



The INKSLINGER

Sail On



HIGH DESERT BRANCH CWC

Inspiring a Community of Writers

NOVEMBER 2022

ROUND TABLE MEETING A GREAT SUCCESS!

Photos shown are from our October 8 meeting featuring round tables of various topics discussed by leaders with special expertise. The in-depth knowledge shown by topic leaders emphasized the capacity our HDCWC branch has to impart valuable information from their experiences.



Christian writing table, Mike Apodaca



Suspense table, Mike Raff



Poetry table, Mary Langer Thompson.

(Continued on page 2)

ROUND TABLE MEETING

(Continued from page 1)



Screenwriting table, Roberta Smith



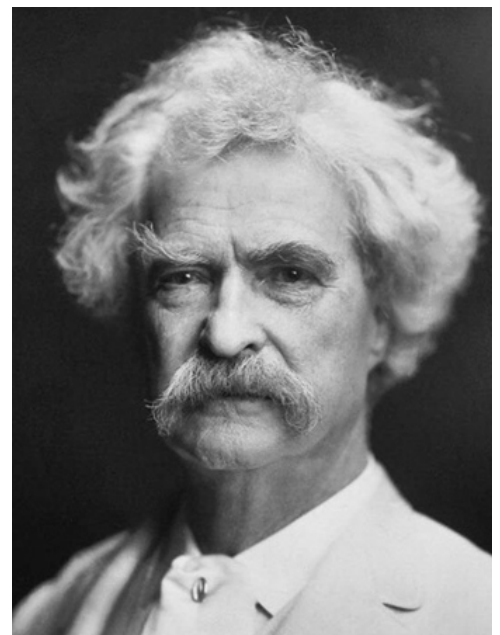
Researching table, by Jenny Margotta (Far Right)



Memoir table, Lorelei Kay

"The time to begin writing an article is when you have finished it to your satisfaction. By that time you begin to clearly and logically perceive what it is you really want to say".

– Mark Twain





FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dwight Norris

AN UNEXPECTED TRIP

Remember warm thoughts and prayers for our vice president Mike Apodaca and his mother. Mike was scheduled to speak to the *Writers of Kern* in Bakersfield for their monthly club meeting on Saturday, October 15th, but had to be with his ailing mother instead in Oklahoma. Mike asked me to fill in for him, so I prepared for the hundred and fifty mile drive.

Sleep was elusive, so late Friday night I decided to get up at about 2:00 AM and get ready to move out. Our meeting, including a delicious breakfast, started at 8:00 AM, so this should work out just great! My tires hit the pavement about 3:30 AM and I was on my way. I was rolling along on Route 395 in no time, looking forward to *Kraemer Junction* and on up Route 58, all the way to Bakersfield. But never assume that the best laid plans are what will actually come to pass!

I had my Google maps all programmed on my magic phone, but I also was prepared with flat road maps supplied by AAA. I like to see where things are likely to wind up, not just blindly step toward the destination. So, I'm following along behind some trucks on 395, and suddenly my Google maps lady (I never got her name) tells me to make a left turn in two blocks. I was content on the 395, but somehow I felt that maybe following the instructions of the mystery lady would have its benefits. I made the left, then a right, then so many blocks this way and then that way. These were dark streets, and before I knew it, I was turned around to the point where there was no going back. The area I travelled was very dark and with no signs and little development. The distances I was instructed to travel were longer and darker and without support or direction. I knew I was beyond the point of no return and must follow through, hoping the path was legit and would eventually spit me out in a civilized area.

As I was on a particularly lonely and dark stretch for thirteen miles, I spied a small sign posted on a forsaken and weathered chain link fence. It said to the reader, *El Mirage Airport*. I was encouraged because at least it was a sign of human presence and organization. In another four miles, a sign read *Entering Los Angeles County*. I perceived that as a sign of progress as well. Now I'm getting somewhere! Then there appeared a sign marked AVENUE P. It seemed to me from many days past that there was an Avenue P somewhere in Palmdale! Then, at long last it dawned on me (figuratively *and* literally) that I must be trudging my through the back alleys of Palmdale and Lancaster! My automatic programmer must have recalculated to save me a mile or two on my journey. Most of the way I could drive no faster than thirty to thirty-five miles per hour due to darkness and generally bad conditions. Can you imagine?

Finally, I arrived a couple of minutes before 8:00 AM at a restaurant in Bakersfield where breakfast was being served, where friendly people were all around, and where I made new friends who share a common passion for writing. I was happy to be able to vacate my car and shake the hand of Sandy Moffett, acting president for *Writers of Kern*, stretch my legs, and give my presentation on Sandy Armistead. It was the first opportunity I'd had to speak about my book on him. I think it was well-received. 🚩



FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT

Mike Apodaca

WHY WE NEED A WRITING COMMUNITY

I write this from Oklahoma where my mom is in the hospital. This is my sixth day here. When I arrived, my mom was unresponsive and we were bracing ourselves for the worse, but, as usual, she has surprised us all and has made remarkable improvement over the last two days.

I left on a Wednesday. I had an engagement to speak at the Kern Valley branch of the CWC on Saturday and was supposed to be the moderator at a panel at the Hesperia Public Library on Monday. What was I to do?

Fortunately, I'm not alone. I'm part of a writing community. I have friends, people who care about me and are willing to step up and help when I need a hand.

I called Dwight Norris and asked him to take my place on Saturday. Without hesitation, he agreed. It was a big ask. This meant Dwight had to drive more than two hours each way to do a presentation in my stead. He stepped up without any hesitation.

Bob Isbill, once he knew my situation, asked Jenny Margotta to take my place on Monday, and she readily agreed. My writing friends came to my aid and freed me to focus on my immediate need—my mom. These are just the latest examples of the many people in our club who've helped me (and, in many cases, saved my bacon) through the years.

It is possible to join a writing club (or any organization) and to stay isolated from other members. Not everyone has an outgoing personality. Not all connect easily with others. Some have to work at building relationships. And, as anyone will tell you who has close friends, true camaraderie takes time and effort.

What can we do to build these relationships?

We can start by attending club meetings.

Along with this, we can let the leaders know what talents we have and what we're willing to do to help the club. Perhaps we can serve on a committee. Or take on a particular task. Somehow, we need to become part of the picture. Contact Mary Thompson or Debbie Rubio and volunteer for the AIMS project. Or Let Dwight Norris know that we'd be willing to be a judge for the Scholastic Arts and Writing Program.

When the club has open mic events, we can prepare something and participate (we have one in November).

It's always a good idea to plan to join those who go out to lunch after the meetings.

We can exchange numbers with someone we meet at a meeting and make a phone call or two.

I started my connections with a critique group (thanks, Anita I. Holmes!). This is where we really get to know people.

Whatever it takes, we all need to build our own network of supportive friends who can help us in time of need. But please don't misunderstand me. This is not why we form these relationships. Primarily, we need to establish these connections with others for what we can give them, not for what we can receive from them. If everyone has a giving spirit, then everyone will also receive. Those who only take, eventually end up with nothing.

I am thankful to be a part of the HDCWC. I've found encouragement, a place to serve and help others, and a circle of good people who have my back. 🚩

WRITERS ARE READERS

BOOK REVIEWS *by Mary Langer Thompson*



FIELD GUIDE TO WRITING FLASH FICTION: TIPS FROM EDITORS, TEACHERS, AND WRITERS IN THE FIELD

What is Flash Fiction? Roughly, it's one to three pages and 250-1,000 words. It's the short short story or a "story in miniature" that goes back as far as the 1300s with *The Decameron*, a collection of short stories narrated by several people who escaped the Black Death. Maupassant ("The Necklace"); Colette; Chekhov; Kipling; Kate Chopin; Strindberg; Ambrose Bierce; O. Henry; Sherwood Anderson; Hemingway ("For sale: baby shoes, never worn."); Dorothy Parker; and Kafka all wrote short shorts. English teachers and professors love the short short because they can be read, analyzed, and discussed in an hour. They are great for reading online and economical in terms of printing.

This Rose Metal Press field guide has 25 brief essays on the form gives flash fiction prompts such as "He said/She said": "Write a story that is 250 to 500 words long using the structure of alternating voices. He said: _____. She said: _____. He said: _____. She said: _____. The two characters should disagree about an issue or subject and dialogue should have a subtext or emotional truth on a deeper level.

Learn about the attributes of flash fiction: short, descriptive, literary, brief, incident, scene. It's about ambiguity, a singular moment, sketch, slice of life, one impression. Each word has to bear weight. Most begin in the middle.

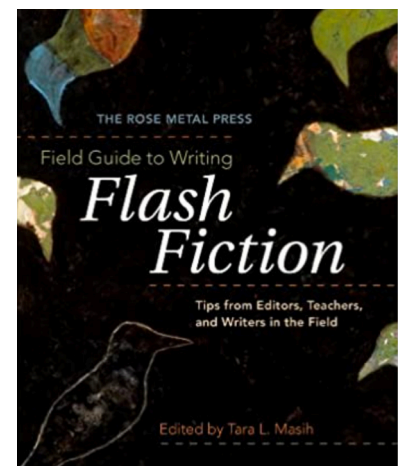
Author Pamelyn Castro includes a chapter on "Linking Up to Myth." "Drawing upon characters or archetypes from mythology provides a way of making use of underlying stories." She advises getting a good mythology handbook to help or do a net search for classical Greek myths. Castro includes story examples.

It's a challenge to make a story work in a small space and also good practice for longer works. Like with poems, every word has to matter. Advice from Tom Hazuka: "Keep a flash book in the bathroom." Jayne Anne Phillips suggests writing one-page fiction from wedding pictures and gives a story example. Or, as Stuart Dybek advises, "Keep a Great Thoughts Notebook for at least a week" and gather "lint from your childhood." Pick one scrap of memory that conveys the most feeling and put it in the form of a story starting with an opening description, shifting to a second character, and dialogue.

Gebbie discusses titles and opening sentences. Each has to intrigue you, the reader. Vanessa Gebbi gives prompts from the poetry of Dylan Thomas: "Do not go gentle into that good night." "Unremembered skies and snows." "Dancing with Cobweb."

Flash fiction needs "smart surprises," says Jennifer Pieroni. Surprises need to be in the form of language and image. She suggests revising cliches, surprising your reader with their freshness. Williford has students generate their own inkblots, like Rorschach. Stare at it and write what you see. He quotes Bradbury: "Don't think." Just write what you see and the images will convey what you're feeling.

Butler defines flash as "a short short story and not a prose poem because it has at its center a character who yearns." "Fiction," he says, "is the art form of human yearning." Almond believes writing bad poetry will yield better short stories. So dust off those bad poems and try a story. "Don't wait to be ready," says Ron Carlson. "Start right now. " 🚩





Jenny Margotta

From an Editor's Desk

MYSTERY NOVELS

Of the five most profitable genres today, mystery/crime novels rank second, with only romance novels ranking higher. Pamalagyi.com lists romance novels as grossing \$1.44 billion in 2021, mystery/crime at \$728.2 million, religious/inspirational at \$720 million, science fiction/fantasy at \$590.2 million and horror at \$79.6 million. Who hasn't heard of the Alex Cross series by James Patterson, or the Bosch series by Michael Connelly, and, of course, the iconic Hercule Poirot series by reportedly the best-selling author of all time, Agatha Christie?

According to Statista.com, the most popular fiction genre among U.S. readers in 2015 was Mystery/Thriller/Crime. That study grouped thrillers in the genre, but in my opinion, thrillers have several distinct characteristics that set them apart from mysteries, so I'm just going to focus on mysteries here.

Given the popularity and possible healthy income of mystery novels, I was surprised that a recent search of genres in HDCWC's MRMS database showed only five of our current members marked MYSTERY as one of their genres of interest.

Mystery/crime novels usually feature a crime to be solved by either a professional or amateur detective. The crime generally occurs early in the book and then the hunt is on for the identity of the perpetrator/s. Readers often delight in solving—or thinking they have solved—the mystery before the main characters do, so you don't want to give too much away too early. Think of a mystery novel as creating a puzzle. Knowing when to reveal certain details is probably the biggest challenge. Too much too soon and your readers lose interest. You want to keep them glued to the book until the very end.

The possibilities in a mystery novel are endless. The story can be set in any country, in any century, and there seems to be no end to the number of ways the crime—most often a murder—can be accomplished. It's a smorgasbord of twists and turns and characters for a creative writer. As is the case in many genres, mysteries often cross over into several different genres. There are romance mysteries, thriller/suspense mysteries, historical mysteries, and more.

There are four primary sub-genres in mystery and crime fiction.

1. Detective novels center around a professional or amateur detective who investigates and solves the crime. Famous detective novel authors include Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes), Agatha Christie (Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple), Raymond Chandler (Philip Marlowe), Dashiell Hammett (Sam Spade), and Sue Grafton (Kinsey Milhone).

2. Cozy mysteries are so-called because they contain no graphic sex, gratuitous violence, or profanity. The cozy mystery detective is most often an amateur working in a restaurant, bookstore, hospital, or other non-police/investigation area. My favorite cozy mystery author is the Scottish author MC Beaton. She has written over 60 books (with 21 million copies) that have been translated into 17 languages. Her series include 36 Scottish police constable Hamish MacBeth books and 25 retired English PR executive Agatha Raisin books. Cozy mysteries often have a humorous side to them.

3. Police procedurals are mystery novels where the protagonist is employed in some capacity on a police force. Some of the better-known authors of police procedurals are PD James, and Ed McBain.

4. Capers are told from the criminal's point of view, while those in the other categories are told from the detective's point of view. Their popularity is based on the fact that they take the reader behind the scenes of the crime. Like cozy mysteries, caper mysteries also often include humorous elements. Michael Crichton is perhaps today's most well-known caper novelist.

There are always exceptions of any set of rules or guidelines, but most mysteries generally include:

1. The crime
2. The investigation
3. The plot twist
4. The breakthrough
5. The conclusion

If you decide to tackle writing a mystery, whether it's a short story or full-length novel, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

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(Continued from page 5)

1. Make it exciting from the very start. Pique your reader's interest with the first paragraph and keep them wanting more.
 2. Setting a mysterious mood is always a plus. The most shocking plot twist of all times will fall flat without the right mood. Think abandoned building or isolated cabin in the woods, include plenty of descriptive language as you lay out your chilling details, and keep it suspenseful until the very end.
 3. Reveal details slowly. The element of suspense is best created by building the story on details and clues revealed over time.
1. Leave clues behind. They might be actual clues to the culprit or they could be red herrings. Readers delight in following the trail and sifting out the false clues.
 2. Tie up loose ends. Even though many mystery novels become series, each book generally doesn't end with a cliffhanger as far as the plot of that book is concerned. You can, of course, whet your readers' appetite for the reappearance of your protagonist if you're planning to feature him/her again.

Ready to begin the next best-seller mystery novel? 🚩

WORD OF THE MONTH:

Denouement [ˌdānoʊˈmāN] Noun

1. the final part of a play, movie, or narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together and matters are explained or resolved.

“The book's denouement was unsatisfying and ambiguous.”

Synonyms include finale, culmination, climax, conclusion, resolution

“A book is made from a tree. It is an assemblage of flat, flexible parts (still called “leaves”) imprinted with dark pigmented squiggles. One glance at it and you hear the voice of another person, perhaps someone dead for thousands of years. Across the millennia, the author is speaking, clearly and silently, inside your head, directly to you. Writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people, citizens of distant epochs, who never knew one another. Books break the shackles of time—proof that humans can work magic.”



— Carl Sagan

BRIGHT WARM FLAME

By fumi-tome okta

You're like a bright warm flame
atop a long tall candle
You dance so delicately
akin to the flutters
of a butterfly wing
Why has a certain smile
turned upside down
Why has your kilowatt
lost its warm yellow glow
I care for you
dear bright warm flame
If I may
If I might
touch your sadness
with my love and friendship
so you may glow again
you to me
and I to you
bright warm flames
Your heart nestled in the crevice of my breast
and I
shhh
cradled deep within
the billowy clouds of
your heart
my heart
our heart.



October 27, 2022



*"It is easy to write a check if you have enough
money in the bank, and writing comes more
easily if you have something to say."*

– Sholem Asch

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS

November 10 Ann Miner

November 13 Katina Newell



THE MOST FAMOUS AUTHORS OF ALL TIME

By Michael Raff

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY

Many of the authors I have researched for these articles suffered bizarre and heart-breaking lives. Enduring scandal, poverty, and the premature deaths of three of her children, Mary Shelley was by far no exception.

Born Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin in London, England, in 1797, her father was political philosopher William Godwin and her mother the philosopher and women's rights advocate Mary Wollstonecraft, who died of puerperal fever shortly

after giving birth to her daughter. The child was raised by her father, who provided her with a wealthy but informal education, encouraging her to adhere to his own anarchist political theories. He described his daughter as “singularly bold, somewhat imperious, and active of mind.”

In 1814, Mary had an affair with Percy Bysshe Shelley, a political follower of her father’s, and a well-known poet and philosopher, who was already married. They seemed destined to live a hedonistic life together. With her stepsister, Claire Clairmont, she and Percy travelled through Europe. Upon their return to England, Mary was pregnant with Percy's child. Over the next two years, she and Percy faced criticism, severe debt, and the death of their prematurely born daughter. They married in 1816 after the suicide of Percy's first wife, Harriet, from drowning.



In 1816, the couple spent the summer with Lord Byron and John Polidori near Geneva, Switzerland, where Mary conceived the idea for her Gothic novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, which was published two years later.

The Shelleys left Britain in 1818 for Italy, where their second and third children died before Mary gave birth to her only surviving child, Percy Florence Shelley. In 1822, Percy senior drowned, (ironically enough), when his sailboat sank. A year later, Mary returned to England and devoted herself to the upbringing of her son, her career as an author, and editing and promoting the works of her late husband.

The last ten years of Mary’s life was troubled by illness, probably caused by a brain tumor that took her life at age 53.

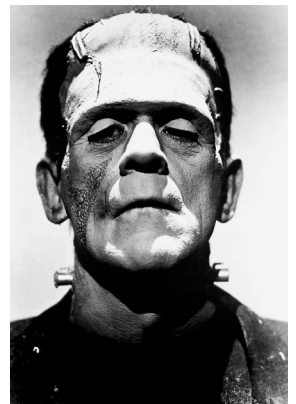
Until the 1970s, Mary was mostly known for publishing her husband's works and for *Frankenstein*. However, modern scholars have shown interest in her literary output, particularly her novels, that include the historical *Valperga* (1823), the apocalyptic *The Last Man* (1826) and her final two novels, *Lodore* (1835) and *Falkner* (1837).

Studies of her lesser-known works support the view that Mary remained a political radical throughout her life. Her works often argue that cooperation and sympathy, particularly as practiced by family women, could reform civil society, a direct challenge to the individualistic romantic ethos promoted by Percy and the theories of her father.

Surprisingly, I’ve never read *Frankenstein*, but I’m more than a little familiar, considering all the plays, comic books, and film adaptations. My favorite? *Frankenstein*, 1931, starring Boris Karloff, whose portrayal, you could say, breathed new life into the story.

FUN FACTS ABOUT MARY SHELLEY

- Frankenstein is considered an early example of science fiction.
- Mary and Perry’s affair began when they started meeting at the gravesite of her mother. It’s been rumored she lost her virginity in that churchyard.
- Percy, who had affairs with other women, sometimes left home to dodge creditors.
- Mary described the city of Naples, Italy, as “a paradise inhabited by devils.”
- It has often been questioned if Mary’s husband extensively contributed to or actually wrote Frankenstein. Modern research has proven otherwise.
- The birth of the most famous horror story began in front of a fireplace at Lord Byron’s villa when he suggested telling ghost stories. A few nights later when she was asked if she had come up with a story, Mary replied something along the lines of perhaps a corpse being “re-animated.” That night she had her famous “waking dream.” “I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out . . .”



Until next month, turn up the lights, and keep reading and writing. 🚩

HDCWC CELEBRATES WRITERS WEEK WITH CHILDREN'S BOOK PANEL

By Bob Isbill

The HDCWC hosted a panel of local authors discussing children's books and stories and the different approaches to this genre of writing and editing at the Hesperia library on October 17th. This free presentation was intended to inform and encourage those wanting to write children's stories but did not know where to begin.

The remarkable thing about this panel was its makeup of such different authors. Andrea Willow's *The Whole World is Naturally Curly* is an artistic book that can appeal to adults as well as children. Amelia Hansen, at 14 years old, has published nine books about the adventures of a cat saving other animals in distress; Mary Langer Thompson has written "*How the Blue-Tongued Skink Got His Blue Tongue* and *The Gull Who Thought He Was Dull* and Mary Ruth Hughes has written a series of books accompanied by a CD of the story plus music.

Moderator Jenny Margotta has edited 162 books during her career, many of which are children's books. She offered a multitude of tips on getting together specific information and intent before you start writing the book and advice on how best to think about publishing it.

All participants are members of the High Desert Branch of the California Writers Club (HDCWC) which meets monthly in Apple Valley.

For more information, visit www.hdcwc.com or call 760.221.6367.



left to right Andrea Willow, Amelia Hansen, Mary Langer Thompson, Mary Ruth Hughes, Jenny Margotta

HIGH DESERT BRANCH OF THE
CALIFORNIA WRITERS CLUB
BOARD OF DIRECTORS



THE FOLLOWING OFFICERS AND
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UNTIL THE END OF THE FISCAL YEAR
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Quote of the Month

By Michael Raff

"Most people are mirrors, reflecting the moods and emotions of the times; few are windows, bringing light to bear on the dark corners where troubles fester. The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows."

-Sydney J. Harris, journalist and author

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