Theatre of the Mind  Slpotting  Character  Seduction  Story  
Time  THEORY OF STORY  Obsession  
  Want/Don’t Want  Perspective/POV  Tone  
Choreography  Sense of the Senses  
THEATRE OF THE MIND  Evoking  
  Significant Detail  Thingness  Generosity  
Character  Want/Don’t Want  Writer  Want/Don’t Want  
  WANT/DON’T WANT  
Reader  Want/Don’t Want  
Reader Character  
You  Are  Your  Choices  CHARACTER  Story  Character  
Writer  Character  
Page Turnability  
PLOD, PLOT, PLOTZ, SLPOT  
  Hope vs. Fear  Profluence  
Space Break  Iterative  
STORY TIME  Compression  THIS INK BLACK MAGIC  
Scene  Elongation  Summary  
  Scroll Back  
Costly To Break This Contract  
Authorial Distance  PERSPECTIVE/POV  
  First, Second, Third, OM  
Passion  OBSESSION  The-me  
Character  Obsession  Competition  Negative Capability  
  Lit of Illumination  WHAT  Heart  Reading  Talent  
Inner Dialect  Which Story to Write  
Advanced Word Working, UG1555-001 Fall 2012  
Class meets Thursdays 6:20-9:00, 25W4 # C-16  
Office hours: Thursdays 5-6, 1 Washington Place, #431  
Spain’s e-mail: clspain@msn.com  
Required materials:  
  Opn mind, obsession to learn, humbleness mixed with arrogance (it takes a certain arrogance to imagine anyone would want to give up part of their life to read what you have written), a sense to be humored.
Workshop objectives:

My objective is to teach you everything I can about the craft of fiction, and to help you write at least one compelling draft of a short fiction.

At our first class meeting you will write down your own objectives, read them aloud to class, turn them in.

Requirements:

Submit 3 fictions (one a constraint story, more on later), double-spaced and numbered, up to 12 pages long, with a mistspelling in the first sentence of each. If it is a part of a larger word work you must accompany the submission with a summary of the project. Be sure ___ copies arrive in class one week before your work is up for discussion. Extra stories to be left in my box from which any absent workshop member--with great shame--will pick them up.

Answer story questionnaires for the work of your peers. Accompanying each questionnaire should be a written critique of 150-200 words. Each of these are brought to class in duplicate--hand one to author, one to me.

Choose an “almost favorite story” for our Savage Detective Exercise, bring in ___ copies. Participate in in-class writing exercises.

Fill out a Constraint Story Questionnaire. Meet with story editor (me) to discuss. Write constraint story (this one of your three fiction submissions).

Grading:

Turn in ___ copies of 3 fictions, numbered and double-spaced, on time: 25/25

Complete Story Questionnaires for the work of your peers, in duplicate: 25/25

Written critiques of the work of your peers (150-200 words), in duplicate: 25/25

Bring in a second favorite story for Savage Detective Exercise: 5/5

Participate in workshop discussions: Talk way too much you get 0/10, talk none at all you get 0/10, talk just right you get 10/10.

Don’t be a jerk (this means you are respectful of your peers and their work): 10/10

Whether I like your fictions or not: 0/0
Attendance:

Be here. Workshops work because of synergy; if you can't commit to going shoulder to shoulder for a semester, bail now. One excused absence will not effect your grade. Excused means you email me no later than noon on day of class to let me know you will not be coming because you accidentally chopped off your arm, foot, nose. Two excused absences and your grade will be dropped one letter grade. Any unexcused absence will result in the lowering of your grade. If you do miss class you must email your story questionnaires and written critiques of each fiction to each author and cc me by Friday noon after the Thursday class you miss. Don’t be late to class. We already don’t have enough time to do all we need to do. If you have a job or any other regular commitment that you know will make you regularly late, bail now. Anyone coming in after 6:30 will be marked late and if that happens twice it will affect your grade.

Incompletes:

Only given to students who suffer compound fractures or similarly catastrophic fates.

*All subject to confusion, delusion, fickle whims and moods of prototypefessor.

9/6
Ground Rules
Teams Chosen: Team Emily, Team Flannery, Team Samuel, Team Herman

9/13
Theory of Story, How Writing MightaKindaSorta Work, TOTM I
Submitting: First round Team Em

9/20
Want
Covering: First round Team Em
Submitting: First round Team Flan

9/27
TOTM II
Covering: First round Team Flan
Submitting: First round Team Sam

10/4
Story Character
Covering: First round Team Sam
Submitting: First round Team Herm

10/11
SLPOT
Covering: First round Team Herm
Submitting: Second round Team Em

10/18
Which Story to Write, W + O = T
Covering: Second round Team Em
Submitting: Second round Team Flan

10/25
Story Time
Covering: Second round Team Flan
Submitting: Second round Team Sam

11/01
Perspective I
Covering: Second round Team Sam
Submitting: Second round Team Herm

11/08
Perspective II
Covering: Second round Team Herm
Submitting: Constraint Team Em

11/15
Story Talk
Covering: Constraint Team Em
Submitting: Constraint Team Flan

11/22  NO CLASS

11/29
Revision, Filtering, License
Covering: Constraint Team Flan
Submitting: Constraint Team Sam

12/06
The What, Spellbinding Across Centuries, Heart Reading
Covering: Constraint Team Sam
Submitting: Constraint Team Herm

12/13 Ink Black Magic, Writer Character, Creativity and Constraint
Covering: Constraint Team Herm
WORKSHOP TENETS

For the writer:
--Writer says everything writer has to say on the page. That means while your story is discussed/dissected you squirm/die a thousand deaths **SILENTLY**. At end of discussion the writer has a minute to ask any questions he/she felt were not already answered. This is not a time for the writer to explain what they meant to say.
--Try to hear everything you can.

For the reader:
--Assume it is A DRAFT, not a finished fiction, somewhere on an arc of becoming what it will become. We WASTE TREMENDOUS ENERGY if we critique these DRAFTS as if the were published fictions.
--Be decent.
--Don’t address writer as if they are a character in the story.
--Focus, as best you can, on THE HOW of the story, the WHY of effect, not the WHAT of what the story is saying.
--be prepared to concisely make a “single-most-important comment” about each story. You can choose to highlight something you thought worked particularly well, or to focus on something you felt was particularly problematic.

CRITICS

Nobody ever raised a statue to a critic. --said somebody, may they pardon me for mangling the quote.

Vladamir--No no, after you.
Estragon--No no, you first.
v--I interrupted you.
e--On the contrary.
They glare at each other angrily.
v--Ceremonious ape!
e--Punctilious pig!
v--Finish your phrase, I tell you!
e--Finish your own!
Silence. They draw closer, halt.
v--Moron!
e--That's the idea, let's abuse each other.
They turn, move apart, turn again and face each other.
v--Moron!
e--Vermin!
v--Abortion!
e--Morpion.
v--Sewer-Rat!
e--Curate!
v--Cretin!
e--(with finality) Critic!
v--Oh!
He wilts, vanquished, and turns away.

This to emphasize that in this class, even though what we will do the most of is critiquing, what we celebrate is the writer, the creator. We agree to devalue the critic, if not mock them.

Yes, in this class, when we talk artists we talk SUN-GODS, creators of rosy fingered dawnings of life-giving light, or creators of high-noon scorching illuminations (of the human heart).

And when we talk critics we talk pale reflections, auxiliaries, dim moons.

CRITIQUING

When we are pale-reflecting, dim-mooning, we are not critiquing WHAT the piece is saying unless we can’t help ourselves.

Certainly we are not trying to teach the WHAT. How could we? The WHAT is some reflection of who the writer is.

So we try to focus on the HOW. How the piece is executed. Of course we must acknowledge that in some fundamental way the HOW and the WHAT are inextricably bound, but it’s a question of shading our attention.

We are critiquing CRAFT CHOICES.

We are trying to understand HOW, word by word, scene by scene, a writer vaults a fiction off the page and onto that stage in every reader’s head. We are trying to understand HOW writers seduce readers with sentences. We are trying to learn HOW to accomplish the first and last task of every narrative, the waking of want in the reader to reach for the next page.

Yes, you hope to teach the writer something, you think you have something to teach them, and if you (and they) are lucky they might learn something, but mainly you teach yourself.

Watching the first flight of a new flying something it is easy enough to know if a story stays up in the air or not. Fathoming WHY it flies or stalls calls for another level attention.
WE TRY TO BE TEACHER CRITICS

We try and be Teacher Critics as opposed to Critic Critics. The difference? Something about stance. The Critic Critic guards the gate, and already knows. And their most important job is to say, No, you can't come in. The Teacher Critic is a Keats, living like a real poet, available to all, living in uncertainty, always learning, searching for WHY. In this class I ask that you try to develop your Teacher Critic self.

When we critique a piece, each of us, and the rest of the class, will probably find out more about ourselves than we will find out about the piece.

It should be obvious (but so often we forget) that there can only be so much strength to a brand new something a writer is coaxing into what it will eventually become.

It is folly to lean hard on all of it--language, character, summary, scene, sense detail, specific detail, architecture, pov, et cetera, et cetera--all at once.

We try to lean on it just right.

Different drafts call for different levels of attention.

Some submissions are only ready to bear up to inquiries of the broadest nature, to questions of obsession and want and profluence.

Sometimes, by happy miracle, an early draft is delivered to the writer as if by the gods, and it is ready to have its structure leaned on, its scenes and summaries leaned on, perhaps even its sentences and metaphors leaned on.

Sometimes the piece is perfect. Not often, but it happened once. And we were looking so hard for what was wrong that we didn’t see it was right.

When we examine workshop drafts (turned in under deadline and duress) we focus on potential as opposed to measuring against the completed best.

GETTING CRITIQUED, WILTED, VANQUISHED

We can only hear what we are ready to hear.

But hear everything you can.
Listen for the gifts your critics give you, but don’t listen too hard, don’t lose your balance. Hear what you can hear, what speaks to you, and let the rest dissipate, disassociate, disappear.

We must waltz our narratives--naked hearts--out in front of that gatling gun of subjective opinion, get bloodied and shredded, and be bulletproof as well.

FIRST DRAFTS/EARLY WORKSHOP DRAFTS

The idea is to bring in something that can be leaned on. If you are sure it is finished, and the cement has set, it is a waste of everyone's time. Better to send it out to a magazine, see if they will publish.

Yes, be sure you build first drafts from sand, not concrete. You want to be able to kick it over; it will get kicked over; kicking it over is a good thing.

That said a true first draft is probably not what we want to drop on a workshop. With a day or two of distance we would most likely see for ourselves much of what the workshop has to tell us.

The best workshop story, for both writer writer and teacher critic, is probably one that has been drafted several times, that has an idea of what it wants to be about.

Maybe perhaps.
I’m pretty sure you don’t want to use class energy checking spelling and syntax.

It is a lucky day if an early draft even approximates a story.

Generally early drafts are not so much about writing stories but about searching for stories.

Perhaps the most one can hope for is something to save, something we can't let go of, something that won't let go of us.

I’d like to suggest that if we nail even one moment in an early draft, really capture it, that should be enough to give us hope, keep us going.

Great fictions are miracles.

Good fictions are miracles.

We revise words that aren't stories into words that are.

We are high wire walkers, balanced on thin cables of language, knowing wire walkers

f

a

l

l.

We will do it fifty times before we get it right. If our gods favor us.

FAILURE, FAIL-YOU-ARE

Wonderstand failure it no enemy.

Most any artistic triumph is an eyelash away from disaster.

We must give ourselves permission to fail, and to fail spectacularly.

The greatest hindrance to creativity is fear of failure. Whenever the punishment is too severe, creativity dies. Look at the unholywoods; if they fail somebody loses 100 million.
This is delicate, dangerous work. We are trapeze artists, and when we let go of our drafts, let slip the bar, it’s as if we are flinging written versions of ourselves high into the dangerous void beneath the red and white circus tent fabric, flipping and spinning and drawing on the air with our language, and the reader has to make the catch.

Sometimes they don’t.

But in this workshop we are not in front of a hostile crowd (I won’t allow it), we are working over a net of peers. If the catch is missed, writer’s fault or the reader's, and if we fall, we fall to friends.

And, if we work long enough with a net under us, finally, we don’t need it.

Like those Olympic ski aerialists who practice their flips and twists by landing in pools of welcoming water. Imagine if they tried to learn those moves over stone hard snow? How many would survive?

Yes, we must forgive each other for falling short (of course we must fall short), and, most importantly, we must forgive ourselves.

When I write the word forgive I am reminded of a thought that winged through my mind: the idea that for the novice writer there can be no greater quality to cultivate than forgiveness. Maybe for any writer. If we can’t forgive ourselves for our early efforts, for not measuring up to what we hold up as great, we are doomed to half empty notebooks of paralyzed poetry and stunted stories.

...J.S. is perfectly right in regard to the slipshod Endymion. That it is so is no fault of mine.—No!—though it may sound a little paradoxical. It is as good as I had the power to make it—by myself—Had I been nervous about its being a perfect piece, and with that view asked advice, and trembled over every page, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble—I will write independently.—I have written independently without Judgement—I may write independently and with judgment hereafter.—The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself—that which is creative must create itself—In Endymion, I leaped headlong into the Sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the Soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea and comfortable advice.—I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest.—But I am nigh getting into a rant...Keats.

I pass on Keats quote because...because the Keats letter illustrates what is to be lost. If Keats had allowed himself to focus on what Endymion was not, if he had not given himself permission to learn, to flex and strengthen, to stretch his capacities, to fail, writing the 4000 lines in eight months, then the extraordinary reach of 1819 would not
have happened, and the miracles of Ode to a Nightingale, Ode on a Grecian Urn, Ode on Melancholy, To Autumn, La Belle Dame Sans Merci, Hyperion, The Fall of Hyperion, Bright Star—would have been lost to all of us. So. So I just wanted to say that.

Ode on a Grecian Urn

1
Thou still unravish’d bride of quietness,
   Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
   A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring’d legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities of mortals, or of both,
   In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
   What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

2
Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
   Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear’d,
   Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
   Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve:
   She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

3
Ah, happy, happy boughs! That cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
   For ever piping songs for ever new:
More happy love! More happy, happy love!
   For ever warm and still to be enjoy’d,
For ever panting, and for ever young:
All breathing human passion far above,
   That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy’d,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

4
Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead’st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadal,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e’er return.

5
O Attic shape! Fair attitude! With brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say’st,
“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,”—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
—Keats

TEACHING YOURSELF TO READ LIKE A WRITER

Might a measure of how well a writer is doing their job be the amount of attention (or lack of attention) we pay to how they are doing it? So, the better the writing, the less we notice, the less we learn about “the how” of it?

(Isn’t it true that the work of great writers—great anybodies, think Jordan, think Callas, think Hendrix, think Flannery—appears effortless?)

With a great story we are lost in the dream, paying no attention to how the dream is generated. Yes? Maybe?

Maybe perhaps?

When we read as readers we only care that it works, that it loses us in the fictional dream, that it transports us to a whaling ship sailing a Quito spring, or to a civil war field hospital that Inman walks out of, or to a hotel room in Dublin where Gretta remembers her one true love, Michael Furey, and with such a fewness of words shatters Gabriel’s world.
If it is even a little bit true that reading like a reader doesn’t illuminate HOW a piece is written, is there something we might take from that? Should it shape the way we read when we are teaching ourselves to write?

Maybe? Perhaps?

For our first reads perhaps we should give ourselves permission to read with those same sympathies/tendencies/wants that the reader reads with, not asking for anything more than the reader asks for: seduction, fictional dream, mystery, profluence, take me away, mask the tic-toc.

But, for the second read, you probably want to read not as a reader, but as an apprentice wordwright.

So how is a word writer to read?

The Questionnaires are an attempt, no doubt a little painful, at getting you started reading the way apprentice writers might want to read. A way to tease out “the hows” of a fiction.

So I ask you to ask yourselves: Does anyone want anything? How is time handled? Is it in scene, is it in summary? Does it come “alive” in the reader’s mind? Why? Which senses does the author favor?

A WORRY

Is it possible that understanding “the how” of a performance actually hinders the experience of it?

Certainly this is the case with magic.

Or even a worse worry: Is it possible that knowing how something works actually hinders the creating of it? Is it possible that you would be better off working instinctively, not thinking about it?

My sense is there is probably something to this worry. There is most likely a stage we pass through when learning how something works that leaves us illuminated, perhaps for the first time, as to the complexity of the craft. And this awareness might leave one feeling, at least temporarily, inadequate, self-conscious, blocked.

But I am also fairly confident that an informed approach to writing is the only way to give yourself a chance at repeatable success.
The emerging picture from such studies is that ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert—in anything. In study after study, of composers, basketball players, fiction writers, ice skaters, concert pianists, chess players, master criminals, and what have you, this number comes up again and again. Ten thousand hours is equivalent to roughly three hours a day, or twenty hours a week, of practice over twenty years. Of course, this doesn’t address why some people don’t seem to get anywhere when they practice, and why some people get more out of their practice sessions than others. But no one has yet found a case in which true world-class expertise was accomplished in less time. It seems that it takes the brain this long to assimilate all that it needs to know to achieve true mastery. Levitin, This Is Your Brain on Music