

IDH 2930 – (Un)Common Reads  
*Orfeo* by Richard Powers

Section 1G32  
MUB 142  
Period 7 (1:55-2:45 p.m.) W  
Fall 2017

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### Course Description

All sections of IDH 2930 are discussion-oriented courses centered around a single book. They provide 1 academic point toward Honors Completion if accomplished with a grade of B or higher. Grading is primarily participation based. All students are expected to participate vigorously and earn an 'A' in the course.

This section is an exploration of Richard Powers' *Orfeo*, a novel that relates the story of Peter Els, an aging avant-garde composer who has taken to dabbling in DNA manipulation as a post-retirement hobby. Through an offbeat encounter with local police, he's mistakenly identified as a bioterrorist and impulsively flees when the men in hazard suits show up.

Els' odyssey presents not only his adventures as a fugitive, but also a moving retrospective of his artistic and personal journey from young idealist to disillusioned has-been. Along the way, Powers raises and illuminates some rather big questions about the meaning of art and its role in society, the challenges of staying true to one's calling – artistic or otherwise – and the veracity and ambiguity of art and mass media. He also skillfully weaves in a survey of some of the major developments in late-20th and early- 21st century Western art music in a way that makes them both accessible and compelling to readers who are unfamiliar with these genres.

Together, we will read *Orfeo* and chronicle our responses to each chapter, objective and subjective. Additional supporting readings and, especially, guided listening to some of the works that play a role in the novel will enhance the experience. Our goal will be not only to experience this literature, but also to engage some of those big questions about the purpose of art, the role

### Objectives

By the conclusion of this course, students will be able to identify some of the key issues and works in *Orfeo*, as well as articulate their own views about art and its role in contemporary culture and in their own lives.

### Course Requirements

Since this course is a discussion-oriented seminar, there will not be any test or exams. Instead, students will be evaluated on their participation during class meetings, online journal entries, and responses to the journals of others. Online entries and responses will be posted on the course Canvas site in E-Learning, as will select readings, video and audio excerpts relevant to the discussions.

In addition, each student will serve as the discussion leader for at least one class meeting (depending on the number of students enrolled). When serving as the leader, a student should be prepared to draw attention to key points, passages, or ideas in that week's reading and, when appropriate, to supplement the discussion with relevant outside materials. Most importantly, they should draw their classmates into a lively discussion.

## Grading

The grades for this course will be based on a 100-point system, in the following manner:

**60 points** = participation in class and online journals. Student are expected to post an entry in their online journal for each week's reading. This may contain both objective analysis of the material and subjective responses to it. You also have the opportunity to respond to the journal entries of your classmates.

**40 points** = preparation and performance as the course discussion leader.

All grades will be determined based on the following scale (corresponding grade points are listed in parentheses, consistent with the university grading regulations outlined at

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>):

92-100 points = A (4.00)	80-81 points = B- (2.67)	68-69 points = D+ (1.33)
90-91 points = A- (3.67)	78-79 points = C+ (2.33)	62-67 points = D (1.00)
88-89 points = B+ (3.33)	72-77 points = C (2.00)	60-61 points = D- (0.67)
82-87 points = B (3.00)	70-71 points = C- (1.67)	0-59 points = E (0)

PLEASE NOTE: If you perceive a grading error, you must address the issue within 72 hours of the grade posting, otherwise the grade is final and will not be discussed further. Specific grade questions and concerns will only be discussed with the student. Due to the 1974 Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, I cannot and will not discuss your progress or grades with your parents. For more information on FERPA, please visit <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/ferpa.html>. Any correspondence received from your parents/guardians will be responded to with a link to the FERPA information site and nothing more.

## Course Schedule (Tentative)

Date	Reading	Topic	Assignment
Aug. 23		Language of Music	Introduction, Mozart, Copland
Aug. 30	pp. 1-28	A Man Apart	Journal Entry, Sign-Up to Lead Discussion, Mahler
Sept. 6	pp. 28-64	Songs on the Death of Children (& Dogs)	Journal Entry, Student-Led Discussion
Sept. 13	pp. 64-92	TBA (Created by Student Leader)	Journal Entry, Student-Led Discussion, Messiaen
Sept. 20	pp. 92-125	TBA (Created by Student Leader)	Journal Entry, Student-Led Discussion
Sept. 27	pp. 125-154	TBA (Created by Student Leader)	Journal Entry, Student-Led Discussion, Crumb, Rochberg
Oct. 4	pp. 154-186	TBA (Created by Student Leader)	Journal Entry, Student-Led Discussion
Oct. 11	pp. 186-221	TBA (Created by Student Leader)	Journal Entry, Student-Led Discussion

Oct. 18	pp. 221-245	TBA (Created by Student Leader)	Journal Entry, Student-Led Discussion, Reich
Oct. 25	pp. 245-273	TBA (Created by Student Leader)	Journal Entry, Student-Led Discussion, Shostakovich
Nov. 1	pp. 273-306	TBA (Created by Student Leader)	Journal Entry, Student-Led Discussion
Nov. 8	pp. 306-334	TBA (Created by Student Leader)	Journal Entry, Student-Led Discussion, Partch, Lieberson
Nov. 15	pp. 334-369	TBA (Created by Student Leader)	Journal Entry, Student-Led Discussion
Nov. 29		Summary & Big Questions	Journal Entry, Student-Led Discussion
Dec. 6		Final Thoughts	

### **Conduct**

Students are expected to show respect for one another and for the instructor in all communication. This doesn't mean that we can't disagree or debate, only that we handle such disagreements with courtesy and that we allow each party to present their position without interruption.

One piece of respectful communication is that mobile devices must be turned off during classes to prevent interruption and distraction. Students should not use computers, tablets, etc. during class unless instructed to do so.

### **Attendance**

Consistent and punctual attendance in every class is expected. Students are responsible for all assigned work, announcements made in class, and any material covered in class regardless of attendance or punctuality. Chronic absence and/or tardiness will be noted and can adversely affect the student's discussion/participation grade.

Most assignments will be submitted online through the course website. Only in exceptional circumstances will it be possible to submit assignments after the closing deadline. In the event that late assignments are accepted/permitted, there will be a substantial grade penalty assessed. Please note that technical difficulties do arise, and will generally not be considered an excuse to miss a deadline (especially without documentation from the UF Computing Helpdesk) – it is in your best interest to complete your assignments early so that you have time to work through any unforeseeable problems. You are advised to read through the technical information posted on the LSS website (<http://lss.at.ufl.edu>) to minimize any potential technical issues.

For conflicts that may arise due to University-sponsored events or religious holidays, you are advised to plan your work in advance. The instructor recognizes and will comply with the University's attendance policy (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>); however, since no assignment requires that you log on the day of the deadline, you are responsible for planning ahead and taking care of work before a trip or holiday (including university holidays such as

Homecoming). If a conflict seems unavoidable, you must contact the instructor at least one week prior to the date in question.

The instructor reserves the right to amend any portion of the course structure, including items listed on the *Due Dates*.

### **Academic Honesty**

All violations of academic honesty will be referred to the Dean of Students Office for disciplinary action without exception. PLAGIARISM OR CHEATING **WILL** RESULT IN A FAILING GRADE FOR THE PLAGIARIZED ASSIGNMENT, AND POSSIBLY THE COURSE. If you are uncertain about these guidelines, please see me. **Ignorance to the law is no excuse.**

By registering for classes, you have agreed to abide by the UF Honor Code, which reads, in part: “On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: *On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.*” (The full text of the Student Honor Code is available through the Dean of Students Office website, <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honorcode.php>.)

### **Accommodations**

Students requesting classroom accommodations must first register with the Disability Resource Center (0001 Reid Hall; 352.392.8565; [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc)) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter that must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester. Accommodations are not provided retroactively.

### **Online Course Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results>.