Graduate Workshop--Fiction for non-Fiction Writers

Syllabus

This class is put together for a very particular audience--students with advanced skills in language and structure, but not necessarily in the structures of fiction. Accordingly, I will be spending the bulk of our discussion time talking about those structures, including scene versus narrative, the uses and abuses of dialogue, and issues of pacing. I will also be happy to entertain any other questions about the making of fiction as they arise. I expect our job here to be twofold: discerning what separates fiction from nonfiction or poetry, and what distinguishes good, successful fiction from that which is less so. The nature of the course being what it is, I'll talk about short stories as our default mode, but I welcome questions and discussions about novels, and will be happy to workshop chapters, if you have them.

PROCEDURES

- Each student is responsible for workshopping a minimum of three manuscripts over the quarter. These can be stories or chapters, although if you bring in chapters, please also bring a one-page précis of the novel to that point (and after, if you know). The final portfolio, due on December 10th at noon, must be made up of workshopped material, but needn't contain all the work you've workshopped. (The point here is to encourage you to try out what interests you. If you take a flyer on something and decide you hate it, you won't be stuck with it in the portfolio.)

- Students are responsible for making 10 copies of workshop MSS--one for every student and themselves, and for emailing MSS to me. If some students would prefer to receive material electronically, we'll iron out the particulars on the first day of class. MSS are due the week before their workshop date (for instance, a MS due to be workshopped on October 10th will be due in class on October 3rd.) If an emergency prevents you from distributing the MSS on time, you may email them, with the consent of the class. LATE MSS WILL BE COUNTED AS COURSE FAILURE. Final portfolios should be emailed to me by noon on Monday, December 10th.

- Each MS will be given an automatic P or F for mechanics--spelling, punctuation, syntax and usage errors.
- Any suspected plagiarism—the appropriation of another writer's work for your own—will be reported immediately to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.

- Students will be expected to have hefty input on each MS presented for workshop, both written and spoken. Written comments should include both marginal notes and approximately a page of summative comments at the end. I reserve the right to collect comments without prior warning. Because student involvement is essential for the success of the course, attendance will be monitored. After three absences for whatever reason, grades will be dropped half a grade for each subsequent absence. The Office for Disability Services, 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. The office's number is 2-3307.

- Each student will be responsible for making the primary presentation on another's work throughout the quarter. (I will make the assignments after our first class meeting.) Presentations should be brief and should focus on the salient characteristics of the MS, particularly, as the quarter goes on, in how those characteristics amplify or move away from devices used by the author in earlier MSS.

- Four prose readings will be hosted by the creative writing program this quarter, plus the book festival. Students are required to attend at least two of these readings. Dates and times are on the syllabus. If you have a conflict and cannot attend two events, please see me.

- We will be reading a few texts. Most weeks we will look at one of the stories from the 2011 edition of *Best American Short Stories*, edited by Geraldine Brooks. We will devote two classes to novels—F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and Kevin Wilson's *The Family Fang*. In addition, I've put Charles Baxter's *The Art of Subtext* on the reading list as a helpful resource.

GRADE BREAKDOWN
- Class participation 40%
- Portfolio 60%
Guide to my Proofreading Marks

Consider deleting
Wonderful
Delete

Diction
Transition. There isn't one, and there should be.

Make specific
Run in; make one paragraph out of two.
Make a new paragraph

You're padding
Empty Calorie. This isn't moving the story ahead

Tighten. Make some cuts here
Misplaced modifier

Comma splice
Expand or develop. You've got a good idea here,
but it needs more flesh.

Cliche. Find something fresher

Redundant

Awkward
Overexplanatory dialogue. People who know each other wouldn't talk like this.

Unclear pronoun referent (antecedent)

Vary sentence structure
Graduate Workshop Syllabus

Aug. 22 Intro, discussion

Aug. 29 Intro to BASS, Sam Lipsyte, "The Dungeon Master" Workshop

Sept. 5 Claire Keegan, "Foster" Workshop

Sept. 12 Rebecca Makkai, "Peter Torrelli, Falling Apart" Workshop


Sept. 19 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "Ceiling" Workshop

Sept. 20 Student-faculty reading Michelle Herman, Brett Beach, Jenna Killic. 165 Thompson Library, 7:30 pm.

Sept. 26 F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby

Oct. 3 Bret Anthony Johnston, "Soldier of Fortune" Workshop

Oct. 10 Nathan Englander, "Free Fruit for Young Widows" Workshop

Oct. 13 Rebecca Makkai, Fiction Reading. 165 Thompson Library, 8 pm.

Oct. 17 Ricardo Nuila, "Dog Bites" Workshop

Oct. 17 Lee Martin, Dinty Moore, Eric LeMay, and Jeff Gundy, Nonfiction Reading. 311 Denney Hall, 7 pm.

Oct. 24 Mark Slouka, "The Hare's Mask" Workshop

Oct. 31 Richard Powers, "To the Measures Fall" Workshop
Nov. 7  Kevin Wilson, *The Family Fang*

Nov. 14  Tom Bissell, "A Bridge Under Water"  
Workshop

Nov. 15  Student-faculty reading: Andrew Hudgins, Rebecca Huntman, Elizabeth Zaleski. 165 Thompson Library, 7:30 pm.

Nov. 21  Thanksgiving. No class.

Nov. 28  Ehud Havazelet, "Gurov in Manhattan"  
Workshop

Dec. 10  PORTFOLIOS DUE (EMAILLED) AT NOON.
Graduate Workshop Sign-Up
(sign up for three dates minimum)
No more than four MSS per workshop.

Aug. 29

Sept. 5        Hannah Matus, Kate Shipley, Brendan Shaw

Sept. 12       Cyrus Hampton, John Slefinger, Lauren Barret

Sept. 19       Yonina Hoffman, Kristen Grayewski, Andrea Dickens

Sept. 26       F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

Oct. 3         Lauren Barret, Rebe Huntman, Brendan Shaw, Kate Shipley

Oct. 10        Cyrus Hampton, Kristen Grayewski

Oct. 17        John Slefinger, Yonina Hoffman

Oct. 24        Andrea Dickens, Hannah Matus, Kate Shipley

Oct. 31        Cyrus Hampton, Rebe Huntman, Brendan Shaw

Nov. 7         Kevin Wilson, *The Family Fang*

Nov. 14        John Slefinger, Yonina Hoffman, Lauren Barret, Andrea Dickens

Nov. 21        Thanksgiving. No class.

Nov. 28        Kristen Grayewski, Hannah Matus, Rebe Huntman
Letters of Recommendation

I am happy to write letters of recommendation for you. It is both part of my job and a pleasure to share my knowledge of your work with other people.

One way or another, you're likely to be asking for such letters for the rest of your life--for grants, residencies, jobs, and so forth, and so it's a good idea to learn the etiquette involved. Here are the guidelines to follow when you would like to ask for a letter:

1. Please ask for recommendations at least two weeks before they are due. More advance notice than that, of course, means that the recommender will have more time to do a good job.

2. Enclose with your request a stamped envelope addressed to whomever you want to receive the recommendation, including OSU offices.

3. If you are asking for more than one recommendation, please provide all the forms, materials, and stamped letters at the same time, accompanied by a cover sheet that explains what each one requires and its due date.

4. It is a courtesy to let your supporters know when their letters have aided a successful application.

I'm wishing you the best of luck.
Graduate Workshop Introductions Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Will introduce the work of</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lauren Barret</td>
<td>Kate Shipley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andrea Dickens</td>
<td>John Slefinger</td>
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THE FAMILY FANG

(Prologue)
[Crime and Punishment, 1985] - jellybeans
1-5

Chapter 1    Annie takes her top off
6-13

[The Sound and the Fury, 1985] - Kill All Parents
14-17

Chapter 2    Potato gun
18-34

35-41

Chapter 3    Annie's Esquire interview
42-61

[The Portrait of a Lady, 1988] - Buster's beauty pageant
62-69

Chapter 4    Buster goes home
70-80

[The Day of the Locust, 1989] - Sometimes I think my heart is in my tummy
81-89

Chapter 5    Annie doesn't go to Wyoming
90-106

[untitled project, 2007] - chicken sandwiches
107-116

Chapter 6    Buster teaches a class
117-137

[More Woe, 1995] - Romeo and Juliet
138-147

Chapter 7    Caleb and Camille go missing
148-159

[A Christmas Carol, 1977] Annie meets Santa Claus
160-173
Chronological arrangement of art

[Shot, 1975] - Caleb shoots Hobart

[A Christmas Carol, 1977] Annie meets Santa Claus

[Crime and Punishment, 1985] - jellybeans
[The Sound and the Fury, 1985] - Kill All Parents
[Lights, Camera, Action, 1985] - Caleb makes a movie
[The Last Supper, 1985] - Caleb and Camille take A and B to dinner

[The Portrait of a Lady, 1988] - Buster’s beauty pageant

[The Day of the Locust, 1989] - Sometimes I think my heart is in my tummy

[More Woe, 1995] - Romeo and Juliet

[The Inferno, 1996] - Burning house

[untitled project, 2007] - chicken sandwiches

[Favor Fire, 2009] - Lucy's movie
Course Evaluation
English 6765.02/03, Autumn 2012

What were your expectations for this course? Were you satisfied or disappointed?

Did you feel adequately prepared for this course?

What aspects of the course were most useful to you?

What aspects were less useful—or not at all?

What would you like to see included in the course?
Day One.

What do you enjoy about fiction? What do you just hate? What is enticing about the idea of writing fiction? What is frightening or threatening?
Exquisite Corpse, starting with sentence I provide:

Max Beeman didn’t see why he had to apologize, just because he loved his goat.

Julie Foster was the kind of girl mothers approved of.

Morning call came early at Auschwitz, but David didn’t mind; he was a morning person.

Fourteen cats wasn’t so many, Lou thought.

No solvent could get tar off of cream-colored carpeting.

After losing his wallet, after hearing his boss’s dissatisfaction with his last three projects, after blowing first his diet and then his vow not to drink, Mark came home to see his brother’s car in the driveway.

The day after Eileen posted the job announcement—no benefits, no promises, lousy pay—she found two hundred and fourteen résumés in her in-box.

No one needed to know that Jenn played computer solitaire while she talked to her fiancé.

First she would need two buckets—one for the ketchup and one for the Jell-o.

Maurice was tired of the bassoon jokes, and wondered what was so damned funny about bassoons.
The Great Gatsby
Chapter-by-chapter breakdown

1 – Intro all characters, get Nick east, establish Myrtle. 22 pp.
2 – TJ Eckleburg, NY with Myrtle. 16 pp.
3 – Gatsby's parties, first active scene with Gatsby. 23 pp.
5 – Daisy and Gatsby (shirts) 17 pp.
6 – History of James Gatz. Tom gets suspicious; he and Daisy attend party. Chapter ends with Nick re-thinking Gatsby's history 16 pp.
7 – Parties stop. Jordan, Nick, Tom, Daisy and Gatsby go to NY. Gatsby forces Daisy to profess her love. Myrtle is killed. Gatsby stays outside of her house, watching. 34 pp.
8 – More background on Gatsby. Gatsby killed 17 pp.
The Great Gatsby

List five characteristics of Fitzgerald's style.
Using those (and any others you can think of), do a close imitation of F, describing a luncheon given by G for 100 or so guests. Feel free to rely on or refer to the text. Now, still in imitation mode, write a conversation between Jordan and Daisy, discussing Nick. Which is easier? Is a conversation between Jordan, Daisy and Nick (about anything—say, golf) easier than one that he does not mediate?

Break down the book: hand out chapter-by-chapter summary, plot graph on board. Discuss 3-act structure. Ask students to chart Daisy on graph. Is her line different from Tom's? Chart Nick. See if this alters our concept of the 3-act structure.

F, of all people, had CHARACTER IS ACTION taped over his typewriter. Why does that seem so odd? The book is full of action. Why does it seem not to be?