

*Writers
Workshop*

Syllabus for STRATEGIES IN PROSE.

Spring Semester, 1977.
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The course will deal, in two-week discussion segments and in the following sequence, with:

A FAREWELL TO ARMS, Ernest Hemingway.
THE GOOD SOLDIER, Ford Madox Ford.
TO THE LIGHTHOUSE, Virginia Woolf.
THE SOUND AND THE FURY, William Faulkner.
ULYSSES, James Joyce.

The remaining classes, and individual conference times----to be regularly scheduled--- will deal with the exercises that follow. There are some explanatory remarks re those exercises on page 5, but here I want to introduce some general notions. I'd like to take as model for this course that of the mediaeval guild, and that we all are apprentices to a vanishing trade. In this instance, we have the ongoing achievements of five master craftsman to emulate and, ideally, by June of 1977 or 1986, we'll receive our working papers as journeymen. It's an approximate model only, and not one to be over-scrupulous about, but there are several attributes thereof to keep in mind.

First, the whole impulse towards "self-expression" is a recent and possibly aberrant one in art. Legions of masterful authors found nothing shameful in prescribed or proscribed subjects, or in eschewing the first-person pronoun. The apprentice in an artist's shop might mix paint for years or learn to dado joints for what must have felt like forever; only slowly and under supervision might he approach the artifact as such. Though you come prepared to write your own life's story, or that of a St. Jago's monkey your great-uncle trained, have patience for a season, please; that's not our purpose here.

Nor is "signature" important. The bulk of our literature's triumphs have been collective or anonymous; who can identify the authors of The Bible, The Ramayana or Beowulf? More important, who cares? The Iliad and Odyssey are by an unknown bard as are, for all practical purposes, the plays of William Shakespeare. This is not to say that these works don't display personality---the reverse is more nearly true---but rather that the cult of personality should fade. It too is recent and, I think, aberrant; it has nothing to do with the labor of writing as such.

So what I want to focus on is craft, the craft of our five exemplars (which will imply a special way of reading them) and delimited problems they pose. Instead of what does Mr. Joyce mean, we'll talk of how he means and contrives it; instead of discussing Woolf as incipient suicide, we'll talk of Mrs. Ramsay's death in a parenthesis. To attempt a comprehensiveness about any of these works in our brief-time-span is silly; to attempt to comprehend the way they marshal metaphor is possible, perhaps.

The article of faith on which this course is based is that imitation is not merely sincere flattery, but also a good way to grow. Some of the problems that follow may seem maddening, unworkable, yet if this course produce a dozen parrots---parakeets, even---of Faulkner, then it shall succeed. And if any one of us contrives to echo, in any of the exercises, those masterful tonalities these master-craftsmen sounded, then there'll be music indeed.

One final cautionary note. Since the whole thrust here is process, don't worry overmuch about result. It's better to attempt and fail than not to try at all. Amen.

Plausible exercises.

1. Add a chapter to the middle of any of the books under discussion.
2. Rewrite the ending via (a) substitution of alternative.
(b) an epilogue that reverses the terms of the preceding.
(c) an epilogue that amplifies---additional character, boat in a bottle, note in a desk-drawer, etc.
3. Introduce a dialogue or incident that the author would and should have cut.
4. Deal with imagery a la the five stylistic prototypes---how Joyce treats water as opposed to Hemingway and Woolf; a horse in the five versions; dawn; dusk; a timepiece.
5. Social rank: deal with this substantive question in the five fashions.
6. Lovemaking. " "
7. Death. " "
8. Some theme or context that none of them confront, and yet in their terms. Mediaeval pageantry; space travel; racing; homosexual love, etc.
9. Write a Joycean parody of Hemingway, a Faulknerian of Ford.
10. Dress a character in the five fashions; have them plant a garden or explicate their preference in drink.
11. Rewrite a page; change nothing.
12. Rewrite the dinner party in To The Lighthouse as a Hemingway scene; rewrite a section of Molly Bloom in Dowell's voice; give us Quentin's suicide as told by Caddy to her escort in the Nazi staff car.
13. Landscape: first provide an appropriate terrain and time of day, year for each of the five instances. Then reverse their terms so that Bloom visits Cambridge, Mrs. Ramsay goes to the Italian front, Ashburnham visits Leonora's American cousins, the Compsons.
14. Dialogue: let Stephen Daedalus discuss, with Mulligan, the flaws in Ford; have Frederick Henry tell Catherine (who is a literature, not art, student as they come to Switzerland) his opinion of Faulkner.
15. Monologue: the protagonists introduce in retrospect their book to follow. One day after the fact, one year, ten years; from the grave.
16. Write a critical preface to any, then all of the novels. From the author's point of view---"What I was attempting here," etc.
17. Pastiche: create a scene in the five styles seriatim, but so that it emerge as one scene, not five.
18. Satire, or the reversal of tones: make Frederick Henry's plunge into the river a comedy, ditto with Quentin's; make Nancy's "Credo in Unum Deum Omnipotentem" lascivious, not chaste.

Plausible exercises (cont.)

19. Transposition: Turn an available monologue into dialogue and vice-versa; shift point-of-view, so that the first person become the third, and vice-versa; shift tense so that the present become the past.
20. Revision: Recast one of your own available short stories into the five tones; then do the same with some other student's submission.
21. Reconstruction: Employ an alternative form-----set a scene as playlet, a descriptive passage as sonnet, an expressed character-attitude into essay.
22. Write a critical monograph on some aspect of pure rhetoric in one or more of the authors under discussion; explication de texte.
23. Process: Take as your end-point the closing passage of A Farewell to Arms, The Good Soldier or Ulysses. Then work towards that model in three or thirty revisions until you reproduce it letter-perfect.
24. Cut and improve a sentence, a paragraph and a page in each of the five instances.
25. Select an example in each that strikes you as a paradigm of style, and defend.
26. " " , then attack.
27. Change character-color: make Luster a white man, or Rodney Bayham a black. Make Edward a misogynist and Bloom an anti-semitic with no contextual alteration; make Lily Briscoe a musician, with no stylistic shift:
28. Describe Rinaldi's death (a) via tertiary syphilis
(b) in battle
(c) as a suicide
in each of the five authorial voices.
29. Translate a page in any of the books into any language available to you, then translate it back. Compare.
30. Enlarge and improve a sentence, a paragraph and page in each of the five instances; make the sentence a paragraph, paragraph a page, and page a brief chapter with no additional information or extraneous voice.
31. Create thirty additional exercises such as the above; submit.
32. Create your own short story in which such characters as Molly Bloom or Mr. Ramsay appear, though parenthetically; then do the same employing them as prototypes but without specific identification.
33. Describe some recognizable locale (Commons, the corner of Fifty-Seventh Street and Fifth Avenue, Disneyland, etc.) in the terms of Hemingway, Ford and so forth. Do this as if your protagonist is seeing this scene for the first time, then last.
34. Discover and defend new titles for each of the books (e.g. A Separate Peace, The Saddest Story); create epigraphs for each.

Plausible Exercises (cont.)*

35. Create a masque, ballet, silent screenplay or dumbshow in which the characteristic gesture of the protagonist in each of the five instances is otherwise displayed. This is neither a charade nor mime.
36. Inanimate objects (the rowboat in A Farewell to Arms, the eighteenth hole in the pasture-turned-golf-course in The Sound & The Fury, etc.)----ruminates about them in the author's voice, then in that of three or more of the ancillary characters.
37. Introduce the (biographical) personalities of Hemingway, Ford, Woolf et. al. in a scene deploying their principal creations; have Bloom confront Jimmy Jason, ^{Wick}Bill, etc.
38. Provide the birth, marriage and death announcements of Lily Briscoe, Stephen Daedalus and Benjamin Compson; then write a dream sequence (nine in toto) for each.
39. Write an epistolary exchange between Florence Hurlbird and Jimmy, a series of songs by Blazes Boylan about Molly, such that the reader's sense of their relationships will be entirely changed. Love's old sweet song: make Bloom a hero of imaginative constancy, and Dowell a rake.
40. Revise three of these exercises, once accomplished, back into your own voice.
41. Having read a chapter in any of these books through twice (but without a conscious attempt at memorization), attempt to reproduce it.
42. Write a collective novel, with two or more collaborators, having agreed in advance as to the broad outlines of plot, characterization and so forth----but without continual cross-checking. So that you are solely responsible for Chapters 1, 4, 7, 10 and ignorant of 2,3,5,6, etc.
43. Combine exercises 4 and 9, above, but in terms of imitation not parody. Have Joyce write of water as if he were Hemingway, not aping him; have Ford attempt to reproduce---for instance as in 40---the Dilsey chapter.
44. Recreate Act IV of Hamlet in the five voices.
45. Find passages of twenty lines or longer in each of the five books that do not signal signature. Reproduce them, without identification or alteration of any sort, and try to fool your friends.
46. Create forty-five additional exercises such as the above, but with different models.
47. Rewrite the first chapter of the books here under discussion via, and as in #2,
 - (a) substitution of alternative
 - (b) a prologue that amplifies, as before
 - (c) a prologue that reverses our understanding of what is to follow, so that the book be materially altered----Quentin doesn't die, just disappears; a memoir written by the surviving son of Catherine Barclay, etc.
 - (d) Intersperse throughout the book, via cutting and splicing, the necessary changes attendant on the decisions above.

Plausible Exercises (cont.).*

48. Strip the veil of familiarity from things: reread the books.
49. From internal evidence only, and without consulting the author's next work (or ignoring what you a priori know), invent the first chapter of the five subsequent novels. Do this consciously as sequel, but in stylistic not substantive terms; we're not talking here about Son of The Good Soldier, or The Ramsays Return to the Lighthouse.
50. Write Son of the Good Soldier, and The Ramsays Return to the Lighthouse.

*Remarks: It should be obvious that the above are signposts, largely, and not the road itself. Also that any one who could manage all fifty of these exercises within a fourteen-week span would be so preternaturally gifted as to have no use or need for all fifty of these exercises. (Though the gift of imitation is a discrete skill sometimes; the first-rate forger might prove wholly unoriginal.)

Further, and as a couple of the above proposals suggest, there should be nothing sacrosanct about the propositions here---one could as easily invent a separate list. Or combine or revise or ignore them.....What I've tried to do, in effect, is indicate a way of thinking about prose in general---a way that combines a craftsmanlike appreciation of the manner in which books are put together with a glad willingness to take them apart. Though I think numbers 24 and 26, for example, might well result in an improved page of Faulkner or Woolf, it's certainly not the point of this course that we should meddle endlessly with what's left well enough alone. That would be idiot's delight, even if by term's end we were idiots savants.

Rather, the aim of these exercises is two-fold. First, and clearly, it's one way to learn to read five twentieth-century masterpieces. But the second aim is a little less clear and bears explaining. It has something to do with the nature of language and our presumed literacy----a natal familiarity with English that, more often than not in the contemporary writer, breeds contempt. No-one presumes to give a dance recital without having first mastered the rudiments of dance, to perform Mozart before they've learned scales, or to enter a weight-lifting contest if they've never hoisted weights. Yet because we've been reading since five, we blithely assume we can read; because we scrawled our signature when six, we glibly aspire to write.

Anyone who does even a percentage of these exercises will have to revise such assumptions. Our language is a rich and complex thing, and the conscious, conscientious study of rhetoric has largely disappeared. There are books on ~~the~~ subject, of course, and now and again the academy asseverates that style's a thing to keep. But if you cannot tell an oxymoron from chiasma by term's end, you will nonetheless have learned something about the freedom within limits that is the root and force of syntax. Hemingway and Faulkner covered their tracks, but they too went to "singing school," and Joyce and Woolf are mandarins throughout. Ford called himself "an old man mad about writing," and I want that to be our apprentice-motto equally. Do as many of these exercises as you can plausibly manage, then scrap them and start