SEX WRITING 101: IT’S NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN

Writers and anyone else with inquiring minds and are not timid will want to hear internationally acclaimed editor and author Jonathan Beckman present “When Good Writers Turn Bad in Bed” at 1 p.m. on Saturday, October 6 at the San Fernando Valley chapter of the California Writers Club. We will hold this meeting in the Saban Community Room.

How to avoid crude, tasteless, often perfunctory use of redundant pages of sexual description that do nothing to develop plot or character are among the many topics that Beckman will discuss.

Beckman believes we perhaps avoid writing about sex because there are so many poorly written scenes and we don’t want to add to them. “Or, perhaps we don’t have a clue on how to write about the subject,” he says. Beckman judged the “Bad Sex in Fiction Award” when he was senior editor at the London Literary Review. Over the years, the award has expanded to include absurd, incoherent, clichéd, unintentionally comic and pretentious descriptions of sexual activity.

Obviously, Beckman is very serious about this topic. “If a publisher pushes sex, it should at least be well written. Bad sex scenes are a major turn-off for both editors and readers.” The presentation will provide tips to writers on how to write sex scenes well or how to avoid writing them badly.

During the presentation, Beckman, now deputy editor of 1843, an international lifestyle and general interest magazine published by The Economist, will share some examples of bad sexual scene writing. (no parental guidance rating required.)

“Mediocre sex scenes can be the reason why many manuscripts never see the light of day,” said CWC-SFV President Bob Okowitz. “Learning about the birds and the bees from Jonathan Beckman will definitely benefit the writers who attend this unique and fascinating meeting, but of course, as the old saying goes, practice makes perfect whether it’s using the keyboard or in a more intimate setting. Who knows, maybe this will bring back some razzle-dazzle back into the lives of those attending the presentation.”

None of our chapter members, many who are well past 60 years of age, were aghast when the topic for the October 6 meeting was first announced. Their attitude, in fact, was bring it on.

“We are so honored that the distinguished Jonathan Beckman will travel half-way around the world to be with us,” said CWC-SFV Program Chair Lori Hamilton. "His visit demonstrates how well-known and respected our club has become."

Please join us and perhaps learn better bedside manners for your next romance story.

—Gary Wosk

Jonathan Beckman

Born in London, Beckman earned his bachelor’s degree in English from Cambridge University and a master’s degree in intellectual and cultural history from Queen Mary University in London.

His book, How to Ruin A Queen, which is based on one of the greatest scandals in pre-Revolutionary France, was published in 2014 and won the 2015 Somerset Maugham Award, the Royal Society of Literature/Jerwood Award for Non-Fiction and was short-listed for the American Library in Paris Book Award.

Hello friends, it’s autumn in the Southland and the shorter days reminds us that winter is coming.

Local merchants are stocking shelves with gaudy costumes and bright packages of sweets. Soon kids everywhere will be trick-or-treating again.

I grew up in New York City and my October trick-or-treat outings were insane! My friends and I had had 200 apartments within easy reach. Way too much candy!

October also meant that summer vacation days were definitely over. But we still had occasional fun “Indian Summer” days when summer came back for a week or two, even as the trees changed colors.

I’ve lived in California since 1976 and I’ve found that our October weather is very different from back East. We don’t have too much dramatic tree foliage color changes or cold rainstorms. In this mild weather, I often feel energized to write. I look for a quiet corner, turn on the laptop and get busy. Maybe you do too. But since I’m the Prez, I’ve got to come up for air sometimes and take care of SFV business.

And there’s always lots to do, that’s for sure. This fall our club is in a building phase as we reach out to nearby communities and try to build up our membership. To this end, we’re making new social media contacts that help us make contact to all kinds of writer-friendly events and resources.

Take Meet up, for example. This website https://www.meetup.com/ has special benefits for our club. Meetup members list their interests, and those who put down “writing” receive announcements about Saturday CWC-SFV meetings. Several Meetup members have come to visit our meetings. I hope they comb back. I also hope to see all active members at our upcoming October meeting.

Thanks for reading, Bob Okowitz
Got a Bad Case of Writer’s Block? 
Rita says, “Be spontaneous!”

Our September speaker needed very little introduction. She was our club’s long-time member, Rita Keeley Brown. Rita is a published author and an experienced creative writing teacher. She knows many ways to help writers recharge their batteries, so to speak. But this Saturday, she also knew that a tedious lesson plan would never work. After all, in early September, our members had just returned from their summer hiatus. Bring on the cookies and coffee!

Rita decided to introduce an exercise that’s been very popular in her creative writing classes: spontaneous writing in reaction to a prompt.

“Here’s how it works,” Rita began, “First, sit back and relax. Close your eyes and shut out all worries of the day. I’m going to give you one word and let’s see what pops into your mind.”

Other prompt sources such as unfinished sentences and works of art followed. A 10-minute writing time followed each prompt about the image or idea triggered for each individual.

Their stories were then read to the person next to them and if time allowed to the large group. Next, each person was given a sheet of several unfinished sentences. They were to choose one that clicked with them – an ‘Aha’ moment.

People intently read their sheet of prompts and then pens got busy. When ten minutes were up, several people read aloud their compositions. The room that had been hushed now filled with lively conversation and laughter.

This exercise proved so popular with our group that Rita was asked for a repeat performance at a future meeting. She promptly agreed. We broke into spontaneous applause.

—KH

Visual Prompt: A sketch of a man's face ...

What am I doing here? I'm tired, sore and thirsty. If I had a mirror, I'd see a weathered face.

Black moustache, lined face and searching eyes. Don't try to guess my age or occupation.

Looks can be deceiving. Clothes, a disguise. What I want you to see is ME—a human being who has seen better days. But there’s still a small twinkle in my eye. I may limp, but I do it with a jauntiness.

Who Am I? I am ...

He reminds me of the man playing a violin in the Plaka, in Greece.

He also, had kind piercing eyes. I photographed him, then painted him into my painting of houses above the Plaka, sitting on a raised brick planter, in front of a house with a blue door.

Now he looks out from the canvas with his kind smile. And now I smile at the memory.

—Sylvia Molesko

—Sheila Moss
Prompt: Coming directly toward me in the parking lot was...

Coming directly toward me in the parking lot was the tallest man I had ever seen! He scared me to death! But he had a smile on his face when he said "Hello."

"Goodness" I said, in an effort to calm myself, "You're closer to heaven than anyone I've ever known!"

"Yes, I'm the tallest man in Canada! I'm in the Guinness Book of Records!" he said proudly, raising a hand the size of a large dinner-plate.

The difference in height between us made me imagine a cake baked with badly mixed ingredients, causing it to rise unevenly.

When I got home I checked the giant out on YouTube. There he was—the glorious Jerry Sokoloski—the tallest man in Canada! I had missed an opportunity to interview a true giant! I still wonder which vehicle he had used to get to the parking lot.

Ester Shifren
OCTOBER

solitude
motionless
and alive
with barely perceptible pulse
wind chimes
in the distance

dried leaves
leaving lonely branches
and a flutter of sound'
muted in frosted dawns

loneliness'
without regret
within a gray frame'
crystal reflections

memories
awakened within
energy
diffused from dreams

october evening
canopy of stars
cool and velvet night
embroidered with music
wind chimes
in the distance

--Lillian Rodich

MOONSTRUCK

The moon is a shiny new penny
tossed on the sky's black oilcloth,
I would pluck it, twirl it
and make its magic mine ....
a glowing reminder
safe in my pocket ...
but how sad the night sky
without its lucky charm!

--Lillian Rodich
Critiquing in Cyber Space

By Joan Zerrion

From 2009 to 2014 I happily participated in an online writing group, five women who lived along the West Coast from Port Townsend, WA to Idyllwild, CA. I'd met two of them at a writing workshop conducted aboard an Alaskan cruise, which was great fun and as much a chance to explore my desire to write as to see the Inside Passage.

After the cruise we invited two other women who had studied with the Writing It Real teacher, Sheila Bender, and adopted Sheila’s three-part critique method: First, mark all the “Veloero” words and phrases that really work for you. Second, monitor your emotional responses to the material and report them accurately. Third, specify what you want to know more about, or what seems unclear or underdeveloped. It’s a very focused and supportive critique model and the gold standard for me still. Anyone interested?

With this shared format we exchanged writings/critiques on the 15th of every month for five years. Quite often I hadn’t written anything until the deadline loomed and then I had to produce something quick! I moved from Idyllwild to LA in 2010 but continued to write vignettes about life in a small mountain town, until my fellow writers said it felt like a novel in the making. But managing mountain rental properties and raising two teenagers as a single woman, I couldn’t seem to find the time to focus on that ambition.

Eventually life intervened and the online group dissolved. I still wrote occasionally but only this summer was I inspired to compile the pieces I’d written about “High Pines,” and able to make them into a narrative. To my surprise, I now have 70,000 words with more chapters still to be woven into the story. It’s been so much fun to put this together and to discover that almost inadvertently, I did write a novel, thanks to my online writing group!

I’ve joined CWC-SFV to keep myself focused, to see myself as a writer among writers and to explore publication while working on a sequel. It seems the characters in my book are just not done with me yet.

Review and Refresh

Little Things Can Mean a Lot

Little things mean a lot, like... making the verb agree with the subject, not with the noun closest to it. Not... One of the children were missing. One is the subject. So it's One of the children was missing.

... pronouncing the word “mischleous” right. It’s pronounced miss-cha-vuss, not miss-cheeve-ee-uss.

...not misusing the reflexive pronoun myself. Don’t say That Toyota barely missed Sally and myself instead of saying That Toyota barely missed Sally and me. Don’t say Mildred, Sammy, and myself saw that movie. Say Mildred, Sammy, and I saw that movie. Myself is not somehow magically correct in every grammatical situation.

...remembering that combinations connected by or, or either... or, or neither... nor are considered singular.

Either Mr. Gordon or his wife Norma opens the store each morning. Not... open the store. Neither Martin nor Bruno knows what happened Saturday night. Not... know what happened.

...not putting the word however at the beginning of a sentence. (Okay! If you insist, go ahead. However, I think there’s always a better place for it within the sentence.) Later in life, however, he thought differently about this... has a better ring to it than However, he thought differently about this later in life.

...using the word fewer with items that can be counted, like fewer pencils, fewer students, fewer bricks. Use the word less with items that can’t (or wouldn’t normally) be counted, like less sand, less milk, less booze. And in spite of the beer commercials, less calories is wrong, as is the ten items or less you see at the checkout stand in the supermarket.

...using him, her, us, or them after prepositions ... and not using their counterparts he, she, we, they. The expressions between you and I... for he and Sheila... with he and she... are all wrong. They should be between you and me... for Sheila and him... and with him and her.
Duotrope is a quick, easy, convenient and inexpensive way for writers to find publications that might be interested in their poetry, short stories, flash fiction, and novels. In fact, Duotrope might be one of the best resources to come along for writers since the advent of word processing, the Internet and self-publishing.

The online service has surely worked wonders for this author. If not for Duotrope, it would have been much more time consuming to have found homes for my short stories. I give it one big thumbs up. The best part is that no agents and complicated contracts are needed.

Subscribers who sign up at Duotrope.com pay as little as $5 and as much as $100 to receive, via mail, dozens upon dozens of listings of publications in need of all forms of fiction and non-fiction. Just go down the line and click on the ones that seem like a good match.

For only $5, subscribers receive the listings for one month. If you want to make someone happy, new and experienced writers will appreciate receiving a digital gift card. You can also send yourself a digital gift card. Once your subscription expires, Duotrope will let you know. Only credit cards are accepted.

The listings are broken into such categories as Paying Markets, Non-Paying Markets, Markets No Longer Accepting Submissions, Defunct Markets and Anthologies. Some pay and some do not.

You won’t get rich. Compensation generally ranges from one cent per word up to twenty cents per word, but it’s better than a kick in the pants. It’s really worth the investment. Listings are regularly updated, too, although there might be a few repeats, but for the price, you can’t beat it.

If your story is accepted, let Duotrope know, and they will let the entire world know by mentioning your name.

Just follow the directions, and presto, your masterpiece can be submitted within minutes, once you get the hang of it. Even those not that adept on the computer will figure it out.

According to the website “Duotrope is an established, award-winning resource for writers and artists. We help you save time finding publishers or agents for your work, so you can focus on creating. Our market listings are up to date and full of information you won’t find elsewhere. We also offer submission trackers, custom searches, deadline calendars, statistical reports, and extensive interviews.”

At the topic of each listing, a summary is given of what the publication is looking for. Sometimes the summary is straightforward, and other times, it’s rather vague. And there are other guidelines as well, such as the required word count, genres that are accepted and the pay scale.

—Gary Wosk

Southern California Writers Showcase

Writers Showcase represents our California Writers Club branches in Southern California, from Long Beach and Orange County to the Inland Empire and the East Sierra. This website is a showcase of work by our member authors, including poems, essays, humor, short stories, fiction and memoir to read online. Our CWC-SFV members’ submissions are accepted by this online publication.

Our member authors also have creative writing tips and writing ideas to provide insight and inspiration. You will also find news from our branches, interviews with published authors, and lists of local writing events and conferences to keep you up to date.

Check out our URL: http://www.socalwritersshowcase.com/ and contact Pat Avery if you need submission instructions.
A Higher Calling

—Kathy Highcove

Big John watched the flood waters swirl underneath his attic window. Lawn chairs and trash cans bobbed on the current.

He stared down at his cell phone. No messages. What the hell happened? he wondered. Where's everybody? I want my messages! Is this thing broken?

"I figgered you'd be sittin' up here, Big John," cried a female voice. He whirled around and recognized his tenant, Angelique, an elderly Creole. She had her wiry grey hair tucked into a bright red bandanna.

"You startled me, woman! But I'm actually glad to see you. How'd I get up here? One moment I'm down there swimming in my business suit, and then I'm suddenly up here, looking out this here window. In a tomato-red jogging suit. No messages on my BlackBerry! What happened? D'you know?"

"You be daid, Big John, and so's I. See your sorry body o'er there? You had y'self a heart attack and drowned daid."

"What? You're ... right. I see myself floating face down. Hands and legs all splayed out like a dead crab. And I'm bloated all out of my clothes, suit jacket blowing up like a grey sail on a kid's raft. Lost my best shoes and silk socks, and my head's jammed into the crotch of a magnolia tree. Food wrappers plastered all over my face. Horrible. How'd I die?"

"Remember comin' over here in the mornin' to give all us renters some bad news? Yew wanted to raise our rents, you greedy old pole-cat! You and me and lotsa folks was arguin' in the rain on the front porch when the levee busted."

"Then ... are you really daid—I mean dead, too? I didn't kill you, did I? I think you riled me."

"Hah, you nevah teched me. The flood waters swept us all off the porch. I slammed into a lamppost. Drowned daid."

"What now? The moon is rising and this town is dark and spooky. Feel like I'm in limbo. Useless."

"Not 'zactly. You got a new job to do. Just like me. I've been sent here to fetch y'all for the Parade. Look yonder. There's our krewe. Let's go."

"Parade? It's not Mardi Gras yet, Angelique," replied Big John with a smirk. Then he peered closer in the direction where she pointed—toward the dark horizon, where night's smooth edges met the turgid dark floodwater. Something long writhed and lifted into the air like a disjointed snake.

Big John's eyes widened as he watched a line of specters slowly dance toward him, over the dark water. "Oh when the saints, go marchin' in ..." The tune drifted through the humid night air.

"What kind of parade is that?" Big John asked. "I knew some of those folks. There's Papa Rolando. He died last week of pneumonia. And isn't that drummer the guy we used to see in the La Vida Loca Club? He was shot by his girlfriend's husband. Our krewe is a bunch of ghosts?"

"'Cmon, Big John. Look who's talkin'. Now we gotta join 'em or else we'll be haints in this big old moldy house. Oh, nearly forgot. I'm s'posed to give you this here saxophone. Learn to blow with soul. Yew got forevuh to learn how!" She guffawed at his baffled expression.

"Where're we going?" Big John asked as the duo wafted through the window. They sailed gracefully over to their krewe and settled next to a toddler shaking a tambourine and an old man tooting a bugle. Angelique pulled a kazoo from her skirt pocket.

"Not sure. Mobbe we're goin' to find a black hole, jump in, an' spin around with star dust ... or mobbe we'll all come back to life here—like my mama once tolle me. Next time mobbe I'll be your landlord, heh, heh. Oops, there's the signal. We're leavin'."

The reveler's line rose slowly, writhing across an inky sky. Angelique pointed at Big John, "Blow your horn, brother. Let's hear your soul music."

Big John blew a low note then looked down one last time at the flooded house.

"Okay, Angelique. I'll try to keep up, but sure wish I could take my cell with me."
2018 CWC-SFV Scholarship Recipient

This spring CWC-SFV awarded a scholarship to Daniel Glassman, a Pierce College student.

We stipulated that the awardee would be a student who had received at least a B in two English classes and had displayed writing talent. We asked the Pierce College English department professors to select the student.

Daniel Glassman was chosen by his professors to receive our award. Glassman spoke to our club members at our September meeting and praised his creative writing experiences at Pierce College.

In his talk, he told us that the Pierce College English Department fosters an invigorating environment that encourages young writers like himself. He immersed himself into improving his writing and has developed relationships with professors and other developing writers.

Recently, Glassman evidently applied what he’s learned when he co-founded GlassMotion Films and became head writer for the fledgling company.

He told our September gathering, “I truly appreciate the scholarship award and hope to continue my involvement with CWC-SFV.”

We in turn wish him well in his educational and vocational pursuits at UCLA.

—Pat Avery

Under this light
The hope for that moment
If the reality’s slight
The dream still potent

Acting like those round me
But my mind races
Thoughts quite hazy
The change, it races

Not sad, just happy
Planned the night out
Hope it ain’t scrappy
Alone after, pout

For these temporary woes
Are beautiful on their own
But the more time goes
That hope, more grown

I’m not complaining
This is all very slight
Beauty’s just draining
Under this light

I’d rather sing one wild song
And burst my heart with it,
Than live a thousand years
Watching my digestion and being afraid of the wet.

—Jack London

Daniel Glassman shares a poem.

In The Wings
California Writers Week

In 2003, the California Writers Club worked with legislators to establish a week to celebrate and recognize California Writers. The result of this effort occurred on September 4, 2003 when the California State Assembly officially declared the third week in October of each year as California Writers Week. The Resolution is endorsed by the California Library Association. Next month, during the third week of October, CWC branches and libraries all over the state will celebrate California Writers Week.

To learn more about the history of CWC, the oldest writers club in the nation, click on www.calwriters.org

NEW EVENING CRITIQUE GROUP

Are you interested in joining a critique group but our established daytime or weekend critique groups don’t jibe with your schedule? Happily, a new evening group is forming, tentative genre long fiction, to meet on a weekday evening (time, day, and frequency to be determined).

This group would be perfect for members who cannot join one of our daytime groups or those who would like to explore writing long fiction (novels, fiction, non-fiction, life story, memoir, etc.).

If you’re interested please contact Geri Jabara CWC, SFV Critique Group Coordinator, at geri.jabara@att.net

Write a novel in a month!

National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) celebrates its 19th year of encouraging creativity, education, and the power of the imagination through the largest writing event in the world.

This November, 976 Municipal Liaisons (MLs) will coordinate hundreds of local, in-person writing events, working with local businesses, libraries, and community centers in cities and regions across the globe. NaNoWriMo expects over 400,000 people to start a 50,000-word novel in the month of November. Throughout the month, they’ll be guided by this year’s theme: Super powered Noveling.

For more information on Nanowrimo:

Websites: nanowrimo.org and ywp.nanowrimo.org
Facebook: NaNoWriMo Twitter: @nanowrimo Instagram: @nanowrimo
Black Cat
A cat as black
As blackest coal
Is out upon
His midnight stroll,
His steps are soft,
His walk is slow,
His eyes are gold,
They flash and glow.
And so I run
And so I duck,
I do not need
His black-cat luck.

Author Unknown

Dogs have owners, cats have stuff.

~Author Unknown

A house is never still
in darkness to those
who listen intently;
there is a whispering
in distant chambers,
an unearthly hand
presses the snib of
the window, the latch
rises. Ghosts were
created when the first
man awoke in the
night.

J.M. Barrie

One need not be a chamber to be haunted;
One need not be a house;
The brain has corridors surpassing
Material place.

~Emily Dickinson

The cat is domestic only as far as suits its
own ends.

~Saki

The problem with cats is that they get the exact same look on their face whether they see a moth or an axe-murderer.

~Paula Poundstone

Cats are dangerous companions for writers because cat watching is a near-perfect method of writing avoidance.

~Dan Greenburg

How like a queen comes forth the lonely Moon
From the slow opening curtains of the clouds
Walking in beauty to her midnight throne!

~George Croly

There is something haunting in the light of the moon; it has all the dispassionateness of a disembodied soul, and something of its inconceivable mystery.

~Joseph Conrad
Autumn Trees

Autumn trees lining streets, tawny-haired colonnades on each side, shower shade and summer secrets leafing sidewalks yellow-brown.

Burnished arches overhead, they shed rusty coats, peeling to skin, bare themselves in winter wind; dance with abandon, stretch, twist, feeling strength deep down in roots.

When air is still in chill of winter, chagrined they surrender with uplifted subletting to silent, scrawny lions, gray sphinxes stoned in rows, standing guard till warmth of spring—till bouffant shade and summer secrets touch heads above the streets again.

—Lenora Smalley
How to Find Us

Driving west on the 101 freeway to the Woodland Hills area, exit at the Valley Circle/Mulholland off-ramp. Coming east, exit at Calabasas Rd./Mulholland off-ramp and move left with traffic onto Calabasas Rd.

Westbound travelers go south over the 101 freeway you just exited and drive straight on until you see Spielberg Drive on your right.

Eastbound motorists must be in the far right lane on Calabasas Rd. so you can easily turn right onto Mulholland Road. Continue to Spielberg Drive.

Drive along Spielberg Drive, turn left at an intersection and continue along the road to a kiosk with a gate across the road. Inform the kiosk attendant that you’ve come for the California Writers Club meeting and ask for parking directions.

The parking lot for our meeting is near a statue of a trombone player. (Buddy Rogers) When you leave your car and look around, you should spot a group of buildings nearby. That’s where the Katzenberg Pavilion is located. There’s a large koi pond and small bridge over the pond right beside an entrance to our meeting room.

Another clue—if you’re lost, wandering around the facility’s campus, Katzenberg Pavilion is directly across from the Stark Villa. Look for our sign-in tables set up outside the Pavilion. Club members are waiting to welcome you into our gathering.

SFV-CWC Location

Motion Picture & Television Fund
Katzenberg Pavilion
23388 Mulholland Drive
Woodland Hills, CA 91364