

CRW 4905 (Section 12937)—Senior Advanced Fiction Workshop
Mondays 4:05-7:05 in CBD 0224
Camille Bordas, bordas.camille@ufl.edu
Office hours: by appointment

Keep track of this syllabus and feel free to ask questions about it at any time.

Required Texts:

Emailed Readings/Linked Readings—You must print emailed and linked readings and bring them to class on the days they are to be discussed. I will email you all the readings for the course by the end of the week.

Readings by Students—At the very beginning of most class meetings, one student (sometimes two) will hand in FOURTEEN COPIES of their story: one for each member of the workshop, and one for me. If you miss class or come late, it is your responsibility to get hold of the story to be discussed the following week. As with the emailed readings, you must bring these to class on the days we are scheduled to discuss them.

About Our Class

Each class will be divided in three parts:

- traditional workshop (we'll talk about your stories)
- a conversation about a published story I'll have assigned
- in-class writing exercises, or discussion of a previously assigned take-home exercise.

Discussion: This class is 100% discussion-based. You must participate in discussion. Disagreements will arise during discussions, as they should. However, personal attacks will not be tolerated. You must conduct yourself in a manner that at all times respects the members of the workshop.

The Fiction of Your Workshop Peers: Most weeks, you will come to class having read one student story. You must read every story twice. I ask you to approach the first reading the same way you would approach reading a book you've elected to read on your own, for pleasure, and to treat it the same way. That is: I ask you to try to read the piece on its own terms, and as if it were already published, all its ducks in a row—as if the writer has deep intentions behind every line (which hopefully they do), and you, the reader, want to understand those intentions, and to enjoy the process. I ask that you don't make notes or line-edits until the second time you read the piece, and at that point, you make your notes and line-edits toward helping the writer achieve what you have perceived them to be after. If a writer is working in a tradition you're not fond of, don't try to line-edit them into a different one: just try to help them to do what they want to do better, and note where their piece pulls you forward, where it stalls you out, and why. You'll want to map your comments to lines, phrases, words, and moments in the story. We want to use the story to

discuss the story. We want to locate and then accurately describe problems. Same goes for victories: if something works, say it, and tell us why it does.

You are required to come to class

- 1) having line-edited each piece of student work we'll be discussing that week
- 2) having written a list of **AT LEAST three questions** you have about each piece
- 3) having written a list of **AT LEAST three comments** you have about each piece
- 4) having written **one (or more) suggestion(s)** for each author, regarding how you think he might improve his piece.

These questions, comments, and suggestions, are to be given to the authors at the end of workshop.

I may ask to see your lists of questions and comments at any given time. I may ask you to read them aloud during workshop.

Your Fiction: Over the course of the semester, you must turn in one story. Its due-date will appear on the calendar I will email you by the end of the week. You may not turn your fiction in late. You may not email it. You must have fourteen copies with you at the beginning of class on the day it is due. If you fail to turn in on the day your work is due, you will fail the class.

The story to be workshopped must be **12 pages or less**.

All stories **MUST** be

1. typed in 12-point Times or Times New Roman font
2. double-spaced with reasonable margins
3. PAGE-NUMBERED
4. titled
5. by-lined
6. stapled
7. **LITERARY FICTION**, as opposed to genre fiction or YA Fiction. If you're not sure whether what you write is genre or not, run it by me, but as a general rule, I'm asking for no dragons, no spaceships, no vampires or mummies or shape shifters, etc. (Though it is always acceptable to play with those elements and with genre codes if they're not the primary source of intrigue and tension). If you're not sure whether what you write is YA or not, you can also run that by me, but as a general rule, I'm asking for no moral lessons, no virtuous heroes, no self-righteous politics, and no simple characters.

Errors in grammar, usage, and spelling: I expect your work to be devoid of them. If you have questions about grammar, usage or spelling, please make use of a dictionary, and/or Strunk and

White's *Elements of Style*. Submit work that is in excellent shape. No rough drafts. Pieces you took as far as you could on your own.

Conferences: I will confer one-on-one with each of you about your work. We will do this immediately after class on the day your work is discussed.

Giving and receiving feedback: While giving feedback, consider what the author is trying to do. As Updike said, "Do not fault them for what they do not try." Help your classmates to better do that which they're trying to do already.

When you receive feedback, please remain silent and take notes. This is hard. Our first instinct is to defend our choices. Even if you feel someone is misreading your piece, refrain from replying. You will have a chance to discuss questions you may have with your peers at the end.

Published stories: Each week, we'll read a short story by a published author. You're required to come to class with thoughts, comments and questions you have about the piece. Write them down before class. I may ask to see them at any point. Write down, also, where you thought the story was particularly successful (a scene you liked, or a bit of dialogue, for example), the key moments, how the story surprised you. It's important you come with these comments to class, because each week, I'll ask one of you to briefly talk about the story, based on these questions and comments you had about it. These "presentations" are only meant to get our conversation started and need not be thorough. All I want will be for you to summarize the story, and tell us about the questions you had, or how the story surprised you. This should not take longer than three or four minutes.

Here are some examples of questions you might ask yourselves while reading stories:

- 1) What do we know about the protagonist? What do we suspect about the protagonist?
- 2) In what kind of world is the story set (ours, ours+, fantastical, etc.)?
- 3) Where exactly is the story set? If this is unclear, make an informed guess. Be descriptive.
- 4) What is at stake? At what point do we realize what is at stake?
- 5) What questions does the story address?
- 6) What is/are the primary source/s of narrative tension? Another way to phrase that: what is propelling us through the story? (note: don't just say "the voice." If that's the answer, then describe the qualities of the voice that propel us.)
- 7) What is the author asking us to pay attention to? How do we know?
- 8) What are the scenes/images that stick with you the most? Why?

Attendance/Punctuality

You will be allowed one absence for the semester. Barring very extreme circumstances, you will automatically fail the course if you miss more than one class. If you are more than twenty minutes late to class, you will be marked absent.

Plagiarism

Will lead swiftly to failure and lots of embarrassment.

Cell phones and Laptops

Their use is not allowed during class. You must come to class with a paper copy of the materials to be discussed that day.

Course Calendar

Week 1, January 6:

Introductions.

Turning in a story for the following week: **Kara**

Week 2, January 13:

—Workshop: Story by **Kara**

—Discussion: Excerpts from Edouard Levé's *Autoportrait*

—In-class exercise

—Turning in a story for the following week: **Emily**

NO CLASS ON JANUARY 20th (MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY)

Week 3, January 27:

—Workshop: Story by **Emily**

—Discussion: "People Like That Are The Only People Here," by Lorrie Moore

—In-class exercises

—Turning in a story for the following week: **Jillian**

Week 4, February 3:

—Workshop: Story by **Jillian**

—Discussion: "Largesse of the Sea Maiden," by Denis Johnson

—In-class exercises

—Turning in a story for the following week: **Michael**

Week 5, February 10:

—Workshop: Story by **Michael**

—Discussion: "The End of FIRPO in the World," by George Saunders

—In-class exercises

—Turning in a story for the following week: **Alicia**

Week 6, February 17:

—Workshop: Story by **Alicia**

—Discussion: "Good Country People," by Flannery O'Connor

—In-class exercises

—Turning in a story for the following week: **Kaylyn**
and **Annabelle**

Week 7, February 24:

—Workshop: Stories by **Kaylyn**
and **Annabelle**

—No published story to discuss, since we'll have two stories to workshop

—In-class exercises

—Turning in a story for the following week: **James**

SPRING BREAK

Week 8, March 9:

- Workshop: Story by **James**
- Discussion: excerpt from Patrik Ourednik’s *Europeana*.
- In-class exercises
- Turning in a story for the following week: **Brianna**

Week 9, March 16:

- Workshop: Story by **Brianna**
- Discussion: “Death of a Right-Fielder,” by Stuart Dybek
- In-class exercises
- Turning in a story for the following week: **Willow**

Week 10, March 23:

- Workshop: Story by **Willow**
- Discussion: “All Will Be Well,” by Yiyun Li
- In-class exercises
- Turning in a story for the following week: **Annie**

Week 11, March 30:

- Workshop: Story by **Annie**
- Discussion: “The Toast,” by Rebecca Curtis
- In-class exercises
- Turning in a story for the following week: **Roberto**

Week 12, April 6:

- Workshop: Story by **Roberto**
- Discussion: “The Chimney Sweep,” by Adam Erlich Sachs
- In-class exercises
- Turning in a story for the following week: **Naz**

Week 13, April 13:

- Workshop: Story by **Naz**
- Discussion: “A Poetics for Bullies,” by Stanley Elkin
- In-class exercises
- Turning in a story for the following week: **Melanie**

Week 14, April 20:

- Workshop: Story by **Melanie**
- Discussion: “I Could Say Many Nice Things,” by Ben Marcus
- In-class exercises
- Turning in a story for the following week: NO ONE—END OF WORKSHOP