

Creative Writing 4905
Fall 2017

Instructor: Charlie Sterchi

Class meetings: Tuesdays, Periods 9-11, CBD 216

Office: TBA

Office hours: TBA

E-mail: sterchi@ufl.edu

Readings:

The Complete Stories, Flannery O'Connor

Art is Short, Life is Shorter, Shields and Cooperman

Object Lessons, Lorin Stein

Airships, Barry Hannah

Elements of Style, Strunk and White

Basics:

- **Attendance:** I expect that each of you will miss one class meeting. Safety and sanity will likely require it. This absence will not be on the day you are workshopped. This will not be on the day you are to turn in for workshop. Else there will be trouble. Three absences will result in a failing grade.
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- **Format:** All submissions to the workshop must be double-spaced and typed in a legible 12-point font. Acceptable fonts are Times New Roman and Garamond. You must bring hard copies for all.
- **Length:** Student stories will not exceed 17 pages in length.
- **Response:** We will devote the bulk of our time to a lively and frank discussion of the work at hand. You should also give one another written feedback in the form of marginal notes and a comment or letter to the writer. You do not need to turn these comments in to me. During the workshop the writer whose work is being discussed should try not to speak but may interrupt should the workshop seem to be going off on an impractical tangent.
- **Grading:** In a workshop grading is necessarily subjective. I will not give grades to individual stories because I do not believe that imaginative writing can be rated. Your final grade will be based on your informed participation in the workshop, your improvement, and the care with which you read and respond to the writing of your fellow workshop participants.
- **Grammar, Usage, and Spelling.** None of us wants to have to devote time or energy to correcting errors in grammar, usage, and spelling. Have your Strunk and White, and use it.

- **Reading.** You are expected to have done the assigned reading for each class and to be prepared to discuss it. The reading load is not onerous.

Some Thoughts on the Workshop:

The great value of the workshop is that it gives the writer who is “up” the opportunity to hear how a group of sympathetic peers has responded to her work. The trouble is, while some writers benefit immensely from this experience, others emerge from the workshop overwhelmed, unable to make sense of the morass of contradictory and sometimes confusing reactions that their submissions have elicited. The trick in any workshop is to learn how to weed out from this morass those responses that help and ignore those that hinder. Few of us find this easy. Some shut down.

Another problem: by its very nature the workshop teeters on the brink of anarchy. We value honesty, but the line between honesty and cruelty can be a blurry one. Rudeness, intentional or otherwise, is a not uncommon phenomenon in workshops, as is that one category of response that writers dread even more than rudeness: silence.

Finally, in workshops we are all susceptible to the tendency to be overly prescriptive: in effect, to try to bully the writer into writing her story the way *we* think it ought to be written rather than the way *she* thinks it ought to be written.

What's the solution? We'll see if we can figure one out as we go along. From the outset, though, I would ask the participants to consider a few basic rules of conduct:

1. Don't become overly attached to your opinions. The workshop is about the story, not about you (this is aimed at the author *and* the workshopers). Be articulate and cogent. Try to be helpful. But don't use the workshop as an opportunity to show off. Be kind and respectful, and you are less likely to make a fool of yourself when workshoping a classmate's story.
2. Don't try to compel the writer to write the way *you* write or to write the story the way *you* think it ought to be written. Try instead to get inside her head, to help her be the best version of herself that she can be.
3. Respond to what's on the page (and what's not on the page). As much as possible, try not to give overly specific advice. It's one thing to say “I wonder if this story might work better in the first person,” or “The ending feels flat”; another to say “Here's a great idea! Why don't you make the dog an alligator?” The risk in offering suggestions is that they might push other, more original, less predictable ideas out of the writer's mind; close his imagination down when our goal is to open it up to new possibilities.
4. Try as much as possible to leave movies out of the discussion.
5. Nothing involved in writing is sacred. We are not in church. Don't be dour. Keep it lively and irreverent. You should aim to make trouble. Your story will not be

perfect. If your story is perfect, you are in trouble. Perfect little stories are boring. Don't be offended when we give you suggestions. Remain agog. Remain gumptuous. Shoot at the moon, not for it.

6. **NO FOOD** unless it is dry baked goods (homemade) in quantity to share. No peanut butter. No chocolate.
7. **Do not answer your phone. Do not allow phone to ring audibly. Do not text message.** If you're expecting an important call, tell me about it before class, and remove to hall if call comes.

Other Required Rules

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

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

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points can be found at

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

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

Advice Regarding Imaginative Prose and How to Write It

“‘The aim of literature,’ Baskerville replied grandly, ‘is the creation of a strange object covered with fur which breaks your heart.’” – Donald Barthelme, *Come Back, Dr. Caligari*

“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

“All writing is garbage. People who come out of nowhere to try and put into words any part of what goes on in their minds are pigs. All writers are pigs. Especially writers today.”

– Antonin Artaud

“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.”

—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.”

“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.”

—Williams

“Writing requires maximum ambition, maximum audacity, and programmatic disobedience.”
– Elena Ferrante

“Some people . . . run to conceits or wisdom but I hold to the hard, brown, nutlike word. I might point out that there is enough aesthetic excitement here to satisfy anyone but a damned fool.” – from “The Indian Uprising,” Barthelme

“My best stories come out of nowhere, with no concern for form at *all*.” – Barry Hannah

“Learn to play your instruments, then get sexy.” – Debbie Harry

“Calmly write a not calm story.” – Padgett Powell

“The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an ‘objective correlative’; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately released.” – T. S. Eliot, 1920

“Then there is the other secret. There isn't any symbolism [mis-spelled]. The sea is the sea. The old man is an old man. The boy is a boy and the fish is a fish. The shark is all sharks no better and no worse. All the symbolism that people say is shit. What goes beyond is what you see beyond when you know.” – Hemingway to Bernard Berenson, 1952, SL, 780

“Keep them people, people, people, and don't let them get to be symbols.”
– Hem to Dos Passos, 1932, SL, 354

“. . . a writer should create living people; people, not characters. A character is a caricature.” DA, 191

“Mice: Do you know what is going to happen when you write a story?”

Y.C.: Almost never. I start to make it up and have happen what would have to happen as it goes along.” –By-Line: Ernest Hemingway, 217

“I am very much taken with your books and their wonderful imaginative energy. The more fantastic the action the more precise the writing and this is the way it ought to be.”
– Flannery O'Connor to John Hawkes (“experimental” writer, 1950, HB, 292)

“Eschew the monumental. Shun the epic. All the guys who can paint great big pictures can paint great small ones.”
– Hemingway to Maxwell Perkins, 1932, SL, 352

“This much is clear: inspiration arrives best and brightest when it arrives on the pogo-sticks of the unexpected and the improbable.” – Franklin Rosemont

“What an opossum does is climb a tree and get himself out on a limb when he feels threatened.” – Walt Kelly

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

August 22—INTRODUCTION

August 29

Read: “Greenleaf” by Flannery O'Connor
“Murderers” by Leonard Michaels (*ASLS*)
“Water Liars” by Barry Hannah
“Old Birds” by Bernard Cooper (*OL*)

September 5

Read: “A Late Encounter with the Enemy” by Flannery O'Connor
“Pretty Ice” by Mary Robison (*ASLS*)
“Dimmer” by Joy Williams (*OL*)

“All the Old Harkening Faces at the Rail” by Barry Hannah

September 12

Read: “Good Country People” by Flannery O’Connor

September 19

Read: “Everything That Rises Must Converge” by Flannery O’Connor
 “The Old Dictionary” by Lydia Davis (*ASLS*)
 “Car Crash While Hitchhiking” by Dennis Johnson (*OL*)

September 26

Read: “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid (*ASLS*)
 “In the Cemetery Where Al Jolston is Buried” by Amy Hempel (*ASLS*)

October 3

Read: “Enoch and the Gorilla” by Flannery O’Connor
 “Except for the Sickness I’m Quite Healthy Now. You Can Believe That.” By Thomas Glynn (*OL*)

October 10

Read: “The School” by Donald Barthelme (*ASLS*)
 “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin (*ASLS*)

October 17

Read: “Ten Stories From Flaubert” by Lydia Davis
 “Scarlotti and the Sinkhole” by Padgett Powell
 “A Temple of the Holy Ghost” by Flannery O’Connor

October 24

Read: “Our Secret Home” by Barry Hannah
 “Several Garlic Tales” by Donald Barthelme (*OL*)
 “A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor

October 31

Read: “Why Do the Heathen Rage?” by Flannery O’Connor
 “Why Aren’t You Dancing?” by Raymond Carver (*OL*)
 “Trick or Treat” by Padgett Powell

November 7

Read: “Constant Pain in Tuscaloosa” by Barry Hannah
 “Judgment Day” by Flannery O’Connor

November 14

Read: “Coming Close to Donna” by Barry Hannah
 “Likely Lake” by Mary Robison (*OL*)
 “Midnight and I’m Not Famous Yet” by Barry Hannah

November 28

Due: Final Revision by NOON (Canvas)

