

Writing Conference composes a pretty piece of prose



For Saturday's Compose Writing Conference, part time faculty members from the English department Nicole Rosevear and Jaime Wood ran a workshop titled "Turning Big Truth into Art: The Essential Work of Poetry and Fiction."

Anna Axelson Co-Editor-in-Chief

With a wrangling twist of masterful words, classrooms full of bright, eager minds and a wholesome helping of bona fide talent, Clackamas Community College's composition seems to have pulled together into one glorious piece of prose. Starting off June with a well-written bang, the campus played host on Saturday to the fourth annual "Compose," CCC's Creating Writing Conference.

While there were many workshops to choose from (16 in all – up four from last year), my immediate draw was to fiction and I found myself seated before the rumored great Trevor Dodge. The published author and beloved instructor's session "The Beautiful Lie: Emotional Truth in Writing Fiction," broke down some of the key aspects of being a writer: trust, belief and risk.

"If a reader trusts you, you can tell them anything," said Dodge. "Belief is the epicenter of the reader."

You don't have to be telling the truth to be believable. But then again, what is truth?

As Dodge explained through the words of fellow authors Lidia Yuknavitch (a fellow speaker at Compose), Tim O'Brien, Lance Olsen, Raymond Carver and Alison Bechdel – all recommended reads by Dodge – it became clear that the line is quite faint. We don't love the words of J.R.R. Tolkien because we've embraced the notion of a stout, furry-footed, diminutive humanoid species who inhabit the lands of Middle-earth, but because of the truths within Tolkien's world and the emotions in which the words draw the reader in.

During the fabulous lunch provided by Oregon City's own Just a Bite Cafe (there were turkey and veggie offerings), accomplished playwright and Clackamas instructor Sue Mach delivered a keynote address to the satiated crowd. The fueling force – and title – of the speech was "Failure is the only Option."

"Expect to fail," said Mach. "You owe it to yourself to tell the story that is meant to be told."

While she went on to speak of creative conflicts, the importance of truth, the yearning for a story, her meaning can probably be summed up in the immortal words of Yoda: Do or do not. There is no try.

"The world needs critical thinking. Our culture needs critical thinking," said Mach to an attentive crowd. "Do it because there is a lot of important things to say."

Inspired and ready for more, my next workshop was "Turning Big Truth into Art: The Essential Work of Poetry and Fiction" run by Jaime Wood and Nicole Rosevear, both part time faculty for the English department. The themes were reminiscent of the rest of the day (these ladies did a spectacular job of keeping truth and failure from being a depressing topic), but the readings were inspired. First was "Failure," by Philip Shultz, then "Girl," by Jamaica Kincaid. Both pieces, while staggeringly different, carried a power that raised goosebumps and sparked discussions of what truths we could determine, and just how the poet or author relayed those truths. This session was a great follow-up to Dodge's workshop, delving deeper into the truth within the lie.

For me, Compose ended with "Sleeping With Your Verbs, Dancing With your Appositives:

Grammar Concepts for Improving Style," presented by Clackamas instructor James Bryant-Treise. As amped up as I was to put the pen to the page, a few moments of reflection, revision and reconsideration were a great way for this editor to rein in the stampede tempting to overwhelm my fiction urge.

"You do not have a sentence if you do not have a subject and a verb," said Bryant-Treise. "By being aware of your subject and verb you can know how to emphasize or de-emphasize."

Bryant-Treise set a room full of eager writers on course with a simple writing tool: Erasmus' Exercise. Named for the Renaissance writer, the exercise involves taking key sentences and rewriting the content in numerous different ways, practicing your verbal flexibility, all the while ensuring you have the basics such as both a subject and verb and some semblance of balance.

For the complete listing of workshops, the schedule is still available at www.ccccreativewritingconference.wordpress.com.

With the announcement that next year's Compose will not be free as the last four have, I can't help but wonder what that means. Will the fee help to expand the conference? Perhaps allow the college to add to the workshops offered or bring in more outside speakers, resources, vendors? Compose has potential and our students and community could benefit from contributing to its growth. We're right on the edge of a growing world of literary love, with Portland becoming a hotspot of writers, publishers, even literary agents. I can't wait to see where this trend takes us. I truly hope Compose is able to keep up.



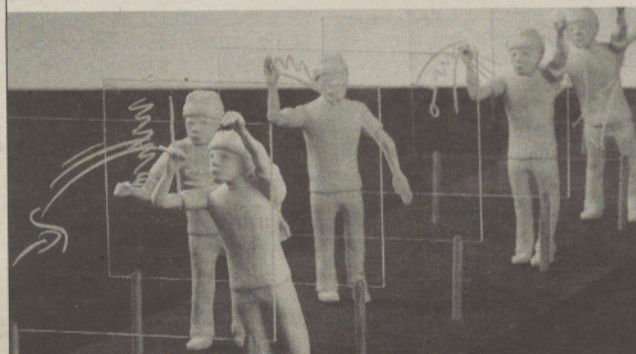
Clackamas instructor and accomplished playwright Sue Mach delivered the keynote address in Gregory Forum during Saturday's fourth annual Compose Writing Conference. The title and theme for the keynote was "Failure is the Only Option."

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Literature & Writing Courses Offered Fall 2013

- ENG 104 - Introduction to Literature: Fiction
- ENG 104 - Introduction to Literature: Fiction (a focus on literature of horror)
- ENG 107 - World Literature
- ENG 121 - Mystery Fiction (Online)
- ENG 194 - Introduction to Film
- ENG 199 - Witness Literature (Online)
- ENG 199 - Introduction to Literature (Hybrid)
- ENG 201 - Shakespeare
- ENG 216 - Comics & Literature (Hybrid)
- ENG 250 - Greco-Roman Mythology (Hybrid)
- ENG 253 - American Literature
- WR 241 - Creative Writing: Fiction (Hybrid)
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