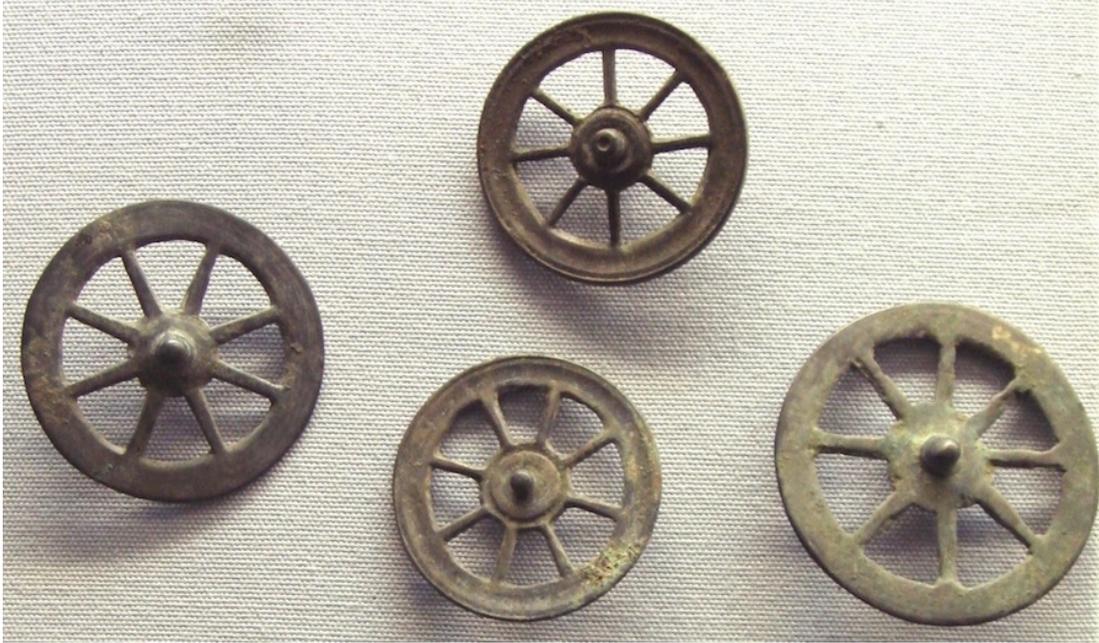


# FYW 100H



## *Re-Inventing the Wheel*

*Tuesday/Friday 12-1:50, Craig-Lee 105*

Dr. Russell A. Potter

It's usually a criticism of someone who, foolishly, is bothering to do something that's already been done -- no need to re-invent the wheel! -- but it's also an apt description of what writers do when they begin to write. After all, there are only so many themes, so many characters, so many words in the English language, and only so many ways of combining them. Add in the additional constraints of genre and form (short story? Personal essay? Epistolary novel?) and it soon seems an impossible task. Which is why, perhaps, so many writers today struggle so mightily for originality.

Of course, there was a time when originality, as such, wasn't held in very high esteem. Every single one of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* was based on pre-existing story, as were nearly all of Shakespeare's plays. One could say, certainly, that at the level of language these writers were innovators, but part of what enabled them to be bold with words was the fact that their listeners already knew something of the tales they (re)told. Even once the "novel" -- a genre once named for its newness -- took hold, a great many of its basic plot-lines were recycled. And yet, in this restless recycling of all that has been said, there yet remains something new -- a voice, a tone, a manner of connecting one thing with another, that feels particular to a certain writer, however universal her or his themes.

And, truth be told, "college" writing -- the vast majority of which is composed, critiqued, and consumed solely within the Bizarro world of writing classes -- is not usually meant to go anywhere, to endure, to reach wider audiences. It's rather like a vast practice session or dress rehearsal for a play that is never going to be staged, which of course makes it even more maddening to do (and to teach)!

So here, in this class, we're going to take a different approach: we're going to write as though the "wheel" -- in our case, the usual constraints and rules of academic writing -- had not yet been invented. What might a paragraph look like, if captured in the wild? What sorts of play and interplay might writing have, say, with drawing or photography? What if, instead of confining our words to the computer-screened page, we were to scrawl, scratch, engrave or emboss them, paint them with a brush? And most of all, what if we were to undertake the task of writing without any thought as to where we were "going" with it, or what it might all eventually mean. What if -- dare I say -- we were to write for the sheer fun of it?

#### CLASS SUPPLIES:

1. A sketchbook, at least 9x12 inches (the Canson Field Sketchbook is a good choice)\*
2. A college-ruled composition book
3. Pens -- at least 6 different colors. Pencils, markers, crayons, stubs of crayons are good too.

\* = can be found at Dick Blick, Jerry's Artorama, the RISD store, or online

#### REQUIRED CLASS BOOKS:

Lynda Barry, *One Hundred Demons!*

Allie Brosh, *Hyperbole and a Half: Unfortunate Situations, Flawed Coping Mechanisms, Mayhem, and Other Things That Happened*

Selected short pieces and poems (via blog links)

**WEEK I** (Aug. 30, Sept. 2) Tuesday: Introduction to course; in-class survey. For Friday: read David Mamet's "The Rake" (blog link). Friday: Neruda, "Ode to Things"; Wilbur, "Junk" (blog links). Survey results will be revealed. *In-class project (will lead into first writing piece).*

**WEEK II** (Sept. 6) Tuesday: Draft of first writing piece, "My object, myself" due; first small-group workshops. No class Friday (I will be at faculty retreat).

**WEEK III** (Sept. 16) No class Tuesday. Friday: *Collecting and curating*. Bringsværd, "The Man Who Collected the First of September, 1973" (blog link). Second draft of "my object" essay due.

**WEEK IV** (Sept. 20, 23) Tuesday: In-class workshop -- "building a museum of ourselves." Friday: Self-museuming presentations; process materials and object writings collected.

**WEEK V** (Sept. 27, 30) Tuesday: "Menace" by Allie Brosh; letters from and to your ten-year-old selves. Small group workshops using letters. Friday: "Menace" by Allie Brosh (available *free* on her blog). In-class drawing and writing exercise on Brosh piece on "costumes we have worn."

**WEEK VI** (Oct. 4, 7) *Friends -- and others*. Tuesday: Group discussion of results from "costumes we have worn" exercise. For Friday: Barry, "Head lice / My Worst Boyfriend," "The Visitor," "Magic." In-class discussion and writing.

**WEEK VII** (Oct. 11, 14) TBA

**WEEK VIII** (Oct. 18, 21) TB A

**WEEK IX** (Oct. 25) Tolkien, "Leaf by Niggle." Niggle project, phase I.

**INTERLUDE:** I will be away at a conference in Ireland from October 28<sup>th</sup> through Nov. 6<sup>th</sup>. On my return, due to the conjunction of Election Day and Veteran's Day, we will also be unable to meet in person that week.

**WEEK X** (Nov. 15, 18) Niggle project, phase II.

**WEEK XI** (Nov. 21, 23; Friday class meets this Wednesday)

**WEEK XII** (Nov. 29, Dec. 2) Workshop week.

**WEEK XIII** (Dec. 6, 9) Presentations of final projects.