

CRW 6130**Graduate Fiction (Mostly) Workshop
Fall 2021**

Meetings: Wednesdays, periods 6-8, CBD 224

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Office hours Tuesday, 3-4 pm (via Zoom) or by appointment

Readings:

Over the course of the semester we'll be reading and discussing a number of short stories. Most of these I will send you electronically. The books I would recommend that you buy—not for the class, but because, IMHO, they are books that every writer should have on their shelf—are:

[*The Stories of John Cheever* \(Vintage\)](#)

[*The Essential Tales of Chekhov*, edited by Richard Ford \(Ecco\)](#)

[R. K. Narayan, *Malgudi Days* \(Penguin\)](#)

[Flannery O'Connor, *The Complete Stories* \(FSG\)](#)

[Grace Paley, *The Collected Stories* \(FSG\)](#)

[FYI, Although these links are to Amazon pages, I am not encouraging you to buy the books through Amazon.]

Scheduling:

The schedule for the rest of the semester will be finalized at the first meeting.

DL's Workshop Methodology:

- It's my belief that the best way to learn to write is to read. For this reason, over the course of the semester, I will be recommending a lot of books to you. I also welcome your recommendations. Many of my favorite books—Denis Johnson's *Jesus' Son*, Rachel Cusk's *Outline*, and Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*, to name a few—I first read at the urging of my students.
- Were it up to me, the title of this course would be "Graduate Workshop in Imaginative Prose Writing." In recent years especially, writers have been challenging, ironizing, or just plain ignoring the supposedly rigid boundary that separates fiction from nonfiction. (The French have never paid that boundary much attention. Therefore it is no surprise to discover that the term *autofiction* is French.) Bring in the work that matters most to you, even if that work does not fit the traditional rubric of fiction.
- Except when holidays or unforeseen circumstances make it impossible, please deliver hard copies of your submission to your fellows one week before the class in which is to be discussed. Please double-space and use a 12-point legible font. (Times Roman, Times,

Baskerville, Courier, Garamond, and Goudy Old Style are all good choices.) Please do not print on both sides of the page unless economic necessity makes it impossible to do otherwise. It is more important that you eat than that you print on only one side of the page. Should we end up at any point meeting via Zoom, you may of course submit your manuscript to the class electronically.

- You are welcome but not required to give the writer whose work is up for discussion a response letter. Should you write such a letter, you can, if you wish, read it aloud, but this is not obligatory. In my experience, one's original thoughts about a submission tend to refine and sometimes even reverse themselves in the course of the conversation.
- Although I am basically in favor of the rule (part of workshops since time immemorial) that when your work is "up" you should stay quiet during its discussion by the group, I am not a drill sergeant by nature and recognize that sometimes this rule, like all rules, must be broken. An example of when it should be broken, taken from a workshop I taught five or six years ago: Due to a typographical error, the group believe a certain character in a story to be the narrator's mother when in fact she was his sister. Waylaid by this misapprehension, the group devoted much of the workshop to puzzling over the author's portrayal of a mother/son bond. Should a situation like this arise, you should interrupt to clarify. You should *not* interrupt to explain what you meant to say (but didn't), to defend yourself against a criticism, or to justify your use of a word or phrase to which someone else objects. Commentary of this sort should be withheld until after the discussion has concluded, at which point you will be handed the microphone and allowed to say anything you want.
- If you are writing a novel or other long work and would like to submit a chunk of it, let me know and I will arrange the schedule accordingly. We will discuss the logistics of workshoping novels at the first meeting.
- If the workshop is to work for you, you need to bear in mind what Padgett Powell calls the Two-Thirteenths Rule: of thirteen sets of comments, two on average are actually likely to prove helpful. Something else to bear in mind: as you go through the comments your colleagues have made, you may find that they are at odds with one another. The line that one person exhorts you to cut another will tell you is the best thing you've ever written. Take these suggestions seriously, but please, for God's sake, don't write *for* the workshop or to *please* the workshop. You will never be able to please everybody. You *must* please yourself.
- Along the same lines—don't write for me or to please me. That I am the teacher doesn't mean that I am infallible, or that I don't have biases or particular tastes. I try to wield only that authority which I believe I have earned. That said, I've been at this game a long time, and have probably learned as much if not more from my failures as from my successes. In other words, take me seriously, but don't go against your own instincts to suit mine.
- I am assuming that you want to publish. Publishing is an entirely different sort of enterprise from writing. If you are to have a career as a writer, you must learn to balance two radically different lives: the artificially private life of writing and the artificially public life of talking about what you've written. This is something we will discuss over the course of the course.

- Bottom line: Writers are rebels. Be disobedient.

Some Potentially Useful Remarks About the Writing of Imaginative Prose:

Approval of what is approved of
Is as false as a well-kept vow.

—John Betjeman, “The Arrest of Oscar Wilde at the Cadogan Hotel (1937)”

How can I know what I mean until I see what I say?

—Anonymous old woman quoted both by E. M. Forster and Flannery O’Connor

Writing is about everything human, and we are made out of dust, so if you don’t like getting your hands dusty, you shouldn’t be a writer. It’s not a grand enough job for you.

—Flannery O’Connor

When asked by an interviewer whether writing workshops discouraged young writers, O’Connor replied, “I don’t think they discourage enough of them.”

Never put yourself in a position of moral superiority to your characters.

—Notorious writing guru Gordon Lish

Lish’s law: Enough is enough.

What are the realistic qualities to be imitated (or faked) in dialogue?—Spontaneity. Artless or hit-or-miss arrival at words used. Ambiguity (speaker not sure, himself, what he means.) Effect of choking (as in engine): more to be said than can come through. Irrelevance. Allusiveness. Erraticness: unpredictable course. Repercussion.

—Elizabeth Bowen

Now it fell to me to give advice to many authors which in at least two cases bore fruit. So I will repeat it here, free of charge. It proved helpful to the type of writer who has some imagination and wants to write fiction but doesn’t know how to start.

“You are writing a letter to a friend,” was the sort of thing I used to say. “And this is a dear and close friend, real—or better—invented in your mind like a fixation. Write privately, not publicly; without fear or timidity, right to the end of the letter, as if it was never going to be published, so that your true friend will read it over and over, and then want more enchanting letters from you. Now, you are not writing about the relationship between your friend and yourself; you take that for granted. You are only confiding an experience that you think he will enjoy reading. What you have to say will come out more spontaneously and honestly than if you are thinking of numerous readers. Before starting the letter rehearse in your mind what you are going to tell; something interesting, your story. But don’t rehearse too much, the story will develop as you go along, especially if you write to a special friend, man or woman, to make them smile or laugh or cry, or anything so long as you know it will interest. Remember not to think of the reading public, it will put you off.”

—Mrs. Hawkins, in Muriel Spark’s *A Far Cry from Kensington*

In both theorems (and in theorems, of course, I include the proofs) there is a very high degree of unexpectedness, combined with inevitability and economy. The arguments take so odd and surprising a form; the weapons used seem so childishly simple when compared with the far-reaching results; but there is no escape from the conclusions...A mathematical proof should resemble a simple and clear-cut constellation, not a scattered cluster in the Milky Way.

—G. H. Hardy, *A Mathematician’s Apology*

Good writing never soothes or comforts. It is no prescription, neither is it diversionary, although it can and should enchant while it explodes in the reader’s face.

—Joy Williams, “Why I Write”

The writer doesn’t write for the reader. He doesn’t write for himself, either. He writes to serve...something. Somethingness. The somethingness that is sheltered by the wings of nothingness—those exquisite, protecting wings.

—Joy Williams, “Why I Write”

I might explain that when I write a novel wrong, eventually it breaks down and stops and won’t be written any more, and I have to go back and look for the flaws in its design. The problem usually lies in the relationship between story and truth.

—Rachel Cusk, *Aftermath*

Learn to play your instruments, then get sexy.

—Debbie Harry

Reading Schedule (This schedule is provisional and subject to change. If it becomes clear that we don’t have time to discuss all the stories below and conduct a decent workshop, I’ll change or cut back on the reading assignments. In any case these stories *all* deserve to be read, even if we don’t end up talking about them.)

8/25

John Cheever, “Reunion”

9/1

Anton Chekhov, “Enemies” and “Gooseberries”

9/8

John Cheever, “Goodbye My Brother,” “The Country Husband,” and “The Housebreaker of Shady Hill”

9/15

Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People" and "Everything That Rises Must Converge"

9/22

Grace Paley, "Goodbye and Good Luck," "The Loudest Voice," and "Two Short Sad Stories from a Long and Happy Life"

9/29

Grace Paley, "Wants," "An Interest in Life," and "Distance"

10/6

RK Narayan, "The Blind Dog" and one or two other stories TBD

10/13

Amy Hempel, "San Francisco," "The Rest of God," and "The Harvest"

10/20

Uwem Akpan, "An Ex-mas Feast" and Camille Bordas, "Most Die Young"

10/27

Yiyun Li, "Kindness" and "All Will Be Well"

11/3

Rebecca Curtis, "The Christmas Miracle" and J. D. Daniels, "Letter from Cambridge" (from *The Correspondence*)

11/10

From here on in, we'll be reading stories that *you* choose

11/17

11/24

NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING)

12/1

12/8

Boilerplate

Attendance Policy, Class Expectations, and Make-Up Policy

If you need to miss class, please let me know in advance. You should try not to miss more than 2 classes during the course of the semester. Excused absences must be consistent with university policies in the [Graduate Catalog](#) and require appropriate documentation. Additional information can be found in [Attendance Policies](#).

Evaluation of Grades

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Total Points</i>	<i>Percentage of Final Grade</i>
Participation		40%
Reading		10%
Writing		50%
		100%

Grading Policy

The following is given as an example only.

<i>Percent</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Grade Points</i>
90.0 - 100.0	A	4.00
87.0 - 89.9	A-	3.67
84.0 - 86.9	B+	3.33
81.0 – 83.9	B	3.00
78.0 - 80.9	B-	2.67
75.0 - 79.9	C+	2.33
72.0 – 74.9	C	2.00
69.0 - 71.9	C-	1.67
66.0 - 68.9	D+	1.33
63.0 - 65.9	D	1.00
60.0 - 62.9	D-	0.67
0 - 59.9	E	0.00

More information on UF grading policy may be found at:

[UF Graduate Catalog](#)
[Grades and Grading Policies](#)

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. [Click here for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner](#). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. [Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students here](#).

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and

integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” [The Honor Code](#) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Software Use

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Student Privacy

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please see the [Notification to Students of FERPA Rights](#).

Campus Resources:

U Matter, We Care:

If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

Counseling and Wellness Center: counseling.ufl.edu/cwc, and 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS)

Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.

University Police Department at 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies), or police.ufl.edu.

E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learning-support@ufl.edu.

Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling.

Library Support, Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints Campus

On-Line Students Complaints