

Also, I watch the bird feeder—so many, many kinds of birds come. The Shea sons hang around all the time, asking when will I go home, but Bess tell them, Get lost.

She's permanent resident, say Bess. She isn't going anywhere.

Then she wink at me, and switch the channel with the remote control.

Of course, I shouldn't say Irish this, Irish that, especially now I am become honorary Irish myself, according to Bess. Me! Who's Irish? I say, and she laugh. All the same, if I could mention one thing about some of the Irish, not all of them of course, I like to mention this: Their talk just stick. I don't know how Bess Shea learn to use her words, but sometimes I hear what she say a long time later. *Permanent resident. Not going anywhere.* Over and over I hear it, the voice of Bess.



Reply All

ROBIN HEMLEY

To: Poetry Association of the Western Suburbs Listserve
From: Lisa Drago-Harse
Subject: Next Meeting
Date: July 17th

Hi all,

I wanted to confirm that our next meeting will be held in the Sir Francis Drake Room at the Bensonville Hampton Inn on August 3rd. Minutes from our last meeting and an agenda for the next meeting will follow shortly.

Peace and Poetry,
Lisa Drago-Harse
Secretary/PAWS

To: Poetry Association of the Western Suburbs Listserve
From: Michael Stroud
Re: Re: Next Meeting
Date: July 17th

Dearest Lisa,

First of all, I LOVE your mole and don't find it unsightly in the least! There is absolutely no reason for you to be ashamed of it (though it might be a good idea to have it checked out). But please don't remove it! Heaven forbid, my darling! As I recall, I gave you considerable pleasure when I sucked and licked it like a nipple. A nipple it is in size and shape, if not

placement. That no one else knows your mole's position on your body (other than your benighted husband, poor limp Richard, that Son(net) of a Bitch as you call him) is more the pity (if Marvell had known such a mole, he undoubtedly would have added an extra stanza to his poem). But my coy mistress is not SO terribly coy as all that, if I remember correctly (and how could I forget!) You were not at all what I had expected in bed—not that I had any expectations at all. When you started massaging my crotch with your foot underneath the table in the Sir Francis Drake Room, I was at first shocked. For a moment, I thought perhaps the unseen massager was none other than our esteemed president, the redoubtable Darcy McFee, (makeup and wardrobe courtesy of Yoda). Is that terrible of me? I have nothing personal against her, really, except for her execrable taste in poetry, and the fact that you should be president, not she. And her breath. And that habit of pulling her nose when she speaks and that absolutely horrific expression of hers, Twee. As in, "I find his poetry just so twee." What does twee mean and why does she keep inflicting it upon us! So imagine my horror when I felt this foot in my crotch and I stared across the table at the two of you—she twitching like a slug that's had salt poured on it and you immobile except for your Mont Blanc pen taking down the minutes. Ah, to think that the taking down of minutes could be such an erotic activity, but in your capable hands, it is. To think that mere hours later, it would be my Mont Blanc you'd grasp so firmly, guiding me into the lyrical book of your body. But initially, I thought the worst, that it was Darcy, not you. My only consolation was the idea that at least I had her on a sexual harassment suit, her being my boss after all at Roosevelt. Another reason, I thought it was her and not you was because I know you're married and she isn't and I knew that Richard is a member of our esteemed organization, too (and he was in the room, seated beside you no less!). It was only that sly smile in your eyes that tipped me off. I, too, love the danger that illicit public sex brings, as long as it's kept under the table, so to speak. And yes, maybe someday we can make love on that very same table in the Sir Francis Drake Room, my darling. But I must ask you, sweetheart, where did you learn that amazing trick. I have seen people wiggle their ears before, but never that! What amazing talent and such a pity that this is not something you bring out at parties or poetry readings to awe the dumb masses! Would Darcy find that too twee? I think not! Thinking of you now makes me so hot. I want to nibble you. I want to live in your panties. I want to write a series of odes to you equal in number to every lucky taste bud on my tongue, every nerve ending (no, not endings but beginnings!) on my body that live in rapture of your every pore. No, not poor, but rich. I am rich. I make metaphors of your muscles, of your thighs, of the fecund wetness bursting with your being and effulgence. I must swallow now. I must breathe. I must take my leave, my darling, and go now to relieve myself of my private thoughts of you and you alone.

With undying love and erotic daydreams,

Mikey

P.S. Do you think you could get away for an evening next week? Could you be called away from Richard for an emergency meeting of the Public Relations Committee?

To: PAWS Listserve
From: Darcy McFee
Re: Re: Re: Next Meeting
Date: July 17th

I am traveling now and will not be answering e-mails until I return on July 21st.

Thanks!

Darcy

To: PAWS Listserve
From: Sam Fulgram, Jr.
Re: Re: Re: Re: Next Meeting
Date: July 17th

Whoa boy! Do you realize you just sent out your love note to the entire Poetry Association of the Western Suburbs listserv?

Cheers,
Sam

P.S. That mole? You've got my imagination running wild. As long as the entire organization knows about it now, would you mind divulging its location? I'd sleep better at night knowing it.

To: PAWS Listserve
From: Betsy Midchester
Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Next Meeting
Date July 17th

Hi all,

Well! That last message from "Mikey" Stroud certainly made my day. I thought at first the message was addressed to me. As I had no memory of placing my foot in Mike's crotch, I naturally assumed that I needed an adjustment of my medication so that I wouldn't forget such episodes in the future. Now I see it's simply Michael ("Down Boy") Stroud and our esteemed Secretary of the Galloping Mont Blaanaanc who need the

medication adjustments. Thanks, in any case, for a much needed lift in an otherwise humdrum day.

Betsy Midchester
Treasurer/PAWS

To: PAWS Listserve
From: Lisa Drago-Harse
Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Next Meeting
Date: July 17th

This is a nightmare. I'm not quite sure what to say except that life is unpredictable and often irreversible. While I do not wish to go into details or make excuses for the above e-mail from Michael Stroud, I would like to clarify one thing: that was not my foot in your crotch Michael. But your belief that it was my foot in your crotch explains a few things concerning your subsequent behavior toward me that were, up until this moment, a mystery.

LDH

To: PAWS Listserve
From: Michael Stroud
Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Next Meeting
Date: July 17th

I'm

To: PAWS Listserve
From: Michael Stroud
Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Next Meeting
Date: July 17th

I hit the send button by mistake before I was ready. This isn't my day, to say the least! I'm sorry!!!! I'd like to apologize to the entire PAWS community, and also to Lisa's husband Richard and to Darcy. And to you, Lisa. I don't mean to make excuses for myself, but I would like to say that I've been under a tremendous amount of pressure of late, at school, at home, and I am nothing if not vulnerable and flawed. All I can say is that in poetry I find some solace for the petty actions of others and the sometimes monstrous actions of which I'm all too capable. As déclassé as Truth and Beauty are these days, it is in such expressions as those of Matthew Arnold, Keats, Byron, and Shelly to whom I look for my meager draught of the Divine. And sometimes, I must admit, I seek in the affection of my fellow poetry lovers, the divinity which I myself lack. I ask you all to blame me, not Lisa for what has happened.

But if not your foot, Lisa, then whose?

Michael Stroud

To: PAWS Listserve
 From: Greg Rudolfsky
 Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: RESPECT
 Date: July 17th

Just a little bit, Just a little bit.
 Sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me, RESPECT, Just a little bit, just a little bit...

To: PAWS Listserve
 From: Samantha M. Poulsen, RN
 Subject: Fecund Poets
 Date: July 17th

I do not care whose foot is in whose crotch, but I think it's insulting and idiotic that so-called educated people would use such phrases as, "the fecund wetness bursting with your being and effulgence." And officers of the PAWS at that!

To: PAWS Listserve
 From: Richard Harse
 Re: Fecund Poets
 Date: July 17th

I would like to tender my resignation in the Poets of the Western Suburbs, as I will be tendering my resignation in several other areas of my life. I only belonged to PAWS in any case because of my wife's interest in poetry. I wanted to share her interests, but clearly not all of them.

To: PAWS
 From: Darcy McFee
 Re: Fecund Poets
 Date: July 22nd

Well, it seems that our little organization has been busy in my absence. I have over 300 new messages in my e-mail account, all, it seems from my fellow poetry lovers! I haven't yet had a chance to read your exchanges, but I will soon. In the meantime, I wanted to convey some exciting news. This weekend, while attending a workshop at Wright State in Dayton, I ran into the former Poet Laureate, Billy Collins, who has agreed to be our special guest at our annual Poetry Bash in Oak Park. He said he's heard quite a lot about our organization in recent days and that our board had achieved near legendary status in the poetry community. I knew this would make you as proud as it makes me.

To: PAWS Listserve
 From: Darcy McFee
 Subject: Twee
 Date: July 24th

So this is how it is. Upon reading the 300 e-mails that collected in my inbox over the weekend, my mind is a riot of emotions. I have not slept for nearly 48 hours. Never before have I been so insulted. Yet, I also know that I am, at least in part, to blame. Had I not stuck my foot in Michael Stroud's crotch, none of this would have happened. Twitching like a slug that's had salt poured on it? That hurts, Michael. It really does. I didn't realize you were so shallow. But in reading your collective e-mails, I see that at least half our membership has a decidedly sadistic bent. In any case, it was not your crotch, I aimed for, Michael, but the crotch of our Vice-President, Amir Bathshiri, with whom I have long been intimately acquainted, both of us having lost our spouses several years ago. If the seating arrangements in the Sir Francis Drake Room were any less cramped, none of these misunderstandings would have occurred. Of course, I never would have tried to fondle you, Michael. In the first place, you are the most boring, tedious person I have met in my life, and believe me, as Chair of the English Dept. at Roosevelt, I have met my share of boring, tedious people. You recite poetry with all the grace of a highway sign that cautions one to beware of falling rocks. In fact, I would rather make love to a falling rock. But enough! I know that it is my errant foot to blame. Amir and I have talked this over and have decided to withdraw from PAWS as well as from academia. Early retirement calls, Michael and Lisa, and I will give neither of you a thought as I walk along the beach hand in hand with Amir in the months and years to come, listening to the mermaids singing each to each.

Yes, Michael, I find you and your crotch and your paramour the very essence of Twee.

To: PAWS Listserve
 From: Betsy Midchester/Treasurer
 Subject: New Elections
 Date: July 30th

Please note that the agenda for our next meeting has changed. We will spend most of the meeting on new elections to be held for the positions of President, Vice-President and Secretary of our organization. Note, too, that we will no longer be meeting in the Sir Francis Drake Room of the Bensonville Hampton Inn. Instead, we will be meeting in the cafeteria of Enchanted Gardens Residence for Seniors in Glen Ellyn. The change in venue was planned well in advance of recent events, so members should not read anything into this (though if any organization's members are skilled at reading between the lines, it should be ours). Please think about whom you would like to nominate for these

important positions in our organization. And in the meantime, please remember to always be conscious and considerate of your audience.

Peace and poetry,
Betsy Midchester
Treasurer and Acting President/PAWS



Writing Exercises

- Part 1: In the first-person or third-person limited omniscient, write a scene where your character hears the sound of someone trying to break into the house. Your character is home alone (although it may not be her house), vulnerable in some way: in the bath, or in bed, or trapped in a windowless room. The scene should begin with the first hint of danger and it should end the moment before your narrator actually sees the intruder. Your goal here is to imagine in a convincing way your narrator's emotions and perceptions, and to create as much suspense as possible.

Part 2: Write the same scene from the perspective of the intruder. This might be a random break-in by a common burglar, or maybe the intruder's story is more complex. Consider your intruder's expectations: Does he expect the home to be empty? If not, who does he think might be there? Consider whether or not your intruder knows (or thinks he knows) the occupant of the house. In this scene, the reader should identify with the intruder, and again, your goal is to create suspense.

- Write five openings to a story, each from a different authorial distance. The first version should be written from a great distance. With each version you should lessen the authorial distance, so that by the fifth version we immediately feel close to the character. It may help to use filmmaking as an analogy: Your first version should be like a panoramic establishing shot, and your fifth version an extreme close-up. For instance:
 - It was the blizzard of 1972, the worst storm Boston had experienced in a decade. A young woman, holding her coat closed over her pregnant stomach, struggled down Broad Street.
 - Jennifer Meyers clutched her coat and prayed she wouldn't slip on a patch of ice.
 - Jenny waddled down the snowy sidewalk and imagined how silly she must look: a pregnant woman staggering around in a blizzard.
 - How Jenny wished she were back inside her little apartment, at one with her futon couch, an afghan pulled up to her chin, watching *Days of Our Lives*.
 - What was she thinking? Trudging through a blinding storm to the Circle K just for a pint of Chunky Monkey? Pregnancy cravings were one thing, but this was ridiculous.

Now write the opening paragraph of your story. Start at a great distance, but steadily reduce the psychic distance with each sentence, so that by the final sentence of the paragraph the reader feels extremely close to the character.

- Select a tense situation such as an auto accident, a potentially violent encounter, or a disintegrating love affair, and describe it four times from four different points of view:
 - first person
 - third-person *limited* omniscient
 - third-person objective
 - third-person omniscient
 Which point of view works best for this material, and why?
- Choose a significant incident from a child's life (your own or invented). First, write a scene from the point of view of the child in first-person present tense. Try to capture a child's perceptions, vocabulary, and syntax. Now rewrite the scene in first-person past tense from the perspective of the same character as an adult. In this version, your character will not only possess an adult's perception of the event, but will also be able to recall his own childish reaction to it. Try to convey how your character feels about his child-self through his tone (affectionate, amused, nostalgic, embarrassed, mocking, ironic and detached, etc.). What do you gain/lose with the two different points of view?
- Write a gossipy letter from the point of view of one family member who passes scathing judgments on another, but let readers know that the speaker really loves or envies the other (an unreliable narrator). Alternatively, have the speaker loudly praise the other family member, but let readers hear harsh criticism implied.
- Write down a false statement about yourself, such as "I have a pet snake." Keep going, elaborating on the false statement, allowing the "I" character to develop. You are beginning to create a narrator who is not like you, which will give you more imaginative freedom than you might feel when writing about yourself as the "I" narrator.
- Imagine a character who is your complete opposite in some specific way. For example, if you hate country music, take on the "I" voice of someone who is, among other things, a country music fan. Now choose an action (walking to school, eating in a café, making a sale to a customer), and write a scene in which your "opposite I" character is performing that action. Make the character sympathetic and intriguing. Don't announce that he or she is a country music lover, but allow the detail and dialogue in the scene to gradually reveal this to the reader.