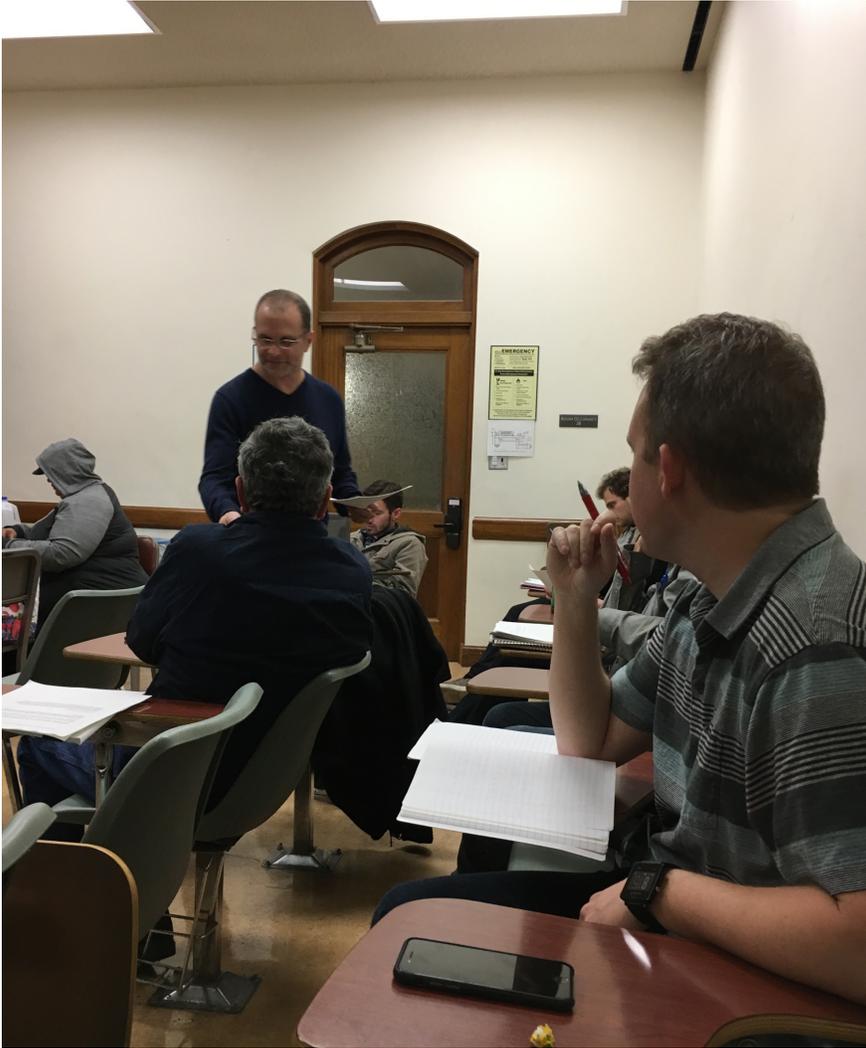


**2017 Otis Faculty Development Grantee Report  
by Sung Ju Ahn**



Mark Sarvas critiquing in the UCLA Extension Novel Writing V class

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I am grateful to receive the Spring 2017 Otis Faculty Development Grant, which will pay my tuition to the two UCLA Extension classes I took on advanced novel writing (Advanced Novel Revision Techniques, Summer 2016 and Novel Writing V: A Continuing Writer's Workshop, Spring 2017). I took these classes to learn the techniques I needed to finish my novel, *Midwife Shin*.

*Midwife Shin* is my debut historical novel set in Korea during World War II when it was occupied by the Empire of Japan. A penniless Korean widow with two small children goes against the patriarchal establishment, spurred by Western liberal ideals, and becomes the main breadwinner and matriarch by getting a nursing and midwifery education in a school run by the Imperial Japanese Army and the Red Cross Society.

I have been working on this novel for almost 9 years and I am near the end of my writing. However, to elevate my work to a literary level, I took two classes from a novelist and teacher, Mark Sarvas. What he taught was the nuts and bolt of writing, everything from structure, to dialogue to what elements to focus on in a rewrite. He did not teach me anything new. Instead, through his class I was able to synthesize all I've learned in my years as a playwright, screenwriter, and copywriter with what I learned at Bread Loaf with Andrea Barrett and through my close readings of Alice Munro, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Elena Ferrante. The fruit of this synthesis will be the completed *Midwife Shin*.

Also, this class raised important questions for me: How much of an artistic, literary creation is the product of intellect and how much is intuition and instinct? Where is the balance between narrative and the dramatization of interior thought in this work? What is the main difference in the way the West sees the world and history and the way the East sees the world and history? And what does this point of difference say about the East and the West? Finally, and most importantly: Why are most woman throughout history powerless and oppressed? I don't pretend to have the answers to these questions, however, having the space to ask these questions has made my novel richer.

Both UCLA classes were conducted as workshops where an excerpt of the student's novel was read and line edited for homework and class consisted of critiquing the student's work. This was an invaluable lesson to me on how to conduct critiques in my own class. Most studio classes at Otis involve critiques, but not LAS classes. My LAS classes have always inevitably involved open critiques where the whole class weighs in on a classmate's work. I find this is the best way to teach because an open critique forces the student to take ownership of his/her work. They have to complete it and complete in a way where they are proud to show it to others and be able to communicate their vision to others. The critique also means, their classmates have to take ownership of their opinions and back their opinions with statements that articulates their point of view. It's harder to just "bullshit" in a critique in front of your peers. "I don't like it" has to be backed up with a good reason why. Since writing, more than anything, is about communication, taking part in literary critiques has illuminated better techniques to conducting my own critiques at Otis. In fact, this semester, I received an OARS grant to investigate the effectiveness of critiques on writing in my Business Writing class (LIBS 314H) and I have used many of the techniques developed in my UCLA classes.

Taking the UCLA class from Mark Sarvas has definitely advanced my career as a writer and has added value to my teaching. I have seen a dramatic improvement in my novel, which improves my chances of being published. This summer, several of my Otis colleagues and a former student will be reading my work and giving me their opinions. In addition, I would love to do a reading (perhaps during Academic Assembly) and look forward to sharing my knowledge of Korea and novel writing with the greater Otis community.