, average brothers slept.

Chunks of fire shot into the sky,  
 Blazing grasshoppers, crazy, shot from guns,  
 And the glow made our street in the bad part of town  
 Finally look like something beautiful.

The fire was too close. My skin was getting hot  
 And I knew I had to do something soon—  
 Wake them all up, my brothers and parents—  
 Even if I didn't want to.

### **Prom Night at My House**

The other girls wear silk and ride in limos  
 while Katie watches me google "buy straight jacket."  
 She wants a costume to become Pirate Miles,  
 a character she drew, her identity in a cyber-world  
 where goth kids meet and make new friends online.  
 The other girls like shorts and strappy sandals.  
 Mine prefers wicked Hot Topic, despises preppy Gap  
 sneers at Hollister, den of conformity, eschews lip gloss,  
 lives in grays, blacks, reds; wears army boots to school  
 has Nine Inch Nails, not hip hop, on her ipod.  
 Her favorite color: gray. Decay: her favorite word.  
 Tonight the other mothers tie bows on wrist corsages.  
 We're at Barnes and Noble, searching for Nietzsche,  
 to find just where he said that "God is dead."

## The Night of the Fire

Pam Arterburn

I woke to the orange glow  
outside my window  
and stood up on my bed.  
I was not afraid.  
As my brothers slept,  
I watched the fire burn.

← something interesting -  
needs some  
head!

OK -

Something strange + wild needs  
to happen. Lang - too  
rudimentary.

A  
The noise woke me up,  
A ~~fast~~ sound like wind  
but faster, angry,  
a rushing, a river,  
sound like a fast river.

← something else here  
- extend

Bits of fire shot into the sky

like grasshoppers, bits of fire shot towards the sky  
and the glow Play w/ syntax  
from behind the next building  
Made the street come alive. click - describe here!

Usually they are gray and dirty,  
But tonight the roofs are  
yellow-orange  
like the paint we use at school  
to color in the sun.

← bad line break!

Challenge: we should understand  
the poet's fascination w/ the  
event. What happened? Convey  
the strange, powerful center so  
we know why you are fascinated.

Break the poem open

Don't try to be Tack. It needs  
to be MY memory. Don't be  
in service to the other person.

I have to find in Tack's story  
some truth about my childhood.

Match it up to something in yourself.

The Night of the Fire

Pam Arterburn

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We're at Barnes and Noble, searching for Nietzsche,  
to find just where he said that "God is dead."

Newport Beach, 1965, 1978

Pam Arterburn

It's too early to sleep. The sun is out, neighbor kids laugh together, but I am in bed, because it's my bedtime. Seven thirty.

*passive tense*

Tonight my skin glows beneath new pajamas—white where my suit covered, and pink everywhere else. A sun ray pokes through closed curtains

*could be tightened into a single stanza*

and I am back in the waves, my feet rocking back and forth, legs still stiff against the pull of ocean, the silk of melting sand.

My mother tucks me in primly between the clean yellow sheets. The kids at do magic tricks and eat pink ice cream.

z

\* \* \* \*

*so these are the opposite forces at work*

But today the ocean scratches hard, throws me to the solid sand and doesn't hide the cold. Waves strike hard, telling me The truth. I should not be here.

*personification*

The water glares at me as I sit. On the blanket, hair dripping, Sand in my bottoms. It sneers. At the guilt I try to swallow.

) z

I go back in. This time the ocean is ready. It scoops me up, Throws me out and slams me to the Bottom. I gulp for air.

He sits on the sand, reading a book about a poem. His critics argue, and we collect our things and leave, afraid of the silent drive home.

*which we?*

*this is intro'd so late it feels extraneous*

*who's He?*

*that's what you go back in?*

*Pam,  
The best's illusive—  
Mom tucks primly,  
The ocean scratches,  
but there's no action  
other than going in the  
ocean. What does it  
add up to? Both*

Pana Arterburn  
First Poem, Revised (Please ignore the first one)

Our Only Beach Trip

These fine waves don't want my sort of a girl.  
They know why we're here.  
That wave snickers at the next one. They wink  
as I kick and splash, know I don't want to go under,  
but they laugh, suck me in  
and flick me onto the ground.

personification

she likes the opening line

No

OK

Sea water seeps from my pores.  
I can't crawl, can't stand up;  
sand creeps across my stomach,  
seaweed twists into my hair.

Are you even looking?  
There you are, up on the towel, criticism  
reading Wallace Stevens, Roethke,  
Pound. Poets fight for your attention.

I gape at you, my gills now filling with oxygen.  
It's poisoning me. And you're looking  
pretty bloated from here. Sea snails slime  
your surfer haircut and deep woodsy tan.  
The waves can see how it is with us,  
you reading and me out here dying.  
I can't yell at you, but I flip my tail violently.  
You turn onto your back to get the perfect tan.

Attitude of the  
ocean - changes -  
key turn but it  
doesn't really take  
place.

Fantastical  
dream-like

Play with (turn like a  
stone)  
He's pristine - on the  
sand - body AND  
brains. Think  
about -

Too much personification.  
"cutesy."

Sentimental, ① get rid of  
cuteness of  
waves  
② PASSION -  
get that  
in.

Write this down: Personification happens  
when poet is outrageous.

~~There is a negligent~~

\* It seems like  
the WAVES are  
hurting me, not HIM

Pana Arterburn

First Poem, Revised (Please ignore the first one)

### Our Only Beach Trip

These fine waves don't want my sort of a girl.  
They know why we're here.  
That wave snickers at the next one. They wink  
as I kick and splash, know I don't want to go under,  
but they laugh, suck me in  
and flick me onto the ground.

Sea water seeps from my pores.  
I can't crawl, can't stand up;  
sand creeps across my stomach,  
seaweed twists into my hair.  
Are you even looking?  
There you are, up on the towel,  
reading Wallace Stevens, Roethke,  
Pound. Poets fight for your attention.

I gape at you, my gills now filling with oxygen.  
It's poisoning me. And you're looking  
pretty bloated from here. Sea snails slime  
your surfer haircut and deep woodsy tan.  
The waves can see how it is with us,  
you reading and me out here dying.  
I can't yell at you, but I flip my tail violently.  
You turn onto your back to get the perfect tan.

A Sestina for Suzanne Lummis, from Pam, her Student

A My teacher spoke, and dutifully I wrote;  
 B her words I sought to capture in my notes.  
 C She talked of poetry; her voice would float  
 D and as I listened, sometimes I decided  
 E I could be a poet—sometimes not,  
 F for she was so well-versed that I felt lost.

F The class would chatter; someone was always lost  
 A “Do I have the poem that you wrote?”  
 E We tried to make them sing, some we could not  
 B make sense of, but we took lots of notes  
 D and we improved, and sometimes we decided  
 C a poem had jumped up off the page to float.

C And I would dream that my poor poem could float.  
 D But more than not, I read it and decided  
 F That as I had suspected, I was lost.  
 A So every day, I tried and thought and wrote  
 B And Suzanne’s words I’d ponder in my notes  
 E Because she was the poet; I was not.

E We wrote about riding in a car, but not  
 C of *Time* or *Life*, for those would float  
 B like bad cheese into her nostrils, yes, I wrote  
 F that topics such as these to us were lost  
 A because Suzanne despised them. This I wrote  
 D and came to see the truth. So I decided

D that I had been converted. Yes, I decided  
 E that she a gift. And I did not  
 A miss a single word again. In fact, I wrote  
 C her words with “SL” so I could tell what float  
 F from what just sunk (my words) so none were lost  
 B from that point forward ever in my notes.

B Back at home, I’d re-review my notes.  
 D “Don’t be philosophical,” she decided.  
 F “Don’t describe emotion,” or you’ve lost  
 E the reader. “Be specific! Waste not  
 C a word! Windy abstractions? They just float  
 A Away. Avoid the sentimental!” I wrote.

E Her words aloud would pour like milk but not  
 C before they growled. And they did float  
 A with presence and particularity, and so I wrote.

**Final Project**

Pam Arterburn

December 12, 2006

“Introduction to Poetry”

Instructor: Suzanne Lummis

Pam Arterburn

Poem #1, Revised

Original title: Resistance is Futile

Conversation Among Lovers

We are sitting in my back yard, talking about last night.  
You remember that I looked at that maintenance guy  
who was pushing a trash can down the sidewalk  
past our table at the outdoor nacho place.

You say I made eyes at him. You say my eyes searched  
till he looked, that I was brazenly attracted to  
this strange man who was wearing a shirt that said  
"Mike" and pushing a trash can.

We talked about this for an hour. I tried to explain  
that No, I was not trying to make eye contact.  
Yes, you said, You Were. I could Tell.  
Well, I said, you were Wrong.

We are on the way home from the beach. You are drunk.  
You are yelling at me about the bouncer at the bar,  
the bald guy, the one who looked like a fat Yul Brenner,  
the one who sized up all the girls with a sleazy glare.

You say I spoke to him, that I said Hello,  
that I gave him the Wrong Impression. I said no,  
I was just being nice. You said there is no such thing  
in a Bar. It's called Flirting.

I said you are possessive, that you want to control me.  
You said that you are afraid of losing me.  
We went inside and held each other on my bed.  
You said I love you so much. I said I adore you.

Pam Arterburn, First Poem

use  
strange  
creature

Resistance is Futile

bats

A switch is thrown and anger lights up.  
 Out of nothing, no fire, not a black spider  
 Your heart heats up, sparks jump out  
 Lighting on my hair, my clothing,  
 An ember here, a mosquito ablaze  
 Stinging and jumping lighting on me  
 Until I sit in the center of the fire ring,  
 Surrounded by huge flames.  
 With your black eyes sparkling at me  
 From beyond, from the darkness, the  
 Eyes of obsidian, a taxidermist's prize--  
 They look so human.

unexpected  
ine. good

too happy - sparkling

You glare at me, watching, groping,  
 Trying to determine the damage,  
 What you have done this time--  
 This time, it always comes back.

what is the damage?  
Verbal?

make  
sense

My heart shrinks to heat, draws  
 Back from the flame, slides down a long  
 Corridor, into that one room you  
 Never can unlock.

from

And then I begin the long journey  
 Back to you. I don't want to go.

end it.

Melo-  
dramatic

Dark creature, part monster  
 You wait in shadows, luring me  
 With sweets, with dripping sugars  
 With your hands, your sweet mouth  
 Your warm body, your blood.

Take it out of the allegorical.  
 Be careful about heart, heat, blood, etc.  
 - Flame metaphors overused

Mountain Avenue, North

I drive it every day, to get to my mother's house, the way to the ten, my route to work.

Today is different. We ride silently, two clay figurines. I know the street, but I am no longer myself.

I think of William Carlos Williams, the road to the Contagious hospital.

But the trips to the hospital are over now. Her body lies in its small, sturdy home, all oak, [at the funeral home.] We slide past Mission, Past the Déjà vu, pink and green,

"1000 pretty girls and three Ugly ones," the marquee boasts. Today I can't even hate it.

My hands are motionless on my lap. The awful heat, pale cold sunshine. Sweat

Doesn't drip. Pyschadelic, Familiar like a nightmare, It's a street in an alien land.

We're closing in. Our destination is closer now. We pass McDonalds, Ralphs, The Volkswagen dealer.

Behind us, I am not here. Scenery droops and melts behind us. A child fingerprints, smearing it all to black.

line break is bad - keep name on one line

say it differently - livelier, more individual - ~~never~~ Like somebody talking, like a voice.

doesn't say a lot. The reader will focus - "still" is a more interesting word, more intense.

not good - already said better use an image - to convey strange, distant feeling

Use "is" (to be verbs) less.

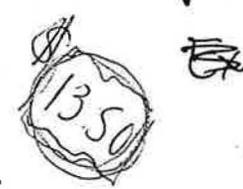
Poem

weight sentences - most rich, strange meaning is last. Tercets create control.

written? mobile? fill out the thought why?

delete we been there?

lie still - more here not is - bad word period



Mountain Avenue, North (Revision)

Pam Arterburn

I drove it every day, to get  
to my mother's house, the way  
to the ten, my route to work.

Today we drive in silence.  
I know the street's the same  
But I am no longer myself.

We rode together to the hospital  
last week to visit my mother,  
and I looked out the window.

But the trips to the hospital  
are over now. Her body  
lies in its small, sturdy home, all oak.

We slide past the Déjà vu, pink and green,  
"1000 pretty girls and three  
Ugly one," boasts the marquee.

Today I can't even hate it.  
Decadence can't take anything from me.  
I am a dead tree, a tire mark.

My hands lie still.  
The awful heat, pale cold sunshine.  
Sweat doesn't drip.

Our destination is closer now.  
We pass McDonalds, Ralphs,  
our Volkswagen dealer.

Behind us, scenery droops  
and melts. A child  
fingerprints, smearing it all to black.

# Class Notes

November 21 2006

SL-Title "The night the fire came"

First Wind, Then Fire

Title (see)

The night the fire came  
 down my street, the wind  
 came first. It scattered  
 junk mail like paper airplanes  
 roof planks like jets  
 trash can lids like floating galaxies  
 and frayed Barbie  
 clothes, no longer glamorous,  
 ripped from tiny stewardesses  
 zipped along behind.

help  
was level  
of writing

Don't mix  
real w/  
imagined. This  
is not possible.

SL - Lots of nice control  
 good compression, energy  
 Starting to look like  
 poetry! (But a lot  
 to talk about too) SL

Not an  
interesting  
LIST.  
of a  
series

Loading the cars we ran screaming  
 Don't forget the hamster!  
 Did you find the white cat?  
 Where is the wheelchair tray?  
 Did you find the dog yet?

3 - and

Pronouns (I me we)  
are confusing - Jill

Could the poem be  
 about a relationship,  
 about a "we"? (SL)

I looked up only once.  
 Rushing along above me  
 dirt snowflakes, falling  
 scoops of embers like comets,  
 now in the lawn, on the  
 wooden deck,  
 on the shake roof like  
 strands of Christmas lights thrown  
 onto the carpet

reduce  
similies by  
two.

Tie in fire w/ Don's  
death

Challenge - get wild with it.

(we) crept  
 The next day, creeping home, afraid  
 to find nothing, it was all there.  
 Even the cat waiting on the step,  
 dinged with ash, insulted  
 insulted to be so dingy.

DM

Bring flowers (dead) up in poem.  
 The bougainvillea was all we lost,  
 singed and wiry. I let it stay.

end this line with "insulted."

separate

Then yesterday, two pink flowers  
blinked on the deck in the warm breeze.

make it clearer that 3  
years passed!

Too many similar similies.

December 10, 2006

Pam Arterburn

Revision of "First Wind, Then Fire"  
(Revised title)

The Night the Fire Came Down my Street

The wind came first, scattering  
junk mail like paper airplanes.  
You and I worked fast. You grabbed  
the pets and papers. I got one box  
and ran up and down the stairs  
trying to fill it.

Pictures of my parents. Books  
read long ago. One little book of poems  
from my childhood. I rushed and pulled  
and shoved the tokens into the box.

Our daughter dropped the cat  
on the way to the car.  
We looked at each other, you and me,  
the wind swirling like a tornado.  
So I ran after the cat, onto our back deck.  
I looked up just once.

Scoops of glowing embers sailed down  
landing in the yard, on our shake roof,  
circling me and rolling on the deck  
like strands of Christmas lights  
thrown out of the box onto the carpet.

And then we drove away.  
The next day we came home,  
afraid to find nothing. But it was all there,  
even the cat waiting on the step,  
dingy with ash, insulted.

Three years later, I think of the fire  
and you, who I knew better than any box  
of trinkets, better than any book.

Suzanne Lummis Oral Report

Pam Arterburn

### History/Biography

She is the present and founding Director of the Los Angeles Poetry Festival (LAPF), and literary coordinator of the Arroyo Arts Collective project "Poetry in the Windows" in Highland Park, CA. She was principal editor of *Grand Passion: The Poetry of Los Angeles and Beyond* - a publication of the LAPF organization. She studied with Philip Levine at Fresno State, where she completed her M. A. in Creative Writing. Lummis is also the editor of *Speechless*, a poetry e-zine with this heading:

*To render. Be rendered. Awestruck. Awesome.  
A magazine of poetry and related arts straight from L.A.*

Suzanne Lummis has been recognized by the Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Poets and Poetry as "one of the most distinctive and influential poets in Los Angeles." Lummis is also a playwright. Her two plays, *October 22, 4004 B.C.*, *Saturday* and *Night Owls*, were produced in Washington State and Houston, Texas, as well as at The Cast Theater, Los Angeles. The late Drama-Logue honored the Los Angeles productions with Playwriting awards in 1987 and 1989.

### History:

Suzanne Lummis' grandfather, Charles Lummis, was "multicultural" before its time, founding the Southwest Museum and filling it with his own collections. He walked from Ohio to LA in 1894 and his writings along the way describe his love for New Mexico, Native Americans and Hispanic architecture. He was City Editor of the LA Times, a Native American activist, one of the originators of the Arts and Crafts Style in LA, and a friend of local writers.

Uncanny similarities between grandfather and granddaughter:

### Grandfather:

Lummis could be generous to fledgling young writers, many of whom he published in *Land of Sunshine*. Lummis did his best to promote the local-color movement. He pointed out that most great literature was in one way or another regional. He wanted writers committed to Southern Californian and

Southwestern themes and materials, and not New York dropouts choosing the Southland as a second-best place. Of S. CA, he said, "We know and respect and love the old home; we have chosen the new simply because it is so much better worth living in. We read the Eastern magazines, and help to make them, and have no desire to compete with them—but merely to fulfill a certain special need which they do not and cannot quench."

Granddaughter:

From an article she wrote in *Speechless the Magazine* about a new Los Angeles poet:

It was one of those stunning you'll-always-remember-exactly-where-you-were-when-it-happened moments. It came upon me a ways into the 1999 L.A. Weekly article assessing poetry in general and Los Angeles poetry in particular. I'd been reading along, ticking off to myself the individual poets, and whole poet clans, who were going to be sorely aggrieved by the journalist's comments and asides that - to the lay reader - might seem innocuous. Then I came upon a certain foolhardy passage and thought 'Oh my God...' Well, I can't reproduce word-for-word my exact thoughts of four years ago, but they may have gone something like this: '...Wow, Hannibal and Napoleon couldn't unify Europe. T. E. Lawrence and other historical forces couldn't unite the Middle East, but one Brendan Bernhard has - for a while at least - drawn the wildly various sectors of the Los Angeles poetry monde into some state of consensus. He's pissed off everyone.'

Writing about the Poetry in the Window contest, Lummis again shares her grandfather's values:

And of folks on the street? - besides, that is, those already predisposed people who drive to Highland Park for the poetry walking tour the first day? I myself can relate only one striking encounter. I think it was the fourth year, somewhere between Mr. Maury's Shoes and 99 Cents Plus. A Latino man, who looked to be about the right age for Occidental College, ran up to me, "This is fantastic! You guys are amazing! I've been reading the poems everywhere. Thank you, thank you for this!"

I asked him if he had one of our brochures with selections of poetry we make available for all the shops. "Yes, yes," he assured me, "I've got everything. This is amazing." I assumed he must be an avid reader. "Have you been interested in poetry for very long?" He answered, still a little out of

breath, "Not till today."

--Well-known prose piece by Suzanne Lummis--the Charles Bukowski Obituary (excerpt):

Of course, Charles Bukowski was politically incorrect before some thinly talented radio personality made it the rage. He sported the grunge look before a Seattle band set the fashion. He predated the new appreciation of older women; he declared that women are the most desirable at the age when they're just starting to fall apart, which is good news for some of us. He continued to drink hard liquor straight from the bottle long after imported water had replaced martinis on the social scene; and only the influence of the woman he loved, then married, was able to slow him down. He was a writer who insisted on being out-of-step with his times.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Poetry: In Danger by Suzanne Lummis

David St. John's back-cover words about the collection:

"Suzanne Lummis's breathtaking  
new collection of poems,  
In Danger,  
unveils all of the levels of  
loneliness we assuage with the  
consolations of poetry.  
With candor, power and poignancy,  
Suzanne Lummis  
illuminates the glorious  
absurdities of our lives,  
especially the pride and paranoia  
that arise from living in an  
urban landscape.  
Nobody can ride  
a metaphor bareback  
better than this poet, and  
nobody delivers  
her work to the page  
with as much sass and wry humor.  
If Los Angeles were to have its own  
poet laureate, my choice would be  
Suzanne Lummis"  
David St. John

Spots that define Lummis' style:

1. From *The Cradle Will Rock*

(about the 1985 Mexico City earthquake)

It's Mexico City, '85. Men and women  
crawl sobbing over rubble, knock  
and knock, but can't get down  
to the source of those screams,  
and the dying can't come out. Oh who needs  
this knowledge cutting close to the bone!

2. From *No Metamorphosis*

(about roach infestations)

Roaches, it is said, have emotions,  
but which ones? No doubt  
they're only in awe for a moment,  
then it's back to those blunt  
bare-handed needs: hunger  
and thirst, peewee lust.

3. From *Crash I*

(about a car accident in the city)

As always, the drivers  
were frozen at first  
as if they were still  
in flight—now  
they wander out part-conscious.  
A man from one car seeps  
a bit from the head.  
His passenger throws her arms  
around him and cries  
as if to make the city  
hear. Of course nothing does  
but us.

She's also helped to define the "poem noir," an edgy style  
that achieves a fusion of opposites - urban grit and urbane  
wit. Examples of noir in Lummis' collection, In Danger:

4. From *Gin Alley*

It's 1939, a Monday, and a Depression.  
So me I fasten one tall heel the color  
of heart's blood on each foot  
and go to Gin Alley.  
I'm not thirsty tonight,  
desperation and lust will do fine.

5. From *Femme Fatale*

That woman with you, for instance,  
 Checking herself in the mirror  
 To see where she stands—  
 She's innocent so far, but someone  
 Will disappoint her.  
 Even now you're beginning to.  
 Even now you're in danger.

6. From *Shangri-la*

New York, is it true  
 that in the rest of the world it is winter?

Our state is a mosaic of blue pools,  
 even the Mojave, and the palm trees  
 line up straight to the Sierra Nevadas  
 and the surf comes down slow like  
 delirious laundry, even near Fresno.

7. From *Midnight Special*, (*The Donut Inn*)

I bet  
 At this hour the donuts  
 Lie face up, half  
 Human.

This next excerpt shows Lummis' wit and unique application  
 of cultural references to her poetry:

8. From *The Barbie Coffin*

Her mom, of whom we know little, of whom  
 even Barbie knows little, wails  
 at the unloading of oblong crates,  
 "Barbie, the garage, the entire backyard  
 are crammed full—your golf cart,  
 dune buggy, your Victorian carriage and horse,  
 the portable reflecting pond with the rose  
 flood lamps and little motorized swans!  
 And now all these coffins? Honey,  
 you'd look fine in a nice urn."

Two poems to read: *Why Life is Worth Living* and *To The Man  
 in the Parking Lot of Sunset and Normandie*

Pam Arterburn  
Final Paper

**Not Standing, but Flying: Barbara Hamby's *Babel***

Barbara Hamby's website describes her not only as a poet, but also as a writer of self-help books. An overview describes Hamby's book about finding a partner after fifty:

*"Find Romance in Later Life* lists the many opportunities to meet your match. Churches, clubs, blind dates, classes, and both classified and online personals ads are discussed. Examine the advantages and the pitfalls of each venue."

Hamby's love of lists is not confined to assisting the lonely, however. Her latest book of poetry, *Babel*, is also a study in enumerations, a collection that burbles to the brim and over the brim. Listing is not all she does, however; she is also your best friend, as in *Romance*, cluing you in to the secrets she's gathered. Hamby's inventions swell to fill these poems, occasionally doubling back to reappear, like the mockingbird who flies carelessly through them.

The poems are organized into three sections, "The Mockingbird Blues," "13 Ways of Looking at Paris," and "American Odes." Of the three, perhaps the first section demonstrates Hamby's vitality and love of speed the best.

Arterburn, 2

It begins with "My Translation," an anthem-like poem that sets the hurry-up-and-go tone for the entire collection:

I am translating the world into mockingbird, into  
 blue jay,  
 into cat-bombing avian obbligato, because I want  
 more noise, more bells, more senseless  
 tintinnabulation,  
 more crow, thunder, squawk, more bird song,  
 more Beethoven, more philharmonic mash notes  
 To the gods (3).

Imagine recess back in first grade, the kids bursting onto the playground, your best friend grabbing your hand and running, your feet barely touching the ground, toward a few wild moments of recess. This is the sense you have in many of Hamby's poems. She is the friend, and you are being forcibly dragged along. The same sense of anticipation, of danger, of trust in the hand you're holding happens here. In "Run," she uses the second person "you" to put the reader into the action:

Oh yeah, you're that girl on the bus, skipping town  
 like a jackrabbit or the second hand on a watch,  
 because time's  
 on the move and all you have is debts (14).

And in "The History of Apples, Part One," she pulls you with her language, portraying Eve as a modern-day bad girl—

There's Eve with her apple patter—"You're gonna love  
 this, honey, this is gonna feel so good in the  
 godforsaken  
 marrow of your narrow hips, so good God said,

Arterburn, 3

You better  
not. That good" (6).

Here, in "Calling the Friends of Friends," she puts you in a café in Paris, where

Your heart feels  
like the dessert on the plate in front of you,  
broken by a diabolical fork and oozing a thick  
liquid  
that could be blood though it's probably chocolate  
but bitter and hot, words like crumbs in your throat,  
while your fellow dingers are answering cell phones,  
chatting merrily or dialing as if death and madness  
weren't stalking them as avidly as they're hunting you  
down the boulevards and avenues (32).

So much happens that the poem expands to become almost a physical thing in the ways that it combines thoughts, feelings and images. It is a giant snowball rolling down a mountainside, hitting everything in its path, gathering bits and pieces so fast that it's hard to focus because you're moving, and a stick is poking you in the eye. There is no way out of these poems; she manipulates the reader with her use of pacing, compression and force.

Certain poems need to be read aloud and sound almost like performance pieces. The title poem, "Babel," which is the first poem in section two, "13 Ways of Looking at Paris", seems to require a stage, or at least a sturdy soapbox, to pull off:

Arterburn, 4

Assyrian for gate of God, behold our present bedlam,  
 ziggurat of steel, zeitgeist of bread and 2000  
     cheeses,  
 behold its gothic towers, the stutter of its engines,  
 yammering madmen, black-jacketed girls  
 colliding with the morning on the Pont Marie,  
     Children passing  
 x-rated marquees at the Place Pigalle.

Hamby doesn't really need to focus on a city; the last two lines above seem flat compared to the best of her poems. Paris seems to hold her down, make her stand still. She has a much better time when her only concern is the fun she can create with language, when she is using a topic that is hers alone. In "Thus Spake the Mockingbird," the bird's voice demonstrates how much better Hamby can be when not distracted by street names:

I am the careless minx in the skirts of women, the  
     bright moon  
 caressing their hair, the sharp words pouring from  
     their beautiful mouths  
 in board rooms, on bar stools, in big city  
     laundrettes (20).

Some poems in the Paris section are more prose than poetry, thus flat and ordinary compared to her stronger work.

"Ode to the Potato" begins,

'They eat a lot of French fries here,' my mother  
 announces after a week in Paris, and she's right,  
 Not only about les pommes frites but the celestial  
     tuber  
 in all its forms: rotie, puree, not to mention  
 au gratin or boiled and oiled in la salade

Arterburn, 5

Nicoise (27)

It feels almost like work; she's just not having much fun. The beginning of "Calling the Friends of Friends" is even harder to like:

When I call up my best friend to tell her I'll be  
 living  
 In Paris, she says I have to telephone her cousin,  
 The product of one of those marriages concocted  
 at the end of World War II (30).

She is so much better when she's not standing on the planet but flying above it, like the mockingbird that serves her so well. In "The Mockingbird Falls in Love," Hamby's free once more:

She calls the shots,  
 has the hots for every leather-jacket-wearing  
 Sal Mineo  
 wanna-be who ever sculpted a perfect curl over  
 his third eye,  
 resolved to quit smashing the nose of his one  
 and only, died  
 in a fiery crash (13).

The final section of her book, "American Odes," spans several topics, from hardware stores to bubblegum to her 1977 Toyota, all written about in Hamby's version of an ode. Conventions of the Hamby Ode include a smart, economical beginning:

*Ode to W. E. Diemer, the Inventor of Bubblegum*

Arterburn, 6

'It was an accident,' he said and pink because red food coloring was all he had (64).

These odes also involve at least some nostalgia:

Where are the men—Mr. Franks, Mr. Piggot, Tyrone,  
 Hank,  
 Ralph—sunburnt with stomachs and no asses,  
 Men who knew the mythology of nails, Zeuses  
 Enthroned  
 On an Olympus of weak coffee, bad haircuts,  
 And tin cans of galvanized casing nails (*Ode  
 To Hardware Stores* 53).

But not all nostalgia conjures up warm feelings; she remembers her mother's harshness in one ode:

I see my sister  
 Has chosen not to threaten her child as our own  
 dear  
 mother routinely threatened us. Driven crazy, she  
 browbeat us with strangulation, being slapped silly,  
 public humiliation, murder and eternal  
 damnation (*Ode on Satan's Power* 58).

But these are well-rounded odes, involving not only nostalgia but humor as well:

I'm in a dim Chinese restaurant in Hollywood  
 With my boyfriend, Mr. Wait-a-Minute, Mr. Should-  
 Have-Could-have, the Marquis of Maybe-Baby,  
 Prince of the Past Tense, last Emperor of Whoa Nelly  
 (*Ode to the Bride of Frankenstein* 72)

This final section of the book, despite its adherence to the ode in each poem as a unifying element, gives Hamby the freedom to run loose once again. The best poem in that section, "Ode on My Sharp Tongue," looks back on her job as

Arterburn, 7

a cocktail waitress. She is doing a bit of story-telling at the beginning, but unlike the poems in her Paris section, it doesn't feel stiff:

Being a cocktail waitress did nothing for my eternal,  
most high and holy inviolate numinous soul,  
because it took me almost not time to figure out  
that by being mean I raked in more loot (61)

That she manages to work "numinous" and "raked in," and that the result is completely believable, is one curiosity that the reader may contemplate for a moment but accepts completely.

Babel is not a book that tries to persuade or push you around. Like a radio at the beach, sometimes it's noisy, too distracting, and it muddles up the atmosphere you thought you wanted. But when that one song comes on, you hum along and want the guy to leave the radio on, at least for a while, because you feel the water in the air and your bathing suit is full of sand and you forgot the sunscreen and feel a sunburn coming on right here, underneath the sun, with the gulls flying right over your head. It's just that good.

**Section Two: Fiction Courses**

**Eng 401.11 Describing Setting so your Reader Won't Skim it to Get to the Good Part**

**English 410.1 Discovering and Creating Timeless Themes**

**English 401A The Essential Beginnings**

**English 431.15 Writing the Short-Short Story**

**English 446.126 An Experiential Workshop for Aspiring Novelists**

**English 446.15 The Writer's Workout**

**English 425.21 Creating Memorable Characters**

**English XL134A Creative Writing: Short Story**

**UCLA, 2006-2007**

## **Part Two, Fiction Courses**

During my year at UCLA, I took eight fiction-writing classes, ranging from a weekend course about character development with Dan Jaffe, to a short-short story class with Stephanie Waxman, to a formal story writing class with Dr. Stephen Cooper. In addition, I studied novel writing with Phyllis Gebauer, writing strategies with Chris Meeks, a theme workshop with Lollie Ragana, and workshop in setting with Mary Yukari Waters. These instructors taught me much about the craft of fiction, and I produced several stories and useful pieces during these classes. What follows are highlights of some of these courses, taken from my class notes.

### **Fiction Courses--Summary of Class and Notes, with my Comments:**

1. **Chris Meeks, "The Writer's Workout."** Professor Meeks focused his instruction on what he called the "turns" of a story, the spot in a scene where something changes. He stressed that fiction is active, and he encouraged us to "give yourself permission to be mediocre" and not be too hard on ourselves as beginning writers. We did weekly assignments and wrote in class frequently. "As writers," he said, "we are philosophers. Look at your story and say, 'what does it mean?' We're giving stories to people in order to help with their lives." He also encouraged us to fictionalize our own lives. "Don't be afraid to use your own story. But it's yourself, naked. When you make it fake, you take its power away."
2. **Phyllis Gebauer, "Building a Good Foundation: A Two-Saturday Workshop for Aspiring Novelists."** Professor Gebauer may be in her eighties, but she has an

energy and with that I envy. Her two-Saturday workshop in novel writing gave us more information than some of the longer classes I took at UCLA. Her lecture was no-nonsense and full of great tips and insights into novel writing and publishing. She told us that plot is arbitrary and can be manipulated, and she urged us to use story line cards that we can put on a table and manipulate. A good story can be reduced to one sentence. Following Aristotle's plan, she broke the lecture into three sections, the beginning, the middle, and the end of a novel. I especially learned from her how the middle of a novel works. "The lead (the main character) tries this and it fails. He tries something else and it fails. Trial and error. Maybe he even changes his goal; he gets into deeper trouble. It's a domino effect—one thing leads to another." She also broke down ending into different categories. In one, the happy ending, the main character gets what he wants. Usually, however, he no longer wants it because he's changed.

As the weekend progressed, her lectures became more specific and focused. For example, she broke viewpoint (point of view) into six possible types, giving examples and explaining each version. One statement still resonates with me: "Novels aren't written. They are re-written." All of my fiction teachers encouraged us to just sit down and write. Phyllis said that "all stories are a contract. You're going to tell a story that is worth the reader's time. It gives the reader a bonus—new information (what does it feel like to be a hooker?) into a way of life. At the end, it's going to be resolved. Completion, closure." On the second day, she focused on developing what she calls a "good commercial opening." "The beginning is a seduction," she said. Her lecture about scenes and

transitional passages stands out in my mind. Phyllis Gebauer didn't waste one moment of our time. During the weekend, we wrote scenes, worshopped our pieces and wrote an outline for our first novel. It was an amazing class.

3. **“Writing the Short-Short Story,” Stephanie Waxman.** This class was held at one of UCLA's Westwood locations and was the only morning class I took, so just getting to class from my Alta Loma home was quite a struggle. But Professor Waxman managed to pull a lot of writing out of me over the span of this course. For each class, we read stories in the textbook and brought in a short-short story to share with the class. She would begin the class with a brief lecture, but most of what I learned in her class came through the comments she made about student papers and her interaction with the class. She had us write in class every day, and our piece became the basis for the assignment we would write that week. Some of her ideas were fantastic. She taught us to write “installations” in which we began with an image, then built on that one little thing. For example, “a dish towel on a chair—a leather footstool—a cat on the footstool—men's slippers on the Mexican tiled floor beneath the footstool.” It's a process of following where your eye leads you, and that becomes the diving board to jump into a story. I will certainly use many of the assignments and ideas I learned from Dr. Waxman in my own classes.
4. **“Writing the Short Story,” Dr. Stephen Cooper.** Of all the fiction classes I took at UCLA, this was by far the best. Dr. Cooper is a full-time professor at Cal State Long Beach and a published writer and expert on the writings of John Fante. His book on Fante's life and work, Ask the Dust, is already considered a classic. .

On the first night of class, he intimidated all of us with his professorly seriousness and warnings about the rigors of the class. This got rid of the faint-hearted, and we were left with a core group of about twenty loyal students.

Each week, Dr. Cooper began the class with a cartoon about writing; this got the class thinking and made a nice start. We all wrote at least three stories during the ten weeks that the class met, and we also had to write responses to every story presented in class. So for each story we wrote, we were able to read it aloud, listen to oral comments from the students, and on the following week we would receive written comments from the students and Dr. Cooper. At the end of the class, we had to submit full revisions of our three stories. These stories ranged from 6-15 pages and had to follow specific format guidelines. In lectures, Dr. Cooper's style was terse yet explosive. "A short story is ruthlessly exclusive. It wants to keep things out."

I took this class in the Fall, and it was here that I realized the unique nature of the UCLA Writers Program Students. One classmate, a dreadlocked and heavily tattooed man named Cliff Cadaver, was a former body piercer/tattoo artist who had done TV and movie work and written for trade magazines. He also wrote the definitive book on body piercing, which continues to set the standard. Marnie Castor, the yoga instructor from Santa Monica who plays in a Patsy Cline tribute band, sat so close to Dr. Cooper that I thought she might end up on his lap several times. Howard, just divorced after eight years of marriage, wanted to do things that scared him. I wasn't surprised that Howard did not finish the class. The young researcher at the Getty Institute, the motorcycle rider who came to LA just

to get out of Chicago, the screenplay writer, the “moderately successful” actress, the UC Berkely grad just back from spending six months in London--my classmates were a fascinating, unpredictable mix and some of the most intelligent people I’ve ever met. Dr. Cooper’s class was great on so many levels. If I had to choose one class that defined my hopes for my sabbatical, this would be the one.

5. **“Creating Memorable Characters,” Dan Jaffe.** Professor Jaffe is an amazing man—a gentle, kind, talented instructor who can simultaneously encourage us and lead us forward in a concrete way. I took two classes with him, and t his one came very early on. The second one, “Writing the Personal Essay,” was one of the last classes I took. He was another instructor who used the time so wisely. In both classes, I have pages of exercises written in class, and it’s some of the best writing I produced at UCLA. His in-class exercises will also prove useful to me when I teach our Fiction class, because they were so clear and interesting. Most of the instruction in the class came from the interaction between Dan and individual students. He would introduce a concept, give us an exercise, let us write, then listen as we read. The comments that followed, both from our classmates and from Dan, were quite helpful; Dan really listened to us and cared about us as writers and as human beings. He shared his own writing, much of it quite personal, and he wasn’t afraid to share his life with us.

6. **“The Essential Beginnings: An Introductory Creative Writing Workshop,”** Vindana Kahana. This introductory fiction class seemed like a good choice, and the instructor was low-key but very focused and positive. Each week we were

asked to do fairly extensive readings and to bring in a piece that was based on that week's lesson. These were broken into fairly predictable topics; we did a character sketch, a plot twist, some foreshadowing, but all of the assignments were focused and enjoyable to write, and I came out of the course with a notebook full of materials I will use in my own fiction writing classes. She focused on the classic elements of fiction in her lectures; week one was about conflict; week two was about plot, and so on. One interesting method she used was "story cards," 3 x 5 cards divided into three classifications: characters, actions and settings. She would distribute these, and we'd have to use them in a piece. I had to write, for example, about a "housewife" who "pierces her nose" in "Kansas." I enjoyed the class and came away with assignments that will work in my own classes.

7. **"Describing Setting so Your Reader Won't Skip It to Get to the Good Part,"** Mary Yukari Waters. This beautiful wisp of a teacher with huge expressive eyes writes about post-WWII Japan, focusing on the lives of Japanese citizens with ties to America. I bought her book right after the class ended and loved it. Her class focused on how to make the reader see, hear, feel—it went beyond setting to address all the senses and descriptive writing, which she believes to be the heart of what writing should be. We read stories and did a lot of writing in her class; we discussed our work and traded ideas about how to make a place more vivid. She gave us some amazing handouts that contain some of the best descriptive writing I've ever read, and I will certainly use these in my writing classes.
8. **"Discovering and Creating Timeless Themes,"** Lollie Ragana. This weekend course was my final class at UCLA, but I wished I'd known about Lollie Ragana

sooner, because she is one incredible teacher. Her approach focused on the mythological and Jungian elements at work in stories, and she is quite brilliant. What I learned in this seminar class has already spilled over into my teaching. For example, she used the example of Hagrid and Humbaba as “threshold guardians,” creatures at the threshold of a character’s breakthrough. They scare us—we know danger may happen. But we go there anyway, and the guardian may even become an ally. Like Dorothy—when she sees that the witch is not so powerful against her, she becomes assertive and strong, and she fights back. Other topics she covered include the “super objective,” language and imagery, voice, environment, the story cycle, the trickster character, trickster stories, catastrophe, the chase, self-sacrifice, betrayal, rebellion, grief and persecution. All of these topics are relevant in any literature class, and she presented ways into a story that I never learned about in my grad school program so many years ago. I want to take more classes with Lollie and am so fortunate to have found her.

**Fiction Course Handouts and My Writing:** The first section that follows is a compilation of course materials and handouts. The second section comprises many of the fictional pieces I wrote last year.

**Fiction Courses:**

**Class Handouts**

**and**

**Course Materials**

**UCLA, 2006-2006**

**“THE WRITER’S WORKOUT”  
Techniques For Stronger Writing  
X446.15**

**Syllabus**

Winter 2007  
Tuesdays, January 23 - March 13  
Occidental College, Johnson Hall Room 208  
Instructor: Christopher Meeks

**work-out** (wûrk' out') *noun*

- 1. A session of exercise or practice to improve fitness, as for athletic competition.
- 2. A strenuous test of ability and endurance.

Write while the heat is in you. . . . The writer who postpones the recording of his thoughts uses an iron which has cooled to burn a hole with. He cannot inflame the minds of his audience.

**Henry David Thoreau** (1817-62), U.S. philosopher, author, naturalist.

It's hard enough to write a good drama, it's much harder to write a good comedy, and it's hardest of all to write a drama with comedy--which is what life is.

**Jack Lemmon** (1925-2001), U.S. actor.

My role in society, or any artist's or poet's role, is to try and express what we all feel. Not to tell people how to feel--not as a preacher, not as a leader, but as a reflection of us all.

**John Lennon** (1940-80), songwriter and Beatle.

**Overview**

Much in the way artists take life-drawing classes to grow and keep in form, this class is designed to get you working right away, and writing intensively in either fiction or narrative non-fiction forms. The goal is to express ideas and emotions with greater clarity. Think of the eight weeks as a way to jump into writing. If you're willing to stretch and sweat a little, you're in the right place. Writer's Workout will lead you through a series of exercises that will strengthen your writing abilities, challenge you to achieve your goals, and perhaps even encourage you to set higher ones. It will provide an honest yet supportive forum for your work. And you will write, write, write—coming up with more stories and story elements than you might ever thought possible in a short time.

## REQUIRED

Two books are required, from which we will discuss stories and craft. If you're going to write fabulous narrative, then you should read fabulous stories and learn from your literary ancestors.

**American Short Story Masterpieces** edited by Raymond Carver and Tom Jenks  
- \$7.99 ISBN 0-440-20423-2

**Creating Fiction** edited by Julie Checkoway - \$14.99 ISBN 1-884-91051-3

Optional: **The Middle-Aged Man and the Sea** by Christopher Meeks - \$12.95  
ISBN 1-411-64761-0

You can get these books at Vroman's Bookstore, on Colorado Boulevard at El Molino in Pasadena (just east of the Paseo). Ask for them in **Will Call**, upstairs under my name.

In the first four weeks, you'll read from the books and write in and out of class; in the last four weeks, you'll write some more and read each other's work, which we'll discuss.

## THE PLAN

Week One – Introduction and Character

Week Two – Conflict and Story Movement

Week Three – Point of View

Week Four – Premise and Structure

Week Five – Stronger Dialogue and Descriptive Prose

Week Six – Perfecting Your Form

Weeks Seven and Eight – Your Stories

## ASSIGNMENTS

The course includes reading, writing in class, and polishing work at home. Don't worry if you don't feel "like a writer." The writing is fun and simply gets you writing and using personal experience. Keep an open mind, and you will do well. In class we will start with short, twenty-minute exercises that are designed to get you writing. You then have a chance to polish the best of these at home. These pieces, by the way, can

be submitted to the class as a whole to discuss. Make enough copies for everyone to silently read in class (or, more likely, to take home). We will spend a certain portion of each class on your writing, but because this class is about writing more than critiquing, we'll save most of the discussion of your work until the last two classes, where everyone will have a chance to present a polished piece. This process helps all writers, from novice to professional.

To get the assignments, you can go to my website, [www.chrismEEKS.com](http://www.chrismEEKS.com), and click on "Homework Assignments" and "The Writer's Workout."

## GOALS

Rome was not built in a day—nor even in eight weeks. Allow yourself room to grow. You are likely to grow as a writer in this class—but don't expect you will go from first story to published author in two months. While I will offer ideas on how to get your work into the marketplace, your first goal is to allow yourself room to experiment and make mistakes. To create a polished work requires trying out new things—and you won't score every time. Keep an open mind as you hear reactions and suggestions on your work from your fellow writers. You will likely be drawn to certain people's reactions more than others. You may even hear some contradictory ideas. Writing is a subjective art, so you need to take the advice that can help you and politely let the rest wash over you. The primary goal of this course is to get you to write and leave you inspired at the end of eight weeks. The time goes fast, so hold on!

Here are some other books on writing that I recommend:

*On Writing Short Stories* edited by Tom Bailey (Oxford Press). *Advice from some of the top masters of the form, with examples of short stories.*

*The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers* by Christopher Vogler (Michael Wiese Productions). *Particularly appropriate for screenwriters.*

*Writing In Restaurants* by David Mamet (Penguin Books). *These essays stress what fuels the author and many writers. Writing is much more than money. It's about living. (The book is also thin, for those of you who don't want to read a lot.)*

*Writing for Story* by Jon Franklin (Mentor Books). *While this two-time Pulitzer Prize winner writes about non-fiction stories, his insight holds up extremely well for fiction, too. Story structure is universal. The chapter on structure is most valuable. As I read it, I wrote down a lot of ideas for stories that I wanted to create.*

*Art of Dramatic Writing* by Lajos Egri (Touchstone Books). *Many playwrights consider this a "bible" for writing in dramatic structure.*

*Writing In General and the Short Story in Particular* by Rust Hills (Houghton Mifflin). *A blueprint for writing fiction. Even after I had been writing fiction, I found the book useful.*

On Being A Writer, edited by Bill Strickland. *Interviews with famous writers including Hemingway, Faulkner, Jong, Vonnegut, and more. It's intended to be inspirational.*

Dramatists Sourcebook (Theatre Communications Group). *If you're a playwright, this book is a must. It gives you the places to send your work.*

Novel & Short Story Writer's Market (Writer's Digest Books). *Places to send your work for short story writers and novelists. This virtual bible gives editors names, what they seek, how much they pay, how to get to them and much more. If you write non-fiction, get the larger "Writer's Market 1999" instead.*

Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott (Pantheon). *This is less "How to Write Stories" compared to the above books, and more "How to Think." She focuses on a kind of organic writing that I believe in. Lamott's personal examples of heartache, toil, and triumph resonate.*

The Writer On Her Work, (Volumes One and Two) edited by Janet Sternburg. *A number of great female writers describe what it takes to do the work and balance the rest of life.*

Making a Good Script Great by Linda Seger (Samuel French). *After you've created good characters and a storyline in a first draft that seems to have all the elements—this explains how to make it all better.*

30 Steps to Becoming a Writer and Getting Published by Scott Edelstein (Writer's Digest Books)

Playwriting for Theatre, Film and Television by Laura Shamas (Betterway Publications)

On Becoming a Writer by Dorthea Brand

Wild Mind: Living the Writer's Life by Natalie Goldberg (Bantam)

The Best Writing On Writing, edited by Jack Heffron (Story Press)

How to Write Irresistible Query Letters by Lisa Collier Cool (Writer's Digest Books)

## **GRADING**

Not everyone in the course will be taking it for credit. Some people, however, do want a letter grade and have made arrangements to be given a grade for college credit. (It can also be taken Pass/Fail.) For those of who are taking the class for a letter grade, the following criteria will be used in your earning a grade.

Attendance and participation	30%
Homework	20%
Critiques of others' work	25%
Final project with class critique	25%

### **Grading Guidelines**

A final grade in this class is based on the participant's total performance throughout the quarter, not on any single individual work. If you don't want the pressure of grades, you don't need to get a grade. Call the Extension Office and ask for No Grade. You won't be looked at any differently.

### **Attendance**

There are only eight classes. If you miss one, that's one-eighth of the course you've missed. Two classes is one fourth. (Isn't math beautiful?) Hence, it's important that you attend each class if you want to get the most value from it. If you are asking for a grade, missing more than one will bring down your grade.

### **THE WORKSHOP ENVIRONMENT**

If you have never participated in a writing workshop, it can be both fun and intense. The idea is that all participants critique each other's work—we will do this mostly during the last two weeks. We literally go around the room, and each person offers his or her opinion. It's done in a supportive atmosphere.

Analysis and critique are important components of being a writer. You need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of another person's writing, and critiquing in this fashion builds your analysis skills. When you can understand the merits and problems of another work, you're more likely to understand your own work.

In order for this to be a positive and helpful resource for each writer, I ask that we work with the following rules of order:

- 1) Listen carefully as work is read aloud by the author. Unless writing notes distracts you from listening, make notes for your comments afterwards.
- 2) Typically, we start the critique with whomever likes to start. From there, we go around the room in order.
- 3) As a critic, start your comments with what you think is effective. What do you like about the work? Then move into suggestions that can help the

author improve the work. Sweeping negative judgements on the nature or character of a piece are seldom of use to an author. So much about writing is rewriting, so the comments should address how an author might revise.

- 4) Critiques should be given without interruption from anyone else. If the author wants to comment, save it for after everyone has critiqued. (The author should be keeping notes.) The instructor will go last in the critique. In that way, his point of view won't dominate.
- 5) After everyone has spoken, anyone can bring up a point for debate. If someone feels strongly about having flashbacks, for instance, and other people disagree, this is a time to discuss the issue. Again, the author should be generally silent to allow debate and to see what people are finding important.
- 6) After any debating, the writer should be allowed to direct questions to people or to the group as a whole. He/she can initiate topics for discussion. The writer can also offer a summation of what's been said, to see if there's a good understanding. The author can also explain his or her intentions. It's helpful for everyone to know what you were trying to do.
- 7) "Supportive" doesn't mean giving a series of sweet nothings, but writers do need to know what works and what is strong, as well as what needs improvement. "It's nice" or "I liked it" as a full critique doesn't serve much function. It's the specifics that help.
- 8) *Criticism always refers to the work and never the person.* "This script is weak," is acceptable. "You write weak stories," is not. We're here to help each other, and we're all vulnerable.

## **INSTRUCTOR**

**Christopher Meeks** has had stories published in such literary journals as *Rosebud*, the *Southern California Anthology*, the *Santa Barbara Review*, *Writers' Forum*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, and *The Midday Moon*. His column about writing can be viewed on the Internet at [www.efuse.com](http://www.efuse.com) (click on "Design" and scroll down to "Columnists"). He has had three full-length plays mounted in Los Angeles, published four children's books, reviewed theatre for seven years for *Daily Variety*, has had two screenplays optioned and another win the Donald Davis Dramatic Writing Award; his latest books are *The Middle-Aged Man and the Sea*, a collection of short fiction, and *Who Lives?*, a play. He also teaches during the year at CalArts, Art Center, Santa Monica College, and USC's graduate Professional Writing Program.

**HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT #2**  
**"The Writers' Workout" - MEEKS**  
**(Due February 6)**

- 1) In *American Short Story Masterpieces*, read two stories: "1/3 1/3 1/3" by Richard Brautigan and "The Fever" by Raymond Carver. Underline lines that you particularly admire or are truthful. While both stories have a narrator, notice how they are built in scenes. People do and say things, and experience is delivered. In each story, consider who is the narrator, what does he want, and what is standing in his way?
- 2) Please read "Casting Shadows..." (page 96) in *Creating Fiction*; underline/make notations while you read or reread. If you have questions or something inspires you, note it.
- 3) Write a scene, which is to say, have characters in a single location doing and saying things so that turns occur. Is it clear who the protagonist is, what he or she wants, and what's standing in the way? The scene can be anything you want, based, for instance, on a story you want to write or using an in-class exercise. The scene doesn't need to be long (and probably shouldn't be). Please type up and double-space. Indent your paragraphs. Proofread.

★ Enormous pressure reveals true character.  
 Churn up the flames! Add more pressure — see what happens.

- In groups - Read + comment on the scenes. What works well? Be specific. Also, offer advice to make it better. So - your story will come in w/ 2 critiques. Use your name. Then discuss. "How do you plus it?"

Pixar -  
 Teaches at  
 Cal. Arts

Toy story 2 - toys make it to airport  
 Plane wasn't there in original scene!  
 wondered how to make it more desperate.  
 Plane takes off! No exit! Someone  
 thought "wheel well!"

animate -

Talk -

**UCLA EXTENSION WRITERS' PROGRAM Spring 2007: "Writing the Short-Short Story"**  
 Instructor: Stephanie Waxman ([waxman5@verizon.net](mailto:waxman5@verizon.net))

**Required Text: NEW SUDDEN FICTION Short-Short Stories from America and Beyond**  
 Edited by Robert Shapard and James Thomas

**Week 1: April 17: Why Is This Night Different + Sense of Place**

**Discussion:** What makes a short short different from a longer story?

**Quick Exercise:** this room from the POV of someone who wants or doesn't want to be here.

**Quick Exercise:** Make a list of places which have impacted you.

**Inspirational Read:** Walker's "Flowers"

**Long write:** Choose one of the places as the setting for your story, using the theme: journey.

**Discuss:** characters at cross-purposes or on a collision course or just wanting different things

**Homework:**

- Finish what you began today.
- Read "Delicate Touch," (206) "Before and Again," (182) "The Palmist" (78)
  - How are two characters present with different wants?
  - How did the authors achieve a sense of place?

**Week 2: April 24: Collision Course + Sense of Place**

**Discuss:** "Delicate Touch," "Before and Again," "The Palmist"

**Read homework.**

**Quick Exercise:** make a list of people you know only vaguely.

**Quick Exercise:** Choose one:

- I'm the kind of person who:
- An object I treasure is:
- One of my deeply held beliefs is:
- A place that is significant to me is:

**Long write:** Put him/her in a scene with a character based on your mother.

**Discuss:** Negotiation + The Expanded Moment

**Homework:**

- Finish what you began today.
- Read: "Stolen Chocolates," (299) "How I Left Ned" (337) "Moscow" (341)
  - Consider negotiation
  - Think about expanded moment

**Week 3 – May 1: Negotiation + Expanded Moment**

**Discuss:** "Stolen Chocolates," "How I Left Ned," "Moscow"

**Read homework.**

**Inspirational Read:** Anne Lamott on Character.

**Quick Exercise:** Choose a different person on which to base a character. 2 sentences each:

- Physically: what s/he looks like.
- Behavior: what s/he does.
- Dialog: what s/he says.

**Long Write:** Use the expanded moment in an exchange between this character and someone with whom he/she is negotiating.

**Discuss:** Narrative Voice and Point of View + Flash Forward

**Homework:**

- Finish what you began today.
- Read: "Berlin Wall Piece" (57) "Objects in Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear" (90) "Feeling Good, Feeling Fine" (111)
  - Consider Narrative Voice and Point of View
  - Pay attention to the dialog.

**Week 4 – May 8: Narrative Voice and Point of View**

**Discuss:** "Berlin Wall Piece," "Objects in Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear," "Feeling Good, Feeling Fine"

**Read homework.**

**Discuss:** The difference between dialog and conversation:

**Quick Exercise:** list situations that involve someone returning home.

**Quick Exercise:** write a dialog about returning home; no narrative.

**Long Write:** Choose a different returning home and write the story including dialog.

**Discuss:** Chekov and the gun on the mantel + 2<sup>nd</sup> person POV

**Homework:**

- Finish what you began today.
- Read: "Power Lines" (251) "Incarnations of Burned Children (255) "Paper Slippers" (320)
  - What is the gun on the mantel and the use of language

**Week 5 – May 15: Gun On the Mantel + Language**

**Discuss:** "Power Lines," "Incarnations of Burned Children," "Paper Slippers"

**Read homework.**

**Make a list** of different rooms.

**Short write:** in the first person with someone walking into a room.

**Long Write:** Choose another room from your list. Think about the gun on the mantel.

**Discuss:** direct address + other conventions: e-mail, etc.

**Homework:**

- Finish what you began today.
- Read: "Audio Tour" (316) "In Reference to Your Recent Communications" (142) "Reply All" (269)
  - Think about direct address + other conventions

**Week 6 – May 22: Direct address + Other Conventions**

**Discuss:** "Audio Tour," "In Reference to Your Recent Communications," "Reply All"

**Read homework.**

**Discuss:** How to make the stakes high.

**Quick Exercise:** list of everything someone could possibly lose.

**Long Write:** Choose one and build a piece around this loss.

**Discuss:** 180 degree turn.

**Homework:**

- Finish what you began today.
- Read: "Blood" (85) "My Kid's Dog (244) "The Wine Doctor (137)

- What is the 180 turn?

**Week 7 – May 29: 180 Degree turn**

**Discuss:** “Blood,” “My Kid’s Dog,” “The Wine Doctor”

**Read homework.**

**Discuss:** A story leads inevitably to a change.

**SW read:** “The Wig”

**UCLA Evaluations.**

**Quick Exercise:** a list of objects, significant either for their positive or negative association.

**Long Write:** Choose one and build a story using this object as the central point.

**Discuss:** What if? (Magical Realism)

**Homework:**

- Bring SASE
- Finish what you began today.
- Read: “The Rememberer” (63) “Consumed” (196) “Mud” (229)
  - What is the what if?

**Week 8 – June 5: What If? (Magical Realism)**

**Discuss:** “The Rememberer,” “Consumed,” “Mud”

**Read homework.**

**Quick exercise:** make a list of what if’s

**Long Write:** Choose one. Using either:

- Negotiation
- Collision course
- Gun on the mantel
- Why is this night different.
- You can use direct address or some other convention.

**Discuss:** What have are you taking away from this class?

**Homework: NONE.**

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**Recommended Readings:**

Bird by Bird (Anne Lamott)

Writing Down the Bones (Natalie Goldberg)

Writing On Both Sides of the Brain (Henriette Anne Klauser)

**GRADES** Pass/Fail will be based on minimum of 800 points to Pass. \*Grades will be based on:

Attendance & participation: .....800 points

Homework:..... 700 points

TOTAL POSSIBLE:.....1500 points

\*NOTE: This grade does not reflect your “talent” as a writer nor does it take into consideration your improvement as a writer shown in these eight weeks. It simply reflects your participation in the coursework.

**HOMEWORK** must be typed, double-spaced, font size 12, stapled, titled, name and page numbers and name of assignment in upper right-hand corner. DO NOT E-MAIL.

### Story Endings

“Within a month, over eight hundred people contracted acute hepatitis in Muji. Six died of the disease, including two children. Nobody knew how the epidemic had started.”

*Saboteur*, Ha Jin

“When he raised his eyelids the room was a blur. He waited for his vision to clear but nothing came. The red hatband was out of sight.

He felt the place in the bed where his treasure had slept. There was a damp circle on the sheet. She was gone.”

*Transactions*, Michelle Cliff

“A laugh came up out of me like a sneeze. I laughed and laughed and went on laughing—so hard that Hildie got mad, and the madder she got the more I laughed. Before I had stopped laughing, she’d thrown all my things out on the lawn. This was the last night of my marriage, I knew that, and that was all right with me. I wouldn’t want anyone to think I was complaining.”

*Nobody in Hollywood*, Richard Bausch

“The light was burning in my head, and it was all I needed. I reached into my pants and pulled out the gun. I could have anointed any one of them, but the woman was first. I bent to her where she lay on the unyielding concrete of the steps and touched that snub-nose to her ear as tenderly as any man of healing. The noise of it shut down Jesus, shut him down cold. Into the silence, and it was the hardware man next. Then I swung round on Mr. Beard.

It was easy. It was nothing. Just like killing babies.”

*Killing Babies*, T. Coraghessan Boyle

“The body was like a sweet, dim dog trotting lamely toward the gate as you tried slowly to drive off, out the long driveway. *Take me, take me too*, barked the dog. *Don’t go, don’t go*, it said, running along the fence, almost keeping pace but not quite, its reflection a shrinking charm in the car mirrors as you trundled past the viburnum, past the pine grove, past the property line, past every last patch of land, straight down the swallowing road, disappearing and disappearing. Until at last it was true: you had disappeared.”

*Real Estate*, Lorrie Moore

### Story Endings

Florentino Ariza listened to him without blinking. Then he looked through the windows at the complete circle of the quadrant on the mariner's compass, the clear horizon, the December sky without a single cloud, the waters that could be navigated forever, and he said:

"Let us keep going, going, going, back to La Dorada."

Fermina Daza shuddered because she recognized his former voice, illuminated by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and she looked at the Captain: he was their destiny. But the Captain did not see her because he was stupefied by Florentino Ariza's tremendous powers of inspiration.

"Do you mean what you say?" he asked.

"From the moment I was born," said Florentino Ariza, "I have never said anything I did not mean."

The Captain looked at Fermina Daza and saw on her eyelashes the first glimmer of wintry frost. Then he looked at Florentino Ariza, his invincible power, his intrepid love, and he was overwhelmed by the belated suspicion that it is life, more than death, that has no limits.

"And how long do you think we can keep up this goddamn coming and going?" he asked.

Florentino Ariza had kept his answer ready for fifty-three years, seven months, and eleven days and nights.

"Forever," he said.

Gabriel García Márquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*

This is what I know, the one and only thing. The best way to die is while you're living, even here in New Jersey. Even for someone like me. You'd laugh to know how long it's taken me to figure that out, when all I had to do was cross over the mountains. When I walk to my car in the parking lot on winter nights, I have often noticed bats, a black cloud in the darkening sky. They bring me comfort. They make me feel you're not so far away. To think, I used to be afraid. I used to run and hide. Now I stand and look upward. I don't mind what the weather is; the cold has never bothered me. I hope what I'm seeing is the ever after. I hope it's you.

Alice Hoffman, *The Ice Queen*

And Hana moves possibly in the company that is not her choice. She, at even this age, thirty-four, has not found her own company, the ones she wanted. She is a woman of honour and smartness whose wild love leaves out luck, always taking risks, and there is something in her brow now that only she can recognize in a mirror. Ideal and idealistic in that shiny dark hair! People fall in love with her. She still remembers the lines of poems the Englishman read out loud to her from his commonplace book. She is a woman I don't know well enough to hold in my wing, if writers have wings, to harbour for the rest of my life.

And so Hana moves and her face turns and in a regret she lowers her hair. Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal's left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor and gently passes it into the finger of his daughter, a wrinkle at the edge of his eyes behind his spectacles.

Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*

Thus, neither of us is alive when the reader opens this book. But while the blood still throbs through my writing hand, you are still as much part of blessed matter as I am, and I can still talk to you from here to Alaska. Be true to your Dick. Do not let other fellows touch you. Do not talk to strangers. I hope you will love your baby. I hope it will be a boy. That husband of yours, I hope, will always treat you well, because otherwise my specter shall come at him, like black smoke, like a demented giant, and pull him apart nerve by nerve. And do not pity C. Q. One had to choose between him and H. H., and one wanted H. H. to exist at least a couple of months longer, so as to have him make you live in minds of later generations. I am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*

This is where the story starts, in this threadbare room. The walls are exploding. The windows have turned into telescopes. Moon and stars are magnified in this room. The sun hangs over the mantelpiece. I stretch out my hand and reach the corners of the world. The world is bundled up in this room. Beyond the door, where the river is, where the roads are, we shall be. We can take the world with us when we go and sling the sun under your arm. Hurry now, it's getting late. I don't know if this is a happy ending but here we are let loose in open fields.

Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body*

Good Dialogue:

1. Reveals character and situation:

"I'll go with you and I'll stay with you all the time. They just let the air in and then it's all perfectly natural."

"Then what will we do afterward?"

"We'll be fine afterward. Just like we were before."

"What makes you think so?"

"That's the only thing that bothers us. It's the only thing that's made us unhappy."

2. But does so subtly/ sometimes with gestures:

"Connie, you ain't telling the truth. This is your day set aside for a ride with me and you know it," he said, still laughing. The way he straightened and recovered from his fit of laughing showed that it had been all fake.

3. Uses simple words, and can be illogical and repetitive:

"I said we could have everything."

"We can have everything."

"No, we can't."

"We can have the whole world."

"No, we can't."

"We can go everywhere."

"No, we can't."

4. Makes the most of simple statements:

"Actually, I have been going to a lot of doctors recently."

"What's wrong?" asked Earl.

"Oh, probably nothing. But they're putting me through tests." She sighed. "I've had sonograms. I've had mammograms. Next week I'm going in for a candygram." He looked at her concerned. "I've had too many gram words," she said.

When working on your own stories, examine the character's speech to make sure it does more than convey information. Does it characterize, accomplish exposition, and reveal emotion, intent, or change? Does it advance the conflict? Does it sound realistic?

## Dialogue

The easiest way to tell the reader who is speaking is by stating, he said/she said. You can occasionally use "asked" or "replied", "answered", but avoid too many words like "growled" or "exclaimed". Trust the growl to be inherent in what is said and how the person is described.

Other ways to attribute dialogue to character are:

-Use the name of the person being spoken to:

"Jesus, Benjy, my job's more important than your marathon Monopoly game."

-Use action:

She filled a grocery bag with dog food and topped it off with a can of Drano. "You get the picture."

-Use physical description:

Jessica's t-shirt said, "Death by Doughnuts" and her hair rode her shoulders, Christ-like. "I'm learning all about it in my accounting class."

-Use emotional clues:

Her head was spinning and she had trouble keeping the gun pointed at the man's tie. Didn't know who was more frightened. "Don't let things get out of hand here."  
The man nodded. "Take it all, you can have it all."

Excerpted from: *What If? Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers*, Anne Bernays & Pamela Painter

Remember the relationship between the characters and their previous history if any. For instance, two best friends will know if "Bob" is the boyfriend that one of them is speaking of without saying, "Did you know Bob, my boyfriend of three years, is now seeing someone else?"

### Things Not To Do With Dialogue:

"But of course it's 2308 now and all of our radio-activated transforming mechanisms have been operational for centuries."

"I have a feeling that Joanie, my wife, is cheating on me. I think she went to work on some bastard in the kitchen at the party you and I were both at earlier this evening, Lee."

"Did you lose the case you were trying in court today?" Lee asked.

"Yeah. I was gonna tell you about it since you're a lawyer too. You think our boss at the law firm we both work for will hit the ceiling? What do you think?"

"Hello," she said.

"Hello."

"So, what's happening?"

"Not much."

## Opening Lines

“Mr. Chiu and his bride were having lunch in the square before Muji Train Station. On the table between them were two bottles of soda spewing out brown foam, and two paper boxes of rice and sautéed cucumber and pork.”

*Saboteur*, Ha Jin

“A blond, blue-eyed child, about three years old, no one will know her exact age, ever, is sitting in the clay of a country road, as if she and the clay are one, as if she is the first human, but she is not.”

*Transactions*, Michelle Cliff

“I was pummeled as a teenager.

For some reason, I had the sort of face that asked to be punched. Something about the curve of my mouth, I guess. It made me look like I was being cute with people, smirking at them.”

*Nobody in Hollywood*, Richard Bausch

“When I got out of rehab for the second time, there were some legal complications, and the judge—an old jerk who looked like they’d just kicked him out of the Politburo—decided I needed a sponsor.”

*Killing Babies*, T. Coraghessan Boyle

“It must be, Ruth thought, that she was going to die in the spring. She felt such inexplicable desolation then, such sludge in the heart, felt the season’s mockery, all that chartreuse humidity in her throat like a gag.”

*Real Estate*, Lorrie Moore

### Setting: Sense of Place, Time, Cultural Setting

Setting creates the mood, reveals character and can even provide the storyline. You can orient your reader to the story's time and place through simple statements of information or through concrete details. When done well, setting helps to create atmosphere so that the reader can experience the world of the story.

"The setting is important to our understanding of character type and of what to expect, as well as to the emotional value that arises from the conflict. As we need to know a character's gender, race and age, we need to know in what atmosphere she or he operates to understand the significance of the action."—Janet Burroway

Joyce Carol Oates, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been":

Suburban countryside, probably early 1960s. The mall is called a "shopping plaza." Restaurant is shaped like a bottle. Traditional middle-class family: father is away at work most of the time, mother at home, high-school students who don't work during the summers. Connie lives in a "ranch house" that is somewhat isolated, at the end of a long gravel drive with woods behind. Main scene is a hot summer day.

Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants":

Spain, near the river Ebro, bar at train station. Wealthy Americans traveling aimlessly—"look at things and try new drinks." Not set in recent times: he's "the man" but she's "the girl." Scorched earth where they are sitting (dry ground, no trees) but other side of the station: "fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro". Setting is a hot day.

Lorrie Moore, "You're Ugly, Too":

Manhattanite history professor transplanted to Illinois because of job. Fairly recent time period: wears Obsession perfume, worries that her oriental rug says "Bruce Springsteen" in Chinese. Characters are educated, cynical, depressed.

Jason Brown, "Driving the Heart":

Driving in towns in up and down Massachusetts. Distance between towns and time crucial to delivering heart. Have to drive because bad weather. Nearing main character's own hometown triggers memories of childhood.

**Creating Memorable Characters: A Weekend Workshop**  
Daniel M. Jaffe, Instructor

**SYLLABUS**

**DESCRIPTION AND GOALS:**

Vivid, complex characters are the heart of good fiction. Whether we choose to render our characters through spare details or extensive description, we need to know them thoroughly. In this weekend workshop, we read short examples of memorable characterizations in literature, and we engage in various writing exercises exploring diverse aspects of character: physical traits, voice and ways of thinking, habits and tastes, past relationships, and current relationships. By the end of the course, students know one or two of their characters deeply enough to begin developing a work of fiction.

**GRADES:**

Grades, for those requesting them, will be based upon attendance, participation, and effort displayed.

**READING:**

Handouts and discussions will contain brief examples from published literature:

Dorothy Allison, "Mama."  
 Feodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*.  
 Katherine Dunn, *Geek Love*.  
 Thomas Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs*.  
 Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*.  
 Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.  
 Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.  
 Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People."  
 Judith Ortiz Cofer, *The Line of the Sun*.  
 J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*.  
 Jane Smiley, *A Thousand Acres*.  
 John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*.  
 Peter Taylor, "The Old Forest."  
 Peter Taylor, "The Promise of Rain."  
 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.  
 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*.

**SCHEDULE:****Day 1****9:30-11:00 Introduction**

- Introductions of instructor and students; Overview of Syllabus
- Discussion: Introduction to Character Development
- Exercise #1:** Defining character traits
- Discussion: Stereotype, cliché

**11:00-11:10 Break****11:10-12:30 Character Basics**

- Discussion: character basics.
- Discussion/reading examples:
  - Body
  - Age, physical health, mental health, maturity
  - Race, ethnicity, religion
  - Socio-economic class
  - Gender, sexual orientation
- Exercise #2:** Third-person description.

**12:30-1:30 Lunch Break****1:30-2:50 Character Basics (continued)**

- Exercise #3:** First-person description.

**2:50-3:00 Break****3:00-4:30 Character Values, Beliefs, Ways of Thinking, Voice**

- Discussion/reading examples: values, beliefs.
- Discussion/reading examples: ways of thinking, voice.
- Exercise #4:** Goals, values, voice.

**Day 2****9:30-10:00 Review**

--Discussion: review of yesterday's work; discussion of any questions.

**10:00-11:00 Past Relationships**

--Discussion/reading examples: past relationships.

**11:00-11:10 Break****11:10-12:30 Past relationships (continued):**

--Exercise #5: Past relationships.

**12:30-1:30 Lunch Break****1:30-2:50 Current Relationships**

--Discussion: current relationships.

--Exercise # 6: Current relationships.

**2:50-3:00 Break, Evaluations-****3:00-4:00 Habits, Tastes, Routines**

--Discussion/reading: habits, tastes, routines.

--Exercise #7: Habits, tastes, routines

**4:00-4:30 Questions; Review**

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## EXAMPLES QUOTED FROM LITERATURE

### Day 2

#### 1. Kesey

“Sometimes a manipulator’s own ends are simply the actual *disruption* of the ward for the sake of disruption. There are such people in our society. A manipulator can influence the other patients and disrupt them to such an extent that it may take months to get everything running smooth once more. With the present permissive philosophy in mental hospitals, it’s easy for them to get away with it. Some years back it was quite different. I recall some years back we had a man, a Mr. Taber, on the ward, and he was an *intolerable* Ward Manipulator. For a while.” She looks up from her work, needle half filled in front of her face like a little wand. Her eyes get far-off and pleased with the memory.

#### 2. Judith Ortiz Cofer, *The Line of the Sun*

They say Guzmán had been a difficult pregnancy for Mamá Cielo, who had little patience for the bouncing ball in her belly. She claimed the monkey was climbing her ribs, that she felt fingers grabbing her bladder and squeezing, so that she had to stop attending mass for the shame of urine trickling down her legs. She took to slapping her abdomen smartly as if she were killing a pesky fly. Her meek husband, Papá Pepe, worried about the unborn child but did not dare to interfere. During her pregnancies Mamá Cielo always became fiercely self-absorbed, not even letting him sleep in the same bed with her.

Many years later, after Guzmán disappeared into the New York City subway system, Papá Pepe dared to say at the dinner table that it was his wife’s prenatal violence that had made Guzmán the runaway he would always be.

#### 3. Peter Taylor, “Promise of Rain”

I can see Hugh now in his corduroy jacket and sheepskin collar stooping down to slip his books always in the same corner of the same compartment of the hall cupboard. He was orderly and systematic about everything like that. His older brothers had never measured up to him in this respect. In an instant he could tell you the whereabouts of any of his possessions. He had things stashed away—ice skates, baseball glove, and other athletic equipment, as well as sets of carpentry tools, car tools, and radio parts—had them pushed neatly away in nooks and shelves and drawers all over the house. They were all things he had been very much excited about at one time or another. Hugh would plague us to buy him something, and then when we did and he didn’t get the satisfaction out of it he had expected, he would brood about it for weeks. Finally he would put it away

somewhere. If it was something expensive and we asked him what became of it, he would say it was just one of his "mistakes" and that we needn't think he had forgotten it.

#### 4. Kelsey

I'm mopping near the ward door when a key hits it from the other side and I know it's the Big Nurse by the way the lockworks cleave to the key, soft and swift and familiar she been around locks so long. She slides through the door with a gust of cold and locks the door behind her and I see her fingers trail across the polished steel—tip of each finger the same color as her lips. Funny orange. Like the tip of a soldering iron. Color so hot or so cold if she touches you with it you can't tell which.

She's carrying her woven wicker bag...shape of a tool box with a hemp handle. She's had it all the years I been here. It's a loose weave and I can see inside it; there's no compact or lipstick or woman stuff, she's got that bag full of a thousand parts she aims to use in her duties today—wheels and gears, cogs polished to a hard glitter, tiny pills that gleam like porcelain, needles, forceps, watchmakers pliers, rolls of copper wire....

She dips a nod at me as she goes past....I hear her rubber heels hit the tile and the stuff in her wicker bag clash with the jar of her walking as she passes me in the hall. She walks stiff. When I open my eyes she's down the hall about to turn into the glass Nurses' Station where she'll spend the day sitting at her desk and looking out her window and making notes on what goes on out in front of her in the day room during the next eight hours. Her face looks pleased and peaceful with the thought.

#### 5. Salinger

a.

There were about ten washbowls, all right against the wall. Stradlater had the middle one. I sat down on the one right next to him and started turning the cold water on and off—this nervous habit I have.

b.

I don't much like to see old guys in their pajamas and bathrobes anyway. Their bumpy old chests are always showing. And their legs. Old guys' legs, at beaches and places, always look so white and unhairly.

c.

The book I was reading was this book I took out of the library by mistake. They gave me the wrong book, and I didn't notice it till I got back to my room. They gave me *Out of Africa*, by Isak Dinesen. I thought it was going to stink, but it didn't. It was a very good book. I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot....What I like best is a book that's at least funny once in a while...I read a lot of war books and mysteries and all, but they don't knock me out too much. What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it. That doesn't happen much, though. I wouldn't mind calling this Isak Dinesen up.

## 6. Harris

a.

Dr. Hannibal Lecter himself reclined on his bunk, perusing the Italian edition of *Vogue*.

b.

“When you’re back in Washington, go to the National Gallery and look at Titian’s *Flaying of Marsyas* before they send it back to Czechoslovakia. Wonderful for details, Titian—look at helpful Pan, bringing the bucket of water.”

7. Barbara Kingsolver, *Pigs in Heaven*

a.

Turtle and Taylor take one last stroll across Mr. Hoover’s concrete dream. Turtle is holding on so tightly that Taylor’s knuckles ache. Their hypochondriac friend Lou Ann has warned Taylor about arthritis, but this snap-jawed grip is a principle of their relationship; it won Turtle a nickname, and then a mother. She hasn’t deliberately let go of Taylor since they met.

b.

She feels for her mother’s fingers, the one sure thing. They are standing in the dark.

c.

Turtle is dragging on her fingers like a water skier.

d.

“This is Turtle,” Taylor says. Turtle’s grip on her fingers is jeopardizing the blood circulation.

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## EXAMPLES QUOTED FROM LITERATURE

### Day 1

#### 1. John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*

The first man was small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features. Every part of him was defined: small, strong hands, slender arms, a thin and bony nose. Behind him walked his opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders; and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws. His arms did not swing at his sides, but hung loosely...[he] dropped his blankets and flung himself down and drank from the surface of the green pool; drank with long gulps, snorting into the water like a horse. The small man stepped nervously beside him.

#### 2. Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

She stops and nods at some of the patients come to stand around and stare out of eyes all red and puffy with sleep. She nods once to each. Precise, automatic gesture. Her face is smooth, calculated, and precision-made, like an expensive baby doll, skin like flesh-colored enamel, blend of white and cream and baby-blue eyes, small nose, pink little nostrils—everything working together except the color on her lips and fingernails, and the size of her bosom. A mistake was made somehow in manufacturing, putting those big, womanly breasts on what would of otherwise been a perfect work, and you can see how bitter she is about it.

#### 3. Katherine Dunn, *Geek Love*

Their firstborn was my brother Arturo, usually known as Aqua Boy. His hands and feet were in the form of flippers that sprouted directly from his torso without intervening arms or legs. He was taught to swim in infancy and was displayed nude in a big clear-sided tank like an aquarium. His favorite trick at the ages of three and four was to put his face close to the glass, bulging his eyes out at the audience, opening and closing his mouth like a river bass, and then to turn his back and paddle off, revealing the turd trailing from his muscular little buttocks.

#### 4. J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*

He was one of these very, very tall, round-shouldered guys—he was about six four—with lousy teeth. The whole time he roomed next to me, I never even once saw him brush his teeth. They always looked mossy and awful, and he damn near made you sick if you saw him in the dining room with his mouth full of mashed potatoes and peas or something. Besides that, he had a lot of pimples. Not just on his forehead or his chin,

like most guys, but all over his whole face. And not only that, he had a terrible personality. He was also sort of a nasty guy. I wasn't too crazy about him, to tell you the truth.

5. Thomas Harris, *The Silence of the Lambs*

Dr. Lecter wore the white asylum pajamas in his white cell. The only colors in the cell were his hair and eyes and his red mouth, in a face so long out of the sun it leached into the surrounding whiteness; his features seemed suspended above the collar of his shirt....The tip of his tongue appeared, with his lips equally red. It touched his upper lip in the exact center and went back in again.

6. Dorothy Allison, "Mama"

When I visit Mama, I always look first to her hands and feet to reassure myself. The skin of her hands is transparent—large-veined, wrinkled and bruised—while her feet are soft with the lotions I rubbed into them every other night of my childhood. That was a special thing between my mother and me, the way she'd give herself the care of my hands, lying across the daybed, telling me stories of what she'd served down at the truckstop, who had complained and who tipped specially well, and most important, who had said what and what she'd said back. I would sit at her feet, laughing and nodding and stroking away the tightness in her muscles, watching the way her mouth would pull taut while under her pale eyelids the pulse of her eyes moved like kittens behind a blanket. Sometimes my love for her would choke me, and I would ache to have her open her eyes and see me there, to see how much I loved her. But mostly I kept my eyes on her skin, the fine traceries of the veins and the knotted cords of ligaments, seeing where she was not beautiful and hiding how scared it made me to see her close up, looking so fragile, and too often, so old.

7. Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People"

Besides the neutral expression that she wore when she was alone, Mrs. Freeman had two others, forward and reverse, that she used for all her human dealings. Her forward expression was steady and driving like the advance of a heavy truck. Her eyes never swerved to left or right but turned as the story turned as if they followed a yellow line down the center of it. She seldom used the other expression because it was not often necessary for her to retract a statement, but when she did, her face came to a complete stop, there was an almost imperceptible movement of her black eyes, during which they seemed to be receding, and then the observer would see that Mrs. Freeman, though she might stand there as real as several grain sacks thrown on top of each other, was no longer there in spirit. [...] Mrs. Freeman could never be brought to admit herself wrong on any point....

## 8. Salinger

a.

"No, everybody's fine at home," I said. "It's me. I have to have this operation."

"Oh! I'm *so* sorry," she said. She really was, too. I was right away sorry I'd said it, but it was too late.

"It isn't very serious. I have this tiny little tumor on the brain."

"Oh, *no!*" She put her hand up to her mouth and all.

"Oh, I'll be all right and everything! It's right near the outside. And it's a very tiny one. They can take it out in about two minutes."

Then I started reading this timetable I had in my pocket. Just to stop lying. Once I get started, I can go on for hours if I feel like it. No kidding. *Hours.*

b.

The bellboy that showed me to the room was this very old guy around sixty-five. He was even more depressing than the room was. He was one of those bald guys that comb all their hair over from the side to cover up the baldness. I'd rather be bald than do that. Anyway, what a gorgeous job for a guy around sixty-five years old. Carrying people's suitcases and waiting around for a tip. I suppose he wasn't too intelligent or anything, but it was terrible anyway.

c.

That's what I liked about those nuns. You could tell, for one thing, that they never went anywhere swanky for lunch. It made me so damn sad when I thought about it, their never going anywhere swanky for lunch or anything. I knew it wasn't too important, but it made me sad anyway.

9. Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.

For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning—fresh as if issue to children on a beach.

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen;...

10. Jane Smiley, *A Thousand Acres*

Ty, who was asleep, rolled over and put his hand on my shoulder, then ran it down my back, so slowly that my back came to seem about as long and humped as a sow's, running in a smooth arc from my rooting, low-slung head to my little stumpy tail.

11. Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*

You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary.

12. Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

When he was nearly thirteen, my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow. When it healed, and Jem's fears of never being able to play football were assuaged, he was seldom self-conscious about his injury. His left arm was somewhat shorter than his right; when he stood or walked, the back of his hand was at right angles to his body, his thumb parallel to his thigh. He couldn't have cared less, so long as he could pass and punt.

When enough years had gone by to enable us to look back on them, we sometimes discussed the events leading to his accident...

13. Kazuo Ishiguro, *Remains of the Day*

It seems increasingly likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been preoccupying my imagination now for some days. An expedition, I should say, which I will undertake alone, in the comfort of Mr Farraday's Ford; an expedition which, as I foresee it, will take me through much of the finest countryside of England to the West Country, and may keep me away from Darlington Hall for as much as five or six days. The idea of such a journey came about, I should point out, from a most kind suggestion put to me by Mr Farraday himself one afternoon almost a fortnight ago, when I had been dusting the portraits in the library.

## Character Sketch

1) Make notes to yourself on a character that you might like to write about, someone that you saw on the street, a combination of people in your life, or someone you just made up. Your notes might describe the person's physical features, personality, mentality, and past history. Here are some questions that might help you figure out who this person is: What is this character's name? What does he/she have in his/her refrigerator? Describe the things in this person's childhood bedroom. What kind of relationship does this character have with his/her parents? Describe this character's significant other. What kind of car does this person drive? What kind of mixed drink would fit his/her personality? For example, is she the kind of woman who wears snake-skin boots and drives a faded blue pickup truck? Is he the kind of man who drives a Volvo and is allergic to bees? (This part is background work for you and doesn't need to be posted.)

2) Then, show us who this person is by having him/her do something specific: cook a meal, drive a car, walk a dog, ride a bike, golf, swim, sew, etc. Describe this character and the action with specific details. How does this person make pancakes or sew the hem of a dress? The idea is for us to get a clear image of the character and what he/she is doing. The questions above (# 1) are a guide and you are not required to answer all of them. Think of them as prompts to help you discover both the inner and outer dimensions of your character. Any quirks you show us about him/her will help to distinguish this person as an individual. Try to create a character that is both believable and interesting.

3) Lastly, have this person think about something while they are doing this action. It might be in reference to what he/she is doing or it might be something that has nothing to do with the action itself. Perhaps your character is sewing curtains for her baby's new room and is thinking about how her life is about to change or maybe your character is swimming laps and is not only thinking about how to correct his form but is also thinking about the argument he had with his teenaged son.

The goal is for us to get a glimpse of your character thinking and acting (save the "talking" or dialogue for later), thus giving us a sense of who this person is and what is going through his/her head. Limit your character sketch to 1 to 2 pages—the idea is for us to focus on the quality of the writing and not necessarily the quantity.

Complete the following sentences to suggest the age of a character, keeping in mind that there are subtle ways to convey this (moral attitude, general psychology, physical surroundings, styles of speech, etc.) as well as the direct (condition of skin and hair, physical mobility, tone of voice, etc.)

1. I figured Denise was as old as my grandmother because
2. Although Daphne wouldn't admit being over thirty she gave it away by
3. You could tell that Larry was using a fake I.D. because his
4. It wasn't clear at first, but Michael couldn't have been more than six. He was

**What do you know about your characters?** Use this list as a guide for fleshing out your characters. You might not use most of what is here, but it is important to understand your character better.

1. Character's name:
2. Character's nickname:
3. Age:
4. Physical characteristics:
5. Education:
6. Vocation/Occupation:
7. Marital status:
8. Family history:
9. Hometown:
10. Most troubling relationship:
11. Type of home:
12. Type of car:
13. Most prized possession:
14. Hobbies:
15. Obsessions:
16. Spiritual beliefs:
17. Politics:
18. Romantic history:
19. Ambitions:
20. Superstitions:
21. Fears:
22. Character flaws:
23. Character strengths:
24. Favorite foods:
25. Allergies:
26. One secret:
27. Strange quirks:
28. Habits or routines:

Source: *What If? Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers*, Anne Bernays & Pamela Painter

**Timeless Themes  
UCLA Extension  
Lollie Ragana**

**Saturday, June 2 and Sunday, June 3 2007  
9:30 am – 4:30 pm**

This class may be taken for a Letter Grade, Pass/Not Pass or Not for Credit. Letter Grades and Pass/Not Pass work will be evaluated on the basis of attendance, completion of assignments and class participation. Those registered for a Letter Grade or Pass/Not Pass must submit a short story or work-in-progress on the second day of the class.

The purpose of this class is to explore the purpose and power of theme to refine and enhance a story. We will examine its connection to aspects of craft such as plot and structure, character and dialogue, language and imagery, voice and tone, and mood and environment.

Who can forget the power of love and self-sacrifice in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Casablanca*, or *Brokeback Mountain*? Or the zeal of the quest in *The Da Vinci Code* or *The Lord of the Rings*? The magical world leading to discovery of Self in *Harry Potter* or the ruthless ambition of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*? A story's theme is its underlying element; it wields the power that makes stories unfold and reveal themselves. Themes such as ambition, love, jealousy, self-sacrifice, betrayal, and rebellion give focus to a story in a way that makes it a compelling experience for readers. A story's theme also provides the basis for a premise: what a writer wants to say *about* the experience of, for example, love, grief, survival, or vengeance. Exploring your own story ideas, discover how the use of a well-developed theme provides shape and dimension while forcing the characters to action and self-discovery as the story unfolds. We will explore various themes with examples from literature and film, then in-class exercises will allow you to explore your own use of theme in a new story or one already in progress.

**Saturday:**

- Introduction of class
- Introduction of instructor
- This morning we will discuss
  - where stories come from and how they are shaped
  - theme and how it forms the foundation and cohesion for a story
  - plot as that which reveals the theme
  - conflict and how it helps to reinforce and clarify a story's theme and premise
  - the main character and his/her super-objective and how it sets up and expresses a story's theme and the character arc
  - language and imagery and their influence on theme
  - Mood, tone, environment, and voice and how each plays a part in relating a story's theme

-- Lunch --

- This afternoon we will continue our discussion with an exploration of themes such as ambition, vengeance, quest, catastrophe, jealousy, love, survival, the chase, self-sacrifice, betrayal, rebellion, grief, and persecution with examples from literature and film.
- We will look at the classics for story idea or plot inspiration followed by an exploration of real-life events that could “re-tell” these tales as contemporary versions of the story.
- In-class: Make a list of your favorite 10 films. Make a list of your favorite 10 books. Explore the themes of these books and films. Do you see a pattern? Is there a particular theme or themes that seem to hold the greatest interest for you?
  - We will discuss your Top Tens and what themes may be at play within each.
- Assignment: Read the hand outs and consider the theme at play in each. Look at how characters, plot, mood, tone, environment and voice helped to relate the theme. Choose a theme that is of interest to you. Outline or write a rough draft of a very short story that expresses this theme. Consider how the character’s traits, arc, and objective will bring this theme to life. Use conflict to further enhance and clarify the theme. You may use a story you are already working on if you wish to fine-tune the theme of it.

### **Sunday**

- Discuss your reactions to the hand outs.

--Lunch--

- Read and share stories with feedback from the class and the instructor.
- Wrap up of questions, comments, feedback.

**Creative Writing: Short Story**  
**XL 134A**  
**Wednesdays 6:30-9:30 pm**

**Stephen Cooper**  
**Fall 2006**  
**Westwood United Methodist Church**

*sccooper@csulb.edu*

**Course Text**

Tom Bailey, ed., On Writing Short Stories

**Course Description**

Available for UCLA transferable credit, this workshop covers the key elements of fiction, including plot, characterization, setting, point of view, and various story development techniques, as well as publication markets. The student's goal is to complete or rewrite three stories of average length. Enrollment limited to 20 students.

**Requirements**

The class will be conducted as a workshop. Students will read and respond to work submitted by all classmates. Responses will consist of in-class discussions and written comments. Written responses should be duplicated, one copy to be returned to the writer, signed, and the other to be kept in the student's portfolio and submitted to the instructor at semester's end.

Writing is rewriting. After a first draft is workshopped, the writer will have the rest of the term to revise it. Revisions will be due at the end of the course for final grade assessment.

Besides reading all workshop manuscripts, students will be assigned to read selections from the book above. All handouts should also be considered required reading. We will discuss these readings in class as time permits. Everyone should come to class ready and willing to participate.

**Grading**

Letter grades: A = Excellent, B = Good, C = Pass, D = Poor, F = Fail. Assessment will be holistic. Factors considered will include the overall quality of workshop drafts, improvements achieved in revision, in-class participation, response papers, etc. Of all these factors, final revisions will count most. Broken down, percentages will be roughly: revisions @ 20% + 20% + 20% = 60%; participation = 20%; responses = 20%. Please note: while excellent attendance will not in itself guarantee an "A," no one should expect an "A" for the course without a record of excellent attendance. Attendance includes arriving on time and prepared, paying attention and contributing to discussions. Unexcused absences will adversely affect final course grade.

**Manuscripts**

All mss. should be typed in Courier New font, 12-point, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, stapled, paginated and proofread. Making copies for everyone will be the writer's responsibility. Please keep copies of your workshop manuscripts bearing my comments to submit in your final portfolios. Final portfolios = original workshop submissions, revisions of each, and copies of all response papers that you have written for classmates.

*✓ w/ Cooper's  
 Comments*

**BUILDING A GOOD FOUNDATION:  
A TWO-SATURDAY EXPERIENTIAL WORKSHOP FOR ASPIRING NOVELISTS**

**Phyllis Gebauer, M. A.**

UCLA Extension  
March 17 and March 24, 2007  
9:30 A.M. - 4:30 P.M.

## BUILDING A GOOD FOUNDATION

### Overview

This course is designed to help you:

- \* Work out your novel's basic story-line and plot-plan.
- \* Begin your novel in a way that pulls the reader in and promises a book that will be worth reading.
- \* Create scenes rich in drama and conflict.
- \* Heighten your awareness of other major aspects of the craft.
- \* Increase your story-sense by listening to and commenting on the work done by others.
- \* Improve your ability to give, evaluate, and use creative feedback.

### Format

- \* Lectures & discussions on story-line and plot, writing an evocative opening, and crafting dramatic scenes.
- \* Small-group feedback on your story-line and plot-plan.
- \* In-class writing exercises on the opening pages and a dramatic scene.
- \* Feedback on the exercises as time permits.
- \* Oral critique of the work done for session #2.

### Criteria for Grading

#### 1. Attendance

By enrolling in this course you become part of a support group. This means your presence is needed in terms of group dynamics as well as in the give-and-take of comments and suggestions.

#### 2. Participation in discussions.

Nobody benefits if nobody dares to ask questions or offer comments.

#### 3. Willingness to give constructive feedback to others.

Remember, as you struggle to figure out what's working or needs improvement in somebody else's work, you're gaining insight and experience to apply to your own.

#### 4. Willingness to share your work with the group.

Reading your work aloud lets you hear the rhythm inherent in your prose and feel its effect on other people.

#### 5. Attitude toward feedback and suggestions.

Being professional means listening to what's being said without defending yourself or becoming hostile. It also means participating in a rational discussion of your work and displaying a willingness to consider changes.

## MARKETING CATEGORIES IN TODAY'S FICTION

(Listed alphabetically)

### Bestseller

Determined by the publisher. Based on the author's track record or subject.

### "Chick Lit"

A young woman coming to terms with various aspects of 21st century life.

### Children's Book

### Comic novel

### Family Saga

### Fantasy/Science Fiction

### Historical

### Horror/Psychic/Supernatural

### Literary

A beautiful use of language, complex characters, intriguing plot line.

An imaginative presentation or distinctive voice.

### Mainstream\commercial

Usually 20th century settings. Intended for the general public rather than a special audience with particular interests.

### Mainstream\women's fiction

A woman coming to terms with modern life and changing values.

### Mystery

"Cozy"

Courtroom drama\Legal thriller

Police Procedural

Private Eye

Psychological suspense

Whodunit

### Romance

Contemporary.

Futuristic/fantasy. (Romance plus science fiction)

Historical. (Set in the past, primarily prior to WW II)

Inspirational. (Religious faith is part of the story)

Multi-cultural. (Heroes and heroines from non-white ethnic backgrounds)

Paranormal. (Angels, ghosts, vampires)

Regency. (Set in England, sometimes France, 1800-1820)

Romantic suspense. (An equal blend of love and danger)

Time-travel. (Going backward or forward to meet the love of a lifetime)

Young adult. (Written for young adult readers)

### Spiritual/Inspirational/New Age

### Thriller.

Techno-Thriller; Medical Thriller; Spy Novel; Action-Adventure

### Western

### Young Adult

**"SPINE" OR STRUCTURE OF A PLOTTED NOVEL**  
If your novel has a plot, please answer the following questions.

1. What is your **WORKING TITLE**?

Slipping Into Distraction

2. How will your book be marketed? **CATEGORY**

Life for the Woman

3. **STORY LINE.** What's your book about?

Work out one or two sentences that describe the basic story in terms of the hero or heroine. This is a book about a (man) (woman) who wants to... and after...ends up.... This book is about a widow who

wants to find a man and dates 5 different guys until finally she starts from her & she realizes that she needs to stop distracting herself

4. Who is your **LEADING CHARACTER**? Name? Age? Occupation?

Ann... 40... Christian  
1st grade (not... school)

5. **GOAL & MOTIVATION.** What does he/she want? Why? What does he/she need?

She wants a boyfriend

She needs to gain what she's lost

6. **WHAT'S AT STAKE** if he or she doesn't get what he or she is after?

She will be alone w/ her thoughts / lonely

7. **WHY SHOULD ANYONE CARE?** What will you do to enlist a reader's sympathy and/or empathy for this person?

She is a sympathetic character - lost in a difficult circumstance - her kids are disabled - she's obviously looking in the wrong place & self-destructing

10-15

2 yrs.

8. THE MAJOR ANTAGONIST OR OPPOSING FORCE. Who or what is working against your hero or heroine? If it's a person, what is he or she after?

Tomas - <sup>says he</sup> wants to marry her but really wants to suck her dry.

9. Based on the conflicting goals of your lead and the major antagonist, what is the CORE CONFLICT of your book? (For example: Love vs greed.)

Not Facing reality  
denial vs acceptance

10. THE BEGINNING. What is the inciting incident that starts the story off?

Anna's principal falls out of a tree & dies  
she is forced to date - 3 mos. after her husband dies  
How do you show the reader (or suggest) the leading character's goal and motivation? She jumps right into relationship and gets burned (lies to friends)

How do you show the reader that your lead will pursue his/her goal no matter what?

She just keeps going from man to man, who ever a day in between despite the fact that they're all shitty.

11. THE MIDDLE. What's the first action your lead takes to attain his/her goal after deciding to go for it no matter what? How do things work out?

Dates Jim / he has no heart + turns on her

What is the second thing that he/she tries and how does that work?

Dates Charlie - he's married

What does your leading character do next? How does that work?

Dates Patrick, the alcoholic football player but boy

(List three significant attempts and outcomes).

Dates Rick - the business owner not over his ex

Dates Tomas - the charming manipulator who she is in love with

12. **THE FINAL CRISIS.** What happens to plunge your hero or heroine into the pit of despair? Describe the situation where it looks as if the lead is going to fail. What makes him/her decide to continue fighting for what he/she wants?

The fight in the car on the way home from the beach - he is drunk & threatens to leave her in the car if he had

13. **THE CLIMAX.** Briefly describe the scene where the lead confronts whoever or whatever has been his/her major antagonist.

Where does this scene take place? Who's in it? What happens? Has the core conflict been resolved?

The young woman - she confronts... Anna + Tomer. Then part about \$15,000

14. **THE RESOLUTION.**

Has the lead got what he/she wanted? Or got what he/she needs? How do you show us that your leading character has grown and changed as a result of all these experiences?

She is alone but finally knows that it's OK. She goes back to school and pulls herself together.

15. **PREMISE OR THEME.**

What does your book say to the reader about the human condition?

Nowady else can fix you.

A voice of reason is important

Disturbing  
Friend

**SPINE OR STRUCTURE OF AN UNPLOTTED NOVEL**

If your novel isn't centered around a plot, please answer the following:

1. What is your working **TITLE**?
  
2. How will your book be marketed? **CATEGORY**
  
3. **WHAT'S YOUR BOOK ABOUT?** (One sentence describing its basic concept.)  
This is a book about . . .

**4. GENERAL INTENT**

What is your reason for writing this? What do you want to show us?

Are you writing this book to evoke a certain emotion?  
If so, what is it? How do you want readers to feel when they finish?

Are you writing to shake your readers up? Make them see things a different way? If so, what do you want them to be aware of?

**5. WHAT WILL HOLD THE BOOK TOGETHER?**

A character? A setting? A way of life? A big event? A specific time-frame? A theme? (the effect of greed, pride, lust, etc.)  
A central metaphor?

Describe the cohesive element

**6. HOW DO YOU PLAN TO STRUCTURE THE PIECE?**

Will you present a series of scenes or vignettes that make a statement or prove a point? If so, describe how these scenes will build in intensity and resemble a plot.

If you plan to structure your book another way, write down how you plan to hold the story together and make it coherent.

**7. NEARING THE END: THE FINAL CRISIS**

Describe what happens close to the end to give readers a sense of "build".

**8. THE PAYOFF: THE LAST IMPORTANT SCENE OR VIGNETTE: THE CLIMAX**

What happens in these final pages. What will you describe or show?

**9. RESOLUTION**

How do you want your readers to feel after reading this book and how do you plan to achieve this?

**10. PREMISE OR THEME.**

What statement has your book made about life and the human condition?

## WRITING A GOOD COMMERCIAL OPENING

### 1. Set the Scene

Where in the world are we? What time in history? (Unless you tell us we're somewhere else, we assume we're in 21st Century America.)

### 2. Introduce a character and a situation.

This may or may not be the lead.

Give a sense of his/her mind-state and goal: what he or she WANTS.  
(this will drive the whole story or novel).

Make us care about this person and what's going on.

Don't slow things up by giving us the full history.

Where a character was born and grew up...

How a company got founded and what its problems are.

### 3. Make something happen.

Let this person move, talk, interact, try to do something.

First impressions count - speech, clothes, actions, thoughts.

Don't just let him/her sit around and THINK.

Jump right in and get started.

### 4. Hint at a future conflict.

There's got to be trouble brewing or we won't be interested.

If you start with a calm scene--the status quo--we expect a change.

### 5. Introduce a dramatic question.

How's he going to get out of this?

Will she ever marry? Dump this guy?

### 6. As much as possible, SHOW DON'T TELL

Don't tell the story as if it's ancient history and you're giving a lecture.

Show us by means of action, dialogue, and inner thoughts.

Let us see the characters in action and hear them talk.

Let us listen in on their thoughts by internal monologue.

That way we can figure out problems and relationships for ourselves. It's more fun.

### 7. End the opening scene or chapter with a "hook."

Something to look forward to.

A coming event we want to be in on.

A dramatic question we want to have answered.

## 8. Be aware of the nature of suspense.

Suspense is anticipation:

I can't wait until he has to face that herd of rampaging elephants.

I can't wait until she has to confront her demented lover.

Suspense comes from the sense that there is going to be drama in the life of this individual and you're going to participate in it. You will experience these things vicariously.

You hook the reader by curiosity.

Where am I? Whose head am I in? What's going on here?

You hold the reader by suspense.

NOW what's he or she going to do? Is it going to work?

### Four things you need in an opening:

1. an existing situation
2. a change in that situation, a threat of danger.
3. an affected character
4. a decision on the part of that character to put things back in balance.  
His/her actions start a chain reaction that sets the plot in motion.

## SCENES AND TRANSITIONS

SCENES are the "show" part of any story and can be defined as "units of conflict going on in the fictional now." They are highly visual in that they let us see a place and the people in it. Also, when the writing is good, they let us vicariously touch, taste, smell, and hear things. Most important, they let us feel with and for the characters as, step by step, they go through the major plot events and life experiences.

When writing a scene, writers use all the tools of their trade: dialogue, action, internal monologue, description, and a narration. Scenes are vivid, engaging, and immediate--the sections that let us participate in what's going on instead of merely reading about it. As far as length, some scenes run half a page, others more than a dozen. Depends how crucial they are to the plot and what is going on emotionally with the characters.

TRANSITIONS (also known as SEQUELS or NARRATIVE SUMMARIES) are the "tell" parts of a story and are used:

To give readers a breathing space after one or more scenes involving action. (In other words, for a change of pace).

To tell us something about the past (though some of this information might also be presented in scenes).

To introduce us quickly to a place, the major characters, and the dominant mood--before getting into the scene itself.

To let characters react to what has just gone on, consider their options, set a new goal that keeps us reading to find out how things turn out.

Scenes are "easy reads" and make a book a "page turner." Narrative passages explore a character's feelings and let an author describe a place or a situation. In popular fiction, writers must be careful not to let such passages go on too long. Not that narrative passages are inherently dull. They can be as gripping and delightful as a scene if the author knows how to write, meaning is able to touch us by his or her use of the language.

## VIEWPOINT AND VOICE

The point of view you select and the tone of voice you employ have more effect on a novel than you maybe know. Read through the following selections and see how the writer's use of viewpoint and voice affect the story being told.

### Viewpoint Choice #1 - First Person

#### First Person Actor. Voice formal and restrained.

It seems increasingly likely that I really will undertake the expedition that has been preoccupying my imagination now for some days. An expedition, I should say, which I will undertake alone, in the comfort of Mr. Farraday's Ford; an expedition which, as I foresee it, will take me through much of the finest countryside of England to the West Country, and may keep me away from Darlington Hall for as much as five or six days. The idea of such a journey came about, I should point out, from a most kind suggestion put to me by Mr. Farraday himself one afternoon almost a fortnight ago, when I had been dusting the portraits in the library. . . ."

Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*

#### First Person Actor. Voice friendly and open.

"I'd been in the office no more than twenty minutes that morning. I'd opened the French doors out onto the second-floor balcony to let in some fresh air and I'd put on the coffee pot. It was June in Santa Teresa, which means chill morning fog and hazy afternoons. It wasn't nine o'clock yet. I was just sorting through the mail from the day before when I heard a tap at the door and a woman breezed in."

Sue Grafton, *"B" is for Burglar*

#### First Person Bystander. Voice relatively formal.

". . . When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction--Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn . . ."

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Narrated by Nick Carraway)

### Viewpoint Choice #2 - Second Person

#### Second Person. "You". Voice friendly and open

"You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, although the details are fuzzy. You are at a nightclub talking to a girl with a shaved head. The club is either Heartbreak or the Lizard Lounge. All might come clear if you could just slip into the bathroom and do a little more Bolivian marching Powder. Then again, it might not."

Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*

### Viewpoint Choice #3 - Third Person

#### Third Person Limited. (One POV throughout the book). Voice a bit distant.

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin muzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him.

The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats. At one end of it a colored poster, too large for indoor display, had been tacked to the wall. It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a meter wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black mustache and ruggedly handsome features. Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working, and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours...

George Orwell, 1984

#### Third Person Limited. (One POV throughout the book.) Voice intimate and friendly.

When he went into the bedroom Moira switched on the bed light and looked at him. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I was thinking."

As he began to undress she turned to face the wall. When he lifted the sheet to get into bed beside her, she swiveled around and looked at him. "What were you thinking? You've something you want to tell me, haven't you?"

He stared at her, tense. Her face, stripped of its makeup, looked naked, her untouched eyes seemed smaller than usual. How did she find out, how could she know, when I only decided tonight?

Brian Moore, *Lies of Silence*

**Third Person Multiple. (POV changes with scene or chapter). Voice friendly.**

## Chapter 1.

He drove cautiously up the Thruway toward Morrison State Park. The thirty-five-mile trip from Manhattan to Rockland County had been a nightmare. Even though it was six o'clock, there was no sense of approaching dawn. The snow that had begun during the night had steadily increased until now it was beating relentlessly against the windshield. The overhead clouds, heavy and gray, were like enormous balloons pumped to the breaking point. The forecast had been for two inches, with 'precipitation tapering off after midnight.' As usual the weatherman had been wrong.

But he was near the entrance to the park, and, with the storm, there probably wouldn't be anyone hiking or jogging. He'd passed a State Trooper ten miles back, but the car had rushed past him, lights flashing, probably on the way to an accident somewhere. Certainly the cops had no reason to even think about the contents of his trunk, no reason to suspect that under a pile of luggage a plastic bag containing the body of a prominent sixty-one-year-old writer, Ethel Lambston, was wedged in a space-defying squeeze against the spare tire....

## Chapter 2

The radio went on at six-thirty. Neeve reached out her right hand, groping for the button to tune out the insistently cheery voice of the newscaster, then stopped as the import of what he was saying sifted into her consciousness. Eight inches of snow had fallen on the city during the night. Do not drive unless absolutely necessary. Alternate-side-of-the-street parking suspended. School closings to the announced. Forecast was for the snow to continue until late afternoon.

Terrific, Neeve thought as she leaned back and pulled the comforter around her face. She hated missing her usual morning job. Then she winced, thinking of the alterations that had to be completed today.

Mary Higgins Clark, *While My Pretty One Sleeps*

**Third Person Omniscient. (An off-stage narrator knows all and tells all. Goes into the heads of all the major characters at random and tells you how they think and feel. Tells you things that the characters aren't aware of. Draws conclusions, pronounces judgment.)**

**Voice formal and academic.**

Even now, six years after the generals loosened their hold on Argentina, after their manicured hands were pried away from the delicate white throats of the disappeareds and the doors of certain buildings were closed and locked, even now Carlos Rueda's gift retains its mystery. If, in Buenos Aires, the supernatural were woven into the daily lives of people, as it is in the Amazon where natives believe numinous spirits invade the birds and beasts, his accomplishments would be easier to discuss. But we have long been hostile to the things of the spirit, less amenable to them than the rocky stretches of Tierra del Fuego are to a sense of security. Our city is like a sophisticated dowager whose soul feeds on cynicism, a place where the mere mention of the unknown and unknowable occasions peals of bitter laughter.

Lawrence Thornton, *Imagining Argentina*.

**Voice comic and witty.**

Brisseau was asleep in the moonlight. Lying on his back in bed, with his fat stomach jutting into the air and his mouth formed an inane smile, he appeared to be some kind of inanimate object, like a large football or two tickets to the opera...

He's dreaming, Cloquet thought, as he stood over him, revolver in hand. He's dreaming, and I exist in reality. Cloquet hated reality, but realized it was still the only place to get a good steak.

In his dream, Brisseau was on a sunlit beach and running joyously toward his mother's outstretched arms, but just as he began to embrace the weeping grey-haired woman, she turned into two scoops of vanilla ice cream.

Brisseau moaned and Cloquet lowered the revolver.

"The Condemned" in *Side Effects* by Woody Allen

**Voice poetic.**

His two girls are curled together like animals whose habit is to sleep underground, in the smallest space possible. Cosima knows she's the older, even when she's unconscious: one of her arms lies over Halimeda's shoulder as if she intends to protect them both from their bad dreams. Dr. Homer Noline holds his breath, trying to see movement there in the darkness, the way he's watched pregnant women close their eyes and listen inside themselves trying to feel life.

Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*.

**Voice slightly formal but accessible.**

A number of years ago in the town of La Luz, on an August day half of hot sun, half of rain, Don Enrique Ortiz de Leon prepared to sell his ancestral estate to an American lady. "The economy of Mexico compels me," he explained, facing his two buys across a desk littered with legal briefs.

"Taxes," said Don Enrique. On the wall behind him, under his grandmother's portrait, hung a 1962 calendar dark with inked-out days.

"Taxes," he repeated. "They are becoming insupportable."

The American gentleman, who was using the false name of Bud Loomis, nodded. Like other travelers, he had come to Mexico for the sake of new surroundings, to get away. Particularly to get away. His own taxes were under investigation in Arizona. In his pocket was a summons to appear in a Tucson court that day. "I know what you mean," Bud said in border Spanish. He drummed his blunt fingers on the arm of his chair and stared at Don Enrique's calendar.

"So I am selling the land that came to me through my mother—all four *hectareas* of my land at Amapolas." As he spoke these words, Don Enrique—Don Enrique Cesar Ortiz de Leon—apologized silently to that Castilian ancestor of his who had stepped just behind Cortes onto Mexican soil. He drew his spare frame taller in order to stiffen his pride. "How large is an *hectarea*?" asked the woman in slow, precise Spanish. From her shoulder bag she removed a pencil and a notepad on which her name, Susanna Ames, was printed on the top. She pulled her chair closer and made space at a corner of Don Enrique's crowded desk.

Susahnahahmes, Don Enrique pronounced phonetically to himself. Her name is Susannahmes. He repeated it like a soundless chant. In answer to her question, he said, "An hectarea is ten thousand square meters."

Bud Loomis, who had reduced her name to one syllable on the day they met, said, "The whole thing's ten acres, Sue, give or take." Then added, without speaking. This is going to be a steal.

Harriet Doerr, *Consider This, Senora*.

## HELPFUL READINGS

### Tools of the Trade

A good dictionary and a thesaurus  
 Rule, Lareina. *Name your Baby*, Bantam. (For character names)  
 Strunk & White, *The Elements of Style*  
 Monthly magazines: *Poets & Writers*, *The Writer*, *Writer's Digest*.

### Inspiration and Personal Growth

Bradbury, Ray. *Zen and the Art of Writing*, Capra Press.  
 Cameron, Julia. *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*,  
 Tarcher/Putnam  
 Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones*, Shambhala.  
 Guarino, Lois. *Writing your Authentic Self*, Dell.  
 Keen & Valley-Fox. *Your Mythic Journey*, J. P. Tarcher.  
 King, Stephen. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*, Pocket Books.  
 Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, Pantheon.  
 Maisel, Eric. *Deep Writing*, Tarcher/Putnam.  
 Maisel, Eric. *Fearless Creating*, Tarcher/Putnam.  
 Metzger, Deena. *Writing for Your Life: A Guide and Companion to the Inner  
 Worlds*, Harper San Francisco  
 Palumbo, Dennis. *Writing from the Inside Out*, John Wiley & Sons.  
 Perry, Susan K. *Writing in Flow*, Writer's Digest.  
 Rico, Gabrielle. *Writing the Natural Way*, J. P. Tarcher.  
 See, Carolyn. *Making a Literary Life*, Random House.

### Fiction Writing in General

Bickham, Jack. M., *Scene & Structure*, Writer's Digest.  
 Block, Lawrence. *Writing the Novel from Plot to Print*, Writer's Digest.  
 Browne & King, *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers*, Harper Collins.  
 Conrad, Barnaby. *The Complete Guide to Writing Fiction*, Writer's Digest.  
 Dibell, Ansen. *Plot*, Writer's Digest.  
 Frey, James. *How to Write a Damn Good Novel and How to Write a Damn Good  
 Novel II*, St. Martin's.  
 Gardner, John. *The Art of Fiction*, Vintage  
 Hall, Oakley. *The Art & Craft of Novel Writing*, Writers Digest.  
 Ivers, Mitchell. *The Random House Guide to Good Writing*, Random House.  
 Kress, Nancy. *Beginnings, Middles & Ends*, Writer's Digest.  
 Ray, Robert J. *The Weekend Novelist*, Dell.  
 Seger, Linda. *Creating Unforgettable Characters*, Henry Holt.  
 Stein, Sol. *Stein on Writing*, St. Martin's

## HOW TO WRITE A MAJOR DRAMATIC SCENE

### Definition of a Scene

A scene is a unit of conflict that takes place in the fictional "now."  
It can be thought of as a mini-story or mini-novel within the larger work.

### Characteristics of a Dramatic Scene

Dramatic scenes usually deal with encounters between characters.  
They have to do with confrontations or fights, either physical or verbal.  
The conflict is acted out and shown step by step.  
There are no long interruptions for past history. Any flashbacks must be brief.  
They range in length from half a page to several pages or an entire chapter.

Technically, a dramatic scene consists of: GOAL, CONFLICT, DECISION

GOAL = in some way we're shown the goal of the viewpoint character in that scene.

This leads to the Dramatic Question: will he/she achieve the goal or not?

CONFLICT: This can be small and verbal or big and physical.

DISASTER: The type of disaster depends on the answer to the Dramatic Question.

Yes, he/she achieves his/her goal, but there's a price to pay.

OR

No, he/she doesn't achieve his/her goal and furthermore things get worse.

### How to Write a Major Dramatic Scene

#### 1. Set the TIME.

What time of day is it? How does this affect the lighting? Sun/shadows  
How much time has elapsed since we last saw the character in action?

#### 2. Establish the PLACE.

Where are we? What's the weather like?  
Consider temperature. Time of year. Smells (cut grass, cooking).  
What season? Autumn, could be symbolic.  
Go there mentally and look around. Feel it. Visualize.  
Use pictures from magazines. Draw diagrams and maps.

#### 3. Establish the VIEWPOINT in the scene and stay with it.

Who's head are we in now? (Important for multiple viewpoint novels)

4. Establish the leading character's GOAL.

What does he/she want in this scene? What's he/she trying to do?

If we don't know what the character wants, we can't root for him or her.

The person has to want something even if it's only a glass of water.

The character's goal engenders suspense by establishing the Dramatic Question:  
will he/she get what he/she is after or not? Yes or No?

5. Establish the OPPOSITION.

What's working against the leading character in this scene?

Could be the weather, his or her indecision, another character.

If it's another person, what does he or she want?

You have to know this--and show it to the reader--even if the POV character is someone else. (Unless you're using omniscient POV).

\*Fiction is conflict. People wanting different things is what stories are all about. Conflicting goals...

6. Let the scene UNFOLD step by step.

Make your characters talk, move around, make love, fight.

Use all the novelist's tools: Action, Description, Dialogue, Internal Monologue.

We don't want just talking heads.

7. BUILD TO A CLIMAX AND DISASTER: ANSWER THE DRAMATIC QUESTION.

Does the leading character get what he/she was after?

Yes, but there's a price to pay.

No, and furthermore things get worse.

8. Write an ending. Use a CURTAIN LINE or VIVID IMAGE.

Cut to another scene or a sequel.

Be sure that somewhere in scene is a HOOK--a coming event or future worry that will keep the reader reading.

**In a scene, can you use flashbacks?**

Yes, if material is relevant to what's happening now or is going to happen soon.

But keep it brief. Don't use flashbacks inside a scene to re-live the character's history.

**What to do when a scene isn't working**

It may not be needed. Doesn't contribute to the plot, character development, or mood.

You may be telling it from the wrong viewpoint.

You may not have enough conflict in it. It may be only an incident, which is an abortive scene the character tries to reach a goal and encounters no resistance or a scene where people just get together and talk.

**Fiction: My Own Writing**

**Stories and Assignments**

**Pam Arterburn**

**UCLA 2006-2007**

Pam Arterburn  
Homework Assignment #2  
The Writer's Workout  
Due Feb. 6: Create a Scene

As Justin walks down the second aisle of desks to reach his usual seat, Julie's cell phone rings. It's six minutes before Biology class begins, and Julie is waiting for a call from Jon. She picks up just as Justin reaches his seat. "Hello? OK—we need to talk, but it's gonna have to wait. My class starts in a few minutes, and despite the fact that you are an ass, you'll just have to wait to hear why." She mumbles something else into the phone, then hangs up. Justin is quiet in his usual way—his dark hair and leather jacket are both clean and shiny. He tries not to pay any attention to Julie, but it's next to impossible. She is scrolling through her text messages while getting her notebook and papers out of her pink backpack, her blonde curls swinging and jumping as she moves back and forth in her seat. She glances his way and removes a pack of gum from her tiny black purse. "Gum?" she asks.

"Me? Are you asking me?" He replies.

"Yes I am," she smiles. "Not that you have bad breath or anything."

"Oh—well, that's good. Sure, I'll take a piece." He reaches over to her small hand and notices her painted black fingernails and large silver rings. She smiles at him, curious about this quiet guy who sits next to her in Smith's boring class.

how does Justin know this? (or if you are switching POV, why the switch? why not just stick with Julie? Do you need to if you want to stick with Justin?

you're switching POV again.

Pam —  
It's a good try — but it's not quite a scene yet. First, choose what POV you want + stick with it! You don't want to casually flip from one POV to another as you'll confuse your reader whose story it is. Pick one person.  
Next give that person a strong desire. Perhaps Justin wishes attention from Julie — then ask yourself what is standing in the way. Make comments about her body language suggests to him — "forget it, buddy." (ours)

Pam Arterburn  
Homework Assignment #3  
The Writer's Workout  
Due Feb.13: Polish a Scene

Julie arrives late to class on this Thursday morning, fresh from her most recent fight with Ken. They have been struggling with their tenuous relationship for several weeks, and she's worn out and discouraged. As she enters the classroom, Smith is already lecturing about the evolution of the fruit fly, and she can tell this is going to be another fascinating day in her Intro to Bio class.

"Welcome, Miss Anderson. We thought you'd never join us." The class tried not to watch her struggle down the narrow aisle with her gigantic book bag, but when she smacked Justin squarely in the head with it as she pivoted to sit, ignoring her became impossible. "Mr. Garrett seems glad to see you too. Isn't that so, Justin?"

"You bet," he replied, rubbing his forehead. The students laughed in spite of themselves, and Julie turned red as she looked sheepishly at Justin Garrett, the one new student she hadn't met yet. Life here at Braselton could be dull, particularly since the freshman class was small this year. She wished their first meeting had come off without her causing him a possible injury. "Sorry," she mouthed, opening her book and fiddling for a pen. He didn't exactly force a smile, but she detected what might have been interest.

"Find a partner for our next activity, please," Smith said loudly. "We will be dissecting fruit flies today, but killing them comes first." Justin looked at her and she nodded back. "One person in each pair must come up and choose your victims. They are in the vials at the south end of the classroom." Justin rose and returned a minute later

with a clear vial containing several large, living flies. "Now, the other part of the partnership must do the evil deed. Please come up to the front and choose your poison." Julie approached the instructor's desk. Inside clear baggies she saw what looked like pieces of cotton that had been soaked in something; they looked soggy. "Don't open the baggie until you are told," Smith crowed.

Julie picked up the baggie and returned to her seat where Justin was busy shaking the vial and examining the flies. "Let's name them," he suggested.

"But we're going to kill them," Julie said.

"All the more reason," he replied. They decided to use dead rock stars, just for fun. "I think Hendrix is already dying," Justin said. "Look—his wing is sort of hanging off."

"Maybe that's because you have been shaking the vial too hard," Julie said. "Hey—Janis doesn't look so good either. I think that's her left wing in Elvis' mouth!"

"Oh my god—our fruit flies are eating each other!" Justin said. "What the hell is going on here? They all need to die!" He grabbed the baggie and popped it open. Some liquid spilled out as he dumped the cotton onto Julie's desk.

"What are you doing?" she demanded, just before she passed out.

"OK, stop faking it" was the last thing Julie heard.

Character Sketch, May 17 2007

Pam Arterburn

1. Notes on a character:

Merri—twenty two years old. College honor student, has a responsible job in a payroll office, married to childhood sweetheart. She has long light brown hair and in her refrigerator you will find whole milk, beer, nectarines, sliced honey ham and some spoiled cottage cheese. Her childhood bedroom was purple—bedspread, throw rugs, painted walls, doll house, lamp shade. Adopted by Nat and Arlene as a baby, Merri had a happy childhood until she met her boyfriend Dan at age thirteen. Her parents did not approve of his long hair, motorcycle or wild ways, but Merri found his bad-boy persona more exciting than the boys in her honors classes with pencil protectors and braces. They married when she was nineteen, much to her parents' horror. Nat and Arlene did not attend the wedding. She drives a beat-up car she's ashamed of. Her favorite drink—a pina colada. She wears dresses and heels to work and school, and jeans and embroidered Mexican shirts for fun. Her husband Dan is a rock musician who is working on a demo tape of his own original songs but is unemployed.

2. Show the person doing something. 3. Have the person think while doing it.

good specific details.

It's almost six o'clock when Merri pulls up to the curb outside the apartment in her beat-up Ford Galaxy 500. She drags the grocery bags out of the back seat, walks up to the door and fiddles clumsily with the sticky doorknob to get inside. The counter she had cleared off that morning now displays a greasy frying pan, a small pile of dirty dishes and an empty mushroom soup can. "Jesus Christ," she mutters. Piling the groceries on the table, she feels her chest tighten. "OK. He has no job, pretends to look for work, and can't manage to wash his own dishes." She peeks through the kitchen door into the front room. Dan's wearing black headphones, strumming his electric guitar. The red light on the tape recorder is on, and she knows not to make any noise. "Working on the demo tape again," she thinks as she washes the dirty dishes, sets a pan on the stove and places the bacon slices evenly into the pan. "The tape that will make us rich. He just has to send it to that producer at Capital Records. Right." She hears footsteps and he stands at the kitchen door, watching her. "I didn't hear you come in," he says.

"I know. You were recording so I didn't bother you"

"It's coming along pretty well. I have about eight more songs left to put on the tape. Should be done in a few weeks. What are you making?"

"Bacon cheeseburgers. Do you want onion on yours?"

"Sure. Call me when they're ready," he says, disappearing.

She turns the bacon over with a fork and pulls globs of raw hamburger out of the package, rolling them into balls and pressing them flat. The fire is hot as she drops them into the pan. A splatter of hot grease hits her bare arm and she winces while she salts the browning meat. Her dad's words rise quietly from somewhere inside her, and she can not push them away. "He'll never amount to anything, Merri. You are making the biggest mistake of your life." She flips the burgers and plunges the paring knife into a white onion, wondering if she'd remembered to buy hamburger buns.

good action

good action

A Life of Public Service  
A LIFE OF PUBLIC SERVICE

yes!

Pam Arterburn  
FALL AFTERNOON

Her 10:00 appointment was still waiting at 10:15 when Myra decided to make a quick call home to make sure her housekeeper wouldn't throw the turkey carcass away. Last night she'd made a roast turkey for her dinner party, and she couldn't wait to use the carcass to make the Tuscan Turkey Soup recipe that Bon Appetit featured this month. Carmen assured her in broken English that no, she would not touch it, and as Myra hung up she made a mental note to stop at Whole Foods to pick up the rest of the ingredients that afternoon. She stood and walked stiffly around her large oak desk, pausing to review the file in her hands. Unwed mother, no substantial means of support, boyfriend still in the picture. Typical case. She closed the file and opened the door to the outer office, ready to give the personal service that had earned her the reputation as one of Chicago's finest Licensed Clinical Social Workers.

"Maria Gutierrez," Myra announced as she opened the door and looked into the waiting area. A short, trim Mexican woman with long black hair and heavy eye makeup struggled to lift the baby carrier (on her lap) and made her way into the office. Myra walked around the desk, sat down, and looked directly at her new client for a moment.

Neither woman smiled. "Hello, Maria. Let's talk about your situation and what sort of help you need," she said (in her best professional voice.) "Tell me about yourself."

"I moved to Chicago because my sister lives here," Maria began. "My boyfriend hasn't been able to find a job. He lives with me. We have no insurance for the baby, and he has been sick. I can't afford the baby formula, and we only have enough money to stay in our place until the end of the month. I don't know what to do." Despite this

evaluation?

let us see this!

why not?

## 2 Arterburn

hopeless tale, Maria's eyes were dry and clear. They fixed upon Myra, the only hope Maria had here in Chicago. "The agency said you are good, that you can help (I need some help)" Maria said.

Myra opened the file and read for a minute or two. "It says here that you are originally from Mexico, and that you lived in California until last month. Did you have a stable life there?" she asked.

"I was the shift supervisor at a Del Taco," Maria replied. ("It wasn't much money, but my boyfriend had a good job. We did OK.")

"Then why, (may I ask) did you give that up and move to Chicago? It hardly seems to be a practical decision," Myra asked in a tone Maria didn't like.

don't  
change POV

("You will probably not understand my situation," Maria said flatly.) "I was pregnant. (His family did not approve. They kicked us out of their house, and the rents in California are so high. My sister offered us a place to live here. But then her building was sold, and she had to move in with a friend.) We <sup>had</sup> nowhere to go."

"I just think perhaps you made this move without a clear plan. There is a residence requirement here in Illinois before you can qualify for public assistance, and you probably don't qualify for a housing voucher or food stamps," Myra said.

The telephone rang. "Excuse me," Myra said. (It was Carmen.)

"Miss Myra, you want me to start to cook the soup? I can put it in a pot to boil."

"No, Carmen—I need to do that myself. You don't have the spices the recipe requires; I am all out of coriander and thyme. Just keep it in the refrigerator, and I'll be home by three." She glanced up at Maria, trying to remember if the recipe called for chili

so harsh  
+ unfeeling  
what has  
earned her the  
reputation  
of finest?

## 3 Arterburn

powder or not. (She was pretty sure that she'd used the last of the chili powder last weekend when the Goldbergs were over for brunch.)

"I don't think you can help me, ma'am," Maria said and stood up.

"Wait a minute, Maria. Let me do some searching." She turned to the computer on her desk and started to peck at the keys.

"There is nothing for me here," Maria said. "I won't trouble you any more. Go back to your maid and your regulations. I will go somewhere else."

She almost walked out to chase Maria back, but she had seen Maria's type before and knew that no matter how hard she tried, it wouldn't be nearly enough. Maybe Maria would come back when she was eligible for public assistance; maybe not.

As the office door closed, Myra's thoughts drifted back in time. She had been a young, unwed mother once, and she had come to another social worker for help. But that time, the help was there. She had given the baby, a girl, up for adoption, and nobody in her family had ever talked about the incident again. Her life went on as though nothing had ever happened. But that was so many years ago.

Enough about that, she thought. It was ten forty five, time for her break. She strode past the clients waiting in the outer office and hurried to the Starbucks next to her building for her regular, a nonfat chai latte. The Chicago air was crisp this April morning, and Michigan Avenue was humming with life. Tonight her husband would entertain business associates at home; her turkey soup would be the star attraction.

Pam -

This is an excellent draft & the class gave good feedback on where the next draft must go. Consider using the baby in the scene. What is Myra's change? How does Maria & baby trigger that change in a way previous clients have not?  
 Stephanie

why give up when Myra is looking on computer?

Pam Arterburn

Scene Assignment (Character/Action Cards)

Character: Housewife

Action: Pierces her nose

Note—I turned the scene into a story.

### Dinner Can Wait

Jane was elbow-deep in a bowl of ground sirloin when her husband Bob popped into the kitchen wearing a chef's hat and his red and white striped apron that read "Kiss the Cook."

"When did you say I should light the coals, dear?" Bob asked, picking a strawberry slice off the untouched fruit tray.

"Honey, stop that," Jane frowned as he reached for a pineapple slice. "I've told you several times. The guests arrive at six thirty, and we eat at seven. You start the fire at six forty five."

"Right, dear. Aren't you almost finished there? It's four o'clock."

Jane rolled her eyes so Bob wouldn't see and tried to muster up a polite response.

"Honey, we have two and a half hours until everyone gets here. Relax. It will be ready on time." She realized that as long as Bob was alive, she'd have to deal with his impatience and nervous energy. Jane sighed, perhaps a bit too loudly. The screen door banged open, and Billy ran into the room, covered with mud.

"Billy—go back outside and play," Jane said. "Daddy and I have work to do before the people come over. Be a good boy and don't touch anything." Jane plopped the seventh hamburger patty onto the foil covered tray and pulled a ball of raw meat out of the pile to make the eighth.

Bob leaned against the counter and fiddled with the knife. "Dear, you know Billy needs a bath before my co-workers show up for dinner. Can't you speed things up a bit?" Jane bit her lip and pounded the raw meat onto the counter with her fist. She thought about Bob's boss, Roger, and his tendency to corner her in the kitchen after his third beer. She hoped the frowzy secretary, Holly, would cancel at the last minute again, and she remembered the obnoxious couple, Bert and Betsy White, who always wore red, white and blue. She finished the last patty and ripped a piece of plastic wrap off the roll.

"Honey, Billy's bath comes last. If I bathe him too soon, he'll just get dirty all over again. Why don't you find something to do?" Jane was crouched low, retrieving the salad vegetables from the bottom drawer of the refrigerator.

"Oh. So, I'm bothering you, eh? Well, don't let me mess up your schedule. I happen to be finished with all my jobs for the day. Some of us get things done ahead of schedule, dear." His smug expression made the hairs on her neck stand up. She took a deep breath, feeling her chest muscles contract.

"Dear, please get out of the kitchen. You are not helping. In fact, you are in my way. If you want to stay, stop twirling that knife, and get the buns out of the cupboard. Do something helpful."

Page two

“Well, I can see that I’m not wanted here, Honey. You just go ahead and do things your way. I think I’ll walk across the street to Pete’s place and see how his new patio’s coming along. Good luck with the party preparations. Don’t forget—the guests will be here in two hours.” Throwing the screen door open, Bob lumbers down the steps and saunters toward the neighbor’s house. Jane watches him go, glad that he’s finally gone. After finishing the salad, she rinses her hands, reaches for her purse and roots around for the car keys.

Backing the white Volvo out of the driveway, Jane checks the rearview mirror and sees Bob throwing his arms in the air, making a “where are you going” gesture that she hasn’t seen before. She heads downtown and parks in front of the Body Piercing and Tattoo Parlor. Jane remembers to remove her apron before getting out of the car and takes a comb out of her purse to smooth her hair. In the mirror, she is surprised to see that she’s still pretty. Jane gets out of the car, stands up very straight, and marches inside.

“Hey there, miss! What’s your pleasure?” a man in a black motorcycle vest with tattooed arms asks. He walks out from behind the counter to greet her.

“Can you pierce my nose?” Jane asks. “I’d like it done right now.” She marvels that her voice is calm and strong, and she smiles at this man.

“You bet I can! Now over here on this rack, we have a selection of studs and nose rings. Everything from a tiny skull to a little diamond.” He guides her to a table that holds silver and gold things.

“I’ll take the skull,” Jane says, picking it up, and follows him. She notices that his jeans fit well and is surprised at how clean he smells. His long pony tail seems expressive, somehow, like a gold cord, like a breeze. She thinks of Bob in his ridiculous apron, probably pacing around the kitchen, helpless without her.

She wonders if Billy will forgive her for this. “But he’s only five,” she thinks. “He’ll be OK.” When the man finishes, Jane thanks him and leaves. The sky is blue and the air smells like honeysuckle. When she starts the car, she reaches for the road map in the glove compartment. The afternoon is hot but the breeze is cool, and she lights a cigarette as she wonders which freeway to take.

Pam Arterburn  
May 29 2007  
Installation Exercise—"Some Things Never Change"

Aunt Harriet hovers over the stove, frying eggs and two sausages for her brother, Harry.

"Housing prices are falling. The economy's in a mess. The rich are getting richer," Uncle Harry complains.

"Knock it off, Harry. That's the way it's always been," Harriet cackles back at him.

"No—it's worse now. Remember the house Dad built in Toledo? With his own hands? Why, today it's worth 500, 600 grand. I told Ma to hang on to it, but would she listen?" Harry wipes his brow with a napkin. His face is redder than usual today, and his wisps of gray hair snake lazily around his head.

"Oh Harry, it's always something with you. Never happy," Aunt Harriet chirps, setting the plate of food down in front of him. She pours herself a cup of coffee and joins her brother at the table.

"Yes, Harry—I remember the old days. Why, Joe and I raised four boys and drove decent cars, all on his post office salary."

"Well, try to do that today," Harry said. "My Melinda can't pay her rent half the time. And she's got a job in a bank!"

A car pulls into the driveway bringing their older brother, Floyd, into the kitchen.

"What brings you way out here, Floyd?" Harriet asks.

"Bad news. Ma died last night. The home just called me. We've got to go get her things. Come on, Harry."

Page two

Melinda drops the cooler alongside their towels and plops into the empty beach chair. “What’s in this thing, baby? It’s really heavy!”

“Oh—just a little surprise. Happy Birthday, Melinda!” In minutes, Alfred had a gourmet lunch spread before them, and after the gorgonzola sandwiches and raspberry salad, it was soon time for dessert. He carefully pulls the tiny cake out of its container, the one with the red frosting rose on top that hid the diamond ring. Melinda’s cell buzzes in her beach bag.

“Hi Daddy. What happened? Grandma? I didn’t know she was in such bad shape. Yes, I can fly out this evening. We’ll talk later.” Alfred hands her a napkin as she buries her face in her hands.

“My grandma died last night,” she says.

“Well, no time to waste, Melinda. We’ve got to go. The tiny cake glistened in the sun, and Alfred gently placed it back into the container.

Aunt Harriet waited by the phone for the mortician to return her call. Harry and Floyd would be home shortly, and the kids—her four boys and Harry’s Melinda—would arrive later.

Harry and Floyd emerge from the glass doors of the nursing home and head to the car, each carrying a box of their mother’s things. They put these into the trunk and wait for the hearse to arrive that would bear their mother’s body to the funeral home.

“Did you call Melinda?” Floyd asks.

Page three

“She’ll be here tonight. Floyd, why is it that the only time we all get together is when somebody dies? That really gripes me. Why on earth can’t we ever see each other and not have to stare at a coffin?”

“Harry, you’ll never change,” his brother replies.

In his kitchen, Alfred removes the cake from the cooler and tries to decide if he can save it or if it’s too far gone. The rose is drooping a bit, and red frosting is starting to bleed into the white background. He scoops the engagement ring out of the flower and slides the cake into the trash. He’s glad about his promotion to chef at the restaurant; Melinda would never marry him if he wasn’t set financially, and this was at least a good start. He wonders when he’ll get another chance to ask her. His cell rings, and he answers automatically, expecting to hear his girlfriend’s voice. “Hello, Henri,” he says. “Ok—I’ll stop by your office on my way in today. See you soon.”

The news is bad. Henri says that customers have left the restaurant because of the new Italian place down the block. He’s very sorry, but Alfred will have to go.

Page four

“But we can give you a letter of recommendation. A very good one,” Henri says. “You’re a good cook, Alfred. You’ll find something.” Alfred thinks about the six months he waited to land this job.

“It’s not that easy, Henri. I wanted to propose to Melinda. Now that’s off.”

“I’m sorry, Alfred. There’s nothing I can do about this.”

Page four

“What a beautiful service that was,” Aunt Harriet whispers to Melinda as they walk arm-in-arm to the family plot at Happy Groves Cemetery. Pastor Johnson says a few words as Grandma’s coffin is lowered into the ground, and Melinda’s cell phone buzzes. She checks—its Alfred.

“Hi, Honey,” she answers.

“Bad news, Melinda. I got fired today.”

“Oh Alfred! That’s awful. What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know, baby. But if I can’t get something soon, I’ll have to move back to San Francisco and my old job.” And then, he thinks, we probably will never get married.

“Oh, that’s too bad. Well, I’ll call you later.”

Aunt Harriet prepared her special potato salad, the version all the kids like best. Melinda and her cousins sit around the kitchen table, reminiscing about Grandma. And from the living room, Uncle Harry’s voice is the loudest noise in the house.

“God damn Congress. Stupid fools, every single one of them,” he complains.

“And you think you can do a better job?” Floyd replies.

“A herd of donkeys would be an improvement,” Harry says.

Aunt Harriet stands in doorway between the kitchen and the living room. “Harry, be quiet. All you do is complain. The kids are trying to talk in here.”

“Shut up, Harriet. Hey—bring me some coffee.”

“Oh all right, Harry. You just never change, do you?”

*please number the pages*

Homework: Week 4

Pam Arterburn

**Long Write: Choose a different returning home and write the story including dialog.**

**All that He Can Be**

Lieutenant Dan Grimes saluted the line of soldiers that greeted him and his comrades as they returned home to the States from Afghanistan. The colors took his breath away; after six months in an army hospital, his eyes were used to white sheets, gray walls and faded blue pajamas. But this fanfare that met them blared with olive green uniforms, white shoes, the red white and blue of flags lining the corridor and of course the colorful civilian clothes of the families waiting eagerly behind the red velvet rope hung across the corridor's width. He craned his neck to see if he might spot Julie, but no luck.

After the speeches, the final roll call, and the names of the dead, the general removed the rope and families began to swarm around the soldiers, hugging and clutching at them. He knew that Cipes' wife was pregnant, but he noticed that she wasn't showing much. He watched Roger Hudsons' daughter Cindy, the one <sup>with</sup> (who had) pink hair <sup>who had</sup> (and) attempted suicide, crying and burying her head in Roger's neck. He was glad Fields' wife was here; she'd threatened to divorce him several times in letters, but there she was, beaming and talking excitedly. Hands came around his head from behind and covered his eyes. He smelled Julie's flowery scent and wheeled around to face her. It had been fourteen months since they'd looked at each other.

*Here's a good place to use the expanded moment:  
The wheelchair - his missing leg - all that <sup>is</sup> unspoken -*

*Pam  
→ This you did, and did well - now you need to go deeper - what is the subText of the dialog? where is the tension in this story? Does something happen to cause the "happy" reunion to shift into something else?*

"Dan! Oh my god," Julie cried out. "I can't believe how good you look, honey!"

He was relieved.

"Hey, honey—did ya miss me?" He wanted to stroke her hair, to lift her off the ground.

"Dan Grimes, you have no idea!" She bent over, reached for his chin and stroked it gently.

"Let's get out of here, baby! Steer me in the right direction," Dan said, so proud to be next to Julie, the girl whose picture all his friends envied. "Wait a second—hey Roger! Come over here! There's someone I want you to meet."

Roger and his wife and daughter gathered around, and Roger stuck his hand out to Julie. "Heard a lot about you, Julie—and those pictures Dan covered the walls with don't even do you justice. Dan—she's prettier than I thought."

"Yep. That's my girl, Roger. Well, nice to see you all, and Roger, let's keep in touch."

"You bet, big guy. (Email me any time)" Roger said before walking away, arm in arm with his wife.

Dan and Julie got to her yellow VW bug and stopped for a moment. He didn't expect her to show up in this car, what with his wheelchair and all.

"Honey, I'm not sure I'll fit in your car," he said.

"Dan, we will make it work. You get into the front seat, and let me worry about the wheelchair, OK?" He struggled to lift his body from the seat and pivot into the small seat. Julie didn't know that she had to lock the wheels, and he almost fell at the last moment, but he made it. He heard her grunts and mild curses as she tried to collapse the

chair; he tried to yell that she had to release the black lever on the right side near the seat, but she didn't hear him. Finally, she managed to slide the chair behind the driver's seat and closed the door. When she got in to drive, she was sweating.

"I'm sorry, honey," Dan said. "I sure wish I could have done that for you." They both looked at his legs. The right one was fine, but the left one ended just above the knee.

move  
To P.O.  
when they  
first meet

"I know you do, Dan. We're just going to have to adjust." Julie started the car and it putted out of the parking lot. They decided to get a bite to eat along the way, and Julie suggested their favorite Chinese restaurant, but Dan asked for Jack in the Box instead.

"You have no idea how much we miss good old American fast food over there."

"Do you want to go in to eat, Dan?" she asked.

"Can't we just eat it in the car?" Dan asked. He detected a trace of resignation as she said okay, but he didn't want her to have to wrestle the wheelchair again just on account of eating. He'd learned to avoid situations that involved the chair while he was in the hospital. When the other patients got well enough to walk again, they'd eat in the cafeteria. Dan had meals delivered to his bed. He'd learned how to wash, exercise, and juggle three tennis balls in bed. It was different since he'd always been so active before, but it saved time.

They got the bag of food and Julie pulled into a spot in the parking lot underneath a tree. The sun glinted into her eyes, and she pulled the visor down.

"Honey," she began, "I don't want you to feel strange because of this. You are still the man I got engaged to, and you are still the man I love."

"Julie, you're saying what you think I want to hear. Truth is, I am different. A simple thing like going up a flight of stairs defeats me. Even dressing myself can be a chore. I hope you can live with the changes. Won't be easy." Dan was aware that the breakfast jack in his hand was shaking.

Julie took a sip of diet coke and looked straight ahead. The smile faded. "I don't know, Dan. We'll just have to see how it goes. Wish I could promise that it will all be OK, but I can't." He wanted to run around the car, pull her out of the driver's seat, make her laugh and chase her all over the parking lot. She'd had lost weight and her hair was lighter. The white top showed off her tan, and the shorts showed off her great legs.

move to p. 2

"Baby, that's all I want," he said. "Don't make any promises. Now let's get home. I can't wait to see if Snoopy still remember me."

what about sex??  
is Snoopy what he can't wait for?

"Are you kidding?" Julie asked in mock sarcasm. "That dog hasn't gotten off my lap since the minute you left."

"Guess I taught him pretty well," Dan muttered so she could hear, and they laughed as Julie drove Dan back home, back to everything he'd left behind.

Pam -  
you've chosen a situation rich with possibilities. Good first draft.  
EW

Assignment: Use the expanded moment in an exchange <sup>160</sup> between this character and someone with whom he/she is negotiating

Pam Arterburn  
May 8, 2007

"The Sawyers and the Lawyer"

"Just show up, and be on time, for once," Jessie spat before hanging up. Phil managed not to run the light before hanging up. They'd had the appointment with the lawyer for a month, but Phil had cancelled it twice. Twenty years of marriage, down the drain. They had raised three kids, built two houses, and weathered the deaths of all four of their parents, but Jessie had "fallen out of love" with him. Funny how all it took to end it was his John Hancock on a dotted line.

He found a parking spot and backed his white Chevy truck in. Fumbling through loose papers and junk piled on his console, he found what he needed: a pen. He was wearing his work hat, an orange t-shirt and jeans, and he felt out of place as he approached the three-story building. The gold-lettered "Winkler and Hugh, Attorneys at Law" sign on the door gleamed as he opened it. "More like Wanker and Screw," he muttered a little too loudly, his jaw set.

"Second floor, on the left," the prissy brunette behind the desk said when he asked for directions. "Suite 209." Her cleavage was two-toned, darker at the top, then white just where it poked out of her dress. "I think you need a new bathing suit," Phil told her. She turned her back to him as he made his way to the elevator.

His ruddy complexion turned pale as he wrote his name and appointment time on the sign-in clipboard. Phil sat down to wait for the lawyer. Jessie was already there, sitting two chairs away from him, talking on her cell. She was wearing white shorts and a pink tank top, and everything that showed was a deep caramel tan. Her noticed that her

Why doesn't  
he take off  
his work hat?  
is he a  
nstruc  
or ker?  
can't tell.

necessary?

Pam Arterburn, page two

toenails exactly matched her top, which matched her lipstick. Phil detected the perfume he liked, "Passion and Roses," the kind he always bought her for her birthday. She turned toward the door. Maybe she just despised the sight of him, he thought. She'd told him that often enough.

The young lawyer walked out of his office to greet them. "Mr. and Mrs. Sawyer—come on in. Let's get some signing done today!" Phil wanted to grab the hand patting his back and throw the asshole to the carpet.

They (rose and) followed him into the office, Jessie sliding past Phil and jockeying her way to the chair closest to the big desk. She had a notebook with her, proof, Phil thought, that all her claims against him were true. And probably a stack of bills she wanted him to take care of. He took off his hat and held it in his lap, feeling suddenly exposed.

"Mr Sawyer, I'm glad you made it. We've been trying to get you here for some time now, and you must know that there is a time limit we're up against. You and Mrs. Sawyer need to divide your property today, and we need to discuss alimony. But first, will you sign the divorce papers? Without your signature, we can't even go forward." Phil felt his cold stare and looked instinctively to Jessie for something—some little bit of support.

true?

"Jessie," Phil began, "is this really what you want? You asked me for time, so I moved out. It's been six months now, and you still haven't told me what it is that I've done. If I sign this paper, we're done. Is that what you want?"

Pam Arterburn, page 3

“Oh my God, Phil. How can you ask me that question? For the past ten years, you’ve worked until nine at night seven days a week. We don’t even know each other any more. Zachary is in college now—have you even asked him how he’s doing? And Amy just got a job working for NBC. Did you even know about that? Do you care?”

good

Phil stared at the walls for a minute. The lawyer had plenty of degrees and photos of himself with local politicians and one with the Republican governor. The flower arrangements were slightly wilted, and the vertical blinds were missing two slats. He thought about what Jessie was saying and felt fresh guilt. “I know I’ve been gone too much—it isn’t easy to make the money you need to pay for the big house, your car, the college tuition, the bills. Why haven’t you pitched in to help? You are the one with the college degree, Jessie. I have never understood why you won’t go back to teaching, at least to pay for health insurance. Even that falls onto me.”

or: staring? glaring?

They sat there, looking at each other for a long minute. He noticed that she still had the same eyes, the same curly blonde hair, and the same beautiful hands. But he wondered what she thought of him, now aged by his business, his hands work-worn and his back bent, his hair thinning.

“Phil, I don’t want to leave you, but I just don’t think you are part of the relationship any more.” The lawyer (shuffled some papers around on his desk and) cleared his throat.

“Mr. and Mrs. Sawyer, now is not the time for this discussion. The time for talking is over. We have papers to sign and a deadline to meet.” Phil looked at the

→ This hat a wye, say?

Pam Arterburn, page 4

whipper snapper behind the big desk. The guy couldn't be more than 29 or 30, and his fancy gold watch gleamed beneath the fluorescent light above.

"Jessie, let's go," Phil said and stood up. "We can work this out. Don't tell me it's impossible. You are the one who always said that where there's desire, there's hope. Well, (the time has come.) I have the desire to stay together. It's your choice now." He was afraid to turn around to see if she was still sitting down.

As Phil reached for the door handle, he felt a hand on his back. Turning, he faced his wife.

"Do you mean this, Phil?"

"I do," Phil said to her for the second time in his life.

The lawyer grimaced as the two walked out together. It had been his third reconciliation of the month, and he needed paying customers. Phil and Jessie stood by his truck and made a vow to each other that they would both work together and save their marriage. The cars on the nearby freeway made it impossible for passers-by to hear their words, but no one could have missed the way they looked at each other.

This isn't necessary + dissipates the great line of dialog. which is the natural end of the story

Pam Arterburn  
Final Story

### The Goodwill Box

“Let me see what’s in that box,” I called out to Katie, “before you take it to Goodwill.”

“It’s just junk, mom,” she called back, muscling the box toward the front door.

“I don’t care. Give me five minutes to go through it.” I heard the box hit the floor of the entry way. We were packing to move, and she was in charge of odds and ends. “Please hurry, mom.”

I picked up the box, brought it into the nearly empty living room and put it down. It was filled to the top with the remainders of my life. On the top, Katie’s old platform boots were neatly folded, their six inch heels a reminder of Katie’s goth phase. She had worn them to school only once, and a short-haired boy had pushed her down. I laid them aside. Next, I pulled out her junior high school yearbook, a remnant of happier days when she still brought home straight A’s, before her brother died, before her dad.

Two old issues of *Sunset* covered my dog’s leash, and I wondered if Katie had hidden it on purpose. The tag was still attached: “Lucy the Lab, Guardian, 600 W. H St.” I unhooked it and slipped it into my sweatshirt pocket. A half-burned candle, an incense burner in the shape of a log cabin, an old nerf ball and a red brush came next. All junk to go back into the box. Then I pulled out a stack of old wall calendars. I’d always saved those; the markings and notes gave my vague past sharp definition. “Jack to doctor, 9:30” one entry read. “Sign loan papers.” I put them aside to keep.

2

“How are you coming, Mom?” Katie called out from upstairs. “We have to be finished in an hour. Are you all packed?” She and I had reversed roles for a while after her dad and brother died; some of that had stuck. For the first year, we both fell apart. But as we began to rebuild our lives, she used order and clocks to define herself, while I stuck to spontaneity and daydreaming, much to her dismay. “I’m just about ready, Katie.”

“You’re not taking everything out of the box, are you?” She knew me way too well.

“Just Lucy’s tag so far.”

“OK—please hurry!” I reached back inside the box and pulled out an old, broken camera. It was a gift from my dad, and I dropped it on the pavement in Las Vegas one July day. Holding it reminded me of him—it was an old-fashioned 35 mm with two lenses to focus and tiny red and black numbers I never understood. The camera had been his before it was mine; he replaced it with a different model and gave this one to me. But this was the camera that had captured so much—Don and my first real vacation, when we discovered South Dakota’s Wall Drug, the Badlands, the Black Hills. Don took my favorite photo of the trip—an inside the car shot of me with a huge burro whose head was inside the car. It was a stop along the road that winds through the Black Hills. A marking on the map called it “Begging Burros,” and we pulled over to see what that meant. Sure enough, within a minute the car was surrounded with beggars, and that guy found the bag of fruit I’d packed for the trip within moments. Could I let this camera go? Placing it next to the calendars to keep, I realized that this was no easy job.

Next came a large road atlas from 1988. This just had to be trash. I opened it and remembered the night Don and I planned our trip from California to Iowa, where his parents lived. We'd argued about which route to take, and I had taken a red felt tip pen and followed the line of freeway from Ontario to Clinton, Iowa, to prove my point. But he'd found a blue pen and in his squiggly hand had estimated the mileage along the margins of the map to prove his route would be better. The writing was still there, and I could feel his presence so well. But it had to go. Damn. I set it aside and moved on.

More old magazines, an ugly green pillow, and a glass vase I'd always hated came next; soon, the box was nearly empty. I saw an Ikea catalogue on the bottom and nearly began to pile everything back in, but my instincts told me to take a second look. It wasn't lying flat. Picking it up, I saw the little tin horse that Don's mother had given to Jack. It was Harry's horse. He was her brother, who had died when he was very small. Something was wrong with Harry, but they never knew what it was. And something had been wrong with Jack, too—and this little horse had belonged to both of them. I pulled it out of the box. It was an old toy, a silvery metallic one, and extending from the horse were metal reins that attached to a wheel. A child could play with this horse, and it would not fall down. Neither of the boys who owned it ever played with it, and now it was at the bottom of a box, destined for Goodwill.

I held the horse on my lap and filled the box up. Looking at the broken camera and the old calendars, I decided that it was time for those things to go. The last item I placed into the box was the road atlas, and I carried it back to the front door.

"I'm finished going through the box, Katie," I called out.

4

“Is it still full?” she called back.

“It’s full,” I said. “You were right—it was just old junk.”

Pam Arterburn

First Story

10-05-06

Long Way Down

Sharon checked her phone. It was Brian again. She had hoped moving to San Francisco would make him go away, but it only gave him a bigger challenge. She made her way down Market Street to Broadway then walked west the four blocks to her apartment, the backpack making her shoulders slump. It wasn't the coolest building, with faded mint green paint, a dead pine tree in a pot on the landing, and Brenda's rainbow-love-freedom window stickers still screaming the seventies, but it was home for now. No mail. She marched up the dark wooden stairs, trying not to stomp, and went inside number ten.

*Good eye on details of setting*

Brenda caught her just as she was swinging her backpack into the chair and closing the door.

"Hey Sharon," she called up the stairs. "Some guy came by looking for you today. Said he was your brother."

"What did he look like? Tall, really built?" Sharon asked.

"Young, scrappy black hair, dressed in black. Who was that?"

*Good dialog*

two

"That's my brother. Next time he comes, you can let him in my apartment."

"Sorry, no can do. I did that once and the tenant almost clubbed me over the head. But he left this." She lumbered up the stairs, still in her house dress, and handed Sharon a piece of paper.

Sharon knew Brenda wanted to come in, but she didn't want to hear about the deaf couple upstairs with the barking Rottweiler or Brenda's knee replacement surgery.

TH "Thanks. I have to work on some orders for a few hours, so I'll catch you later."

"Oh. OK, we can talk tomorrow then. I'm making cabbage soup—we can share." Closing the door, she wondered if Brenda was a stereotype in these old houses chopped up into odd apartments, if all landladies wore ugly pink bag dresses with geraniums and snaps and walked with a limp.

She dialed the number Dustin <sup>had</sup> left. A partial recording of Trent Reznor's "Closer" played in her ears, F word intact, with W "We'll do it later--if you get lucky. Call me back," as his personalized greeting.

"I am home. Are you in the city, or just passing through? I hope you don't need a place to crash tonight. I'm really busy," she said. Moments later, he called.

Fin, via  
specifics

## three

"I was on my way home to LA, but I'll be back up here on Friday afternoon. Can I stay with you this weekend? There's a metal concert Saturday night in the city, and I don't want to take the train <sup>up</sup> from Berkeley."

"Ann and Lisa are coming up, Dustin; we're going out Friday night and staying in Saturday. You can sleep on the old couch. Just stay out of our way for once."

"OK. I can't help it; Lisa's so hot. I guess you liked my new greeting?"

"Right. It's poetic. Practically Shakespeare."

"Trent Reznor is a god, Sharon. Way better than an old dead English fart... See you Friday!"

"I'll stick a key under my mat. Don't destroy anything." Getting into Berkeley at seventeen didn't impress Sharon; she knew her brother was a basic dweeb with strong geek tendencies who loved to watch Spongebob and still played with Legos.

She got the laptop out of her backpack and set it on the kitchen table, pulling the pile of orders out and neatening the stack. A job in publishing, living in this city-sounded like a dream. But she brought home as much work as she accomplished all morning long; it was expected. Weekends were free, her corporate masters giving her a

Promising  
Sibling  
Tension

Efficient  
background  
info

four

pinch of freedom just to remind her that they owned her soul the other five days. So weekends had to be good; she needed to remember what made her feel alive.

Her phone beeped suddenly, and her heart pumped too hard. She breathed out when it was just Lisa, sending a text about this weekend. They were going to a play on Friday night, a comedy based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* but partly improv. "All set on our end. See you at six Friday. Peace." Lisa's text made her mood lift for a moment. Two more days. Ann and Lisa were happy about her move, but it was a selfish happiness. For best friends, they had become less about connecting and more about planning to connect and seeing this famous city.

She thought about home. The publishing job she'd applied for had an office in LA, but the San Francisco branch was where the new hires started; she had signed on for a six-month training period, glad to be gainfully employed. After college she had stayed on at Borders, each month plunging her deeper into fear that she'd keep her high-school job forever. At least Dick promoted her to the Information Booth Manager; it was really all he had, even though she'd applied for a decent job at the Corporate Office in Glendale. But that would have been more of the

more background (kind of) a lot?



## five

same, really; she jumped at the offer from Wadsworth Publishing, even if it meant staging book fairs at colleges and harassing professors to try new textbooks for a few years. But even that was half a year away.

Her friends and even her mother oohed and aahed about her move to San Francisco, but Sharon just didn't get it. She wanted a car but decided it would just be a hassle. The bike got her around, and public transportation was adequate, if a pain, despite what she'd heard. Life in this walking city was claustrophobic after growing up in LA where cars offer a quick escape. And it wasn't just the absence of a car; it was the thick air that leaves a fishy-seaweed weight once inhaled. In LA the air has no scent except an occasional whiff of exhaust. And she missed the feeling of openness, of unimpeded sky. The sudden clustered ascension of high-rises that is downtown LA contrasts with the horizontal plateau of malls and suburbia crossed by open freeways. San Francisco was all city, tall row buildings crowded together on too-high hills as if they might converge and squash her. She recalled photos published after the Northridge earthquake; the old houses crumbled like clods of dirt. She had imagined legs sticking out of the rubble, like the wicked old witch when

All very true and even vivid. but seems like the storyline (i.e. of brother's reappearance) is being forgotten.

six

the house hit her. San Francisco was a place to visit, not to live.

Friday morning came, and a delivery man brought a dozen red roses to Marcie's desk. She buzzed Sharon and said, "Come out front: Special delivery for you, lucky." Sharon shook slightly as she read the three words on the card: "I am here."

By five, she was back home after a trip to the store for wine and jiffy pop, the mandatory girls' weekend snack. The doorbell buzzed at six, and she could hear Ann and Lisa laughing in the hall. "Come in, you two" she said, opening the door wide, arms outstretched. Finally, the weekend could begin. They told her about the trip, summed up the past two weeks, and then the focus was on Sharon. She told her friends about the flower delivery while pouring three glasses of pink wine. They sat around the coffee table in her tiny living room, silent for the first time.

"What are you going to do," Ann asked. "Have you let anyone here know yet? The police, security at your work, anyone?"

"No. I was hoping he'd never find me; I didn't use my mom's maiden name to rent this place, and work has a policy not to give out personal information. But I guess

seven

he didn't need much more than Wadsworth's address, since so many people in LA know I took the job."

"This doesn't mean he knows where you live," Lisa said hopefully, knowing right away it was a stupid comment.

"Unless he followed me home, which he must have done already," Sharon said. The three girls felt a sudden nervous awareness, and Sharon got up to pull the shades even though her apartment was on the second floor.

"Sharon, you should have done more when it happened. You should have carried it a lot further," Ann said, not for the first time.

"I know how you feel about it, Ann, but I did what I thought was right at the time. And it worked. . ."

"Until now," Lisa said flatly.

"We don't know what he's up to, what he wants," Sharon said. "Maybe he's just trying to scare me. He could be in LA right now."

"I have a feeling we'll find out sooner than later," Ann said. "Let's change the subject."

They got ready to go, and Sharon opened the door to leave as Dustin ran up the stairs to her apartment.

"Hey Sharon! Who is this you have here? Don't tell me it's big sister's hot friends, Lisa, and—hello, Ann."

*Or am I mixed up?  
Are they talking about someone else than her brother?*

*Ah—Dustin (not Brian) right?*

## eight

"The Nintendo 64 is all ready for you, Dustin. And we left a new pack of Legos and some army men, too," Ann said.

"Dustin, how are you? It's been a long time." Lisa stuck out her hand as if she were greeting a real human being. Sharon took note. "How do you like Berkeley?" Lisa sort of cooed. "Did I ever tell you I spent my freshman year there?"

"Wow, Lisa. I had no idea! So, what was your major back then? Maybe we had some of the same classes. ~~He~~ He was speaking to Lisa in complete sentences. Sharon could not believe this. They were having a real conversation, and now Lisa showed no sign of wanting to walk out the door. What a traitor! They had all ganged up on Dustin for years. Besides, he was her brother. It was too disgusting to contemplate. As they continued to talk, Lisa started to move back towards the couch.

"Lisa, we have to go. Dustin, there's food. Stay away from the Jiffy Pop," Sharon said.

"Wait a minute. I have four tickets! Dustin, would you like to come with us?" Lisa asked, smiling that particularly annoying smirky smile she used on guys. Sharon was speechless.

Good,  
funny  
stuff

nine

"Um, well, all I have to do here is read Sharon's mail, so sure!" He almost ran out the door, first to leave, knowing his sister should be as far away from him as possible.

P.O.V.  
Ship

Ann and Sharon walked together ten paces behind Lisa and Dustin all the way to the cable car, trying to carry on a conversation but glaring at the pair in front of them having such a fine time. They reached Market Street and got aboard, heading toward the Embarcadero. A quick walk after the stop got them to the theater, a small converted storefront with an Afghan take-out place next door. It was hardly the theater district. A homeless man sat on the nearest corner playing a badly tuned guitar, his hat upside down to receive coins. It was empty. A line of about twenty people had formed outside, and Lisa fumbled in her bag for the tickets. "Here you go," she said, handing them out. The man in front of them said the doors wouldn't open for twenty-five minutes, which made Sharon nervous. She began looking around, once again feeling nervous.

"You OK?" Ann asked. "Now I am going to worry about you just as much as I did before you left."

ten

"I don't know. This move, my new job, the way my life has turned inside out—I did a lot of it just to get away from Brian. How could I have thought that would work?"

"Sharon, come here." Dustin's voice was unusually serious, and he pulled her towards the wall, then stepped in front of her to block her view of the street. The three gathered closely around her. She peered through the space between Ann and Lisa's heads. Brian was across the street, standing next to a bus stop bench, smoking.

The fight <sup>V</sup>or <sup>V</sup>flight reflex turned Sharon into a cave woman for a second, and she bolted from behind her three guardians and ran for it. In her temporary state of de-evolution, she neglected to run toward Market. Instead, she was flying down a dark side-street that became narrower with each stride. The sound of running coming fast from the middle of the street—she'd heard those footfalls before. The three she'd left behind were at varying distances behind the man and his prey. Dustin was closing in; Ann was limping along on her strappy black sandals, and Lisa was barely making progress, but her loud mouth could be heard clearly. "SHARON! COME BACK HERE!"

But Sharon would not turn back. She was going to run all the way back to Sherman Oaks if she had to. Her legs

*whoa —*

## eleven

grew wings and in a burst of strength, she jumped a tall curb and spotted—was that a fire escape?—a black ladder heading up the side of a building. She latched on, swung her legs up, and began to climb. Brian reached it but had trouble latching on, his huge frame and long legs too much muscle for the tiny metal ladder. For the first time, as she reached the roof, she looked down. He was focused on her, climbing, grunting, his face like a dog left too long at the pound, and just as she wrenched the stairs loose at the top and was about to hurtle them backwards into space, he spoke.

"Sharon. Please don't do this!" His voice was raspy and it was almost a cry.

"Brian, why did you have to come here? Why do you hunt me like an animal? Do you think it will make me want you?"

"It's all I know how to do. I love you, Sharon. I adore you. Please, please don't let go of the ladder; I only want to talk to you."

Something inside Sharon melted just a bit; she could feel it. "Stop that!" she told herself. "He's crazy! Then she looked down at him. He was halfway up a ladder on

## twelve

the side of an old brick building on a dark street in San Francisco, and he had come a long way to find her. Now here she was, his life in her hands, staring into his eyes.

They were blue—and they were a mixture of fear, devotion, and love. She remembered the many times they had opened only to be staring right into hers, the few weeks at the beginning, when he was the most amazing man she'd ever dated, the one she knew she'd eventually spend her life with. Her heart melted a little more, and she could feel her expression start to soften.

"Brian, you need to go. Please, just go."

"If you just talk to me, I will go. I promise."

Silence. She took a deep breath, then blew it out.

"OK, Brian, I will. We can talk." She held the ladder while he climbed down, and he steadied it from below as she made her way down. They stood facing each other, faces completely focused, eyes fixed. He hugged her, and she hugged back.

The three trailing behind stood together now, not sure what to do. "Sharon, come over here," Dustin said. "Do you know what you're doing?" Ann demanded. "Sharon, honey—get away!" Lisa called out. Sharon stood with Brian,

## thirteen

suddenly feeling complete, as if she'd been in a dream and was now waking up.

The five decided to skip the play and headed back to Sharon's apartment. Brian slept on the couch that night, and Dustin had to take the sleeping bag on the floor. The following weekend, when everyone else was back at home, Brian returned, and this time, he slept in her bed. As they slept, she dreamed she was back in LA, speeding down a freeway, late for something. She looked in the back seat, where Lisa, Ann and Dustin were discussing a film she hadn't seen. Brian was driving, and she reached for his hands. They looked deeply into each other's eyes.

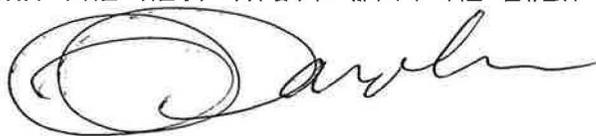
"This is bliss," he said.

"You are so right," she smiled back.

Long Way Down by Pam Arterburn

Reviewed by Robert Marohn

I think you know the main problem with this draft. It is that Brian as a central figure is not given the proper weight he is due given the conflict. He pops in at the very end of the story. The bulk of the writing, which includes good dialog, focuses on other characters and minor relationships. I believe if you focus on the story behind the conflict which is that Brian did something to Sharon to cause her to move to get away from him. Then work to develop this relationship and its resolution using all the writing tools at your disposal. This includes plot. Focus only the essential story line that will dramatize the conflict. By the way, your story does rush to a dramatic ending. But many of the situations you portray are "melodramatic." Can we have a more subtle offering of the day-to-day life of the characters and the predicament they face? For example, "the fight or flight reflex turned Sharon into a cave woman..." I get a picture of Sharon wearing a bear skin. Is this how you want Sharon portrayed? Regarding character, think mainly about the two characters Sharon and Brian and their interaction. I don't think I understand what it is like to be stalked by a crazy boyfriend. Finally, your setting and sense of place is good, but you can further use the elements of theme, tone and style to add to your story. But, be careful when using references like the "wicked old witch" which comes off as cliché or reference to Midsummer Night Dream which comes off as pedantic unless it is central to the theme of the story. Keep at it and the next draft will be even better



Critique of *Long Way Down*  
By Katie Taylor

Pam,

What I enjoyed most about your story is your carefully placed details and realistic dialogue between the girlfriends. On page 2 you describe the landlady and her outfit: '...ugly pink bag dressed with geraniums and snaps and walked with a limp' – wonderful details and extremely visual. On page 4 the way you describe Sharon's new relationship with her friends that 'had become less about connecting and more about planning to connect' – another wonderful insight maybe one I could relate to so responded to! On page 9 you throw in the unnecessary but wonderful detail of 'a small converted storefront with an Afghan take-out place next door' which I could immediately picture. And lastly I enjoyed on page 5 when you describe homes after the Northridge earthquake to have 'legs sticking out of the rubble, like the wicked old witch...' – great visual. Overall the descriptions comparing Los Angeles to San Francisco were strong as well.

The major critique I had with your story was character motivation. The only time I felt I really had a hold on Sharon was on pages 6 & 7 with her girlfriends. The dialogue was concrete and it set up the character conflict and tension of the story (especially by not saying exactly what had happened with Brian which was great because it was realistic – they all know so why speak of just to inform the reader?) The confusion with the character motivation of Sharon started for me on page 10 and lasted through the ending never to be resolved. Even Brian's actions were confusing but not so much because we couldn't get inside his head so it was easier for me to suspend my doubts but with Sharon I supposedly knew exactly what was going on in her head and yet out of the blue, as if acting like a different character altogether she said things and acted in ways I didn't expect at all. This applies to Dustin, Ann, and Lisa who were her guardian angels, her tried and true trusted companions and they just rolled over without question at the end and seemed to lose their voices about the matter completely and just head back to the apartment mute. I think some more dialogue would have been very helpful for the reader to understand why everyone has suddenly made an about face: Sharon accepting Brian, Brian wanting to love NOT hurt/threaten Sharon (as the tension of the story was built upon), and why Dustin, Ann, and Lisa did not worry about Brian and Sharon getting together again let alone seeing each other! I just needed more reasons, the story fell apart for me because of this.

I also think there were maybe too many names and possibly too many characters. At first I was confusing Brian with Dustin. Dick and Marcy only muddled it more for me. Someone also suggested maybe having only one friend and combining Ann and Lisa together and I think that could work well and focus the story more.

Grammatically speaking I was taken out of the story a few times when a few sentences started with 'And' and 'But' (bottom of pages 3 & 4 and throughout 5). Also you have an incomplete sentence (or a hanging gerand?? Something just sounds funny) on page 10:

'The sound of running coming fast from the middle of the street –she'd heard those footfalls before.'

Lastly I liked the dream sequence as long as it is meant to be creepy. In fact I think it strengthens the story quite a bit if it is meant to be taken that way – it would show that Sharon has problems – big psychological problems! – and it reveals to the reader a pattern she might have with the men in her life that you were able to conceal earlier. We were convinced she was the sane one doing the 'right thing' the whole time but in the end she might be her own problem, her own worst enemy, not Brian.

Your story was a pleasure to read Pam – thank you for sharing it and being open to my thoughts about it.

Cheers,  
Katie

Critique of "Long Way Down"  
By Howard Capeci

- 1) Pam- I would like to preface this critique that these are my opinions only. I enjoyed hearing your story.
- 2) I did not care for your title, I wasn't quite sure what it was referring to.
- 3) Like I said in class it is very apparent that you have the voice of a writer, I wish you would use it more- "the thick air that leaves a fishy-seaweed weight once inhaled" is brilliant- it's these kinds of details that make a story great other instances where you did this are "faded mint green paint" "rainbow-love-freedom stickers" "lumbered up the stairs" "His face like a dog left too long at the pound" More of this kind of writing please.
- 4) Like a lot of other people I found the brother / sister / friend story more interesting than her and Brian.
- 5) I didn't buy the reconciliation with Brian at the end.
- 6) "this is bliss" rang untrue.
- 7) I believe you could have less characters in this story to make it stronger.
- 8) Her brother being young and in Berkeley and playing Ninetendo 64 rings true- playing with legos and green army men didn't seem as true.
- 9) On page 9 you use the word nervous in two consecutive sentences.
- 10) I agree with the comment about less backstory- her old jobs etc it took me out of the current story.
- 11) I liked your little realistic touches like the landlady making cabbage soup.
- 12) I LOVED the tension between an attraction between her brother and her hot best friend. Lots to explore here with conflict and tension.
- 13) The jump from running from Brian to melting when he speaks seems to come to easily too fast and the friends all seem to accept it too readily.
- 14) The last dream sequence starts off well and then peters out, I think this can be reworked.
- 15) Overall a good story.

Thank you for the opportunity to read your piece. I hope these comments prove to be helpful.

Critique of Pam Arterburn's "Long Way Down"

By Cliff Cadaver

Hi Pam, critiques aren't my strong point so please disregard any comments that seem off the mark.

This story seems to be about a character with battered women's syndrome. Even though she moved from LA to SF to escape him, she ultimately falls back into the same trap when he tracks her down. I like how the whole first page clues us in to the fact that 'Brian' will not be easily dismissed or forgotten.

Most of the dialogue was well done and smooth. I thought her relationship with Dustin was good, especially deriding him about his love of Legos and army men. Her disgusted reaction to her friend's interest in him was a believable touch. I really liked details such as; wine and jiffy pop, her friend's 'strappy' sandals, and pouring out pink wine. The heavy moment of silence right after she tells her friends about the flowers struck me as very natural.

The scary dream was a good ending, hands off the wheel, not looking at the road, crazy ex-boyfriend driving. The story says to me that Sharon is reverting back to more bad decisions concerning Brian and her subconscious is shouting 'Danger'. I liked the ending but I didn't like the last two sentences.

The big problem I saw was the believability issue of her friends accepting the interstate stalker so easily. He chases her down a dark alley, up the side of a building, and then they all go home together for a slumber party, no way. At least Dustin should leave in anger, maybe all her friends too. I thought the SF details were good specificity but in all there were too many names and characters for a story of this length.

Response to "Long Way Down"

I enjoyed the well-written dialogue and descriptions in this story. As was brought up in discussion, it may be worthwhile to trim some extraneous details and one or two of the friends just to bring the focus back to the main character.

I needed to feel more urgency & fear from Sharon about possibly being stalked by Brian. There is an "it" referred to on page seven. This sounds like a singular incident. What was it? A break in? An attack? We don't know how severe this was, but we do know there should have been police involvement so it must have been pretty bad. This sets up the Brian character as not redeemable, so that when he does enter the picture and they eventually get together, it's difficult to know how to feel about this. Should we be happy for her? Was the danger all in her head? The ending dream sequence has the other characters discussing a film she hadn't seen - is this symbolic for their mistrust of the relationship, but we're lead to believe they're wrong? If the ending dream sequence is ominous, and this is the story of a woman succumbing back into an abusive relationship, I would need a little more to indicate that. Even just a line about how she's "always attracted to guys like that" or "did this before" or something, to establish some sort of pattern.

Some people in class pointed out the implausibility that they would reconcile and then he would come spend the night and all the friends, who a minute before were protecting her, would be OK with this.

I think more about Brian and their relationship would be helpful to explain how we should feel about him and their eventual reconciliation (if it is really a reconciliation, which I wasn't clear on).

*Wiley Alexander*

Pam Arterburn  
First Story, Revised

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Sneak Attack

Sharon checked her phone, somehow expecting it to be Brian, but it wasn't. Since their days working together at Barnes and Noble, their two-year-steady relationship, and the sudden break-up following his decision to quit school to write music, he must be pretty depressed, she thought.

She made her way down Market Street to Broadway then walked west the four blocks to her apartment. It wasn't the coolest building, with faded yellow paint, a dead plant in a pot on the landing, and Brenda's rainbow window stickers still screaming the sixties, but it was home for now. No mail. She marched up the dark wooden stairs and went inside number ten.

Brenda caught her just as she was closing the door.

"Hey Sharon," she called up the stairs. "Some guy came by looking for you today. Said he was your brother."

"Right; he's here in town. Let him in next time."

"Sorry. Against the rules. But he left this." She lumbered up the stairs, still in her house dress, and handed Sharon a piece of paper.

Sharon knew Brenda wanted to come in, but she didn't want to hear about Brenda's knee replacement surgery.

"Thanks. I have to work on some orders for a few hours, so I'll catch you later."

"Oh. OK, we can talk tomorrow then. I'm making cabbage soup—we can share." Closing the door, she wondered if Brenda was a stereotype in these old houses chopped up into odd apartments, if all landladies wore ugly pink bag dresses with geraniums and snaps and walked with a limp.

Her phone rang; it was the annoying sibling, Dustin. "Hey, Sharon. Can I stay with you this weekend? There's a cool new exhibit starting Saturday at the Exploratorium, and I don't want to take the train back down from Berkeley."

"Lisa is coming up, Dustin; we're going out Friday night. You can sleep on the old couch, but just stay out of our way for once."

"OK. I can't help it; Lisa's so hot."

"Dustin, she's six years older than you. Find someone your own age who is not my best friend."

"Older women are cool, Sharon. You are so out of touch."

"Shut up, Dustin. I'll stick a key under my mat. Don't destroy anything." Her brother was a geek who loved to watch Spongebob and still played with Legos. How he got into Berkeley she could not understand.

She got to work on the textbook orders that she didn't finish during working hours, an annoying but expected part

of her job at the textbook company.

Her phone beeped suddenly, and her heart pumped too hard. It was just Lisa, sending a text about this weekend. "All set on my end. See you at six Friday. Peace out." Lisa's text made her mood lift for a moment. Two more days. Lisa was happy about Sharon's move, but it felt like a selfish happiness. For best friends, they had become less about connecting and more about planning to connect and seeing this famous city.

Sharon took the job offer from Wadsworth Publishing, even if it meant staging book fairs at community colleges and harassing professors to try new textbooks. Her friends and even her mother oohed and aahed about her move to San Francisco, but she didn't get it. Life in this walking city was claustrophobic. The thick air leaves a fishy-seaweed weight in the lungs. And she missed LA's feeling of openness. San Francisco was all city, tall row buildings crowded together on giant hills as if they might converge and squash her. She recalled photos published after the Northridge earthquake; the old houses crumbled like clods of dirt. San Francisco was a place to visit, not to live.

\* \* \* \* \*

By five o'clock on Friday afternoon, she was back home

after a trip to the store for wine and jiffy pop, the mandatory girls' weekend snack. Lisa arrived at six and Sharon poured them each a glass of wine. "Guess who I ran into last weekend? Brian!" Lisa announced. "He still misses you, Sharon. Why don't you talk to him? The two of you were really good together."

"Brian is finding himself, Lisa. He quit school to write music. How stupid is that? I told him I'd break up with him if he threw his life away like that, but he did it anyway."

Sharon hadn't had a chance to warn Lisa about her brother crashing there when she heard a noise in the hall and opened the door, only to see Dustin on the other side of it.

"Hey Sharon! Who is this you have here? Don't tell me it's big sister's hot friend Lisa!"

"The Nintendo 64 is all ready for you, Dustin. And I got you a new pack of Legos and some army men, too," Sharon said. "Why don't you run along to the kitchen and leave us alone to talk?"

"Dustin, how are you? It's been a long time." Lisa stuck out her hand as if she were greeting a real human being. Sharon took note. "How do you like Berkeley?" Lisa sort of cooed. "Did I ever tell you I spent my freshman year there?"

"Wow, Lisa. I had no idea! So, what was your major back then? Maybe we had some of the same classes." He was speaking to Lisa in complete sentences. Sharon could not believe this. Dustin and Lisa were having a real conversation, and now Lisa showed no sign of wanting to walk out the door. What a traitor! They had all ganged up on Dustin for years. Besides, he was her brother. It was too disgusting to contemplate. They continued to talk, and Lisa started to move back towards the couch.

"Lisa, we really have to go now. The concert starts at seven thirty. Dustin, there's food. Stay away from the Jiffy Pop."

"Wait a minute, Sharon. Dustin, would you like to come? I have an extra ticket," Lisa asked, smiling that one smirky smile she used on certain guys. Sharon was speechless. ✓

"Um, well, all I have to do here is read Sharon's mail, so sure!" He almost ran out the door, knowing his sister should be as far away from him as possible.

Sharon walked ten paces behind them all the way to the cable cars, glaring. They got on at Market Street headed toward the Embarcadero. A quick walk after the stop got them to the theater, a tidy new venue with an Afghan take-out place next door. A line had already formed; this was the first time Sneak Attack had performed in San Francisco,

and she was surprised to see the LA-based band had such a following. "OK you guys, just stop talking," Sharon demanded. "Lisa, ignore him. Dustin, shut up. I am going to enjoy this evening if it kills me."

"Big sister, you won't even know I'm here," Dustin said. The line was moving fast, and soon they were at the front. She recognized the band's poster, but not the first band to play. ✓

"Who is 'Army of One,' Lisa? Is this their new back-up band?"

"I don't know, but my friends at work said they're really good," Lisa said.

They took their seats, Sharon sitting in the center, which didn't please Dustin much. She sensed that Lisa wasn't too happy, either. "Lisa, this is just too weird," Sharon said when Dustin got up to go to the bathroom. "Why are you talking to my brother?"

"Sharon, in case you haven't noticed, Dustin is cute, smart, and he's going to Berkeley on a full Physics scholarship." /

"That is so gross," Sharon said.

Dustin returned and soon the lights dimmed. The crowd started to make noise; lighters flicked on in the darkness. The curtain opened, and the first band started. Army of One was actually three people, two guys and a girl. Their songs

were sort of punk-folk-ska, but really nice. Sharon's head bobbed and she vowed to pick up a CD on the way out.

"OK Sharon, is that who I think it is," Lisa said, pointing to the rhythm guitarist, a guy with dirty blonde hair, a red T-shirt and baggy jeans.

"No! It can't be him," Sharon cried out, suddenly aware that she knew the guitar player.

"Dude, is that guy Brian?" the always eloquent Dustin asked, and the three stared at the stage, mouths open. ✓

"We are so going backstage after this concert," Lisa shouted! Sharon started to say no but the band stopped and the crowd was making noise for them. Sneak Attack's first set started and Sharon got up to find something to drink.

In line at the concession stand, she decided to go for a beer. Walking back, she saw the familiar red shirt with a black question mark on a guy who was approaching. She had bought it for his birthday last year.

He saw her first, which made things easier for Sharon. "Why didn't you tell me, Brian?" she asked. /

"I wanted you to like me for me, not because I had a record deal in the works with this band."

"Brian, I don't know what to say. Your band is great, though. Congratulations."

"Will you come backstage after the concert, Sharon?"

"Dustin and Lisa are here with me."

"Bring them. See you at eleven, stage right."

\* \* \* \* \*

After the three of them met Brian's bandmates and got the autographs of all the members of Sneak Attack, Brian suggested they go to a nearby bar for beers and burgers. Lisa and Dustin walked ahead of Brian and Sharon, and they sat like two couples at the brewery. Sharon realized that life was changing, that maybe her stupid brother was growing up, and she looked at Brian for the first time that night, really studying his face.

"Brian, you have done really well. I never knew you would make it like this. And I am proud of you."

"Sharon," he said, sipping his beer, "I wished for a long time you had stuck by me. But maybe if you had, I wouldn't have made it so far."

"Are you here for a while?" Sharon asked.

"We're playing again tomorrow night. I can get you three in if you want."

Lisa and Dustin were excited about the invitation, and the four of them decided to meet before the concert for dinner the next evening.

When Brian walked them to the cable car, he put his arms around Sharon. She hugged back and was suddenly glad

to be here in this weird city, on her own, at last.

Good revision  
Definite improvement

Pam Arterburn  
November 14, 2006

In the Light

Sitting there in the pediatrician's examining room with Jack on my lap, I waited for the doctor like a sick native waits for the village shaman, ready for any herb or dance or cloud formation that might offer hope. This child on my lap had been the subject of more fear and worry than anything before him; from his inability to look into my eyes, to his lack of interest in toys, to his trouble swallowing, to his inability to sleep more than a few hours, to the cries that would pierce my head like a scream for help-I had talked to the nurses so many times on the phone and tried every home remedy a friend might suggest, but nothing helped. Here at Jack's six month checkup, some answer had to come.

*Terrifying  
1:15 of  
particular*

The doctor blew in holding Jack's folder, already full of loose pink and yellow papers. He did the standard tests without explaining to me what he was doing, then he sat down directly across the room, perplexed and wincing. While writing in the file, he glanced up to take another look. Jack's head was down on his chest, arms outstretched in front, hands in fists. "That looks just like a seizure," his pediatrician announced. He got up, walked

*so cold,  
this statement*

out and in a few minutes returned with a nurse and a sheet of paper. "Go to this doctor at one thirty. He's a neurologist; I just called him about Jack." I looked at the baby on my lap. He was gazing up at

the lights and pressing his head back against my chest.

We had two hours before the appointment, so I pulled in to the nearest McDonalds for a sandwich, parking as close to the door as possible. Jack was a heavy baby and difficult to manage; he never really cuddled up or held on like my first child had done. As I was walking around the car to get him out of the car seat, a small yellow bus carrying several school-aged children pulled up. They lumbered out, some holding on to aides in order to walk. I watched as they filed slowly inside, looked at Jack, my baby who looked just like a cherub in a Michaelangelo painting, and decided to skip lunch.

My husband met us at Dr. Rice's office, and the neurologist with wild gray hair, big goofy glasses and a long pointed nose soon ushered us in. He explained that the pediatrician <sup>had</sup> sent Jack out of concern for Jack's development, but he assured us that the exam was just a precaution. After dangling several toys in front of him, shining a light into Jack's eyes, measuring his head and

*vivid  
description*

3

trying to get Jack to look directly at a stuffed red dog, he rang a bell to check Jack's hearing. Jack looked up, cooed and smiled wide; we all laughed.

Then Dr. Rice told us about one other test he wanted Jack to have. "Don't worry; I've been practicing medicine for twenty years, and only two children in all that time have had a negative result from this scan," he said. I realized that skipping lunch hadn't been a good idea as my stomach rumbled loudly.

*Thin  
comfort*

We arrived at the hospital for the CAT scan the following Thursday morning carrying Jack. The woman who checked us in commented about how beautiful he was with his father's golden hair, and how his eyes looked just like mine. Don and I sat in the waiting room, and soon a nurse appeared and called Jack's name. "Are you coming in with me?" I asked Don.

"No. They don't want both of us in there," he said.

I followed the nurse down the wide hospital hall. The floors had just been waxed; I could see the fluorescent lights above perfectly reflected in the gray linoleum tile. I walked carefully, holding Jack wrapped in a bulky blanket in my arms, trying not to slip.

*exquisite detail*

We entered the huge examining room and the nurse disappeared back into the hall. My eyes had to adjust to the unfamiliar darkness; the walls seemed to be black, and recessed lights in the ceiling made the room glow a diffuse yet sharp orange; I saw counters and medical objects glimmering under the precise illumination. But the dominant force in the center of the room was a gigantic beige contraption that looked like a huge head with an open mouth. A long black gurney extended out of that mouth and into the room. In the middle of this was a papoose board that had been strapped on, a tool used to secure babies for medical procedures. They were ready for Jack.

*And solo  
T. thanks to  
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I became aware that a man in an open white coat was standing to the left of the huge machine. Between the man and the two of us

gt

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name is Mike; we are going to do a scan of Jack's head today," he  
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He moved toward the gurney, motioning for me to come near. My  
feet would not move when my brain told them to. I could not walk. I  
looked at Mike, embarrassed, and suddenly I felt hatred. He was not  
going to have this child. He held his hands out toward Jack, and I  
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Mike looked into my eyes and we both realized that I was not going  
to place my baby onto that gurney. He motioned toward the door, and a  
nurse approached me from behind. "He's going to be fine," she said,  
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my side of the gurney, and the two of them placed their hands on Jack  
and moved my hands away from him.

It was going to happen. I would see my son strapped onto that  
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Back in the waiting room, Don and I sat together, saying hopeful  
things. "It's just a precaution," he said. "The doctor said so."

"Oh I know," I replied. "He's going to be fine."

6

After half an hour or so, a nurse appeared at the door. "The doctor wants to know what happened at birth," she said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Was there some trauma at birth?" She asked. I assured her that nothing like that had happened, and she walked away.

"I'm sure that's a question they always ask," Don said. "It's just standard."

"Yeah, that's probably true," I replied. When they finished with Jack, the nurse told us to set up a follow-up appointment with our pediatrician.

Finally, the following Tuesday afternoon came, and Don and I arrived at the doctor's office with Jack and Danny, our five year old son. As we <sup>were</sup> getting settled in the examining room, a nurse came in and spoke directly to Danny. "Why don't you come outside with me, out to the front office?" she said a little too sweetly. "The nurses out there have some toys for you to play with." Danny smiled and followed her out the door. The pediatrician came in. I noted a fine misting of sweat on his forehead, and he said we would be waiting for the neurologist to

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arrive before he would talk to us about the CAT scan results.

Dr. Rice burst in a moment later, the huge manila folder with the scans in his hand. He shook my husband's hand and greeted me, then pulled out the large X-rays.

"Here," he said, "is where the brain has died. Do you see? It's all black." We looked up as he held the scans between our heads and the lights above. The outline of Jack's head appeared with absolutely nothing inside its parameters. As the photos continued moving down toward his neck, little bits of white appeared. "This is where we see live brain tissue," Dr. Rice offered. "It's as bad as I've ever seen," he said, looking at us not so much in pity as in ~~conspiratorial~~ gloom.

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He looked directly at me, then at Don. "He'll never talk, he'll never walk, he'll never know you," Dr. Rice said slowly.

8

We all looked down at Jack, who was sitting contentedly on my lap, taking in his surroundings. Jack watched the doctor as he continued to speak, his bright green eyes undimmed by the sharp fluorescent lights above.

over →

Pam Arterburn

Story #3

An American Tragedy

President Sanders peered over his horn-rimmed glasses just as the General made his most emphatic proposal and thumped his fist against the lectern. Sanders had never been a fan of General Skeen, especially after that business with the Nicaraguan President and the botched air raid. Skeen was going on about the war again, just as he did every year, and it was wearing thin with the President.

"This war is not for money! This war is based on principle! It is about saving humanity! Saving lives! That and Our Flag," the General bellowed. Sanders yawned and turned back to the morning news, glancing occasionally at the daily briefing on his lap which appeared outside his bedroom door every morning on a silver tray along with his oatmeal and grapefruit juice.

Two short knocks at the door brought the Vice President into the room, already wearing a sharp suit. "What's up, Vince?" the President asked. "Why you all gussied up like that?"

"Mr. President, our meeting with the Prime Minister begins in less than an hour, and you have not yet been

Page two

briefed on the reason for his visit. Have you read the conditions and proposals outlined in the daily report?"

"Oh heck, Vince—I don't really care what the Prime Minister wants. And no, I haven't read the whole thing. Just let it be a surprise."

*uncomfortably  
close to  
reality, I  
fear.*

"But he wants you to send troops to France in order to stop the European Blockade!"

"Fine, fine—send the troops. Keep them busy. Will you step to the left, Vince? I want to see the weather report."

The Vice President sighed audibly, stepped left and continued to talk. "Sir, the report from the front lines is that their people are resisting en masse. Our attempt to bring them to our side has not worked. We meet at one today with the Generals to work out a new strategy."

"Is that General Skeen gonna be there, Vince? I hate that guy!"

"Mr. President, he is the commander of our ground forces."

"I don't care. Just keep him out of that meeting."

"Well, we could send out an erroneous report about new fighting in the islands to distract him, sir."

"Right, Vince. Lie your ass off. Just do it." The president went back to his news program just as the weather report began, and the Vice President made a hasty exit.

"Cloudy this afternoon with a 60% chance of rain in Washington DC. Looks like the President is going to get wet if he decides to meet the Queen for her annual Laying of the Geraniums in the Rose Garden."

"Shit. I hate it when that happens," the President of the United States said to no one in particular.

*Over Flag*  
*Laying of Ger*  
*aniums*  
*Funny!*

\* \* \* \* \*

The First Lady's head was concealed beneath the large silver hairdryer at the Spirit and Sun Day Spa located in downtown Washington. Four Secret Service agents stood just outside the door, talking to their colleagues inside the limousine on two-way radios.

"How's she doing?" Agent Sawhill asked Agent Mills.

"She's almost dry. Needs a few more minutes, then the comb-out and styling. We'll be out of here in plenty of time to get her to the Queen's luncheon," he replied.

"We have to pick up the First Daughter along the route, you know. Completely unscheduled. She sprung this

Page Four

one on me just yesterday afternoon. Caused the whole day to get moved around," Sawhill said.

"Gotta go, Sawhill—she's dry," Mills announced. "Over and out."

Mrs. Sanders was trying to remember if Quail was served last year for the Queen's Luncheon. She certainly hoped not.

*Pretty Fluid  
p.s.v.*

\* \* \* \* \*

The unexpected report about fighting in the islands caused the meeting with the generals to be cancelled altogether, much to the President's delight. He went outside to see to the Rose Garden preparations. The bustle in the White House kitchen reminded him of the luncheon that would take place first. "But I get to ditch that one," he whispered craftily to himself. "That's just for the ladies. Too bad Wanda can't handle the damn Laying of the Geraniums by herself too. Damn Queen." The veranda was in place, and the flowers were being unloaded from white vans. He watched as the Flag was raised just behind the dais where he would introduce the Queen. Spotting his

*craftily!!*

Page Five

golf cart still parked behind the West Wing, the President pretended to go back to his room and boarded the elevator. It went up then right back down. The door opened. No Secret Service in sight. He decided to take that golf cart for a spin around the White House Lawn.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wanda Sanders arrived back at the White House at a quarter to eleven and summoned her personal maid to her dressing room. "Elsie, help me get dressed quickly today," Wanda Sanders said. She slithered into the emerald green silk suit and adjusted the belt, checking her appearance and allowing Elsie to apply a final coat of lipstick. She was ready to meet the Queen just outside the Main Entrance.



As the Queen's entourage pulled past the Gatehouse and headed along the White House Driveway, drops fell onto the windshield and the chauffeur switched the wipers on. President Harlan Sanders was whistling his favorite Skeeter Jennings song and wondering if the golf cart could do Figure 8's on the lawn.



He started to speed up, glad at last to have escaped the Secret Service, who believed he was watching the news in his room. He revved the engine and marveled at how

*P.O. V.*

Page Six

well the golf cart handled, ready to have some fun with it.

As he was just heading into the complicated maneuver, the Queen's limousine was pulling around that very corner of the driveway. The First Lady was standing on the porch outside the entrance, ready to greet the queen, waving her right hand at the Queen's approaching limo.

\* \* \* \* \*

The General said that President Sanders never knew what hit him, that he died having fun, that he would always be remembered as the fun-loving President. The First Daughter cried real tears, sad that her family never got to go home once again, wondering who would walk her down the aisle on her wedding day. She decided it would be the Vice President, since her daddy was so very close to him.

General Skeen was chosen as the main speaker at the event, and he decided the night before the funeral to focus mainly on Sanders' honesty and integrity rather than his down-home folksiness, since that would be more Presidential. Mrs. Wanda Sanders wondered if they had served Beef Wellington at the state funeral last month for the Senate Majority Leader, but after concentrating she remembered that no, it was Prime Rib. The Secret Servicemen were positioned outside the funeral home, ready

to take a bullet for the dignitaries if need be, ready to give all for God and Country. The Queen's driver stood outside the Cathedral, umbrella in hand, ready to keep her dry as soon as she emerged. Her geraniums were trucked to the ceremony, a fitting tribute to the man who loved them so much. The news reported on the death of a great man, a true Patriot, and a natural born leader.

Pam — I can sense the fun you had with this one — If only it were true!

I thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated your being part of our class, and I wish you the best in every way — And please, let me know the good news whenever it might arrive —

S.G.

(A)

*Acute, generous, constructive*

Story Review:  
"Have you Seen Her?" by Hillary Alexander

Pam Arterbur

responses

In this story, the main character buys a house that is ready (literally) to fall apart, and this, along with a move from Manhattan to Glendale, New York are part of her desire or unconscious wish to get away from the fact that she ran over and killed a six year old boy. But we don't have any indication of this accident until the very end when she calls her new friend, Melissa, who is a waitress at the local diner, and confesses—which follows the scene where the house falls into the ground.

Too much is happening in this story, and the reader is trying to decide what is important and what is not. First, we have the successful Manhattan businesswoman who gives it all up to live in a house that doesn't have running water for months! And she sleeps on an air mattress. Why? Next, we have the waitress/friend who becomes not much more than a smoking buddy; their relationship is not deep but more a product of Karen's morning desire for coffee. Melissa's son died of leukemia and she sports a rose tattoo in his honor, but how is this really an indication of Karen's inner secret?

Despite these questions, the story certainly holds the reader's interest and does a good job of showing how

difficult it is to make a major life change; Karen doesn't have an easy time of it, yet she perseveres right until the house decides it's had enough! A line on the middle of page two would make a great opening line for your story: "Spring came late that year." That has a real opening-statement sound to it! And I like the character of Melissa—she has that "stuck in a small town" attitude and doesn't see what attracted the "city slicker"! (Well, the gravel pit doesn't sound like a real tourist attraction, I suppose—maybe you could ditch that detail.) Good job!

Story Review

Pam Arterburn

Howard Capeci, "Best Actor"

This story about a Hollywood marriage and its assorted resentments, superficialities and resentments is well-developed and well-written.

The tone is smooth and deliberate throughout; you are comfortable with these characters and the setting, even if you don't seem to like them very much. Example: "She shoe-horned herself into a dress that cost vacation money. It fit awkwardly around two problem areas; her poorly done boob job and her ass."

The characters are real and rich in terms of your development of them. Example:

"Security makes them wait while they inspect the car before a valet parks it. The trunk, filled with his scuba equipment and all its odd looking tanks, hoses, and dials, arouses suspicion and causes a delay. This annoys her and she impatiently taps her foot loudly." She belongs and he does not, but she does not make any attempt to bridge that gap for him. Instead, she blames him for being who he is.

The tension in the story centers on the deterioration of their marriage, and this is displayed in the unkind ways they behave toward each other. "Nothing about him that

bothers her ever goes unnoticed, and it seems everything about him bothers her." These are not likeable characters, but they sure ring true.

Only your ending disappoints me. All the work you have put into this story, their relationship, the characters themselves—it's almost an "it was all a dream!" ending—he is going to call—a MAN—for some sort of fling. That's just too easy for the layered, complex people you have drawn here so well.

Story Review

Pam Arterburn

Marnie Castor, "The Billionaire"

The class reacted very enthusiastically to your story, partly because of the way you read it. You sounded like an actress in a film noir, and your reading was at once understated yet pregnant with possibility. I called your style here "Psychadelic Film Noir," and I am sticking to that assessment! There is much evidence in the story to support this, beginning with the very first paragraph:

"It was a deal with the devil. She should have known it by the way the fruit salad that morning tasted like garlic."

That could be serious, or it could be funny. More evidence pushes the reader to the latter: "This was Los Angeles. Rich men didn't like her brand of female: a woman with curves and intelligence." And, "I wear an apron because it is a bold fashion statement. Don't you think it makes me look more feminine the way it ties around my waist? It shows off my curves at the same time softens my hard edges." You must admit, these at least verge on the edge of parody or comedy. I say this only because you seemed a bit uncertain about the class' reaction. But we LOVED the story!!

The dilemma your main character faces may seem far-fetched, but for me it rang true. The details you present—the briefcase with a bank statement, his past as a POW, his other two instant proposals—seem consistent with a high-powered, weird businessman who gets what he wants and is brave enough to make deals on the spot.

The ending comes too quickly; the reader never hears your main character's thoughts. Does she come to regret leaving the restaurant?

Story Review

Pam Arterburn

Molly Cheek, "Grown Up"

I love your story! This is a beautifully written tale about a little girl whose mother is losing it in a major way. The first few pages of dialogue between Dana and Lacey are believable and carefully constructed; Lacey is both annoyed by her little sister and doing a pretty good job of distracting her from the potentially awful news that mom hasn't been in bed all night.

You work important details into the story smoothly: "A glass shattered across the kitchen linoleum, and a laugh spat from a woman's mouth. Her mother's mouth. Lacey recognized the giddy hiccup that followed." This says so much about Lacey's life, about her mother, about what Lacey has had to endure. One sentence I love: "A big oblong ashtray with cracked aqua paint sat beside them, overwhelmed." Wow. That's awesome.

The climax seems to be when Uncle Neal helps Mom up: "Lacey saw his arm reach too far around and linger alongside her mother's breast. Lacey felt queasy." This is just amazing work, Molly.

Elizabeth Shin, "Odor"

Here, Sadie cheats on Ted and blames him for not going to that party with her. As the story opens, he is confronting her with the damaging information and she not agreeing with anything. We get no background. How long had they been dating? Did Ted see this as a potentially long-term relationship? How about Sadie? ZAP Suddenly he is drunk in a strip club. How did he get there? Why is he touching the stripper—isn't that against the rules? A lot of time is spent on the stripper and the club; he accuses his friend of sleeping with Sadie, but otherwise the story is about the stripper from this point on, who he stays with even after getting into a fight with his friend (wouldn't they have gotten kicked out?) and holds in bed, which ironically makes him feel guilty. This is probably because he still feels something for Sadie. But what and why?

Story Review

Pam Arterburn

Cliff Cadaver, "Cryptid Chelonian"

I have no idea what your title means, but this is a cool story. Set in a gay bar, we have Ken waiting for Trevor and passing the time talking to Jerry, the bartender. I had no idea that gay men are so into odd entertainment, so the dancing elf was a complete surprise. He goes to the bathroom and, in a plot twist that seems fresh and new, pees on a frog. The class debated about whether this was a live frog or a sanitizer, but regardless, Kenji SEES a frog, which zaps him back to his childhood and a field trip to an aquarium (where DO you find these ideas?) and a little girl he had a crush on. He sees that she has written the name of another little girl and "love" in her notebook, which went right over my head when we read it in class but which was really a significant element because through this, he sees that there are other possibilities in life besides being straight. The names are confusing, though, and since her crush is Chizue, the reader really has to be on the ball to remember that this is a girl. We end up back in the bathroom at the gay bar, and when Ken comes out, Trevor is there and the story ends.

The story focuses more on the field trip than on the present time; we hear really cool details about their teacher and the fish and ocean creatures, but all of this seems secondary to the main story between Kenji and Trevor, which isn't really all that fleshed out. We see that they are close, but not that much about them as people or their relationship.

Pam Arterburn  
November 14, 2006

In the Light

Sitting there in the pediatrician's examining room with Jack on my lap, I waited for the doctor like a sick native waits for the village shaman, ready for any herb or dance or cloud formation that might offer hope. This child on my lap had been the subject of more fear and worry than anything before him; from his inability to look into my eyes, to his lack of interest in toys, to his trouble swallowing, to his inability to sleep more than a few hours, to the cries that would pierce my head like a scream for help-I had talked to the nurses so many times on the phone and tried every home remedy a friend might suggest, but nothing helped. Here at Jack's six month checkup, some answer had to come.

The doctor blew in holding Jack's folder, already full of loose pink and yellow papers. He did the standard tests without explaining to me what he was doing, then he sat down directly across the room, perplexed and wincing. While writing in the file, he glanced up to take another look. Jack's head was down on his chest, arms outstretched in front, hands in fists. "That looks just like a seizure," his pediatrician announced. He got up, walked

out and in a few minutes returned with a nurse and a sheet of paper. "Go to this doctor at one thirty. He's a neurologist; I just called him about Jack." I looked at the baby on my lap. He was gazing up at

the lights and pressing his head back against my chest.

We had two hours before the appointment, so I pulled in to the nearest McDonalds for a sandwich, parking as close to the door as possible. Jack was a heavy baby and difficult to manage; he never really cuddled up or held on like my first child had done. As I was walking around the car to get him out of the car seat, a small yellow bus carrying several school-aged children pulled up. They lumbered out, some holding on to aides in order to walk. I watched as they filed slowly inside, looked at Jack, my baby who looked just like a cherub in a Michaelangelo painting, and decided to skip lunch.

My husband met us at Dr. Rice's office, and the neurologist with wild gray hair, big goofy glasses and a long pointed nose soon ushered us in. He explained that the pediatrician sent Jack out of concern for Jack's development, but he assured us that the exam was just a precaution. After dangling several toys in front of him, shining a light into Jack's eyes, measuring his head and

3

trying to get Jack to look directly at a stuffed red dog, he rang a bell to check Jack's hearing. Jack looked up, cooed and smiled wide; we all laughed.

Then Dr. Rice told us about one other test he wanted Jack to have. "Don't worry; I've been practicing medicine for twenty years, and only two children in all that time have had a negative result from this scan," he said. I realized that skipping lunch hadn't been a good idea as my stomach rumbled loudly.

We arrived at the hospital for the CAT scan the following Thursday morning carrying Jack. The woman who checked us in commented about how beautiful he was with his father's golden hair, and how his eyes looked just like mine. Don and I sat in the waiting room, and soon a nurse appeared and called Jack's name. "Are you coming in with me?" I asked Don.

"No. They don't want both of us in there," he said.

I followed the nurse down the wide hospital hall. The floors had just been waxed; I could see the fluorescent lights above perfectly reflected in the gray linoleum tile. I walked carefully, holding Jack wrapped in a bulky blanket in my arms, trying not to slip.

## 4

We entered the huge examining room and the nurse disappeared back into the hall. My eyes had to adjust to the unfamiliar darkness; the walls seemed to be black, and recessed lights in the ceiling made the room glow a diffuse yet sharp orange; I saw counters and medical objects glimmering under the precise illumination. But the dominant force in the center of the room was a gigantic beige contraption that looked like a huge head with an open mouth. A long black gurney extended out of that mouth and into the room. In the middle of this was a papoose board that had been strapped on, a tool used to secure babies for medical procedures. They were ready for Jack.

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*Beautifully  
written.*