

Syllabus

EN 302/402, Fiction Writing

Chaminade University, Summer Evening Semester, 2001

Instructor: Christine Hansen, chansen@chaminade.edu

Texts

This course requires the purchase of two texts:

(1) Michael Petracca, *The Graceful Lie: A Method for Making Fiction*

(2) *The Scott Foresman Handbook*

There will also be various online readings, as indicated under the individual units.

In addition, I will be posting lectures on the WebBoard related to many of the units. In some cases, these lectures will explain to you how the Homepage links are to be used, so if there is a WebBoard lecture for the unit, you should read it before working through the unit.

Here's the url for the new 302/402 course:

<http://madrona.forest.net/kraus/chan/302/sumeve01>

Note that this url takes you to the Homepage. From there, you can click on the WebBoard, which is the easiest way to access the WebBoard. The WebBoard is the site where you will post much of your work. You can also use the Homepage to click on links to various online texts.

Course Description

This course in fiction writing examines the techniques of the contemporary short story and provides practice in writing short fictional prose. The course provides opportunity for students to explore their motives for writing and to "try on" a variety of fictional genres, including mystery writing, historical fiction, science fiction, literary fiction, creative nonfiction, prose poetry and young adult fiction. Participants in the course keep journals and workbooks in which they record their observations of class sessions, field trips, readings and independent outings. Although considerable background reading is required from the course text, Michael Petracca's *The Graceful Lie*, the class sessions themselves are conducted as workshops in which student writing is generally at the center of discussion. Throughout the course, writing projects consisting of edited material from journals and other assignments are submitted via an electronic conferencing system for discussion in class. In addition, two finished stories are also required by the end of the term. The objectives of this course cover the general scope of fiction writing from the point of view of the author. By the end of the course the student should have:

- An increased understanding of what motivates people to write fiction
- An increased knowledge of key terminology associated with the writing of fiction
- Knowledge of the "rules" of fiction writing
- An increased awareness of the key stories considered to be a part of any fiction writer's basic knowledge
- A clear understanding of the two ways of developing fictional plots
- An increased knowledge of fictional points of view
- An understanding of how fictional characters are created
- Knowledge of the difference between good and bad dialogue
- An increased awareness of the major fictional genres
- A general knowledge of the market for commercial fiction

Diversity Statement

Chaminade's "Core Beliefs Statement" says, "Students, both traditional and non-traditional, bring a variety of talents, traditions, cultures and abilities. This diversity brings a special opportunity to the Chaminade community, which can then nurture and guide each student to the fullest realization of potential." Consequently, this course encompasses readings that both reflect and examine the diversity of our literary heritage. Additionally, the course puts special attention on the problems faced by authors seeking to write from unique personal or cultural perspectives to readers who may not share the same perspectives or cultural background.

Requirements

Participation (approximately 15%)

Journal (approximately 15%)

Two stories (approximately 40%)

Critiques (approximately 10%)

Final exam (approximately 20%)

Participation

This course requires regular attendance and participation in discussions. This course requires the use of the World Wide Web and email. In order to facilitate required online participation, all students are required to have active Internet accounts with the Chaminade Academic Computing center.

Journal

The journal is an informal record of participation in the course; it may include free association writing, descriptions of objects or experiences, responses to readings, other jottings or musings; 30 - 50 pages (approx. 5000 words) is required. At times, I will post topics (on the WebBoard) for you to respond to, and you will be required to do so. Journals are normally kept in a conventional pen and ink notebooks. Hard copies of journals are submitted at the final exam.

Stories

Two Stories: Approximately 1800 words each.

Critiques

You are required to comment on the other students' stories. Your comments should assist the writer in determining the strengths and weaknesses of the particular story, for the purposes of future revision and/or improvement. Try to be sensitive to the writer's feelings, but honest at the same time. Each comment should be from 1-5 paragraphs in length. Please do be diligent in posting these comments, because often the writer is counting on them, and will be disappointed if you fail to respond.

Final Exam

The final exam consists to two sections. The first, "objective," section is made up of up to 50 short answer questions. The second section consists of one or more essay questions. Both sections of the exam are "closed book."

Self-assessment and Final Grade

The student will complete a self-assessment and grade estimate, which will be submitted during final exam week.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

All material submitted in fulfillment of course requirements must be written by the registered student. While students are strongly encouraged to consult sources outside the required reading of the course, they are also responsible for clearly stating the nature of their sources. Statements of "common knowledge" are generally exempt from this scholarly requirement. Plagiarism is defined as the presentation of someone else's ideas as your own. Plagiarism in this course will result in a grade of "0" for the assignment and possible failure for the course. If the instructor suspects plagiarism, the burden of proof of the originality of the writing lies with the student. Evidence of originality would include copies of early drafts of the writing, research and interview notes, as well as the ability to discuss the themes of the writing with the instructor. Students should consider their instructor's vigilance in such matters a normal part of the academic process and should be prepared to present evidence of originality if requested. Students are strongly advised to save files of early drafts of essays, along with outlines, research notes and other supporting documentation, as the instructor may at any time require that they be presented.

Course Outline

Unit 1 -- First Things

Log in to WebBoard. Read "Help" files. Monday, July 2

Read:

Keeping a course journal (online)

Petracca, *The Graceful Lie*, "Introduction," "First Things" (1 - 64)

WebBoard Forum: Post edited journal entries (minimum 100 words) to the "Journal Entries" conference. Monday, July 9.

WebBoard Forum: Post autobiographical paragraph to "Introductions" conference. Monday, July 9.

Unit 2 -- The Creative Process

Read:

Petracca, *The Graceful Lie*, " "Making Stories" (65 - 109)

WebBoard Forum: Post edited journal entries (minimum 200 words) to the "Journal Entries" conference. Monday, July 16.

Unit 3 -- Making a Story "Happen": Plot

Read:

Petracca, *The Graceful Lie*, "Plot Components" (110 - 164)

Opening to Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" (online)

Opening to Crane's "The Open Boat" (online)

WebBoard Forum: Post edited journal entries (minimum 200 words) to the "Journal Entries" conference. Monday, July 23.

Unit 4 -- Fictional People (Storyfolk): Character

Read:

Petracca, *The Graceful Lie*, "Storyfolk" (165 - 201)

Faulkner, "Barn Burning" (online)

Post first story to the WebBoard by Friday, July 27.

WebBoard Forum: Post edited journal entries (minimum 500 words) to the "Journal Entries" conference. Monday, July 30.

Unit 5 -- Showing Versus Telling

Read: Petracca, *The Graceful Lie*, "Ways of Showing" (202 - 235)

WebBoard Forum: Post edited journal entries (minimum 500 words) to the "Journal Entries" conference.
Monday, August 6.

Unit 6 -- Vision and Revision

Read:

Petracca, *The Graceful Lie*, "Perfection and Print" (236 - 268)

A selection from Joseph Conrad (online)

WebBoard Forum: Post edited journal entries (minimum 500 words) to the "Journal Entries" conference.
Monday, Aug. 13.

Unit 7 -- Fictional Genre I

Post Story #2 to the WebBoard by Friday, Aug 17.

Read:

Petracca, *The Graceful Lie*, "Prose Poetry" (269 - 280), "Creative Nonfiction" (281 - 311), "Historical Fiction" (397 - 435)

Note that there is a considerable amount of online reading for the next unit, so get started on the readings now.

WebBoard Forum: Post edited journal entries (minimum 500 words) to the "Journal Entries" conference.
Monday, August 20.

Unit 8 -- Fictional Genre II

Read:

Petracca, *The Graceful Lie*, "Mystery Fiction" (343 - 396), "Science Fiction" (436 - 487)

H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (online)

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Study in Scarlet" (online)

Poe, "The Purloined Letter" (online)

WebBoard Forum: **Monday, Aug. 27**

Unit 9 -- Style

Read: WebBoard readings (lectures)

WebBoard Forum: **Tuesday, Sept. 4**

Final Exam: Saturday, Sept. 10

WebBoard Forum: **Saturday, Sept. 10**