

**Carleton University Department of English  
Fall 2013**

**ENGL 2903A: FICTION WORKSHOP**

**Thursday 6:05-8:55**

**Location: Please confirm on Carleton Central**

**Instructor: Nadia Bozak**

**Phone, office, and office hours: TBA**

**Email: nadiabozak@connect.carleton.ca**

***\*\*This course has a limited enrollment. Students are admitted by permission of the instructor based on the quality of a fiction portfolio.***

**Course Description:**

The objective of this introductory fiction-writing workshop is to develop students' creative writing skills and, attendant to that, their reading and editorial skills as well. Students in this course are expected to have a sincere interest in writing fiction and a willingness to learn the fundamental elements of the craft (such as plot, character, perspective, style, and setting). While the focus is on writing short fiction—short stories, novel chapters—other formats will be considered as well.

The majority of each class will be spent critiquing and discussing each others' short fiction manuscripts. However, over the term students will also prepare a short presentation on an assigned topic, participate in targeted in-class writing exercises, and as a class perform close readings of short stories by Anton Chekhov, Sandra Cisneros, Flannery O'Connor, Alice Munro, Raymond Carver, Chimimanda Ngozi Adichie, and William Faulkner. Previous experience in a creative writing course is not required.

**Workshop Logistics:**

Each week, three or four designated students will submit in hardcopy a piece of short fiction (i.e. a "manuscript") to each of their classmates. These manuscripts will be taken home, read closely and commented upon in preparation for in-class critique (i.e. workshop) the following week. Over the term, students will submit TWO ten-page manuscripts of their own work (each worth 20% for a total of 40%). They will also critically analyze the manuscripts of fellow students each and every week. To formalize this process, students will take turns preparing "feedback reports" on two separate manuscripts. This report will count for marks (see breakdown below).

**Note well:** Students are responsible for photocopying and distributing their manuscripts the week before it is workshopped. Students will cover the costs of printing and photocopying their own manuscripts.

Manuscripts will be in hard copy only, typed in 12-pont font, double spaced, with one-inch margins. Hand-written or electronic submissions will not be accepted. Your fellow students will not read anything beyond ten manuscript pages.

The goal of this class is to produce quality writing; the process of revision and editing is a fundamental part of that. Please be prepared to revise your work after it is critiqued by your classmates and to submit evidence of those revisions to the instructor within two weeks of being workshopped. A 1-2 page report about the revisions you did will be handed in with your revised manuscript for the instructor to grade. Further guidelines on this will be provided in Week 1.

With the assistance of students, the instructor will maintain a supportive, respectful class environment that encourages all students to share insights, ask questions, express themselves creatively, and contribute to balanced discussions.

**Note well:** The success of this class and your development as a writer depends upon attending each and every session, contributing to discussions, and fully engaging with in-class exercises and workshops (critiques). You must, therefore, be ready to circulate your creative work among your peers and have it openly discussed in class. Such workshopping is premised on give-and-take: as well as receiving and perhaps integrating the comments of others into your writing, you will offer your peers constructive, thoughtful and forthright critiques as well.

### **Required Text (available at Haven Books; 43 Seneca at Sunnyside; 613-730-9888)**

Jack Hodgins, *A Passion for Narrative: A Guide for Writing Fiction, Third Edition* (McClelland and Stewart, 2001). This is a chatty, accessible guide, filled with excellent examples and writing exercises which will serve you well in years to come.

### **Additional Required Readings (available on short-term loan in the library)**

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi, "The Thing Around Your Neck." *The Thing Around Your Neck*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009. 115-127

Carver, Raymond. "Popular Mechanics" *What We Talk about When We Talk About Love*. London: The Harvil Press, 1996. 67-74.

Chekhov, Anton. "Lady with the Dog." *The Lady with the Dog and Other Stories*. Trans. Constance Garnet. New York: The Ecco Press, 1972. 1-28.

Cisneros, Sandra. "A Rice Sandwich"; "Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark." *The House on Mango Street*. Houston: Atre Publico, 1988. 43-45; 56-57.

Faulkner, William. "Barn Burning." *Collected Stories of William Faulker*. New York: Vintage International, 1995. 3-25.

Munro, Alice. "What is Real?" *Making It New: Contemporary Canadian Stories*. Ed. John Metcalfe. Toronto: Methuen, 1982. 331-334.

--- "Ottawa Valley." *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson 1974.

O'Connor, Flannery. "A Good Man is Hard to Find." *A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955.

--- "Writing Short Stories." *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*. New York: Farrar, Giroux & Strauss, 1984. 83-106

## Evaluation:

- 1) 40%: Quality and originality of TWO short fiction manuscripts (10 pages **maximum** each) submitted **a)** for workshops and **b)** to the instructor in a revised form within two-weeks of being workshopped.

Effort, creativity, proper grammar, and formatting are taken into consideration when grading. Additionally, as the labour of revision/re-writing is the foundation of fiction, a 10% portion of the above mark includes submitting (to the instructor) a draft of your work revised in accordance with (or contrary to) the comments received in workshop. This revised manuscript will include a separate summary (1-2 pages) reflecting upon why or why not you have integrated comments received in the workshop.

- 2) 15%: Quality of editorial comments given to the work of others.

This includes: **a)** in-class comments offered to your fellow classmates about their manuscripts **b)** two formally prepared feedback reports (which you will sign up for; report sheets to be distributed in class). These reports are worth 5% each.

Each week students will read and comment upon 2-3 ten-page manuscripts submitted by fellow class members. These manuscripts will be returned to their respective writers, marked with respectful editorial commentary. As noted above, two of these weeks you will ALSO turn in a formal feedback report (I will give you a template to follow).

- 3) 15%: Presentation

This presentation should be about ten minutes in length, put together with the aim to generate class discussion about the weekly readings. The topics (noted on the syllabus and to be selected in Week One) address such things as plot, point of view, or character building as they appear in the textbook AND the assigned stories. The ability to succinctly organize your points and make good use of examples from the stories will be graded. The presentation will be formally written up (2 pages) and handed in to the instructor on the same day.

4) Participation: 30%

Participation is based on: attendance, the quality and frequency of students' contributions to discussions (including critiques, discussions about readings, and writing exercises), and preparedness. Students must come to class having a) read the textbook & assigned stories and b) prepared to speak about the manuscripts up for critique. Participants who miss more than three classes will receive a failing grade. Allowances will be made for medical situations, provided the participant presents the instructor with a medical note as soon as possible and without the instructor having to ask for it.

Thus, over the course of the term you will:

- do a short presentation
- prepare and revise two 10-page manuscripts and write a brief revision summary thereof
- read/comment upon two (sometimes three) ten-page manuscripts to be critiqued weekly
- fill in a short feedback report for two of these manuscripts
- keep up with the textbook and assigned stories and speak about these readings in class

There are no tests or exams. You can expect to devote a minimum of 6-8 hours per week to this course.

### **Weekly Course Schedule—Fall 2013**

#### **Week 1: Introduction and course mechanics**

**Sept. 5**

- Starting out: finding story ideas
- *Sign up for presentations, feedback reports, and manuscript submissions*
- In-class writing exercises
- Reading due: Hodgins, 9-21; 24-42 & "Popular Mechanics" by Raymond Carver

#### **Week 2: Showing and Telling/ Types of Prose**

**Sept. 12**

- In-class writing exercises
- Presentations: **A)** How does Chekhov "show" and/or tell? **B)** Are Hodgins "four types of prose" present in Chekhov?
- *First submissions by 3 participants are due; copies of manuscripts are to be handed out to the group in order to be critiqued in class during Week 3*
- Reading: Hodgins, 45-68; Chekhov, "The Lady with the Dog"

#### **Week 3: Voice and Point of View I**

**Sept. 19**

- Presentations: **C)** What is point of view? What are the differences between the types that Hodgins lists? **D)** How is a child's POV conveyed differently in Cisneros and Faulkner?

- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins, 182-200; Sandra Cisneros “A Rice Sandwich”; “Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark”; William Faulkner “Barn Burning”

#### **Week 4: Voice and Point of View II**

**Sept. 26**

- Presentations: **E)** Describe and then discuss the effectiveness of voice and POV in Adichie. **F)** Discuss tone in any/all of the stories so far this term. What is it? What is persona? Is the author of a story also its narrator?
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins, 182-200; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie “The Thing Around Your Neck”

#### **Week 5: Building Character / Writing Dialogue**

**Oct. 3**

- Presentations: **G)** Discuss the ways in which Munro makes her characters believable/strong, real etc. **H)** Discuss the role of dialogue in Munro. How does it function in her story and/ or another story read so far?
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins, 100-123; Alice Munro “Ottawa Valley”

#### **Week 6: Setting**

**Oct. 10**

- Presentations: **I)** Discuss the various roles of setting. Use examples from assigned stories this term **J)** Discuss the importance of place in assigned stories this term. Consider how they either “describe” or “construct” setting.
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins, 71-92; William Faulkner “Barn Burning”

#### **Week 7: Plot**

**Oct. 17**

- Presentation: **K)** What is plot? What does it do? What is the difference between plot and story? Use examples.
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins, 126-144

#### **Week 8: Structure I**

**Oct. 24**

- Presentation: **L)** How is a story like a journey? Discuss other metaphors for the writing/reading of stories. Speak about this in relation to O’Connor’s essay and an assigned story.
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins, 152-175; Flannery O’Connor, “Writing Short Stories”

-----OCTOBER 31, FALL BREAK, UNIVERSITY CLOSED-----

**Week 9: Structure II**

**Nov. 7**

- Presentation: **M)** Discuss the shapes on Hodgins 161, use at least one assigned story to illustrate, compare, contrast with his models
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins, 152-175 (yes, same as Week 8)

**Week 10: Metaphor and Symbol**

**Nov. 14**

- Presentations: **N)** Discuss a metaphor and a symbol in O'Connor **O)** Discuss the difference between an allusion and an echo, use examples from O'Connor or elsewhere
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins, 205-225; Flannery O'Connor "A Good Man is Hard to Find"

**Week 11: Revising and Editing I**

**Nov. 21**

- Presentation: **P)** One of Elmore Leonard's editing tips is "cut out all the stuff that readers tend to skip." Discuss this in relation to Hodgins' chapter and one or more of the assigned stories. Should the tip be universally applied?
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins: 234-252

**Week 12: Revising and Editing II**

**Nov. 28**

- The importance of revising
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins: 234-252 (yes, same as Week 11)

**Week 13: Fiction and Reality**

**Dec. 5**

- Presentation: **Q)** Can fiction be autobiographical? Can autobiography be fiction? Discuss in relation to Munro's essay.
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Alice Munro: "What is real?"
- Instructor evaluations

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***Academic Accommodation***

*You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term because of disability, pregnancy or religious obligations. Please review the course outline promptly and*

*write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.*

*Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Documented disabilities could include but are not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions. Registered PMC students are required to contact the PMC, 613-520-6608, every term to ensure that your Instructor receives your Letter of Accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations. If you only require accommodations for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC by the deadlines listed in the Academic Year section of the online Undergraduate Calendar.*

*You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at <http://carleton.ca/equity/accommodation>.*