

**Carleton University  
Winter 2016  
Department of English**

**ENGL 3915A: Special Topics in Writing: Characterization**

*Prerequisite(s): third-year Honours standing, a 2000-level creative writing workshop,  
or permission of the instructor.  
Submission of portfolio is required.*

**Monday / 11:30 am – 2:30 pm**

**Location: Please confirm location on Carleton Central**

**Instructor: Mary Borsky**

**Email: [maryborsky689@gmail.com](mailto:maryborsky689@gmail.com)**

**Office: TBA**

**Office Hours: TBA**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

The focus of this workshop is Characterization, and it is intended for students who have a serious interest in writing fiction.

We will be discussing fiction from some of the world's best fiction writers, engaging in in-class writing exercises and responding to work generated by participants of the workshop.

**PORTFOLIO FOR ADMISSION TO THE WORKSHOP:**

In order to gain admission to this workshop, you must submit a portfolio consisting of 10 to 12 pages of your best fiction writing. If your sample is from a larger work, please include a note explaining how your piece fits into your larger project. If your sample is shorter than 10 pages, please include an explanatory note about that.

Please include a one page biographical statement about yourself—what you are studying, any previous writing workshops you've done, publications, your reason for wanting to enroll in this workshop and what you hope to gain from it.

**Please email portfolio to instructor by Friday, December 11.** Decisions will be sent by email to applicants on Friday, December 18.

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

During the course, each participant will write two short stories (or sections of novels). These should be approximately 8 to 15 pages long, typed in ordinary typeface and double-spaced. Handwritten work is not acceptable unless it is part of the text.

These stories will be presented twice, first in an early draft, then later, when the piece has been revised. Because revision is an intrinsic part of the creative process, each story will also require a 2 to 3 page “reflection paper” on the experience of revising your manuscript.

Students will be asked keep a “character journal”—a notebook to record observations about people, seen or imagined. Notes might include speech patterns, gestures, physical features, secrets and dreams, etc.

Students are expected to read an assigned short story (or essay) each week, and come prepared to discuss it.

Students are also expected—each week—to read the work of three or four students whose pieces we will be discussing in class. Comments are expected to be thoughtful, forthright and constructive.

(Each student is responsible for photocopying their own work so copies can be handed out one week before their workshop. Each student is responsible for paying for their own photocopying.)

### **EVALUATION:**

The final course grade will be based on the following:

1. 50%: Quality and originality of TWO short fiction manuscripts and short “reflection papers” for each.
2. 25%: Quality of editorial comments given to the work of others.
3. 10%: Character Journal
4. 15% Participation in class discussions and in-class exercises. Attendance.

There is no final exam in this course.

### **READING LIST:** (subject to minor modification)

Carver, Raymond. “Are These Actual Miles?” *Where I’m Calling From*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988. Print.

Hadley, Tessa. “Chapter 4.” *Clever Girl*. London: Vintage Books, 2013. Print.

Hemingway, Ernest. “Hills Like White Elephants.” *The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway*. New York: Scriber, 1998. Print.

Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird, Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994. Print.

Munro, Alice. “The Beggar Maid.” *Who Do You Think You Are?* Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1978. Print.

Oates, Joyce Carol. “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been? Selected Early Stories*. Toronto: Ontario Review Press, 1994. Print.

O’Connor, Flannery. “Everything That Rises Must Converge.” *Flannery O’Connor, The Complete Stories*. City: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1946. Print.

---. "Writing Short Stories." *Mystery and Manners*. New York: The Noonday Press, 1957. Print.

Wolff, Tobias. "Bullet in the Brain." *The Night in Question: Stories*. New York: Vintage, 1997. Print.

## **WEEKLY COURSE SCHEDULE—Winter 2016**

### **Week 1 / January 4 Introduction and Course Mechanics**

Characterization: an overview

Character Journal

Finding compelling characters / story ideas

In-class writing exercise

Manuscript submission schedule

First submissions by 3 participants are due by Thursday the 7<sup>th</sup>. Copies of these manuscripts are to be emailed to participants in order to be critiqued in class during Week 2. This occurs for this week only. On following weeks, hard copies of manuscripts will be distributed in class, one week prior to the date of critiquing.

Throughout the following classes we will be discussing a story (or essay) a week, with reference to the following topics: round and flat characters, direct versus indirect presentation, the importance of detail, dialogue, gesture, voice, character and plot, "No" dialogue, pacing, text and subtext, staging and characterization, the flawed character, inconsistency in characters.

From time to time, we will engage in an in-class writing exercise.

### **Week 2 / January 11**

Discussion: Raymond Carver, "Are These Actual Miles?"

Workshop manuscripts

### **Week 3/ January 18**

Discussion: Anne Lamott, "Character" in *Bird by Bird*

Workshop manuscripts

### **Week 4 / January 25**

Discussion: Ernest Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants"

Workshop manuscripts

### **Week 5 / February 1**

Discussion: Anne Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts" in *Bird by Bird*

Workshop manuscripts

### **Week 6 / February 8**

Discussion: Alice Munro, "The Beggar Maid"

Workshop manuscripts

## **WINTER BREAK: No class on February 15**

### **Week 7 / February 22**

Discussion: Flannery O'Connor, "Everything That Rises Must Converge"  
Workshop manuscripts

### **Week 8 / February 29**

Discussion: Tessa Hadley, "Chapter 4" of *Clever Girl*  
Workshop manuscripts

### **Week 9 / March 7**

Discussion: Joyce Carol Oates, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"  
Workshop manuscripts

### **Week 10 / March 14**

Discussion: Tobias Wolff, "Bullet in the Brain"  
Workshop Manuscripts

### **Week 11 / March 21**

Discussion: Anne Lamott, "Finding Your Voice" in *Bird by Bird*,

### **Week 12 / March 28**

Discussion: Flannery O'Connor, "Writing Short Stories"  
Workshop manuscripts

### **Week 13 / April 4**

Workshop manuscripts

## **PLAGIARISM**

The University Senate defines plagiarism as "*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own.*" This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;

- handing in "substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs."

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor. The Associate Dean of the Faculty conducts a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include a final grade of "F" for the course. For more information please go to:

<http://www2.carleton.ca/studentaffairs/academic-integrity>

### **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 <http://carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/academic/students/>

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 above.

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](mailto: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).

