

Spring 2015 CRW 4905 section 102B Ind. Work in Fiction/  
Advanced Seminar in Fiction Writing  
M 6-8 CBD 216

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Listserve: SPRING-102B-L@lists.ufl.edu  
Everyone enrolled is on this listserve.  
We may use it to communicate in event of absences. We will not use  
it regularly to distribute stories for class.

The objective of this course is to do something to you, by  
accident or deliberation, that makes you write fiction better in  
three months than you do today. You should also become a better  
critic. If you feel this objective has not been clearly stated at  
the outset, please raise your hand.

The route to this objective is variable, unknowable, and  
elusive. That which cannot be taught is not taught, and that  
which can be taught is sometimes also not taught. But sometimes  
we slip up and teach it.

Grading: Your full efforts at writing and at criticizing for  
the benefit of others will earn a B in here. I am stingy with the  
A. Should a person prove excellent in his or her writing, or  
excellent in criticism, or in both, I can be moved to let go of an  
A. I do not like the invidious world of grading stories, but I  
like the world of inflated grades and the perception that  
creative-writing courses are easy even less. Less than full  
efforts to the best of your capacity--i.e., doing less than you  
are asked to do--and racking up excessive absences can get a  
person into the C range, but this is fairly hard to do if you  
apply yourself in here. If you do what you are expected to do--  
write and criticize as well as you can--it will be good and  
deserve a B. If you surprise in an excellent way you can get into  
an A range. The average grade is lower than an A and higher than a  
C. Attend religiously, speak cogently when asked, surround  
yourself with the mantle of intelligent reticence when not, write  
with vigor and surprise, and all will be well.

I do not put a grade on an individual piece of writing. The  
reasoning and want of reasoning behind this scheme will become  
clear.

Attendance: One absence is allowed, even expected, insofar as a good workshop can sometimes be a good thing to take a good break from. You may give notice of an impending absence or not. A second absence bothers me and should have a good reason for it. Absences beyond the allowed one may lower grade. This policy borders on mandatory attendance and I do not like mandating attendance. But for a number of reasons pertaining to the oblique and accidental way a workshop may teach something, the policy prevails. Should a tree fall, you must be in your desk to hear it.

When attending, sit upright with no food and no active cell phone on your person. Exception to food rule: baked goods in quantity sufficient for the entire class. If your cell phone rings, take it to the hall, answer it, and prosecute your voyage into the night (French system). We will see you next week. The greatest crime in here, beyond the above two, is not delivering a scheduled story. Avoid that. When you are absent, you must procure the stories for the following week, or you in effect absent yourself twice. Arrange for someone you know to get stories for you if you are absent.

We will read and discuss two or three of our own pieces each week and one or two of the pieces by our professional(s). Prepare copies for classmates and for me and distribute them the week before you appear on the schedule.

We will read some of Collected Stories of William Trevor, possibly Paris Trout by Pete Dexter, and possibly some other texts TBA.

The nature and direction of a fiction workshop is very much open, a function of the students' work and criticism. You know by now (veterans most of you of at least two of these endeavors) that all workshops to an extent must derive their content from the work brought in, and at this level I try to let a class have its head as much as possible. A good workshop will develop a set of references internal and unique to itself, for which your attendance is necessary in order that you witness these otherwise obscure references. All this places a certain burden on you. If I encourage you to all chip in your opinions about what might make a given piece of fiction better, and I do--these opinions expressed in a way usable and palatable to the author (of which there is, I think, no harder thing to say right on Earth)--then we must perforce almost certainly live with at least the illusion of Disorgany, a word which I have made up but which seems to convey its meaning well enough. The course is highly organized--around

the disorder that inheres in groping to learn to write. There is not a body of knowledge to be conveyed you about the writing of fiction in an orderly fashion, though there are hundreds of books that pretend that there is, and you are free to pursue them.

We will relieve the regular work of class--which is trying to determine what weakens the work brought in, and what might strengthen it--with various exercises of show and tell:

Sentences--bring in sentences that have struck you as worthy of notice, and be prepared to say why.

Surprises--passages that surprise. We will look to see how.\*

Shorts--bring in a 250-word (max) story.\*

Short shorts--bring in a 50-word (max) story.\*

\* copies for class

NOTES:

Six things to consider, mostly about form:

1) My best stories come out of nowhere, with no concern for form at all. --Barry Hannah

2) I can take a sentence apart and tell you why I did it; obviously that's the key to the whole thing, being able to write a sentence, and I've got a sense of what my sentences ought to do. --Pete Dexter

3) Learn to play your instruments, then get sexy.

--Debbie Harry

4) Some people run to conceits or wisdom but I hold to the hard, brown, nut-like word. --Donald Barthelme (character)

5) Art is not difficult because it wishes to be difficult but because it wishes to be art. --Donald Barthelme

6) There is at the back of every artist's mind something like a pattern or a type of architecture. The original quality in any man of imagination is imagery. It is a thing like the landscape of his dreams; the sort of world he would like to make or in which he would wish to wander; the strange flora and fauna of his own secret planet; the sort of thing he likes to think about. This general atmosphere, and pattern or structure of growth, governs all his creations, however varied.

--G. K. Chesterton

Two things to consider, not really about form:

1) Did it happen? Could it happen? Should it happen? You do not want the first answer to be yes. The second should be a strained maybe. The third answer should be a resounding Yes!

You must at all cost forestall "So what?"

2) The doozie quotient: plausibility of account/probability of event. You want a high doozie quotient. Good fiction is implausibility rendered plausible by an accuracy of adult sentiment conveyed by precision of utterance.

Fiction must be a doozie, and it must be a gratifying doozie.

A good story is the author's private idea of what makes a very good day. It chronicles a heightened moment of his or her dreams.

Powell, CRW 4905, S15, schedule

Jan 12 Introduction

Jan 19 No class: thank Mr. King \_\_\_\_\_

Jan 26 \_\_\_\_\_

Feb 02 \_\_\_\_\_

Feb 09 \_\_\_\_\_

Feb 16 \_\_\_\_\_

Feb 23 \_\_\_\_\_

Mar 02 Spring Break \_\_\_\_\_

Mar 09 \_\_\_\_\_  
Mar 16 \_\_\_\_\_  
Mar 23 \_\_\_\_\_  
Mar 30 \_\_\_\_\_  
Apr 06 \_\_\_\_\_  
Apr 13 \_\_\_\_\_  
Apr 20 \_\_\_\_\_

I am advised to advise you of the following:

Here are two links to syllabus requirements for UF and the English Department, respectively. Anything I have not included above relative to the syllabus can be gleaned from these links. The University of Florida Policy on Course Syllabi, via the Office of the Provost:

[http://www.aa.ufl.edu/Data/Sites/18/media/policies/syllabi\\_policy.pdf](http://www.aa.ufl.edu/Data/Sites/18/media/policies/syllabi_policy.pdf)

And this English Department document:

<http://www.english.ufl.edu/resources/grad/syllabus%20requirements.pdf>