

18 November, 2013

To whom it may concern,

Nora Bonner is a talented writer, yes, but she's also a highly effective teacher of both writing and literature. I have observed several of her classes and can report that she engages her students (not easy with sophomores at 9 in the morning), coaxing them into thinking in helpful ways about craft and aesthetics.

Her undergraduate fiction workshop combines close reading of published texts and assessment of student work. On one occasion, I witnessed her teaching William Gay's "The Paper Hanger." It isn't the easiest or lightest of short stories, but Nora was able to bring the students into a sophisticated discussion by asking questions such as how voice can make a reader actually like a killer and what importance point of view holds. They considered the Southern Gothic and what that means. She then showed them a short interview film of William Gay from the *Oxford American*, which delighted them: the writer as real human being! They were very taken with the question of change—do characters have to change for a story to be effective? Or is the "possibility of change" the real key?

The students remained lively, attentive, even excited about their reading, and became even more so when they turned to their own colleagues' work. The story under discussion could also be described as "gothic" and the students seemed to revel in seeing their own writing unpacked the way a published author's would be. They took each other seriously, treated each other respect, and delivered well-considered editorial critiques—which I attribute to Nora's guidance. I could only wish all my graduate workshops would function as beautifully.

Yours sincerely,

Diane Roberts  
Professor of English and Creative Writing