

**Carleton University
Fall 2014
Department of English**

ENGL 2903A: FICTION WORKSHOP

Wednesdays 2:35-5:25

Please confirm location on Carleton Central

Instructor: Nadia Bozak

Office: Dunton Tower 1918; Hours = Wed 1-2 or by appointment

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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 workshop 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.

Students will emerge from this workshop with two polished fiction manuscripts. They will also present an excerpt (or have it presented on their behalf) in a term-end showcase. This counts towards the participation mark (see below).

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.

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.

Also: Texting or web browsing in class is not acceptable. You lose 5% of your participation mark if you do this.

I do not respond to emails on weekends or after 5 (no internet at home).

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 digitally/ 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. 227-246.

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. 9-29.

--- "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) 20%: 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 four 8-10 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) 20%: Presentation

This presentation should be **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: 20%

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.

Preparing a piece to present (or be presented on your behalf) in a term-end showcase counts as 5% of your participation mark

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 8-10 page manuscripts and write a brief revision summary thereof
- read/comment upon four 8-10 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 2014

Week 1: Introduction and course mechanics

Sept. 10

- 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. 17

- In-class writing exercises
- Presentations: **1)** How does Chekhov “show” and/or tell? **2)** Are Hodgins “four types of prose” present in Chekhov?
- *First submissions by 4 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. 24

- Presentations: **3)** What is point of view? What are the differences between the types that Hodgins lists? **4)** 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**Oct. 1**

- Presentations: **5)** Describe and then discuss the effectiveness of voice and POV in Adichie. **6)** 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. 8**

- Presentations: **7)** Discuss the ways in which Munro makes her characters believable/strong, real etc. **8)** 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. 15**

- Presentations: **9)** Discuss the various roles of setting. Use examples from assigned stories this term **10)** 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. 22**

- Presentation: **11)** What is plot? What does it do? What is the difference between plot and story? Use examples.
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins, 126-144

-----**OCTOBER 29, FALL BREAK, UNIVERSITY CLOSED**-----

Week 8: Structure I**Nov. 5**

- Presentation: **12)** 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. **13)** Is Poe’s statement about the length of stories accurate? Would he consider “Popular Mechanics a fully developed story?”
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins, 152-175; Flannery O’Connor, “Writing Short Stories”

Week 9: Structure II**Nov. 12**

- Presentation: **14)** Discuss the shapes on Hodgins 161, use at least one assigned story to illustrate, compare, contrast with his models **15)** Discuss Munro's approach to structure.
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins, 152-175 (yes, same as Week 8); Alice Munro, "What is Real?"

Week 10: Metaphor and Symbol**Nov. 19**

- Presentations: **16)** Discuss a metaphor and a symbol in O'Connor **17)** 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**Nov. 26**

- Presentation: **18)** 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?
19) Imagine you are an editor blindly reading "Barn Burning" or "Lady with the Dog", if you follow what we've learned about contemporary fiction, what would you cut or revise in these stories? That is, would these works be published in this form today?
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Hodgins: 234-252

Week 12: Final Thoughts/ Fiction & Autobiography**Dec. 3**

- Presentation: **20)** Can fiction be autobiographical? Can autobiography be fiction? Discuss in relation to Munro's essay
- **Practice for term-end showcase**
- Workshop manuscripts
- Reading due: Alice Munro: "What is real?"

Academic Accommodation

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: 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. For more details see the [Student Guide](#).

Religious obligation: 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. For more details see the [Student Guide](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation.

If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable).

After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the [PMC website](#) for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).