**Handout for craft lecture, “Generosity in Fiction”—Joan Silber**

From Anton Chekhov, “At a Country House”

He looked at his long, sinewy, elderly legs [the translation I first read said “his long, veined, old-man’s legs”] and remembered that in the district they called him “the toad,” and after every long conversation he always felt ashamed. Somehow or other, by some fatality, it always happened that he began mildly, amicably, with good intentions, calling himself an old student, an idealist, a Quixote, but without being himself aware of it, gradually passed into abuse and slander…If he sat down to write anything, even if it were only a letter of congratulation, there would somehow be abuse in the letter. And all this was strange, because in reality he was a man of feeling, given to tears.

……..

He wrote that he was old, and no use to anyone, that nobody loved him, and he begged his daughters to forget him, and when he died to bury him in a plain, deal coffin without ceremony, or to send his body to Harkov to the dissecting theatre. He felt that every line he wrote reeked of malice and affectation, but he could not stop, and went on writing and writing.

From David Malouf, *Remembering Babylon*

He banged his head with the flat of his hand and ‘H-h-head’ he hooted, then looked alarmed, as if the word had popped out without his will. They watched, waited for more, but he was stopped for the moment.

It was the stammer. It belonged to someone he had thought was gone, lost, and here it was on his lips again.

From Colm Toibin, “The Name of the Game,” in *Mothers and Sons*

She reverted to something she had not done for years. She had done it when her mother had irritated her, and she had done it when she went to work first, and she had done it also to [her husband] George…She traced the word FUCK on her skirt with her finger, quietly, unobtrusively, but deliberately. And then she did it again. And when she had finished, she traced other words, words that she had never in her life said out loud. She kept her eyes firmly on the bank manager as, unnoticed, she continued to write the words, invisibly, with her finger.

From Edward P. Jones, “Old Boys, Old Girls,” in *All Aunt Hagar’s Children*

Then he began dusting and cleaning clockwise around the room, and by midnight he was not even half done and the shirts were dirty with all the work, and he went back to his room for two more. By three, he was cutting up his pants for rags. After he had cleaned and dusted the room, he put an order to it all.

From Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “Cell One,” in *That Thing Around Your Neck*

Nmamabia did not say what had happened to him in Cell One, or in the new site, which seemed to me like one where they kept people who wd later disappear. It wd have bn so easy for him, my charming brother, to make a sleek drama of his story, but he did not.