Take a Hike

Made verdant by record rainfall, the 42-acre UCI Ecological Preserve provides a scenic view of the campus and city skylines. Recently installed interpretive signs offer visitors a guided tour, highlighting such native fauna as the coastal cactus wren and the flora in which it nests, namely prickly pear and cholla cacti.
The Literary Issue

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Plus: More From UCI’s Card Catalog
Letter From the Editor

The Power of Language

For more than half a century, UCI’s storied M.F.A. program in creative writing has been graduating some of the top authors and poets in the nation, from best-sellers Michael Chabon and Alice Sebold to New York poet laureate Yusef Komunyakaa.

While there are creative writing programs that are older, they were often added years – if not decades – after the universities were established. UCI, however, began its program with the very creation of the university’s English department – a much rarer start that can be directly attributed to founding English department chair Hazard Adams’ vision that the study of literature should provide an “understanding of the writer’s point of view.” But it’s not so unusual a development when you consider UCI’s pioneering spirit and its inherent principle of encouraging faculty and students to think differently.

In this special literary issue of UCI Magazine, our cover story, “Chapter and Verse” (page 18), provides a glimpse into the history, mechanics and culture of the Programs in Writing. Alumni share how faculty members over the decades have mentored them to find their own voices and writing styles. (“I Faculty Who’s Who” can be found on page 23.)

Perhaps channeling the campfire storytellers who once dotted the ranchland on which UCI stands, M.F.A. students, faculty and alumni are a free-spirited bunch. Says author and 1998 alumna Aimee Bender: “There was real appreciation and support for my weirder writing, the writing I thought would be dismissed.”

We are pleased to share, starting on page 27, six excerpts from new works of fiction by veteran and debut authors along with five poems from the class of 2016 and a much-lauded one from Komunyakaa.

In addition to highlighting the works of M.F.A. alumni, we are delighted to include the first U.S. reprinting of Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s “The Upright Revolution: Or Why Humans Walk Upright” (page 14). A UCI Distinguished Professor of English and comparative literature and a repeat contender for the Nobel Prize in literature, Ngũgĩ shows the power of writing in the fable – from its peaceful message of working together while recognizing the beauty of individuality to its translation into more than 60 languages. That makes it “the single most translated short story in the history of African writing,” according to publisher Jasale. (Read more in an Q&A beginning on page 12.)

In an era in which writing has often been reduced to quickly cobbled statements of 140 or fewer characters, it feels more important than ever that UCI’s English department faculty – particularly those in creative writing – continue to foster the artistry and craft of genuine storytelling.

Says M.F.A. fiction co-director Michelle Latiolais: “What we do daily in the Programs in Writing is to try to remain fully conscious every minute of the ability of language to rend the world’s atrocities, its staggering clichés and its beauties.”

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Managing Editor, UCI Magazine

UCI Magazine

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A

almost 40 years ago, Truman Capote, media darling and pioneer of the true-crime novel, celebrated the grand opening of the UCI Bookstore. The author, screenwriter and playwright best known for Breakfast at Tiffany’s and In Cold Blood from some of his early works to a packed house on Sept. 28, 1977, at UCI’s Fine Arts Village Theatre and responded to a standing ovation with two flamboyant bows. He later stood autographing more than 100 books in the new store and answering “about as many questions,” according to Marty Trujillo, who covered the event for New University. “Yes, he tried to write every day, no, he doesn’t worry about writer’s block, he just feels quite fast, almost one book a day.” Capote also offered some warm words: “I wish the bookstore a great success, which I’m sure it’ll have, and you [in] your years here.”
The Samueli Foundation in April provided $30 million to help fund a state-of-the-art convergent science building on campus, expanding UCI’s ability to conduct large-scale, collaborative and cross-disciplinary research in engineering, computing and physical sciences. Construction of the 100,000-square-foot facility could begin as early as this fall and be completed in three years.

In a significant private-public partnership, the Samueli donation has enabled the university to obtain $50 million in legislative funds allocated by the UC Office of the President. An additional $40 million in UCI funds brings the total budget to $300 million.

“Addressing today’s grand challenges in society requires collaborative research across a multitude of disciplines, aligning with our STEM ecosystem concept,” said Henry Samueli, co-founder of semiconductor giant Broadcom Corp. “We hope this gift to UCI can be a catalyst for accelerating cross-disciplinary research and scientific innovations that benefit society.”

Potential ideas include developing chemical and material sensors to better diagnose and treat cancers; using big data, environmental engineering and organic chemistry to improve water supply or solar energy; testing driverless vehicles; and having cybersecurity coders and mathematicians work together on military or medical challenges.

The structure will be located near Frederick Reines Hall, off Bison Avenue and East Peltason Drive. It will accommodate more than 50 faculty members — including high-profile new hires — and hundreds of students. A community observatory with a powerful telescope may be built on the roof.

$30 Million Donated for New Convergent Science Facility

The New York Times has named UCI the No. 4 university in the nation for propelling low-income students into the middle and upper-middle classes post-graduation. Based on new data from the Equality of Opportunity Project, 81 percent of UCI students from the bottom fifth of income distribution ended up in the top three fifths. The study was based on anonymous income tax and financial aid records from millions of college graduates. “This data indicated what we in academia have known all along: Public universities often serve as a catalyst for low-income students,” said Chancellor Howard Gillman. “UCI has been a steadfast leader in empowering students from all backgrounds to equip themselves with knowledge and reach their highest potential.”

Ben Liebenberg / Associated Press

UCI Ranks No. 4 in Upward Mobility

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UCI Ranks No. 4 in Upward Mobility
Critical Theory Is No. 1

UCI’s critical theory program is No. 1 in U.S. News & World Report’s annual graduate school rankings. The campus is one of the world’s leading centers of scholarship in the multidisciplinary field and has been home to such eminent practitioners as Murray Krieger, J. Hillis Miller and Jacques Derrida. A philosophical approach to culture—and especially literature—that seeks to confront the social, historical and ideological forces that produce and constrain it, critical theory at UCI is taught by faculty from the comparative literature, East Asian languages & literatures, English, film & media studies, anthropology, political science, art and drama departments. The campus shares the U.S. News top ranking with the University of Chicago.

Extraordinary Feted

Gary Singer ’74, senior adviser to RSJ Holding and RSJ Development and a UCI Foundation trustee, has received the Lauds & Laurels Extraordinarius Award—the UCI Alumni Association’s highest honor—for his commitment and extraordinary level of support to the campus. After earning a J.D. at Loyola Marymount University, Singer practiced corporate, business and securities law throughout his career, retiring as managing partner of O’Melveny & Myers LLP in 2013. Giving to UCI since 1979, he is or has been a member of the Chancellor’s Club; the Dean’s Leadership Society at the School of Social Sciences; the Board of Visitors and the Dean’s Executive Board at the School of Law; and the UCI Alumni Association’s board of directors.

UCI Medal Bestowed on Drakes

Chancellor emeritus Michael V. Drake and UCI’s former first lady Brenda Drake were awarded the campus’s most prestigious honor, the UCI Medal, on March 30. “The Drakes truly embody the University of California’s mission of teaching, research and public service, and their transformational legacy at UCI continues to be seen today,” said current Chancellor Howard Gillman. “Brenda and Michael’s commitment to academic excellence, diversity and opportunity is renewed, and together as a team they ensured that UCI would become one of the country’s leading public research universities, as well as a leading engine of upward mobility.” During Michael Drake’s tenure, from 2005 to 2014, UCI’s four-year graduation rate increased by more than 18 percent, and the university added schools of law and education, along with programs in public health, pharmaceutical sciences and nursing science. He became president of The Ohio State University in 2014.

“In Vietnam, they have basically written us out of the history books—those who left the country—and in America, they write about the war from the American side, particularly the veteran side, but very little about Vietnamese Americans.”

Linda Trinh Vo, professor of Asian American studies, on the significance of UCI’s oral history project “Viet Stories” Los Angeles Times March 24, 2017

“Legend of Ten’ is not an easy dance to do,” says Lubovitch, who joined the Claire Trevor School of the Arts’ dance department last July as a Distinguished Professor. “The dancers have to execute uniquely demanding physical tasks and ornate spatial configurations. Without question, the UCI dancers rose to the challenge and gave a thrilling and lucid account of the choreography. As a new faculty member, it was a deep learning experience for me as well as the students, each in our own way trying to break new ground.”

The piece was part of Dance Visions 2017, which displayed a broad mix of modern dance and traditional ballet with restagings of two pieces from Lubovitch and George Balanchine along with three new dances from UCI Distinguished Professor Donald McKayle, associate professor Molly Lynch and assistant professor Chad Michael Hall.

Dance of Legends
In Search of Water

This March, UCI environmental engineer Amir AghaKouchak headed to Iran’s Lut Desert, where temps can climb to 159 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer—the hottest satellite reading of ground temperature ever.

Many assumed that any form of existence in the Lut would be impossible, but AghaKouchak and fellow researchers from around the world have found a fascinating web of life there, including insects, reptiles and foxes. They think migratory birds fleeing the heat may be a key food source and, perhaps most surprisingly, discovered shallow water just beneath the desert’s surface.

Via the fieldwork and satellite data, AghaKouchak, a hydrologist, is exploring the origin of the water and how it contributes to the ecosystem in the desolate Lut. One of the team’s main objectives is to understand how species cope with rising temperatures and extreme environments.

“It’s also an amazing part of the planet,” AghaKouchak says, describing the wind-formed pillars known as the Kaluts. “It’s nice and quiet.”
Q: What sets “The Upright Revolution” apart from your other work?
Ngũgĩ: I describe myself as a language warrior for marginalized languages. Much of the intellectual production in Africa is done in European languages: English, French, Portuguese. The people in Africa speak African languages. They have a right to cultural products written in their language. Translation is an important tool that makes it possible for different cultures to borrow from each other.

Q: What are some examples of cultural borrowing?
Ngũgĩ: The Bible and the Koran. People can read them because they’re available in their own languages. Here at UCI, we’re able to discuss Hegel [Georg Hegel], German philosopher, 1770-1831] because his works have been translated. We don’t have to understand the German language to learn from his works. The same is true with Greek mythology, we can learn from it without knowing how to speak Greek. Translation becomes a process whereby languages can talk to each other.

Q: Is that why you’re enthusiastic about the translations of your short story?
Ngũgĩ: The short story he wrote that so far has been translated into 63 languages, 47 of them African dialects. “Walk Upright,” has become the single most translated short story in the history of African writing, according to its publisher, the Pan-African writers’ collective Jalada.

Q: What language do you usually write?
Ngũgĩ: Although there are millions of African speakers, not much has been written in their indigenous languages, he says. “Being able to read literature in your own language is empowering.”

Ngũgĩ (pronounced GU-gi) originally wrote “The Upright Revolution” in his mother tongue, Gĩkũyũ, and then translated it into English himself. The 2,200-word fable (which begins on page 14) tells the story of how “humans used to walk on legs and arms, just like all the other four-limbed creatures,” but eventually the legs managed to stand and walk upright by working together with the other parts of the body. It’s a reminder, Ngũgĩ says, that in our togetherness we have the power to transform the future. He sat down with Rosemary McClure for UCI Magazine to discuss “The Upright Revolution” and his championing of literature in native languages.

Q: In what language do you usually write?
Ngũgĩ: There was a time I wrote in English, but now I often write in my language, Gĩkũyũ [spoken by almost 7 million Kenyans], and translate it back into English. It’s more of a challenge for me.

Q: In 1977, you were imprisoned for a year for critical works about neocolonial Kenya. How did you cope?
Ngũgĩ: For a writer, it was difficult. You were not allowed to write. You were not allowed to do anything, even ask, “Is it raining outside today? Is it sunny outside?” So the only way I could actually, literally, deal with my prison conditions – maximum-security prison for doing nothing – was by writing secretly. I wrote a novel, Otel on a Cross, in Gĩkũyũ on toilet paper with a pen they had given me to write a confession.

Q: What is the message you hope readers take away from “The Upright Revolution”?
Ngũgĩ: The message is that in our togetherness we have the power to transform the future. It was so strong that the newspapers sent reporters and photographers to my house at 4 a.m. to wait outside my front door for the announcement and press conference. When my wife and I opened the door to tell them, they were very disappointed, because they’d come out at 4 a.m. and had no photos or story. My wife made them coffee, and we consoled them.

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He sat down with Rosemary McClure for UCI Magazine to discuss “The Upright Revolution” and his championing of literature in native languages.

Q: For at least the past five years, you’ve been rumored to be a front-runner for the Nobel Prize in literature. How does it feel to be considered?
Ngũgĩ: I really appreciate that people think my work is worth considering. It’s very humbling to me. And it has created some humorous moments. One year the rumor was so strong that the newspapers sent reporters and photographers to my house at 4 a.m. to wait outside my front door for the announcement and press conference. But when it came, another writer had won the prize.

When my wife and I opened the door to tell them, they were very disappointed, because they’d come out at 4 a.m. and had no photos or story. My wife made them coffee, and we consoled them.

Q: What is the message you hope readers take away from “The Upright Revolution”?
Ngũgĩ: The message is connected. We are all connected; we depend on each other.

“The people in Africa speak African languages. They have a right to cultural products written in their language.”
The Upright Revolution: Or Why Humans Walk Upright

By Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o

(For Mũmbi W Ngũgĩ, Christmas 2015, Irvine. Translated from Gĩkũyũ by the author.)

A
time long ago, humans used to walk on legs and arms, just like all the other four-limbed creatures. Humans were faster than hares, leopards or rhinos. Legs and arms were closer than any other organs. They had similar corresponding joints: shoulders and hips, elbows and knees, ankles and wrists, feet and hands, each ending with five toes and fingers, with nails on each toe and finger. Hands and feet had similar arrangements of their five toes and fingers from the big toe and thumb to the smallest toes and pinkies. In those days, the thumb was close to the other fingers, the same as the big toe. Legs and arms called each other first cousins. They helped each other carry the body wherever it wanted to go: the market, the shops, up and down trees and mountains, anywhere that called for movement. Even in the water, they worked well together to help the body float, swim or dive. They were democratic and egalitarian in their relationship. They could also borrow the uses of the product of other organs, say, sound from the mouth, hearing from the ears, smell from the nose, and even sight from the eyes.

Their rhythm and seamless coordination made the other parts green with envy. They resented having to lend their special genius to the cousins. Jealousy blinded them to the fact that legs and hands took them places. They started plotting against the two pairs.

Tongue borrowed a plan from Brain and put it into action immediately. It began to wonder, loudly, about the relative powers of Arms and Legs. They tried to turn it over, push it; they tried all sorts of combinations, but this move was disqualified because its completion involved the legs as well. It was the turn of the toes to laugh. They borrowed thick throatal tones from Mouth to involve the legs as well. What a stupid challenge, thought the arrogant toes. It was a sight to see. Everything about the body was upside-down. Hands touched the ground, the eyes were close to the ground, their angles of vision severely restricted by their proximity to the ground, dust entered the nose, causing it to sneeze; Legs and Toes floated in the air. Nyayo juu, the spectators shouted and sang playfully.

But their attention was fixed on the hands and arms. Organs that only a few minutes before were displaying an incredible array of skills could hardly move a yard. After a few steps, the hands cried out in pain, the arms staggered, wobbled, and let the body fall. Tal. Turukeni angani, they sat there looking a little bit glum, their big toes drooping little circles on the sand, they were trying to figure out a winning challenge.

At last, it was the turn of Legs and Toes to issue a challenge. Thiers, they said, was simple. Hands should carry the whole body from one part of the circle to the other. What a stupid challenge, thought the arrogant fingers. It was a sight to see. Anything about the body was upside-down. Hands touched the ground, the eyes were close to the ground, their angles of vision severely restricted by their proximity to the ground, dust entered the nose, causing it to sneeze; Legs and Toes floated in the air. Nyayo juu, the spectators shouted and sang playfully.

But all of them, including the spectators, noted something strange about the arms: The thumbs which went on for days, at times affecting their ability to work together effectively. It finally boiled down to the question of power; they turned to other organs for arbitration.

It was Tongue who suggested a contest. A brilliant idea, all agreed. But what? Some suggested a wrestling match – leg and arm wrestling. Others came up with swordplay, juggling, racing, or playing a game like chess or checkers, but each was ruled out as hard to bring about or unfair to all. The two-legs, Ostrich, Guinea Fowl and Peacock, flapped their wings in excitement; birds chirped from the trees; Spider, Worm, Centipede and Millipede crawled on the ground or trees. Chameleon walked stealthily, carefully, taking its time, while Lizard ran about, never settling down on one spot. Monkey, Chimp and Gorilla jumped from branch to branch. Even the trees and the bush swayed gently from side to side, bowed, and then stood still in turns.

Mouth opened the contest with a song. We do this to be happy

Mouth: We do this to be happy

Legs: We do this to be happy

Arms: Because we all

Come from one nature

Arms and Legs swore to accept the outcome gracefully – no tantrums, no threats of boycott, strikes or go-slow. Arms issued the first challenge: They threw a piece of wood on the ground. The legs left it right or in combination, was to pick up the piece of wood from the ground and throw it. The two legs could consult each other at any time in the contest and deploy their toes, individually or collectively, in any order to effect their mission. They tried to turn it over, push it, they tried all sorts of combinations, but they could not pick it up properly. And as for moving it, the best they could do was kick it a few inches away. Seeing this, Fingers borrowed sound from the mouth and laughed and laughed. Arms, the challenger, paraded themselves as in a beauty contest, showing off their slim looks, and then in different combinations picked up the piece of wood. They threw it far into the forest, eliciting a collective sigh of admiration from the contestants and spectators. They displayed other skills: They picked tiny pieces of sand from a bowl of rice, they threaded needles, they made little small puppys for moving heavier wood; made some spears and threw them quite far, moves and acts that the toes could only dream about. Legs could only sit there and marvel at the display of dexterity and flexibility of their slim cousins.

The arms of the spectators clapped thunder in admiration and solidarity with fellow arms, which upset the legs a great deal. But they were not about to concede: Even as they sat there looking a little bit glum, their big toes drooling little circles on the sand, they were trying to figure out a winning challenge.

For Mbũmbi W Ngũgĩ, Christmas 2015, Irvine. Translated from Gĩkũyũ by the author.

Turukeni angani
had stretched out when the hands were trying to carry the body and remained separated from the other fingers. The rival organs were about to resume their laughter when they noted something else. Far from the separated thumb making the hands less efficient, it enhanced their grasping and pushing power. What's this? Deformation transformed into the power of forming?

The debate among the organs to decide the winner went on for five days, the number of fingers and toes on each limb. But try as they could, they were not able to declare a clear winner. Each set of limbs was best at what they did best, none could do without the other. There began a session of philosophical speculation: What was the body anyway, they all asked, and they realized the body was them all together, they were into each other. Every organ had to function well for all to function well. But to prevent such a contest in the future and to prevent their getting in each other's way, it was decided that the organs had to function well for all to function well.

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Chapter and Verse

UCI’s renowned M.F.A. program in creative writing continues to churn out heavyweight talent

By Roy Rivenburg | Photos by Steve Zylius

It’s like attending your own funeral, one former student says: “Everyone is talking about you like you’re not there – and you can’t respond.” Another compares the experience to standing naked while classmates examine your body with a magnifying glass.

“A wonderful crucible” is the metaphor used by a third alumnus. What they’re describing is the half-century-old ritual that anchors UCI’s storied M.F.A. program in fiction and poetry writing. Each week, a dozen students file into a small classroom and cluster around a conference table. Then the siege begins. Joined by an instructor, the aspiring scribes meticulously dissect each other’s prose or verse.

“It’s no baby shower,” says Michelle Latiolais, a professor of English who graduated from the program in 1988 and now co-directs its fiction workshops. “When you walk into that room, there’s a force field in the air. It’s intense.”

Over the years, the charged atmosphere has transformed a variety of students – a professional Frisbee player, a Vietnam vet, a forensic scientist and a dyslexic locomotive engineer, among others – into literary luminaries. Three have won Pulitzer Prizes. Some have conquered best-seller charts or landed movie and television deals.

The lineup includes “Game of Thrones” co-creator David Benioff, poet Yusef Komunyakaa and novelists Alice Sebold (The Lovely Bones), Michael Chabon (The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay), Aimee Bender (The Carnal Radiant Skies) and Richard Ford (Independence Day).

“UC Irvine has nurtured a wide array of America’s most recognized and most accomplished writers,” says David L. Ulin, former book editor at the Los Angeles Times. “It’s a great and essential program.”

But M.F.A. officials play down any focus on their famous alumni. “It’s not that we don’t love all of them,” Latiolais says. “But we have so many new writers of note who deserve attention.”

Showcasing Future Wordsmiths

As a lazy cat snoozes near the window of a tiny Long Beach bookshop, a woman in a flower-print dress reads aloud from a manuscript in which “particles hover in the afternoon light” and youngsters shed tears “like sprinklers.” When she finishes, a sandy-haired poet who grew up in an Arkansas religious sect takes her place.

While a crowd of three dozen listens intently, he recites a piece about Beach Boys maestro Brian Wilson enduring a nervous breakdown. Next, a former psychotherapist weaves a narrative that ends with surgeons cutting open her father to remove a blood clot.

The readings are part of a UCI series in which M.F.A. writers share their works in progress at public venues around Southern California. Sometimes, agents drop by to scout for fresh talent, but “we tell students to resist any offers until after graduation,” says fiction program co-director Ron Carlson. “If they concentrate on their writing, they’ll have a stronger chance of survival later.”

Latiolais agrees: “Some schools bring in agents and editors,” she says. “We purposely avoid any marketing talk until a student’s third year, when we send them to Squaw Valley,” a venerable writers conference near Lake Tahoe. Mystery writer Oakley Hall, who helmed UCI’s M.F.A. fiction division from 1969 to 1990, co-founded the Squaw Valley group.

“That’s where I got my agent,” says journalist and author Hector Tobar, M.F.A. ’95, whose best-selling account of Chile’s mining disaster miracle, Deep Down Dark, inspired a movie. “I owe my entire career as a writer to UCI.”

UCI Magazine

Spring 2017
When UCI rolled out its graduate writing experiment in 1965, only about a dozen such programs existed nationwide. Today there are nearly 400. “UC Irvine has nurtured a wide array of America’s most recognized and most accomplished writers.”

Novelists Michelle Latiolais and Ron Carlson co-direct the Programs in Writing’s fiction division.

Surfers and Scholars

in music, art or dance, plus a final exam on literary history and theory. Both elements were eventually shelved, as were a playwrighting option and plans to add specializations in television, movie and technical writing. Some early alumni went on to publish novels, history books and poetry collections of mild renown. Several embarked on careers as college professors or filmmakers. “Somehow the fact that we were flailing didn’t keep us from getting applicants who were quite good,” says James McMichael, a founding English professor who co-directed the M.F.A. program’s poetry workshop from 1969 to 2017. (Before that, poets and novelists usually studied together.)

Notable Plot Points in M.F.A. Writing Program History

1965: English department chair Hazard Adams and novelist James B. Hall establish the UCI system’s first M.F.A. creative writing program, at UCI. A handful of students enroll.

1967: Dora Beale Polk, former speechwriter for a U.S. senator, becomes the program’s first graduate. Three others in her cohort finish in subsequent years. Polk goes on to teach creative writing at California State University, Long Beach and publish mass-market romance novels, poetry and a California history book.

1969: After James B. Hall departs for a professorship at UC Santa Cruz, the M.F.A. writing workshop is split into two branches: poetry, led by founding professor of English James McMichael and poet Charles Wright, and fiction, led by author Daley Hall, who was later joined by founding professor of English Donald Henley (also of published verse).


1977: Prose poet Killarney Clary, whose first collection becomes an international sensation, graduates.


1987: While still a student, Michael Chabon sells his thesis for a record-setting amount for a first novel, catapulting UCI’s program to national fame. Applications double the next year.

1992: Newsweek says UCI has the hottest writing program in the country.

M.F.A. students launch Faultline, a literary and art journal.


To this day, “saying that you went to UCI in a cover letter is often enough to ensure that an editor or publisher will give your manuscript a look,” says Michael Andreasen, M.F.A. ’03, whose debut short-story collection, The Sea Beast Takes a Lover, is due out next year (and is excerpted on page 36).

‘Flawless Parodies’ and Dickinson’s Dictionary

An “avenging unicorn” action figure – with a plastic mime impaled on its horn – sits on a shelf in fiction professor Latiolais’ book-crammed office as she and Carlson discuss the nuts and bolts of UCI’s writing academy.

Every year, several hundred people vie for the program’s 12 open slots: six in fiction, six in poetry. “We look for the program’s 12 open slots: six in fiction, six in poetry. “We look for people who size up our quirks and appreciate them,” says Michael Andreasen, M.F.A. ’03, whose debut short-story collection, The Sea Beast Takes a Lover, is due out next year (and is excerpted on page 36).

An “avenging unicorn” action figure – with a plastic mime impaled on its horn – sits on a shelf in fiction professor Latiolais’ book-crammed office as she and Carlson discuss the nuts and bolts of UCI’s writing academy.

Any student can try for a three-quarters tuition scholarship for the first year, which is open to all students. “That support is augmented with a financial package that covers tuition and pays students $20,000 a year in exchange for teaching one under-graduate writing course per quarter.”

That benefit is augmented with a financial package that covers tuition and pays students $20,000 a year in exchange for teaching one undergraduate writing course per quarter. The benefit is more than monetary, says Walker Pflot, a newly minted poetry alumnus. “Teaching forces you to articulate what makes a good poem or story. It was hugely formative for my own writing.”

Throughout their studies, M.F.A. students learn to scrutinize words and phrases backward, forward and inside out. For example, Michael Ryan, who directs the poetry division, keeps a copy of the 1828 Noah Webster dictionary used by Emily Dickinson so he can more precisely interpret her work during lessons.

“We once spent an entire quarter, in class, analysing fewer than 100 lines of published verse, diagramming sentences and counting how many times each part of speech appeared,” says Sarah Cohen, a 2009 poetry alum. “The writing workshop applied the same laser-like focus to our own works, so that by the end of two years, we could produce flawless parodies of one another’s styles.”

Originally, students were supposed to earn diplomas at the end of their second year. But as time wore on, officials added three quarters. The idea was to give folks more time to polish their thesis project – a novel, short-story collection or book of poems. During the extra months, students continue to teach but no longer attend M.F.A. workshops or classes. The revised format paid off, says McMichael. “Remarkable things often happen in that third year.”
Bonfires, Proms and Mr. Grumpy Grammar

Keeping enrollment small inspires family-style bands and traditions—sometimes literally. A few students have married classmates. More often, they form lasting friendships and networking ties. Alums frequently drop by for school social events.

“I still feel very connected,” says novelist Charmaine Craig, M.F.A. ’99, a one-time film and television actress who served as a model for Disney’s animated Pocahontas character. Though no longer involved in support for her new book (Miss Burma, excerpted on page 27), Craig adds, “It’s so warming to have that 18 years out of the program”.

Incoming class members are instated to the clan each fall with picnics and retreats. “My first year,” says 2016 poetry grad Liz Meley, who describes good verse as “a mixture of fact and magic” (see page 40 for her poem “Winter Religion”).

The extracurricular friendships sometimes help in the classroom, softening the sting of workshop critiques. “You realize the person taking apart your story is doing so because he or she cares about you and wants it to be the best it can be,” Schultz says.

Even so, the process can fray nerves. To cushion some of the blows, poetry professor Ryan shifts into an alternate persona, “Mr. Grumpy Grammar,” when pointing out syntax errors in student verse. But many learn to value the feedback. “Sometimes the most useful criticism is also the harshest,” Andreasen says.

Instructor Carlson concurs. “The discussions are very honest and very serious,” he says. “By the end of three hours, everyone usually has their equilibrium back.”

But just in case, Latios adds, “we always go to the pub afterward.”

“When you walk into that room, there’s a force field in the air. It’s intense.”
An Eclectic Showcase

Celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, Faultline is UCI’s well-regarded literary and art journal. M.F.A. fiction and poetry students edit the magazine, which features the work of new and established writers and artists from UCI and beyond. Launched in 1992 with such contributors as novelist Thomas Keneally, artist Richard Wyatt Jr. and poet Thomas Lux, Faultline was the successor to a string of campus literary publications. The granddaddy of UCI highbrow journals was Synapse, which debuted in 1966 as an independent forum for poetry, fiction, one-act plays, essays, photography and artwork, including pieces by M.F.A. writers. Synapse stopped firing in the early 1970s. Later Anteater literary magazines included Prodigal Sun, published from 1980 to 1982, and Point West, which appeared on and off between 1983 and 1989. Shown here (clockwise from upper right) are Faultline covers from 2014, 2013 and 2012.

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Bright Past. Brilliant Future. UCI’s 50th Anniversary Book


Donate $50 or more to UCI and receive your complimentary copy of this beautifully illustrated coffee-table book featuring the campus’s colorful history and vision for the future.

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Shine brighter.

Contributions exceeding the value of the book ($29.95) may be tax deductible.
You will also find five poems from members of the class of 2016, along with a seminal piece by Pulitzer Prize recipient Yusef Komunyakaa, M.F.A. ’80, on the former U.S. Army correspondent’s first look at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. (accompanied by keen introductory insights from Michael Ryan, director of UCI’s poetry program).

The Written Word

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On the 15 pages that follow, we are pleased to share six excerpts from new or upcoming works of fiction by M.F.A. alumni – from Max Winter’s debut novel, Exes, a study of grief and love in the aftermath of suicide, to Charmaine Craig’s Miss Burma, based on the life of her mother, a beauty queen and actress who became a rebel leader for the Karen people in the country known today as Myanmar.

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pointed away from the water told way he further cocked his head and her to steer clear of the jetty (the “not” caught only English words of which she clearly
The officer suddenly shouted at well, she would have—
her with his eyes, she would have—
eating her hair. If any other man had stared
across the distance, she could see he didn’t hesitate to scrutinize her hips,
and as they stumbled back toward
land over the splintered planks (as she stumbled away from the unknown mark of her body slipping into the shivering waves), she kept her eyes on her feet and searched her mind for some small treat the boy might down acceptably unforeseen. He was already beginning to doubt her reliability. Perhaps the maid had bought a few cream puffs from the Indian who came around on
Wednesdays.
The boy studied her for a moment.
“Are we in trouble, nanny?” the
boy asked. “Perhaps,” she said quietly. Again, the officer began to speak, to express something to her in
English, while beside them a seaplane revved its engine.
“Look!” the boy said, pointing to
the plane that started to skip over the waves.
For a moment all of them stood in
mute wonderment, watching the plane lift off into the vivid blue sky, where it banked and peaceably headed northwest, as though a war were not raging somewhere beyond the horizon.
“Beautiful,” she heard the officer say over the whistling wind.
He had stepped back from the gate. And when their eyes met again, she felt so embarrassed that she
hers, and steadying herself against a gate, taking the boy’s warm hand in
her own in letters like smoke. I touch the name Andrew Johnson; I see the booby trap’s white flash.
Names shimmer on a woman’s blouse but when she walks away the names stay on the wall.
Brushstrokes flash, a red bird’s
wings cutting across my stare. The sky A plane in the sky. A white vet’s image floats closer to me, then his pale eyes look through mine. I’m a window. He’s lost his right arm inside the stone. In the black mirror a woman’s trying to erase names: No, she’s brushing a boy’s hair.
If there is such a thing as a famous contemporary poem, this is it. Political poetry is notoriously difficult to write well because the writer already knows what s/he thinks of the subject, and these personal opinions often preclude discovery for the writer and, therefore, for the reader. But Yusuf Komunyakaa, M.F.A. ’80, understands the kind of poem he’s writing here and plays against the genre’s inclination to be tendentious by welcoming the oppositions and self-corrections within the speaker, from “I’m stone. I’m flesh” to the poem’s stirring, dramatic final sentence: “In the black mirror/ a woman’s trying to erase names/ No, she’s brushing a boy’s hair.”
Reprinted with permission from This Here Burning by Charles Wright (Crown, 1993).

Yusuf Komunyakaa, M.F.A. ’80, was born in Bogalusa, Louisiana. He served in the U.S. Army as a correspondent during the Vietnam War and was managing editor of the Southern Cross newspaper, for which he earned a Bronze Star. He received a B.A. from the University of Colorado Colorado Springs on the GI Bill and an M.A. in writing from Colorado State University. Komunyakaa has published 16 books of poetry, including Neon Vernacular: New & Selected Poems, which won the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award and the Pulitzer Prize in 1994. He has taught at the University of New Orleans, as well as at Indiana University and Princeton University, and is currently Distinguished Senior Poet in New York University’s graduate creative writing program.

Facing It
By Yusuf Komunyakaa
My black face fades, hiding inside the black granite. I said I wouldn’t damnit, my tears. I’m stone. I’m flesh.
My clouded reflection eyes me like a bird of prey; the profile of night slammed against morning. I turn this way—the stone lets me go. I turn that way—I’m inside the Vietnam Veterans Memorial again, depending on the light to make a difference. I go down the 58,022 names, half-expecting to find my own in letters like smoke.
I touch the name Andrew Johnson; I see the booby trap’s white flash. Names shimmer on a woman’s blouse but when she walks away the names stay on the wall. Brushstrokes flash, a red bird’s wings cutting across my stare. The sky A plane in the sky. A white vet’s image floats closer to me, then his pale eyes look through mine. I’m a window. He’s lost his right arm inside the stone. In the black mirror a woman’s trying to erase names: No, she’s brushing a boy’s hair.

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Michael Ryan
Director, M.F.A. Program in Poetry

Charmaine Craig, M.F.A. ’99, is a faculty member in the Department of Creative Writing at U of R Riverside and the descendant of significant figures in Burma’s modern history. A former actor in film and television, she studied literature at Harvard College. Her UCI graduate thesis project the novel The Good Men, was a national best-seller translated into six languages.
New People
By Danzy Senna

New People is a subversive and engrossing novel of race, class and manners in contemporary America. Maria is at the start of a life she never thought possible. She and Khalil, her college sweetheart, are planning their wedding. They are the perfect couple. “King and Queen of the Racially Nebulous Prom.” They’ve even landed a starring role in a documentary about “new people” like them, who are blurring the old boundaries as a brave new era dawns. But everything isn’t perfect. Heartbreaking and darkly comic, New People challenges our every assumption about how we define one another, and ourselves.

A filmmaker arrives at their apartment that weekend to interview them at home. She’s making a documentary about “new people.” That is actually the working title of her film: New People. Her name is Elsa. She has frizzy blonde hair and golden brown skin and green eyes. She stands in the foyer, glittering with snowdrops. In her strong teeth Maria can see the Scandinavian half of her heritage. She introduces the others she has brought with her — an Asian-American cameraman named Ansel with hair down to his waist and a white woman with a buzz cut named Heidi. They crowd in the hallway, damp and smiling.

Elsa is older than Maria and Khalil. She is well into her forties. Maria does the math. This means she would have been born in the 1950s, the Era of Mulatto Martyrs— which Maria knows from the history books was a whole other scene. Maria and Khalil were each born in 1970, the beginning of the Common Era. Elsa says that when she met Khalil at a party uptown, she knew he was perfect for the film. He wanted Maria to play on camera already. She wants to be back in the library under the artificial lights with her papers spread out around her, the headphones playing the children’s voices in Guyana, singing, Jonestown, a mystery about to be solved.

But back at the apartment, Elsa and her crew stick around. They film Maria and Khalil chopping vegetables in their kitchenette, making a Moroc- can tagine while Ornette Coleman plays on the stereo. Afterward, the couple signs forms agreeing to be in the movie. Khalil seems happy about it and Elsa, grinning, tells them how thrilled she is to have them on board. She says they are exactly the subjects she has been looking for. Maria goes through the motions, smiles along, but she is aware of a pain in her chest, a tightness to her breathing.

Danzyl Senna, M.F.A. ’96, is the Los Angeles-based author of five works of fiction and nonfiction. Her first novel, Cassandra, which she wrote while at UCI, was a national best-seller and a finalist for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. Her other books include the novel Symptomatic: the Memoir. Where Did You Sleep Last Night? A Personal History and the short-story collection You Are Free. A recipient of the 2002 Whiting Award and the 2017 John Dos Passos Prize for Literature, Senna has had her work published in Vogue, The New Yorker and The New York Times.

Alex Dupree, M.F.A. ’16, is a musician and teacher living in Los Angeles. He earned a B.A. in English at the University of Texas and is a lecturer at UCI’s Composition Program. He won Southern Poetry-Now’s 2016 Guy Owen Prize, and his work is forthcoming in Field magazine.

Republished with permission. Excerpted from New People, by Danzy Senna (Riverhead Books, expected publication in August 2017).

Acheiropoieta
By Alex Dupree

The knot of the oak tree, the burnt toast, the tortilla, things keep generating images. Uncast shadows keep appearing.

A hurricane destroyed the bridge, now pilgrims gather in the clearing. Things keep speaking for themselves. Even after fascination, after we’ve gone, ungraven images spontaneously keep appearing.

The woodpilan, the oil slick, the cloth with godly likenesses are leering. Things keep speaking for themselves. Even our bodies stoped still move unbidden, persevering. Things keep speaking for themselves. Uncast shadows keep appearing.
My landlord didn’t want to call the cops. For five years he’d been shuffling me from empty place to empty place while he fixed up the thirty or so eyesores my grandfather sold him. He felt bad about my brother, but bad only gets you so far. Smith Hill was the end of the line. Two babies had fallen out of windows that year alone, and now a guy was walking around with a sword. If you touched the stove and the refrigerator at the same time, you got a shock that felt like a punch in the heart. I’d wet my hands and grab hold and come to in another room. I told him I needed one more month – for Eli – and he just shook his head. “I could get six bills for this place, easy,” he said. “Seven even.” He cracked a window, zipped his jacket. He went to open the kitchen cabinets, which held what one expects to find in kitchen cabinets, but also other things. “Five years is a long time,” one of us added. “Ah, hell,” my landlord said – in a different voice. He was breathing through his nose, for one thing. “Your grandpa used to tell me I was like a Jew. ‘Luongo,’ he would say, ‘in my eyes, you’re a Jew.’ And from him, I took it. ‘I’ll take it,’ I said, like it was the first time he told me.” His eyes were wet, like men’s sometimes get near the end. He toed an unplugged cord to see where it led and shook his head when he did. “Jesus, Clay, this is your icebox. You were supposed to take care of things, keep an eye out.” “That’s two different jobs,” I said. A couple minutes later, and he was still shaking his head. I watched him through the bedroom window. For two blocks I could hear his truck rattle. No wonder Grandpa Ike liked him. He’d always known his grandkids weren’t cut out for the family business, but still. My kid brother Eli’s first car crash into that house at the foot of Jenckes had wiped out his inheritance. His second crash wiped out mine. Now I only had a month or so left of walking-around money, and another year of eating money, maybe. But if I also had to make rent, forget it.
Fever Dogs

By Kim O’Neil

Fever Dogs is a fictional biography of three generations of women. It begins at the turn of the 21st century with Jean, a young woman at an impasse. Romantically adrift, in a dying profession, she decides that to make herself a future, she must first make herself a past. Starting from a bare outline that includes an unspoken death, a predatory father and a homeless stint, Jean reconstructs the life her mother, Jane, might have lived.

I was a green-eyed, bee-hived gorilla. I was the wild girl of Brighton. Nobody knew. I had a nineteen-inch waist and a D cup, they called me the Shelf; I cannot account for yourself. After your Gramp broke my nose and my arm, I moved. I lived at the Y by day I kept up at Girls’ Latin. I kept up my grades, the scholarships — nobody knew. We had uniforms, white and navy. Knee-socks and ascot. I kept mine pressed and clean because I loved them. When I met your father, it was easy not to tell him things. He never told me things, too. About money he in effect lied. It takes one to know one, but that applied to me, not him. The year was ’67. Men like that never saw themselves as prey.

When I met him, did I think house? Did I think fedora hats, yard, breakfast nook? Did I think patio? That, and dog and gunpowder and ost and hamster and turtle and dwarf rabbit and, with some luck, horse. I wanted animals. I wanted a brass knocker and a singing doorbell, and a Formica bar in the basement where a person could sit with seams. Show your figure, brassiere if you’ve got it, and stock-

wept. Why, hello, Ray, I’d say. It’s Jane, at Dicky’s. We were just wondering if it was not too much out of your way — Weymouth was on the way to nowhere and Dicky Lucy was a hardship.

Dicky Lucy was vain. And always, yes, your father would come.

Studious Ray, student of how objects transfused power, one to the other, a particulate sharing, like the transfusions, to one the other, blood or germ, of the living. (Ray would correct me on this. Electrical engineering isn’t like that, he’d say.)

And the way Ray hefted Dicky Lucy from his chair at the door to his Ford at the curb, the way Dicky Lucy needled him — someday, I’ll let you see a picture, the way Dicky Lucy’s pumice gun out the window at squirrels in the pines. How humanly they shrieked. How the cantilevered limbs groaned with their running and sometimes fell. I missed and I missed. What else could do? Dicky Lucy’s got himself and my arm so poor. My sympathy lay with anything furry.

Dicky Lucy stayed midweek at Weymouth, but on weekends he got dropped at his hospital in Weymouth, but on weekends he got dropped at his hospital in Weymouth, but on weekends he got dropped at his hospital in Weymouth, but on weekends he got dropped at his hospital in Weymouth, but on weekends he got dropped at his hospital in Weymouth, but on weekends he got dropped at his hospital in Weymouth, but on weekends he got dropped at his hospital in Weymouth, but on weekends he got dropped at his hospital in Weymouth, but on weekends he got dropped at his hospital in Weymouth, but on weekends he got dropped at his hospital in Weymouth, but on weekends he got dropped at his hospital in Weymouth, but on weekends he.

She lived back-to-back to Idy Bridges. Their porches faced off across a shared plot of knotted that I dyed was hard-set and ill-equipped to kill. Ray, I dyed’s youngest, was the last at home, work, study at Northeastern. He had a cherry Ford he tinkered with, Dicky Lucy knew well. At four every Sunday, Dicky Lucy made me dial. I hated telephones then the way I now hate cameras. A liar piece, my voice com- ing at you and pitched all wrong.

Like with a gun, I could never seem to aim straight. Even my breathing on the phone to me sounds like a lie.

In the way the thing begins for man, with cars.

Before cars it would have had to have been horses. Before that, what? What else can man own and strap on and make be fast? They were neighbors, Dicky Lucy and Ray, and they had gone to grade school and high school together but were not friends. Dicky Lucy was two grades ahead. This was when Rindle and Latin was two schools. Latin trained kids for college. Rindle trained kids for typing and pluming, woodwork and metalwork and engines and babies. Ray had won some fame in his grade school days as the local who’d kid TV repairman, but it was Dicky Lucy, not Ray, who went on to Rindle. Mrs. Lucy gospelized with the indoctrination of the long-term lonely.

Sundays Ray would say just I’ll be over. He was, and took Dicky, and I’d take the train home.

But that day, for no reason, he said my name. And how it feels to hear a person say your name is only one of two things — happy or sick. The body keeps its decisions streamlined like that.

He said, Jane. You feel like taking a ride? Then as now a man of small economies.

Kim O’Neil, M.F.A. ’09 teaches at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where she is a senior lecturer in English and assistant director of the Writing Center. She earned an M.F.A. at Lesley University and has worked for a decade as creative director of a Boston animation studio, where she created art for the Cartoon Network’s “Home Movies” and ABC’s “Science Court,” among others. Her short stories have appeared in the Patrons Review and Orange Coast Review.

Kim O’Neil (Triquarterly, expected publication in August 2017).

Meanwhile, under cover of snow and wind and moonless night, a huge, handsome alien spacecraft, broad and sleek and lit up like a supermarket, drifted through a warm bath of ozone and began its delicate negotiations with the earth.

Whoa there, said the planet.

Relax, said the craft.

Relax nothing. You’re not of this earth, said the earth.

We’ll only be a minute, the craft promised from its oh-so-patient hover. Superquick. In and out. Just need to pick up a few things.

Mine is the sky, the earth said. The waters, the mountains, the trees. Mine are the little ants in their anthills, the little birds in their nests, the little people in their homes. There is nothing you could possibly take that isn’t mine.

Come on, said the craft.

Get lost, said the earth.

Hey, the craft said sweetly, casually easing closer. You’ve got all kinds of people! We’re after one, maybe two at the most. You can spare two. How many billions will that leave you?

Somewhere overhead, shadowed and nervous, the new moon slid by.

Imagine the feeling of an orbit. It’s no carnival ride, no waltz around the maypole. It’s more like falling, in a circle, all the time. Not to mention the fact that even the smallest gravity well can invite all kinds of unwanted attention from weapons-grade debris, constantly exposing whole ecosystems to the threat of total annihilation with one meteoric smack.

This can make a planetary body anxious. Even a little paranoid.

Seriously, said the earth. Take a hike.

All right, the craft said. We were hoping it wouldn’t come to this, but it’s worth mentioning, we’re designed to navigate black holes and white dwarfs, quasars and pulsars and gas giants and nebulae. Your little tug is child’s play to us. We’re trying to be polite, but the bottom line is: you haven’t got the mass to stop us.

The planet furrowed its tectonic plates, sloshed its oceans, hunched in its spin. The craft sat frozen in its landing sequence, waiting for the inevitable to sink in.

Don’t get too comfortable, the earth said, and rolled over, and over, and kept rolling.

For real, five minutes, said the craft, which was more than it took to collect the Volvo and its two passengers, now naked as day and moments from consummation, from the snowy shoulder of the road before jetting effortlessly up, beyond the influence of bodies in space, until the craft’s vulgar brightness was just another grain of white sand stuck in the asphalt parking lot of night.

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Bodies in Space

By Michael Andreasen

In “Bodies in Space,” a carefully planned extramarital affair is rudely interrupted by an alien abduction. The piece appears in The Sea Beast Takes a Lover, a collection of short stories examining odd love, strange faith and wild metamorphoses in a world of doomed sailors, misguided saints, inept time travelers, predictably monstrous humans and surprisingly humane monsters.

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After a Day in the World

By Walker Pfost

I am sad when the sun goes down

without any kind of fight

when it nods at the roads

and houses full of car wrecks

and divorces when it slides into

its black sleeping bag

head first –

I am also sad

when the sun tries to hang on

clawing red streaks down the side

of the sky when it says wait

let me go back

I can help them

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Michael Andreasen, M.F.A. ’07, grew up in Omaha, Nebraska, and earned a B.A. in English at Marquette University. He taught English at a junior high school in Japan and accepted a slot in UCI’s M.F.A. program from a payphone in Okinawa. His work has been published in The New Yorker, Zoetrope: All-Story and Tin House. He is currently a full-time lecturer at UCI.

Walker Pfost, M.F.A. ’16, graduated from Furman University and then taught English for two years to middle schoolers in South Korea. He is now pursuing a career as a writer in Los Angeles. His poems have appeared in Euphony, Angel and McSweeney’s Quarterly Concern.
The Lockpicker

By Leonard Chang

Lockpicking is a dead art. Make no mistake about it. Those movies of gentleman thieves, the Cary Grantish dapper tuxedos leaning politely down and picking a lock one-two-three-zip-zap – those are full of crap. That’s fantasy. Reality is brutal. Lock-picking has been shoved aside by crowbars and jacks that wedge open door frames, by messy saws and drills, by a meaty shoulder and a running start.

Doors are barriers, but they need not be broken through with stripped cylinders, sawed-off bolts, and splintered wood littered on the Welcome mat. Doors and locks are puzzles to solve, mazes to navigate, questions to answer. It’s a subtle touch – not a slamming fist – that provides access to a locked apartment, a quiet answer to questions to answer.

Consider this door Jake appraised. He first made sure the door was in fact locked. Once he had begun working on a door only to discover that it had been open all along. This door, his brother’s, was secure. He ran his fingers lightly across the stiles, feeling the grooves in the wood, until he reached the center. He pressed in, checking how much action there was – how tightly the door stayed sealed in the doorjamb. If the door was too tight, then he’d have trouble, since the latch assembly would be wedged against the jamb, he’d have difficulty feeling the nuances in his tension wrench. This door was snug, but not too snug. A small enough gap to work smoothly. He peered closer, smelling the greasy metal. There was a simple pin tumblers cylindrical lock in the door handle, with fewer scratches and marks than a goon might use in an apartment a few doors down. He returned to the task at hand.

As these days, most gorillas trying to break through a door might try one of the common, cruder methods. They might drill into the cylinder, destroying the pins. This is akin to a blindfolded dentist using a claw hammer to get rid of cavities. Or a gorilla might use a high-grade screw to bore into the keyhole, then yank out the entire cylinder with a pair of pliers. If the pliers are really strong, a gorilla could simply grasp the entire cylinder itself, violently twisting it until it broke. Even worse, and Jake really objected to this method, was the gorilla way of jacking or crowbarring the door frame apart, exposing the lock, then sawing off the lock body. After all, you might as well ram a truck through the house.

But Jake tried to be neat. First, he took out his snapping wire, which looked like a large safety pin and was simply a shortcut first attempt before using his picks. He inserted the snapping end along with his tension wrench into the keyhole. Using the spring action of the wire – pulling it down and letting it snap up and lightly hit the pins inside the lock, Jake then tried to force the pins into place by applying pressure to his tension wrench, turning the cylinder. He was in effect jamming the pins into their correct opening positions. It wasn’t as pure as using his picks, but it was easy and fast, and worked about half the time. There were even pick guns that worked on the same principle, everything mechanized and loaded into a small pistol-shaped tool, and pulling the trigger snapped a small wire in the lock. But Jake never bothered with those. They were bulky and expensive. The snapping wire, just one long piece of thin metal bent into a curvy “U” shape, was designed to be used just once.

With the wire, it was still about touch, about feeling the slack in the cylinder, the tension wrench clicking into place. He worked quickly, snapping the wire, then checking the wrench. The tension wrench wasn’t a “wrench” in the toolhead sense – it was another small piece of metal wedged into the keyhole and twisted while picking. It duplicated the turning action of a key. That was all. Very straightforward. Very easy.

Snap, click. Snap, click. After a few more snaps he felt the wrench give a little, and he slowly turned the cylinder, unlocking it.

“Ahhh...” Here we go, he thought. Question: Which way do you turn? Clockwise or counterclockwise?

Answer: Doorknobs always turn clockwise. As for paddle locks, Master locks go in either direction. Yale locks clockwise. But here’s a tip: before you begin anything, use the wrench to test both directions. You’ll feel the pins engage when you turn the lock in the correct direction. In the incorrect direction, you’ll feel solid metal resistance.

Jake tried to push open his brother’s door, but the deadbolt was engaged.

Good for Eugene. Jake had always warned his brother to use both locks. The deadbolt was a wonderful invention. Security is very important, you know.

He tried snapping the deadbolt the same way, but was unsuccessful. The deadbolt looked newer than the door handle, with fewer scratches around the keyway, the brass shiny, there might not have been enough leeway in the shear line. No problem. He looked through his small pack of tools, and selected his rake pick, which used a similar principle as snapping. Here he used the jagged pick head and raked (or “scrubbed” as some people termed it) the pick back and forth, trying to force the pins up to the correct height. Yes, it was another rough and quick method, but he would be damned if he didn’t try it this way first. There was a procedure he liked to follow, moving from simple to intricate, quick to methodical.

The raking didn’t work either. A decent lock. This was not unexpected. He unsheathed his diamond pick, one of his favorites. Unlike the zig-zagged rake pick, the sharp hook pick, or the bulbous ball picks, the diamond pick had a simple triangular head, and yet it opened so many different kinds of locks. Pin tumblers, disk tumblers, wafer locks, lever locks. You name it, the diamond pick – in the right hand – could open them all. Heil, he could even use the diamond to emulate other picks, such as the ball pick, by turning it upside down. Beautiful.

He used to practice with this one, keeping his fingers in shape. He’d wear down the head so quickly that he’d always have a couple of spares.

Jake settled down in front of the deadbolt. He looked up and down the hallway. Where was everyone? It was past six. Possibly dinner. He set in his tension wrench and inserted his diamond pick, feeling the contours in the keyhole, pushing up each individual pin inside the lock, essentially imitating a key one notch at a time. He used the tension wrench to feel if he had clicked the pin above the shear line.

It was all about touch. A delicate, sensitive touch. He couldn’t see anything inside the lock, of course, and the only indication of progress was the tiny twitch of the individual pin “breaking” at the shear line, the point at which the pin allowed the lock to begin turning. He felt it in the tension wrench, a fraction of a fraction of a millimeter. The turning pressure helped keep the clicked,

In The Lockpicker, jewel thief Jake Ahn gets involved in a burglary in Seattle that turns violent when his partner tries to double-cross him. Escaping to San Francisco, Jake looks up his brother, Eugene, and finds himself in the middle of Eugene’s marital and career problems, while gradually becoming attracted to Eugene’s wife, Rachel. The brothers’ painful memories of their childhoods are awakened with this visit, and Jake eventually turns back to his criminal pursuits, involving Rachel.
him out. He touched the deadbolt, then pressed his index finger over the keyhole, letting the small gap indent his fingertip. It was a superstitious gesture that he had started years ago — he wasn’t even sure how or why he began doing this — but now, after a diamond pick job, he let the lock pinch his finger. Thank you.

He put away his picks, and pushed open the door slowly, listening. He waited, but didn’t hear anything, and slipped in. He immediately checked for an alarm control unit, and slipped in. He immediately checked for an alarm control unit, and relaxed when he found nothing.

The apartment was dark, silent. He put away his picks, and pushed the lock pinch his finger. Thank you.

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Polo Powerhouse

The UCI women’s water polo team clinched both the Big West Conference regular-season title (its seventh in nine years) and the Big West tournament title (its sixth in nine years), improving its winning streak to 14 games and overall season performance to 23-6. In the championship game, senior goalkeeper Annika Nelson (shown above during an earlier match against UC Davis) recorded a career-high 15 saves for the second consecutive game. At press time, the No. 4 Anteaters were scheduled to face off against UC Berkeley during the first round of the NCAA tournament on May 12 in Indianapolis.
Escorting Vonnegut

By Gregory Benford

For decades, starting in the 1970s, I was UCI’s default escort for visitors and speakers a bit out of the ordinary. This usually meant science fiction writers with a large audience, though not always. I was an sf writer too, but with real-world credentials as a professor of physics, which some thought qualified me to mediate between the real and the imaginary.

The most striking writer I hosted, in the early 1990s, was Kurt Vonnegut. The university leaders asked me to walk him around campus, have dinner with him and host his public talk in our largest center, where he drew well over 1,000 people. He was affable, interested in the campus, and wanted to talk about sf. “I live in Manhattan and go to the literary parties, but I don’t read their books. I read just enough reviews to know what to say, then look enigmatic.”

Vonnegut reminisced that his mother, Edith, had had a severe depression and vowed never to write another novel, after the book appeared, Vonnegut told me, he went into a deep depression and vowed never to write another novel. Suicide was always a temptation. In 1984, he tried to take his life with sleeping pills and alcohol, and failed. Smoking seemed to be a half-measure in that direction, I thought, watching him light one cigarette from the butt of the previous. Yet he was a man of mirth – perhaps the greatest influence on him. “She thought she might have become a cynic, but there was something tender in his nature that he could never quite suppress.”

He had grown up reading and then writing of but shed the label of science-fiction writer with Slaughterhouse-Five in 1969. Its subtitle, The Children’s Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death, told its intent, refracted through an sf lens. After the book appeared, Vonnegut told me, he went into a severe depression and vowed never to write another novel. Suicide was always a temptation. In 1984, he tried to take his life with sleeping pills and alcohol, and failed. Smoking seemed to be a half-measure in that direction, I thought, watching him light one cigarette from the butt of the previous. Yet he was a man of mirth – perhaps the other side of the same coin?

His novels since Slaughterhouse-Five had been an ironic stew of plot summaries and autobiographical notes. Often, Kilgore Trout was a character, plainly a stand-in for Ted Sturgeon. I asked him about this, and he nodded. “If I’d wasted my time creating new characters, I would never have gotten around to calling attention to things that really matter.”

He remarked that he could easily have become a crank, but I said that was impossible because he was too smart. From his soft, ironic comments, I gathered he could have become a bore, but even at his most despairing, he had an endless willingness to entertain his readers: with drawings, jokes, sex, bizarre plot twists, science fiction – whatever it took.

In his remarks that day and evening, I felt from Vonnegut a deep, dark despair. I mentioned that when Kilgore Trout finds the question “What is the purpose of life?” written on a bathroom wall, his response is, “To be the eyes and ears and conscience of the Creator of the Universe, you fool!” Trout’s remark, I said, was curious, seeing that Vonnegut was an atheist, so there is no Creator to report back to. In The Sirens of Titan, there is a Church of God the Utterly Indifferent, that seemed to be his true position.

That night he said, “The two real political parties in America are the Winners and the Losers. People don’t acknowledge this. They claim membership in two imaginary parties, the Republicans and the Democrats.” In the end, he said, he believed that “we are here to help each other get through this thing, whatever it is.”

Some years later, he nearly died in a fire started because he fell asleep smoking. In 2007, he died, age 84, of brain injuries incurred several weeks prior from a fall. As usual, he had a great exit line. In 2006, he sardonically said in a Rolling Stone interview that he would sue the makers of the Pall Mall cigarettes he had been smoking since he was 12 years old for false advertising. “And do you know why?” he said. “Because I’m 83 years old. The lying bastards! On the package, Brown & Williamson promised to kill me.”

Of all the odd people I escorted, Vonnegut seemed the most in touch with the world he struggled to describe. From his soft, ironic comments, I gathered he could have become a bore, but even at his most despairing, he had an endless willingness to entertain his readers: with drawings, jokes, sex, bizarre plot twists, science fiction – whatever it took.

To my surprise, he knew who I was. “Sure, I’ve read —” and he rattled off six of my titles, starting with Timecop and through my Galactic Center series, then incomplete. He was affable, interested in the campus, and wanted to talk about sf. “I live in Manhattan and go to the literary parties, but I don’t read their books. I read just enough reviews to know what to say, then look enigmatic.”

Vonnegut reminisced that his mother, Edith, had had the greatest influence on him. “She thought she might have a new fortune by writing for the slick magazines. She took short-story courses at night. She studied magazines the way gamblers study racing forms. All to little avail. I think she envied me later.”

He said his favorite writer was George Orwell, tried to emulate him. “I like his concern for the poor, I like his socialism, I like his simplicity.” Orwell’s 1984 and Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World heavily influenced his debut novel, Player Piano, in 1952. He defended the sf genre and deplored a perceived sentiment that “no one can simultaneously be a respectable writer and understand how a refrigerator works.”

“From his soft, ironic comments, I gathered he could have become a cynic, but there was something tender in his nature that he could never quite suppress.”
Lunar Luck

Social sciences dean Bill Maurer (right) and alumni Henry Huang '97 (center) and Larry Tenney '83 (left) assist in the dragon parade part of the Lunar New Year street festival held in Social & Behavioral Sciences Gateway Plaza. More than 2,000 individuals attended the event, which ushered in the Year of the Fire Rooster and was sponsored by UCI's John S. & Marilyn Long U.S.-China Institute for Business, Law & Society in partnership with several schools and South Coast Plaza. "Dragons are believed to bring good luck to people," Huang says. "Therefore, the longer the dragon in the dance, the more luck it will bring to the community."
Swiftly intercepting that note was an unpaid, 24-year-old student. Laughter erupted as it reached Sharaud, the intended victim. The caricature of a classmate bounced around the room, written with oversized lips and the words “PASS-ME.”

Long Beach high school English class. They chuckled as they made the newspaper. Sharaud barely even noticed it. When Gruwell took her class to see “Schindler’s List,” the Los Angeles riots, anger and mistrust were everywhere. A year after Woodrow Wilson Classical High School in 1993 was a volatile mix of white students from relatively wealthy families beset by poverty, drugs and violence. A year after the Los Angeles riots, anger and mistrust were everywhere.

When Gruwell took her class to see “Schindler’s List,” security officers at a nearby grocery store patrolled down several students for weapons. It made the newspaper. Some teachers groused that she was making them look bad.

In her second year – her first as a paid employee – Gruwell began implementing administrators to let her retain 150 new students for all four years of high school. They later called themselves the “Freedom Writers.” After the Freedom Riders, civil rights activists who challenged segregated seating on public buses in the South, Gruwell wanted to make an impact on their lives. She succeeded – but not without constant conflict. “I had to struggle to keep my students every year,” she recalls. “It was a battle to stay with them.”

Nearly 25 years after inspiring the Freedom Writers, alumna Erin Gruwell now shares lessons worldwide

By John Westcott

A scrap of paper passed from student to student in a Long Beach high school English class. They chuckled at the caricature of a classmate bounced around the room, scribbled with oversized lips and the words “PASS-ME.” Laughter erupted as it reached Sharaud, the intended victim. His expression melted.

Satisfied, he was an unpaid, 24-year-old student teacher and recent UCI graduate from Newport Beach, whom her pupils labeled “preppy” Erin Gruwell. ’93 then began a discussion that grew into a big mutiny against traditional education. Those familiar with Gruwell know the story (which was made into a major motion picture, with her role played by Hilary Swank). She compared the racist note to Nazi propaganda leading to the Holocaust. None of her students knew what the Holocaust was. Abruptly, she dumped her meticulous lesson plans and made tolerance for other people the new focus of the class.

Woodrow Wilson Classical High School in 1993 was a volatile mix of white students from relatively wealthy neighborhoods and many others bused in from communities beset by poverty, drugs and violence. A year after the Los Angeles riots, anger and mistrust were everywhere. When Gruwell took her class to see “Schindler’s List,” security officers at a nearby grocery store patrolled down several students for weapons. It made the newspaper.

Each year, she handed the teens journals and asked them to write anonymous entries about themselves. Gruwell learned that many lied about desperation, ducking gunfire and losing friends and relatives to drugs and gang warfare. “It allowed them to tell us what they could not tell anybody,” she says of the journaling.

One girl wrote that she had been sexually assaulted by an uncle near a Christmas tree. After her entry was read to the class, Gruwell recalls, “50 girls said, ‘That’s not my story. But it is my story.”

One of her students, Sue Ellen Alpizar, joined the Freedom Writers as a junior transfer. “She was incredibly engaging,” Alpizar says of Gruwell. “She saw each student as an individual.” The teacher soon realized that the newcomer was dyslexic and paired her with classmates who could help. “I was a D-average student,” Alpizar says. “I wasn’t on track to graduate. But by my last report card, my semester GPA was a 4.0.”

Gruwell also snagged such guest speakers as Miep Gies, the woman who had helped hide Anne Frank and several other Jews from the Nazis during World War II; and Zlata Filipovic, who as a girl had diarized the horrors of the siege of Sarajevo during the Bosnian War.

“Gies told the Freedom Writers, ‘I simply did what I had to do because it was the right thing to do,’ ” Gruwell says. “I aspired to follow in her humble footsteps and do the same.”

Today, the 47-year-old educator still fights the good fight. Her life is a whirlwind of teaching and presentations. “Making a commitment to change,” Gruwell says, “is a cornerstone of the Freedom Writers.”

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Today, the 47-year-old educator still fights the good fight. Her life is a whirlwind of teaching and presentations. Her globetrotting has taken her to Palestine, Croatia, Taiwan and many other places where people yearn to hear her story – and any wisdom she can impart. She has written four best-selling books, including Teach With Your Heart.

In March, she flew to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, with other finalists winnowed from 20,000 nominations worldwide for the Global Teacher Prize. (The winner was Maggie MacDonnell, who teaches in an Inuit village in the Canadian Arctic accessible only by air.)

Many of the 150 Freedom Writers, all of whom graduated from high school, are now teachers, principals, counselors, veterans, architects and tech employees. Some work for the Freedom Writers Foundation that Gruwell established to cut high school dropout rates through the use of the Freedom Writers method. It has taught the progressive curriculum to more than 500 other instructors.

“Making a commitment to change,” Gruwell says, “is a cornerstone of the Freedom Writers.” Her personal commitment to change occurred while she was a UCI student, watching on television as a young Chinese man faced down a tank in Tiananmen Square. In that moment, she decided to become a teacher “to stand up for kids who felt invisible, who didn’t have a voice, who were on the fringe and the margins.”

Gruwell remains active as an alumna. She serves on the UCI Alumni Association board of directors and has given dozens of presentations on campus. Last year, she was the commencement speaker for the School of Humanities. “By fostering an educational philosophy that values and promotes diversity, Erin has transformed her students’ lives and those of many others,” said humanities dean Georges Van Den Abbeele at the 2016 event. “She encouraged them to rethink rigid beliefs about themselves and others, reconsider daily decisions and, ultimately, rechart their futures.”

Though Gruwell left Woodrow Wilson High after five years, she has continued to teach at California State University, Long Beach, Long Beach City College, and Massachusetts’ Bay Path University. The crucial interception of a scrap of paper that started it all happened almost a quarter-century ago. Gruwell’s plans for the future include helping to educate children in Jordan’s refugee camps and becoming a global force in teacher training. Where did that young teacher, initially typcast by her students, find the courage to blow up the tidy boxes of education?

“I was lucky to find my voice at UCI and was encouraged to follow my passion,” Gruwell says. “I was exposed to unbelievably enlightened people, and now I’m just hungry to keep that light burning.”
Class Notes

UCI Magazine

specialists. With nearly 2 million downloads and national
that tests users’ vision and directs them to nearby eyesight
dergree at the University of Houston, became a contact lens
group. After graduating, she earned a Doctor of Optometry
students flocked to the inaugural meeting of UCI’s U See Eyes
expected one or two classmates to show up. Instead, 88
Nikki Iravani ’86
in his sleep.

Christopher Elliott ’90
In his first brush with

Ferial Govashiri ’93, political science
She met the pope and Miss Piggy, kept President Barack
She also does speaking engagements about her White House
work her way through UCI as night manager at an Alpha
launched “Pokemon Go.” Howard, an Encinitas native who
worked her way through UCI as night manager at an Alpha

Nikki Iravani ’86, biological sciences
When she posted a sign three decades ago about forming a
campus club for aspiring optometrists, Nikki Iravani
expected one or two classmates to show up. Instead, 88
students flocked to the inaugural meeting of UCI’s U See Eyes
group. After graduating, she earned a Doctor of Optometry
degree at the University of Houston, became a contact lens
industry executive and later launched Eyekam, a mobile app
that users tests’ vision and directs them to nearby eye-glass
specialists. With nearly 2 million downloads and national
media coverage, the app now has a brick-and-mortar spinoff
in downtown Santa Ana. The center features
virtual reality eye-wear and other high-tech optical products,
as well as an optometry clinic where Iravani cares for patients. Off
duty, she serves on several boards, including the Francisco) Ayala
School of Biological Sciences’
Dean’s Leadership Council.

Andrea Lo ’13, chemistry
Inside a high-tech kitchen laboratory in Corina, Andrea
Lo experiments with ham glazes, bacon seasonings,
cheese sauces and other flavor
concoctions for restaurants,
private food labels and
retail companies. Part chemist,
part chef, she formulates
and taste-tests recipes for
Saratoga Food Specialties,
a research and development firm that supplies ingredients to
Taco Bell and other clients. Lo stumbled across food science
at UCI, where she served as president of the chemistry
club. After graduation, she earned a master’s degree in the
subject at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, then
developed healthy snacks for Disney and pastas for a food
manufacturing outfit in Vernon. When not tinkering with spices,
mapping, pH balances or giving titratable acidity, she enjoys
hiking and travel. In 2013, UCI study abroad programs that took her to
Great Britain, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Andrew Tonkovich, M.F.A. ’93, creative writing
To alumni Lisa Alvarez and Andrew Tonkovich, Orange County is a mecca for
fine writing. For their new anthology, Orange County: A
Dramatic Flyover Images of Baghdad during the invasion of Iraq. A year later, Google bought
and used the technology to create Google Earth and Google Maps. In 2012, Howard joined Niantic Labs, a
company that a few years later spun off into a separate company and
launched “Pokemon Go.” Howard says Encinias, a

Lenette Posada Howard ’90, M.A. ’93, creative writing
What do “Pokemon Go,” the CIA and Google Maps have in common? Answer: Lenette Posada Howard. The connection begins in 2001, when Howard was director of software development for
Keyhole, a three-dimensional aerial
mapping startup that attracted media fame (and CIA funding) for its
dramatic flyover images of Baghdad
Air Travel

Ferial Govashiri ’93
In her first day in

Christopher Elliott ’90
In his first brush with

Lisa Alvarez, M.F.A. ’92, creative writing
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In Memoriam

Charles D. “Chuck” Martin, former
UCI Foundation trustee, died
March 28 at the age of 80. He
was well-known in Orange County business community.
His company, Enterprise Partners managed funds for
top investors, and his private
equity firm, Westar Capital
acquired and built 25
companies. Most recently, Martin served as
equity firm, Westar Capital,
CEO and chief investment officer of Mont Pelier Capital.
He also wrote Orange County, Inc.: The Evolution of an
Economic Powerhouse, which was published last year.
At UCI, his contributions are legendary. He helped institute
and served as chairman emeritus of The Paul Merage School
of Business Dean’s Advisory Board. He helped create
the Chancellor’s Advisory Council and led the initiative to
establish a UCI honors college. A trustee of the UCI
Foundation for almost two decades, Martin was awarded the
prestigious UCI Medal in 2012. He was recognized as a
friend and advisor to our campus is irreplaceable,” said UCI
Chancellor Howard Gillman. “His dedication to attracting
the best students and giving them the best education
will remain an inspiration.”

Andrea Lo ’13, chemistry
Inside a high-tech kitchen laboratory in Corina, Andrea
Lo experiments with ham glazes, bacon seasonings,
cheese sauces and other flavor
concoctions for restaurants,
private food labels and
retail companies. Part chemist,
part chef, she formulates
and taste-tests recipes for
Saratoga Food Specialties,
a research and development firm that supplies ingredients to
Taco Bell and other clients. Lo stumbled across food science
at UCI, where she served as president of the chemistry
club. After graduation, she earned a master’s degree in the
subject at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, then
developed healthy snacks for Disney and pastas for a food
manufacturing outfit in Vernon. When not tinkering with spices,
mapping, pH balances or giving titratable acidity, she enjoys
hiking and travel. In 2013, UCI study abroad programs that took her to
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Say ‘Cheese’
Two Anteaters take old-fashioned “selfies” in a retro photo booth featured at this year’s homecoming festivities in February. More than 8,550 alumni and friends attended the Party in the Park, and the line for a chance to snap a pic in the converted VW bus went on all day and into the night.

Thank you!
We made a mountain out of an anthill!
Thank you for supporting students, research and innovative programs across campus.

#ZotZotGive

On April 12, 2017, we:
- raised over $1.4 million
- from 1,824 gifts
- in just 24 hours
In a world where commitments are often unfulfilled, we view a promise differently. When one is made, we will not rest until that promise is delivered. From the way we connect people with roads, bridges and walking trails to neighborhood parks, sports complexes and 21st century schools, we’re making Orange County a better place to live.

FivePoint is delivering, as promised.