**Course Title:** The Art of Character: Putting the Cart Before the Horse  
**Course Code:** EGL 12 W  
**Instructor:** Martha Conway

## Course Summary

This course is designed to give you the tools to begin writing a character-driven novel or short story. Although there are many roads into the creative process, the one that has worked for me has been to start with a compelling character who wants or needs something, and then add interesting secondary characters and work out their relationships to each other. By digging deeper and making each character more complicated, it is my belief that their story will begin to unfold almost by itself. We’ll start with writing exercises designed to explore what you already know about your protagonist, and then we’ll continue fleshing him or her out (keeping what works, discarding what doesn’t) while exploring other characters and their ties to the protagonist. During the final weeks we’ll begin writing opening scenes and chapters of our short stories or novels; by that time we should have plenty of material from writing exercises, prompts, and assignments to pull from for a first draft.

## Required Texts

- *Euphoria*, by Lily King  
- *Three Uses of the Knife: On the Nature and Purpose of Drama*, by David Mamet

## Grading

Students have three grade options for Continuing Studies courses:

- **No Grade Requested (NGR)** – No credit shall be received; No proof of attendance can be provided. (Not suitable for those requiring proof of attendance/completion.)
- **Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)** - written work & evaluation is required  
- **Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)** - participation as determined by the instructor is required

Please note that you can change your grading status at any point before the final class meeting by contacting the Stanford Continuing Studies department.

If you decide to take the course for Credit or a Letter Grade, your grade will be equally based on participation, writing assignments, workshop critiques and your final workshop piece.
Tentative Weekly Outline

Week One: Exploring Your Protagonist, Building Characteristics, Defining Wants and Needs

- John Truby, “Creating Your Hero.”
- Lily King, Euphoria, Chapters One and Two.
- NoViolet Bulawayo: We Need New Names, Chapter One.*
  (Look Inside: https://www.amazon.com/We-Need-New-Names-NoViolet-ebook/dp/B0092XHU2M/)
- M.L. Stedman: The Light Between Oceans, Prologue.*
  (Look Inside: https://www.amazon.com/Light-Between-Oceans-Novel-ebook/dp/B0064CL1T2/)
  (Look Inside: https://www.amazon.com/Amazing-Adventures-Kavalier-bonus-content-ebook/dp/B0070O5F4U/)

*As we will only be reading the first chapter of these novels, they are not included in the core syllabus. If you do not wish to purchase them, you can borrow them from the library; alternatively, I have included the link to Amazon’s “Look Inside” feature, which in each case allows you to read the first chapter (as of this writing).

Week Two: Developing a Story Premise with Character in Mind

- Euphoria, Chapters 3 and 4.
- John Truby, “What is the Premise?”

Supplemental Reading (not required): “The Appeal of Flawed Characters”
http://booksbywomen.org/the-appeal-of-flawed-characters-lorraine-zago-rosenthal/

This week, in addition to the choice of writing exercises, I will send daily morning prompts designed to help begin exploring characters.

Week Three: Supporting Characters and Character Webs

- Euphoria, Chapters 5 and 6.
- John Truby, Chapter Four, “Character.”
- On Story (video clip), “Heroes and Anti-Heroes: Loving the Villain.”
  http://video.pbs.org/video/2365026098/

Supplemental reading (not required): Pixar’s 22 Rules of Storytelling.
Week Four: Character Change
• *Euphoria*, Chapters 7 through 10.
• John Truby, “Creating Your Hero.”


Week Five: Building Conflict
• *Euphoria*, Chapters 11 through 16.
• Reread two or more first chapters (King, Bulawayo, Chabon, Stedman,) from Week One; or re-read one of these chapters and the first chapter of a novel or first scene in a short story from a work in your genre.

Week Six: Creating an Outside World for Your Particular Characters
*Euphoria*, Chapters 17 through 21.
• John Truby, “Detailing the Story World” and “Connecting the World to the Hero’s Overall Development.”
• Supplemental study: Ursula LeGuin Interview, UC Berkeley (video clip).
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovZ6qgTy3SE

Week Seven to Nine: Student Workshops
• Writing, reading, and giving feedback on student work in small groups.
• *Euphoria*, Chapters 22 through 31.

Exercises
“Ten Ways to Begin” — multiples exercises to inspire opening pages as well as first and second and third chapters ... and on to the end.

Supplemental reading (not required): Interview with Lily King
https://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm/author_number/1201/Lily-King

Week Ten: How Not to Re-Write (or, Make Every Attempt to Write the First Draft through to the End Before Starting Over)
• Continue writing, reading, and giving feedback on student work.
• “Novelists on First Drafts”
  http://www.themillions.com/2013/02/ask-the-writing-teacher-novelists-on-first-drafts.html