BINOCULAR VISION
Story & Reading Guide

EDITH PEARLMAN
Ron Charles of the *Washington Post* touted Lookout Books’ debut as “one of the most auspicious launches in publishing history.” His remark, prompted by Edith Pearlman’s PEN/Malamud Award for excellence in the art of the short story and nomination for the National Book Award in fiction, have proven prescient, describing the trajectory of a book and an imprint that continued to surpass expectations into 2012. Edith Pearlman’s *Binocular Vision* is the first book since the founding of the Story Prize in 2004 to win the National Book Critics Circle Award in fiction and become a finalist for the National Book Award, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and The Story Prize (a nomination she shares with Don DeLillo and Steven Millhauser) in the same year. Pearlman also won the Edward Lewis Wallant Award, presented annually to an American writer whose work of fiction is considered to have significance for the American Jew. All from a writer who has been publishing elegant, award-winning stories for decades, stories lauded and enjoyed by those who read them, though they did not reach a wide audience.

Lookout’s mission—to identify and champion overlooked gems by both debut and established authors—has been fully realized in Edith Pearlman’s *Binocular Vision*. The thirty-four stories in this collection are gems indeed.

“Accommodation is my favorite theme,” says Pearlman. Perhaps this is why her stories are so apt, why they reflect life so well. Ranging from the story of an unusual art heist committed by a tutor and his student, to the tale of a secret tryst in the woods between a professor’s mother and the Tsar Nicholas II, from a simple story of a couple’s realization that all within the marriage is not as it seems, to a story of a young girl’s awareness of her own mistaken assumptions—these stories all feature accommodation in one sense or another. They capture and present a broad spectrum of human experience.
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Cover photograph © Keith Brofsky / Getty

In the town square Fergus was trying out his rudimentary Czech. “Stores are on the ground floors,” he remarked. “People above.”

“I speak only English,” snapped the news vendor, in German. His left hand rested on the awning of his wheelbarrow. Index and middle fingers were missing—their ghosts pointed at Fergus’s throat.

“The cobblestones were light gray once. Dark gray now,” Fergus persisted.

“I have other magazines in the bottom of the barrow,” the news vendor said, in French.

Fergus shook his head, though without censure. An old church stood aslant in the middle of the square. The minute hand of its clock twitched every sixty seconds. Would you go mad, hearing that forever? Would you come to need it, like kisses? A line of customers stuttered into the bakery, and the greengrocer moved sideways and sideways, sprinkling water on his cabbages. Under the October sun the whole little enterprise—church, stores, peaked facades—glistened as if shellacked.

“Good-bye,” Fergus said to the news vendor.

“Au revoir, Toyman.”

Fergus walked away, smiling.

He was a division head of ToyFolk. He came to a new place after a site had been selected, and he supervised the building of the
factory and the hiring of the workers, and managed the facility for a while—ten years, usually; well, it never seemed that long.

The knitting shop—what a careful pyramid of yarns. A cat with a passion for some middle ball could set the whole thing tumbling. The druggist’s window displayed old-fashioned brass scales. Then came the premises of an estate agent. A middle-aged woman sat composedly at a typewriter; a young woman peered into a computer screen with an expression of dismay.

And this next place? Perhaps the window meant to be revealing, but it had too many small panes. There was merchandise inside—women’s accessories? He thought of Barbara, and of his daughters and daughter-in-law; and he went in.

Bells fixed to the door announced his presence. Something flipped onto his head and then bounced onto his shoes. A knitted clown.

“Oh!” said a woman’s voice.

“Ah,” said a man’s.

Fergus picked up the clown and remained squatting, examining the miniature buttons of wood that ran down the torso. Each button had been carved by hand. He cradled the toy in his own hand, two fingers supporting the head. Finally he stood up, creaking just a little, and looked around.

Dolls. Dolls crowding each other on shelves like slaves on shipboard. Dolls democratically sharing a pram. Dolls of all sizes sitting one atop the other, the largest on a rocker, exhaustedly supporting the rest.

Noah’s ark, the animals assembled on deck to wait for the dove.

Jack-in-the-boxes. Punch and Judy, on their sides, locked in each other’s arms. A pint-size printing press.

Teddies . . . His eyes didn’t sting, really; they remembered stinging. They remembered his children asleep, favorites crooked in their elbows. They remembered the plush of his own bear.

The man who had said “Ah” and the woman who had said “Oh” stood in front of a case of toys. They were in their middle forties. Barbara had been at her lanky best then—the rigors of child rearing past, the predations of age still ahead. For this woman, now staring at him with such assurance, beauty must be an old habit. Her pale face was surrounded by hair once blond and now transparent. Her chin was delicately cleft as if by a master chiseler. The
irises of her gunmetal eyes were rimmed with a darker shade. She wore a flowered skirt, a blouse of a different flowered pattern, a shawl embroidered with yet another species.

The man’s eyes were a gentle blue. He had a courtier’s small beard, but he was dressed in black garments that suggested the peasant—baggy trousers, a loose vest over a T-shirt.

Fergus walked toward a shelf of windup toys. He stepped sideways. In a case, tiny ballerinas posed before a mirror, and through the mirror he saw that a curtained archway led to a stockroom.

He glided again, and now the mirror gave him the handsome man and woman in their awful clothes.

“Is this a store?” he asked, turning toward them. “A museum?”

“We are a secondhand toy shop,” the man answered. His accent was French. “That makes us a kind of museum. Most travelers come in only to look. But we get the occasional collector.”

“We started out as a collection ourselves,” the woman said. Her accent was Gallic, too. “We are also a workshop.”

The man shrugged. “I turn out some wooden things.”

“Bernard repairs appliances for the entire population.”

“Anna exaggerates.”

“My name is Fergus.”


“This town has no secrets,” Anna explained.

Fergus laughed. “Not president. A division head.”

“ToyFolk will bring prosperity,” Anna said. “Everybody says so. Will you have some tea?”

Each new posting had brought its special friends. In Burgundy he and Barbara had hit it off with a cartoonist who raised sheep. In Lancashire they spent every Sunday with the dentist and his wife, disorganized, comical, their three children just the ages of Fergus and Barbara’s own. In the Canaries the mayor, a bachelor, cleaved to them with nervous ardor. And now came this pair, served up like a final course. Toy people. What a blast.

“We always have brought prosperity,” Fergus said, smiling at his hosts from the chair they had unfolded. Anna sat on a footstool; Bernard said he preferred to stand. “When we move on things are better than they were—they seem so, anyway. Delicious tea—blackberry?”
“Yes. And your family?” Anna asked.
“Kids all married, living in different states. Barbara joins me next week; she’s in Minneapolis visiting our grandchild.”
“I like your action figures,” Bernard said abruptly. “They remind me of my lead soldiers. Only instead of pouring lead your factory molds plastic—yes?”
“Yes. Limbs and torsos and heads.” Fergus cleared his throat. “Research indicates that as the market for action figures grows, the market for old-fashioned playthings grows also. So you and I are . . . collaborators.”
“To be sure! But toys are not our living. We support ourselves with repairs.”
“You support me,” Anna murmured. Then she raised her chin as if staring down an enemy. She picked up a music box and put it on her knees and wound it up. Two figures in formal clothing twirled to “Cheek to Cheek,” off tune here and there.
“I’ve tried to fix that cylinder,” Bernard said, shrugging again. “It resists me. Will you come back for dinner?”
“I have appointments this evening,” Fergus said. “And the innkeeper has invited me for a schnapps.”
“Tomorrow, then,” Anna said, as the song wound sourly down.

He came, flowers in one hand, wine in the other. In the rooms above the shop the couple lived snugly, kept company by overflow toys. Dolls fitted their rumps into the corners of chairs, peered over the top of a highboy. Cherry-colored rattles flourished in a pewter mug.
“They were dangerous, those rattles,” Bernard said gravely. “Imagine putting paint on a plaything for a mouthing child. Some toys were foolish then.”
“Some are foolish now,” Fergus said. “There’s a list, every Christmas, you hear it on the radio in France, in England . . .”
“Here, too,” Bernard said. “And was anything ever deadlier than a slingshot?”
“Sanctioned by the Bible,” Anna said. “Marbles, though . . . down the throat . . .” She shuddered, then produced that soldierly smile, and busied herself ladling the stew.
Photographs lined the passageway from kitchen to bathroom. Snapshots, really, but blown up and matted in ivory and framed in
silver as if they were meant to hang in a gallery. All were of the same child—blond, light-eyed. At two she was solemn, in a draperied room, sharing a chair with a rag doll. At four she was solemn against the sea; this time the doll was a naked rubber baby. At six she smiled, clutching Raggedy Ann. At eight the girl with her Barbie stood straight as a stick in front of a constructed pond—could it have been the one at the Luxembourg Garden? Slatted chairs, smoking pensioners, and a toy boat sailing off to the right.

No further pictures.

He found himself unable to swallow.

After coffee he walked back to the inn across the floodlit square—the mayor had recently planted a light next to the church. At tables outside the café a few tourists bent toward each other in puppet conversations. In doorways pairs of men stood motionless. Smoke floated from their pipes. The news vendor stood beside his barrow. The church clock ticked.

Fergus looked up at tiled roofs, then at the mountains beyond. Visiting grandchildren would recognize this scene as the source of tales, he thought with a brief joy. The clock ticked. That girl.

It was still afternoon for Barbara. She was babysitting while their daughter did errands. “Hello!” she heard Fergus say, fizzing with anxious love. “How are you?”

She was fine, and the kids were, too. She had made telephone rounds yesterday. As usual he refused to take the whole for the parts, and asked after each in turn, and the spouses, too. “And the little fellow?”

“A genius, I do believe,” she said. Their grandchild was six months old.

“Of course. And the rash?”

“Prickly heat, entirely gone.” She would not fret him about the little patch of eczema. Then they talked about friends in France and England and the Canaries—Barbara kept up with everyone—and then Fergus asked whether she thought their son was really enjoying law school, and Barbara, who knew he hated it, said law school wasn’t supposed to be enjoyable, was it? Perhaps he’d like practice. “Not everyone can be as fortunate in work as you’ve been.” Immediately she regretted the remark; he did not want to be luckier than his children.
“The kids were my work,” he said.
“Well, don’t tell that to ToyFolk; they might renege on that nice retirement package.” She thought of all those years on all those living room floors, the five of them, and wooden blocks and doll houses and action toys. The school conferences. The older daughter’s flirtation with anorexia and the younger’s brief attachment to a thug on a motorcycle. The army-brat hardness of all three of them . . . “Darling. They’re on their own at last.”

She heard two sounds, the first a resigned sigh, the second a catch of breath, as if he were constructing one of his catastrophes.

“I can’t wait to see you,” she said.
“Oh, and there’s this couple . . .”
A cry upstairs. “The baby’s awake.”
“Till soon,” said his soft voice.

Two nights later Fergus visited Anna and Bernard after dinner. In the living room Anna was repairing the headdress of a Japanese doll in a kimono. The kimono had an elaborate design of reeds and a river. The doll’s face was dead white: faithful to life, the color of a powdered geisha. “Is that hair real?” Fergus asked.

“Some of it,” Anna said.
“A museum would give—”
“She is not for sale.”

At the dining table Bernard was playing chess with one of the druggist’s sons. Bernard introduced Fergus to the boy, and motioned him to a chair; but he did not interrupt the play or his affectionate commentary. He revealed his plans to the child, offered suggestions for an opposing strategy, tolerated the distortion of his advice, allowed young Mirik to progress toward gentle defeat. The boy, cheeks aflame, said: “Tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow.” Bernard’s hand rested briefly on the plaid shoulder. Then Mirik ran through the living room, pausing to bow toward Anna.

“No knack for the game,” Bernard summed up. “Such a sweet youngster.”

On the night before Barbara’s arrival Fergus came for another of Anna’s stews. He brought brandy along with flowers and
wine. After the meal Anna said her palate was as discriminating as flannel and she would excuse herself from wasting fine cognac.

Fergus said to Bernard, “I’d like to see your workshop.”

“Let’s take the bottle there.”

From the stockroom downstairs they descended farther, spinning around a staircase to a stone basement. “This was once the wine cellar,” Bernard said. An overbright fluorescent bar in the ceiling made Fergus’s eyes water. Bernard pulled a string, and now the only light came from the church’s flood lamp spilling weakly through a small high window. The two men sat at the worktable, surrounded by shelves of toasters and vacuum cleaners and radios, or their shadowy ghosts; by dolls without heads and marionettes without strings.

“Where did you learn toy making?” Fergus asked.

“Ah, I taught myself. I like to carve, and I am mechanical by nature, and I trained as an engineer. I was employed by a company in Paris.”

“I studied engineering, too, at Georgia Tech. But it wasn’t my bent. Management was more to my liking.”

“A talent for organization, affability, languages. You could have been a diplomat . . .”

“I’m not canny. And I worry too much.”

Bernard lit a pipe. “That must make you valuable to ToyFolk.”

“Well, it does. I’ve never seen you smoke,” Fergus said.

“Anna coughs.”

What had felled the child in the photographs? A missile to the eye, a marble in the esophagus? A train wreck, the middle cars humping upward, the engine falling onto its side? Drowning? There were microorganisms resistant to medicine that could lodge in the chest and emit poisons; sooner or later the patient lay dead. He had spent his children’s childhoods making mental lists of dire events, to forestall them.

He looked across the worktable at the smoking man, then looked away. His eye fell on a rectangular wooden box at the end of the table. One of its faces was glass. He reached for the thing. A crank protruded from the side. “Is this an old automaton?”

“A new one.”

Fergus turned the crank. A bulb went on inside the box. A
castle had been painted on the back wall. Three carved soldiers in breeches and jackets with epaulets pointed their rifles at a blindfolded figure in a peasant’s smock. One soldier had a blond beard, another a jutting brow, the third a frivolous nose. Fergus continued to turn the crank. The soldiers lurched in unison. There was a tiny blasting sound. The blindfolded figure fell forward. The light went out. Fergus kept at the crank. The light went on: the scene as before—executioners poised, villain erect and waiting.

Fergus worked the toy for a while. Then he said: “What will you do with this?”

“Oh . . . we’re fond of the estate agent’s children, and at Christmas . . . ”

“You have a rare talent.”

“Oh, rare, no . . . It passes the time.”

Fergus turned the crank again. “Yes,” he said. “What doesn’t pass the time? Managing factories, mastering languages, raising families . . . ” He had said too much. “More brandy?” he asked, and poured without waiting for an answer, as if the bottle were still his.

Bernard drank. “Your action figures . . . they all have the same face, yes?”


“Features are too . . . subtle?”

“Well, research indicates . . . ”

Bernard said: “After all, this is not for the estate agent’s children.” He paused. “I would like to give it to you.”

“Oh, I—”

“Because you value it.”

“—couldn’t take such a gift.” But he took it.

Barbara rode on a little train that chugged through the mountains. From her window she looked up at pines, down at a miniature town. She recognized it as charming: the ideal final posting for her sentimental man.

When the train halted she stepped briskly off, carrying one small suitcase and a sack of paperback novels. She wore new harlequin glasses bought in the hope that they would soften her bony face.
She leaped toward Fergus and he leaped toward her.

Then Fergus shouldered Barbara’s books and picked up her suitcase. “Only a few blocks to the inn,” he said. “Wherever we live we’ll be able to walk everywhere. In two months we’ll know everybody here. Have you eaten?”

“There was a nice little buffet car. I’ll bet you know half of the citizens already. Let me take the books.”

“I’ve met the officials,” he said, not relinquishing the sack. “The lawyer, the estate agent,” he enumerated as they walked downhill past soft old buildings. “A doctor, too; I met him at a party the contractor gave. All rather wooden, except for a crazy news vendor who speaks in tongues, sort of.”

At the inn she met the innkeeper. Then: “What a model room!” she said when Fergus brought her upstairs. “That fat quilt. Stencils on the highboy. And what’s this?” she said, spotting the automaton.

She listened to a description of a husband and wife who were devoted to toys. Then she picked up the box and turned the crank and watched an execution several times. “The chin below the blindfold,” she said at last. “Such defiance. I’d like to meet the man who made this.”

“You will. Are you tired, darling?” her husband asked.

“Not too tired. Darling.”

Five days went by before Fergus and Barbara could get together with Bernard and Anna—five days of meetings, of house hunting, of the hiring of a tutor. “Though I’m not sure I have the stomach for another language,” Barbara said. “I’ll mime my way around.”

At last the four met on a Saturday night in the dining room of the inn. Under his vest Bernard wore a button-down instead of a T-shirt. He looked like a woodman. Anna wore a cocktail dress—Fergus remembered that his mother had once owned one like it: blue taffeta, with a wide skirt.

The innkeeper sent over a bottle of wine. They bought a second bottle. Guests of the inn and citizens of the town came into the big room in pairs and groups.

“Saturday night,” Anna remarked. “It’s always like this.”

At ten o’clock the innkeeper brought out his collection of big band records, and there was dancing in a glassed-in terrace that
overlooked the square. Fergus danced with Barbara, then with Anna.

“I like your wife,” she said.
“I like your village. I think we’ll be happy here.”
“I suspect you’re happy everywhere.”
“Happy enough,” he said, cautiously. “We have a taste for small things.”
“Here you can make a lot out of a little. Old tragedies like the news vendor’s. His father had a fit and chopped off his fingers when he was twelve . . .”
“Good Lord.” The music stopped.
“He speaks half a dozen languages, more when he’s sober. Life’s a game to him.”
Music again: the big band records repeated. Couples again took the floor. Fergus smiled at the people he’d already met and wondered which would become intimates, which only friends.
“What other scandals can you tell me?” he asked.
“Bernard and I are a bit of a scandal . . . not being married, you know.”
“I didn’t know. That’s not much of a scandal these days,” he said lightly.
She gave him an offended stare. Though the floor had become crowded, he maneuvered her sideways, backward, forward, without colliding with anyone. He had always been a skillful dancer.
“I am married,” she said at last. “Bernard isn’t. I’ve seen you watching the photographs. Isn’t she pretty?”
“She is your image.”
“We lived in Paris. My husband owned jewelry shops. I designed brooches, necklaces. Ten years ago Bernard persuaded me to move in with him. I thought to divorce.”
Divorce was not on his list of unbearables; it was simply unthinkable. “Custody?” he asked.
“We’d divide her.”
“She liked dolls.”
“She was careless with the antiques.”
“Yes, well . . .”
“The bastard sent the whole collection in a taxi across town,” she said, heatedly now. “As if they were groceries. He sold his business,
and decamped with our daughter. I traced them to New York but never any further.”

“That’s kidnapping,” Fergus said. “It can’t be done.”

“No? It was done.”

“She would be... eighteen?”

“She is eighteen,” Anna chided softly.

The song had not ended but they had stopped dancing. He stood with his heels together, stiff as a palace guard. Her fingers caressed the silk of her skirt. He took her right hand in his left and placed his own right on the small of her back and moved forward lightly, mechanically. “You and Bernard were young enough to have children together.”

“Oh, young enough,” she said, and nodded; this time she was not offended. “But I would have no further children until my first child was returned. Loyalty. It’s how I’m made.”

She smiled that brave little smile. Her spite uncoiled like a paper snake; Fergus felt its twitch. He imagined Bernard beset by his own longings: raising a rifle to his shoulder and training its sight on the hollow of her neck... Because the music was ending at last, and because Anna’s outdated dress demanded some appreciative flourish, Fergus whirled her once and then urged her backward over his left arm. He did not bend over her as custom demanded, but instead looked fiercely at Barbara and the toyman standing profile to profile against the floodlit square.

**Barbara felt the beam** cast by his eyes, and turned to face it. He was holding Anna so oddly, like a garment. Anna, one hand clawing his upper arm, righted herself, looking aggrieved. Barbara tactfully shifted her own gaze to the square, where smoke rose from the pipes of standing men; and a café waiter stacked chairs, one on top of another on top of another; and the news vendor, the hour of repose come round, lifted the handles of the barrow and trundled it across the cobblestones, his footfalls managing to keep time with the church clock; ten unsteady steps... click; ten steps... click; ten steps...

“Tomorrow is Sunday,” she heard Fergus loudly saying. His shoulder brushed hers. “We have to call the States early, because of the time difference,” he said, somehow getting it wrong even after
all these years, or pretending to; anyway, he rushed her away from their new friends with only the skimpiest of good-byes.

Fergus, in pajamas, sat on the billowing quilt, clipping his toenails into the wastebasket. Barbara, in her nightgown, brushed her short hair.

“I thought they’d lost her,” he said.

“They lost sight of her.”

“Bernard, a bereaved father, I thought. Well, bereaved in a way. His children were never allowed to be born.” He got up and moved the wastebasket back to the corner of the room and put the clippers on the highboy.

“He’s made other people’s children his,” Barbara said. Fergus, considering, put his elbow on the highboy. “A reasonable alternative to the terrors of parenthood, some would say,” she added.

He gave her a look of distaste.

She countered with one of boldness. “Maybe even preferable.”

“Some would say,” he hurried to supply, sparing her the necessity of repeating the phrase, she who had experienced motherhood’s joys in such reassuring milieus—just listen to that faithful clock. “Well, we know better,” he said.

And waited for her assent.

And waited.
North Carolina Tour

Sunday, April 15
7:30 p.m.
A Celebration of Lookout Books & Ecotone
with John Rybicki
University of North Carolina Wilmington

Monday, April 16
7 p.m.
Park Road Books
4139 Park Road
Charlotte

Tuesday, April 17
7:30 p.m.
Tyler-Tallman Recital Hall
Davidson College

Wednesday, April 18
7 p.m.
Levine-Sklut Judaic Library
5007 Providence Road, Suite 107
[Located in Shalom Park in the Blumenthal Center for Education (Building C) on the “back” side of the Levine JCC.]
Charlotte

Thursday, April 19
7 p.m.
The Regulator
co-hosted by The Hinge Literary Center
720 Ninth Street
Durham
**Why do you prefer to write short stories?**

I have a temperament that shies away from big-scale projects. It prefers instead the small tale, worked over and over again, sometimes under a magnifying glass. I welcome the challenge of compressing a character, a setting, a problem, maybe even its solution, into as few words as possible. It takes a lengthy and sustained effort to be brief; I enjoy that paradox.

**How many stories do you write per year? What is your creative process like?**

About six stories a year, interspersed with perhaps four pieces of non-fiction. Each short story takes several weeks (five days a week, about four hours a day) to write, in many, many drafts, all on the typewriter. The draft then marinates in a drawer while I work on the next story or piece. The marinated story finally gets withdrawn, re-revised, typed at last into a word processor, and presented to my dear friend, colleague and ruthless reader Rose Moss, who usually sends it back to the typewriter for another few weeks of revision. So each story takes about a month and a half in total time, two or three in elapsed time. During its sojourn in the drawer odd, abrupt mental work goes on in my mind, thoughts like ‘Bring back the parrots!’ or ‘She calls him Giorgio, stupid’; thoughts which I write down wherever I am and whatever I am otherwise doing, sometimes disconcerting a dinner companion.
How do your stories originate?
I revise so many times that it doesn't much signify how a story originates. The final draft will be so different from the scrawled note that was its original idea. It's safe to say, though, that each story begins with a character and a situation—a dilemma, a conflict, a wish—and a wisp of a hint about the solution or resolution or gratification or disappointment that results. My first draft is scaffolding. By the tenth draft the scaffolding has been incorporated into the structure of the story.

Where do you draw inspiration for your characters and situations?
From memory, experience, observation, dream, invention, and pretense.

How do you take on so many diverse voices? Does this require additional research?
I do a lot of silent looking: on long walks through city streets here and abroad; in parks and restaurants and hospitals; in homeless shelters and public baths. I talk (but mostly listen) to everybody: intimates, relatives, friends, acquaintances, and strangers. I read; I daydream. It's all a kind of research.

What non-literary sources inspire your work?
People, bugs, history, places; the workings of chance; memory and dream.

There are places within your writing where you manage to condense an incredible amount of back story into just a few, poignant lines. Could you talk about this?
To me, a short story is a Conversation between writer and reader. Since only the writer can speak, she must take care to respect the reader, to avoid telling him what to think, to say as little as possible and imply the rest with metaphor, ellipses, allusive dialogue, pauses. The reader then takes an active part in
the conversation, supplying what the writer has only suggested. In general, overwrought prose comes between the writer and the reader, pushes the reader aside, destroys the Conversation’s balance.

**Who is your ideal audience?**

All my work is directed toward an imaginary ideal reader, literate but not scholarly, wishing to be entertained, unresentful if he is at the same time enlightened.

**You list matchmaking among your hobbies.**

Part of the writing of a short story consists of deciding what person will fit with what other person—in love, in conflict, in friendship, and I like to do it in real life, too. It just seems to be a talent. I matched four couples when I was younger, and three of them are still together—not bad for an amateur!

**Correct a misperception about you as a writer.**

People seem to believe that I worked in obscurity for years. In fact I have always felt appreciated and never felt disregarded. This new attention has brought me new friends and new readers, adding to the friends and readers I already had.

**Can you talk about some of the writers that have influenced you throughout your writing career?**

My favorite all time writer is Dickens, but talent can’t imitate genius . . . I’ve been influenced by all the short story writers I’ve read. Some have instructed me in how not to write; but most have taught me positive things. I’ve studied the construction of sentences from Sylvia Townsend Warner, the precision of detail from John Updike, daily tragedy from Chekhov, lush descriptions from A.S. Byatt. And a million more.

**What is the role of the writer in the world today?**

To clarify that bit of the world she writes about. To entertain.
What is your best piece of advice to new and emerging fiction writers?

Read. Read everything. Read all the time. Revise. Revise each story from beginning to end at least three times. When I say Revise I mean Rewrite completely. Do not use the computer until the last few drafts.

What does the word “story” mean to you?

It means love affair. You the reader and I the author are collaborating in unveiling someone’s obsessive desire; in opening someone’s grieving heart; in discovering, or at least searching for, a new and abiding truth. By the end of this adventure we are a little bit in love.

Compiled from the following sources:

Daniel M. Jaffe, *Biblio Buffet*
Karen Rigby, Cerise Press
Ether Books
Grub Daily
Enid Parker, *Khaleej Times*
Bret Anthony Johnston, National Book Foundation
Newtonville Books Community Blog
Sarabande Books
*The Short Review*
Conor Broughan, *Sycamore Review*
1. *Binocular Vision* is the name of the collection, as well as one of the stories. Why do you think it was chosen as the title? In what ways do some of the themes from the story carry throughout the collection?

2. Many of the stories take place in Godolphin, Massachusetts, a fictional suburb of Boston. Based on the various people who live there and their interactions with one another, what type of place do you think Godolphin is? Would you want to live there?

3. Consider your living environment and your neighbors. Have you ever experienced a situation like the characters in the apartment complex in “Allog?” Do any of the characters from elsewhere in the collection remind you of your neighbors?

4. Religion, specifically Judaism, has a strong influence on many of the characters in this collection. Did any of the stories make you rethink your relationship to religion?

5. There are many stories about illness, including “The Noncombatant,” “Tess,” “Home Schooling,” “Lineage,” and “Self-
What do you think of this story and reader’s guide? We’d love to hear what’s on your mind. Join the conversation on facebook.com/lookoutbooks and twitter.com/lookoutbooks or email lookout@uncw.edu.

6. In the story “Chance,” a local synagogue is selected to receive an old Torah. What is the significance of the story’s title? At the end of the story, the presentation of the Torah moves the entire congregation to tears. How does this response resonate with you? Why do you think the characters were so moved?

7. The collection includes a series of linked stories about a couple, Sonya and Roland, and their work during World War II (“If Love Were All,” “Purim Night,” and “The Coat”). Were you surprised by the relationship that developed between them? How did your opinions of Sonya and Roland change with each story?

8. Anna, Bernard, and Fergus from “Toyfolk” have each chosen professions related to toys. Consider why each might have made that decision. How are these “Toy People” similar? How are they different?

9. In “The Story,” why do you think Lucienne decides not to share her story with the da Costas?

10. Of all the characters in Binocular Vision, which do you most identify with? Why?
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