

University of Florida Gainesville
Advanced Seminar in Fiction Writing 3110
Uwem Akpan

Spring 2023, Thurs, 4:05-7.05 PM, Tur 2305
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Office hours: By appointment
E-mail: uwem.akpan@ufl.edu

*We are one,
After all,
You and I,
Together,
We suffer,
Together,
Exist, and
Forever
Will recreate
Each other.*

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Required Texts: *Palace Walk*, Naguib Mahfouz
What It Means When a Man Falls from the Sky, Nneka Arimah
New York, My Village, Uwem Akpan

Writing: I expect each of you to put up **two** new stories or novel excerpts for workshop this semester. You must also significantly revise one of the stories you hand in for workshop and turn in any such revisions on or before 5 pm on Monday, December 8. Each submission should be 5,000 words. All manuscripts should come with a name, a title and page numbers. They must be double-spaced and typed in a legible 12-point font. Recommended fonts are Times, Times Roman, Cambria, Garamond, and Baskerville. For those of you working on novels, you may choose to put up a fairly large chunk of your work once during the semester and take up both slots that night. That way, you can put up as many as 30 pages at a time. Novelists, like the rest, must rewrite 10 or 15 pages for final rewrite. **You must distribute copies of stories for workshop a week before your workshop day. Your rewrite should be ready by April 6.**

Discussions: We will spend two hours of each class workshopping your stories and the remaining hour discussing assigned stories and issues of craft, content, or the writer's life. Most of these issues will arise naturally from our workshops, but I am also asking each of you to submit by email at least one question about writing (or the writer's life)

that genuinely concerns you; you can do this at any point during the semester. I will often assign or hand out copies of stories that might illuminate these concerns. Please, check the resources section of our Canvas regularly to see if I have uploaded new stories for you to read.

Critiquing: Once you have committed yourself to a workshop date, little short of death should deter you from fulfilling that commitment. Remember that your objective as a critic, both in your written and oral comments, is to do for others what you would want done to your own manuscript. “Great story, send it to *The Atlantic!*” is as useless as “Why don’t you go back to being a carpenter?” This means recognizing the strengths of a manuscript (even if you think these are few and far between), paying lots of (nonjudgmental) attention to what the author is trying to get us to think and feel, as well as tactfully pointing out the story’s weaknesses and offering concrete suggestions for improvement. My motto is: **Say what needs to be said but politely.** Authors should go home feeling inspired to revise their stories, not to get drunk and jump off a building. I will regularly collect your written comments (**one page, single-paced letter**) and keep track of what you say in class. While it is true that I favor quality over quantity in both instances, repeated failure to turn in thoughtful, complete critiques or to contribute to our in-class discussions will affect your grade (see below).

Grading: Individual stories will not be graded. One-third of your final grade will depend on the effort you put into your writing during the semester and one-third on the quality of your revision. The final third of your grade will depend on your oral and written contributions to our discussions and workshops and a report of a visiting writer’s reading on or off campus. Obviously, you are expected to attend every class. Missing two or more workshops generally means failing the course.

Caveat: I am open minded, but I have blind spots and biases like all teachers. All judgments about the quality of a piece of fiction are subjective. Please, come see me if you don't understand or agree with my comments. If something about the class upsets you, come to see me so we can discuss it (or take your classmate out for a walk, a cup of coffee or tea or some other beverage—and talk). Come in for conferences as often as seems useful. ^{[[[L]]]}_{SEP}

TENATIVE SCHEDULE

Jan 12: Introduction/Sign up for workshops.

Jan 19: Read *Palace Walk*, pp 1-50: How does Mahfouz handle characterization? How does he introduce his characters? What psychological attributes of these characters stayed with you? What physical attributes do you remember? Are his characters distant or intimate?

1 **Quentin (novel)**

2 **Quentin (novel)**

Jan 26: No Workshop

Feb 2: Read *Palace Walk*, pp 51-100: How does Mahfouz handle place/setting? Where does the story take place? Is his setting distant or intimate? What parts of the home does he show you and why? How does he structure his days?

3 **Nick**

4 **Zach**

Feb 9: Read *New York, My Village*, pp 1-65 How does Uwem introduce his characters at the embassy? How does he introduce the characters in America? What psychological and physical attributes of these characters do you remember?

5 **Katie**

6 **Isaiah**

Feb 16: More on Mahfouz and Uwem: How do they structure the initial days of their novels? What details help you settle into their stories?

7 **Nikki**

8 **Savannah**

Feb 23:

9 **Ari**

10 **Bella**

Mar 2:

11 Cameron (novel)

12 Cameron (novel)

Mar 9:

13 Katie

14 Nick

Mar 16: Spring Break

Mar 23: *Letters to the Young Poet* by Reiner Maria Rilke

15 Isaiah

16 Savannah

Mar 30: *Letters to the Young Poet*

17 Nicky

18 Ari

April 6: Read two stories of your choice from *What It Means When a Man Falls from the Sky*. What makes Arimah's characters memorable? What twists in the stories surprised you? What is she doing with magic realism? What sentences stood out for you?

19 Bella

20 Zach

21 Katie

Apr 13: Rewrite Workshops

Apr 20: Rewrite Workshops

We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories.

Jonathan Gottschall

Additional Information:

Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism:

Plagiarism violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code:

<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>.

Student disability services:

Students with *disabilities* who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/), which will provide appropriate documentation to give the instructor.

Grading:

For information on UF Grading policies, see:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Grade Appeals:

In 1000- and 2000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

Course Evaluations:

Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>

UF Reading and Writing Center:

The Reading and Writing Center at the University of Florida is an excellent resource for improving reading comprehension and writing skills. For more information, see: <http://www.at.ufl.edu/rwcenter/>

Harassment:

UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/sexual/>

Health/Sickness:

For matters pertaining to health/Covid 19, see <https://coronavirus.ufhealth.org/campus-testing/>

Family security insurance
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