

Creative Writing alum Oubria Tronshaw's short story Whippoorwill, Sing has been made into a film Morning Due which has been selected for the Cannes Film Festival. Here is Oubria's account of how the story, and the film, came to be.

I must admit that writing this makes me nervous. I've never written anything creative for a CSF audience that wasn't first plucked apart and stitched back together by my professors and/ or peers. Now they've asked me to write a story about the success of a story and if it sucks, no one is obliged to tell me. This is not a workshop. This is not a drill. I am craving what once made me cringe- a classroom full of critical ink and the comfort of second opinions; for someone to tell me *this is good, very good. But let's see you make it perfect.*

My first memory of Mark Behr is from an *Intro to Creative Writing* class my first year at CSF. Our teacher was absent and Mark was teaching the exact same class across the hall, so we combined numbers. His group was work-shopping short stories, so our group had to sit there and listen while he berated his students. Perhaps berated is a harsh word. Our group had to sit there and listen while he was *extremely honest* with his students. We had never heard such shoulder-shrinking honesty. Our teacher was very nice and polite and liked everything. In her eyes we were all brilliant creative writers and almost everything we wrote needed no changes at all. Mark told his students to discard whole paragraphs from their stories- whole *pages* sometimes- and then he splashed more cold water in their faces by telling them not to act so surprised- they couldn't have *really* thought it was any good. That was the moment I decided to be The Behr's brightest shadow. I knew that if I could get a walking Fear Factor to think my writing was good, then the rest of the world would think it was friggin' awesome.

Whippoorwill, Sing was the first story I wrote for Mark. I stressed myself so much about writing the best and shortest short-story that the night before it was due I found myself in bed sick with an anxiety-induced cold. I lay there, no longer thinking of brilliantly life-altering topics to write about, but instead wondering how to craft a pitiful sounding email that would elicit both sympathy and an extension. Finally I decided that my sickness would render me blameless if the story was awful. I planned to bring tissue to class and cough extra hard. If I tried, I could fake a sneeze. I rolled over and brought my notepad and a pen to bed. I wrote the story



backwards- I began with an image in my mind of how I wanted the reader to look once they'd finished reading. I wanted them to look like someone had punched them in the face. And so I proceeded to write a deceptive beginning, an anti-climactic middle, and a dramatic 'oh my God that was the saddest story I ever read' ending. All told, it was four paragraphs. I thought to myself *not only is it the shortest, but it actually turned out damn good*. I turned off my light and went to sleep.

The next day Mark used my story as an example of meaningful dialogue. Basically he announced to the class that while my first draft sucked, it sucked *succinctly*. His most emphatic criticisms were that the villain was too monstrous and the heroes were obliviously, unrealistically happy. He felt I had written caricatures instead of characters as a result of lazy writing. He reminded me that the scariest villains and the most believable heroes are the ones that resemble our own selves just a bit. I sat there quietly, obeying the workshop rules (the artist being critiqued is not allowed to speak), politely writing down everyone's comments and suggestions, but on the inside I had cracked into a thousand pieces. They had all seen through me. I *was* a lazy writer, and I knew I had never given 100% to anything I'd written. I just didn't think anyone else knew it. Where I come from, everyone loves me. Even my farts are brilliant. After class I told Mark I didn't know if I could do it, and that I'd never had to work this hard and I cried like a scared little kid. When he reached out and hugged me it gave me the strength to cry a little harder.

My tears that day have become our running joke. The finished story was exceptionally successful at CSF- I read it at the ribbon cutting for the new Benildus Hall, it made it into the first Helman Prize collection, and it won 2nd place for short fiction in the 2006 Glyph. Every time it received a new accolade, Mark would smile and raise his eyebrow- *the tears were worth it, yes?* And I say, a thousand times yes! I must humbly and in all honesty admit that it's the best piece I've ever written (and the shortest). The universe has honored the labor of love that gave birth to it, and it has taken on a life of its own.

My father works at a TV station, and a co-worker of his read the story over his shoulder. When she finished, she told him she was going to make it into a movie. A year and half later, she did. We filmed 11 months after I graduated, when my daughter was 8 days old. My own newborn played the newborn in my story. The film, called *Morning Due*, will be screened at the Festival de Cannes in Cannes, France, next month. My head is spinning- I still can't believe this is happening. I remember being a scared little black girl in Chicago, wondering if I was dreaming too big by moving to New Mexico. Thanks to one wonderfully honest man, this little black girl is flying to France...

With your support, of course. It's an extremely expensive venture- flying 10 cast and crew members to Cannes by May 15th, so we can support the little story that grew into a film. Money, and/or thoughts of loving support, are greatly appreciated. For more information, please visit: www.myspace.com/morningdue