

ENG 318-2B: ADVANCED FICTION WRITING

Instructor: Shena McAuliffe

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Office: Van Etten-Lacey House

Office Hours: Wednesdays 3-5pm (and by appointment)

Classroom: Cole Library 410

Class Meeting Times: 12pm-3pm (Unless otherwise noted)

We should not forget that to be a fine story writer is to be an artist of language, someone who uses sentences to produce feeling. However simple this sounds, there is something extraordinary about it to me, given how few sentences that we encounter in our daily lives can manage to make us feel anything, to stir us toward revelation. The sentence, as a technology, is used for so many rote exchanges, so many basic communication requirements, that to rescue it from these necessary mundanities, to turn it into feeling, is to do something strenuous and heroic.

-Ben Marcus (From his introduction to the
Anchor Book of New American Short Stories)

Description

In this class, we'll form a community of writers, learning from what we read and from each other. We will read widely and write rigorously. We will practice thinking and talking about our own writing and the writing of others. Through writing, we will explore our ideas, expand our imaginations, and pay closer, deeper attention to the world in which we live. Because this is an advanced course, you'll be expected to push yourself to explore new territory in your writing, and to develop those skills at which you already excel.

Class Goals

- Cultivate attention and close observation. Think and see like a writer.
- Read a wide variety of stories. Expand our definition of "story."
- Write creatively in wild and diverse formats.
- Develop our skills, vocabulary, and understanding as readers and critics, and apply those skills, vocabulary, and understandings to our own writing.
- Form a supportive and energetic community of writers.

Expectations:

Be present, physically and intellectually. Engage with the readings and share your ideas with your classmates. Take risks with your writing. Be generous with your insights. Try new forms, strategies, voices, and styles in your writing.

Be curious, bold, imaginative, and kind when discussing each other's work. I hope our classroom will be a comfortable and creative environment. Please cultivate respect for each other. Honor and accept different opinions, beliefs, values, and voices. These differences are often what make fiction such a delight.

Required Texts and Materials

Alice LaPlante: *The Making of a Story*
Anne Carson: *Autobiography of Red*
Rainer Maria Rilke: *Letters to a Young Poet*
Printed versions of stories posted on Moodle
A notebook

Your To-Do List

Maintain a Writer's
Lead workshop
Participate
Complete Exercises as assigned (in-class, out-of-class)
Literary magazine review (1-2 page paper, presented to class)
Final Portfolio
Discussion of 7 fiction writing terms and how you used them in your work
1 full-length revised story (minimum 12pg/Maximum 24pg, unless you've discussed it with me)
5 "best" exercises, cleaned up
1 revised and polished "fake"

Writer's Notebook/Book of Wonders: You'll use this notebook for recording observations of the world, snippets of dialog, ideas for stories, newspaper clippings, odd headlines, what-have-you, riff-raff and zig-zag, in-class exercises, story ideas, Rilke responses, definitions of terms and concepts as they come up...We'll be writing during almost every class, so you're going to generate a lot of material. Please feel free to put anything in this writer's notebook: thoughts, observations, questions, pictures, lists of possible titles, *anything*. I will collect the notebooks twice during the block and it will be graded on completeness. The most important thing is to use your notebook to train yourself to pay attention.

More on written responses: Throughout the block, you'll read craft essays, textbook chapters, plenty of fiction, and Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*. Sometimes I will ask for a specific response to a reading. Sometimes I will provide guiding questions. On these occasions, please write a paragraph (or a few) in your notebook and be prepared to share your thoughts and ideas in class. These responses are intended to help you sort and prepare your ideas. These entries, along with the rest of your notebook, might also serve as a record for your future self to see a little of how you thought way back in the now.

Out of Class Exercises: I will often assign exercises intended to help you apply the skills and concepts we are reading and thinking about from the textbook, essays, and stories. These are not all listed on the syllabus, and many of them will be described in-class on the day before they are due. They will be graded on a check/check-plus/check minus system, with a check meaning you completed the work with moderate attention and a check plus meaning you did a stellar job. **Please type and print all of your out-of-class exercises.** We will often exchange and discuss them in class, and handwriting is just too difficult to decipher. Note: the walking exercise and the fakes exercise will have extra weight. More on these later.

Workshop Submission: On Friday, October 10, everyone will turn in a full-length story (minimum of 10 pages, maximum of 16 pages). During week 3, we will discuss each story in-turn. Bring 14 printed copies of your story: stapled, paginated, and titled. Late stories will not be accepted, and turning in a workshop

piece is worth 40% of your participation grade. Turn it in on time. (NOTE: rolling deadlines discussed in class)

Lead Workshop: You will each be responsible for leading the workshop for one of your classmates. We will go over the expectations for leading workshop on Friday, October 10, when your stories are due.

Literary Magazine Review: Each of you will be responsible for reading and reviewing a literary magazine of your choice. I have provided a list of magazines on Moodle and can loan you a magazine if you choose one that I already have in my possession (first-come, first-serve). You are welcome to purchase a magazine that is not on the list, but please discuss your choice with me beforehand. On October 20, you'll bring your magazine to class and discuss its editorial slant, contents, etc., in order to introduce your magazine to your classmates as a possible publishing venue. Please turn in a 1-2page double-spaced "report"/review of your chosen publication after your presentation.

Final Portfolio: You will receive a handout that offers more detail on the required contents of the final portfolio during week 3.

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| Attendance and | Attendance and participation are necessary to pass this class. You are granted one |
| Participation | absence, no questions asked (but do not miss class on the day of your workshop). If you know you're going to be absent, it's always better to notify me in advance. If you have an emergency, contact me as soon as possible. |

Attendance means being present in body and mind. Turn your phone off. iPods, iPhones, Blackberries, text messaging—all off. Laptops are provisionally allowed for the sake of your writing, but I reserve the right to revoke laptop privileges at any point during the course.

Participation is key to your success in this class. Please share your ideas and complete your work with vigor. If you have a concern or question about completing an assignment or participating in a particular class activity, please see me as soon as possible.

Grading (percent of grade)

Writer's Notebook/Book of Wonders: 15
Participation: 25
Leading Workshop: 5
Out-of-Class Exercises: 20
Literary Magazine Review (1-2page paper, presented to class): 5
Final Portfolio: 30

Document Guidelines: With certain exceptions, please follow these guidelines for all documents:

- Typed
- Double-spaced
- One-inch margins
- 12-point "normal" font, like Helvetica, Calibri, Times New Roman, etc.
- Paginated
- Spellchecked!

Academic Honesty

Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, as student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement of honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in *The Catalogue*, under the heading "Academic Honesty."

Disabilities**Accommodations**

Students who need accommodations for learning disabilities must provide documentation from a professional qualified to diagnose learning disabilities. For more information see cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/documentation/index.shtml

Students requesting services may schedule a meeting with the disabilities services coordinator as early as possible to discuss their needs and develop an individualized accommodation plan. Ideally, this meeting would take place well before the start of classes.

At the beginning of each course, the student must notify the instructor within the first three days of the term of any accommodations needed for the duration of the course.

Course Schedule (Subject to change)

WEEK 1

M 9/29: Class meets at 9:00 am

Introductions, Syllabus, etc.

T 9/30:

LaPlante: Ch. 4 (152-178)

O'Connor: "Writing Short Stories" (moodle)

O'Connor: "Parker's Back" (moodle)

Hemon: "The Life and Work of Alphonse Kauders" (moodle)

In your Writer's Notebook: Responses to questions posted on Moodle AND something else...something you noticed, a curiosity, character description, overheard conversation, list of possible titles...

Due in class: LaPlante Exercise 1 OR 2 (p165-166) for a fictional character.

W 10/1:

Rilke: Letters 1-3 (-21) with response in writer's notebook.

LaPlante: Ch. 11 (Raising the Curtain: 465-478: skip sections on nonfiction)

Sharma: "Surrounded By Sleep" (in LaPlante, p. 441: pay close attention to how the story begins)

Salter: from *Light Years* (Moodle)

Bring to class: the first page of a story of novel you admire and thoughts/notes on why you admire it.

Due in class: 2 wildly different versions of the opening of a story. Read the LaPlante exercises on 476-478, but no need to stick too closely to them. Try beginning in medias res, try beginning with atmosphere and language, play with your syntax, begin with a character description...just make the two openings very different from each other.

TH 10/2:

LaPlante: Ch 5 (Why You Need to Show and Tell: 204-227: skip sections on nonfiction)

Duraj: "Fatherland" (Moodle) Skype with the author during class

Due: Exercise 1 or 2 (224-226)

F 10/3:

LaPlante Ch. 7: How Reliable is This Narrator? (318-340)

La Plante: Ch. 7 (318-340)

Wideman: "Fever" (moodle)

Saunders: "Escape from Spiderhead" (moodle)

WEEK 2:

M 10/6: CLASS MEETS AT 10:00AM

Walking Stories (moodle)

Schulz: "The Cinnamon Shops"

Joyce: Excerpt from *Ulysses*

Walser: "A Little Ramble"

Cardiff: video walk

Jackson: "Snow"

T 10/7: CLASS MEETS AT 10:00AM AND 1:00PM

Fakes (moodle)

Vollmer & Shields: "Introduction: Learning How to Fake It"

Martone: Excerpt from *Blue Guide to Indiana*

Shapley: Excerpts

Moody: "Primary Sources"

Hollars: excerpts

Visit the archives 1PM

W 10/8:

Rilke Letters 4-6

Autobiography of Red

TH 10/9: CLASS MEETS AT 10:30AM AND 1PM

Thon (moodle)

Jackson (moodle)

(Optional: Evenson: "Two Brothers") (moodle)

(Possible: Johnson: "Emergency")

Meet in the Anatomy Lab at 1pm

F 10/10:

Rilke Letters 7-10

Fakes Due (draft)

WORKSHOP STORIES DUE FOR MONDAY

WEEK 3

M 10/13:

La Plante: Ch 10 (Recognizable People)

Groff: "L. DeBard and Aliette" (moodle)

In Class: Workshop Stories 1-4

WORKSHOP PIECES DUE FOR TUESDAY

T 10/14:

Short-Shorts: Barthelme, Kincaid, Hempel, Davis,
Shuman (Moodle) OR Excerpts from Torres (Moodle)
In class: Workshop Stories (5-7)

WORKSHOP STORIES DUE FOR WEDNESDAY

W 10/15:

International Writers' stories (Moodle)
In class: Workshop Stories (8-10)

WORKSHOP STORIES DUE FOR THURSDAY

TH 10/16:

In-class: Workshop Stories (11-13)

INTERNATIONAL WRITERS IN CLASS: 2-3PM

INTERNATIONAL WRITERS' READING: 4pm

F 10/17:

La Plante Ch 13 (Learning to Fail Better: Revision)

WEEK 4

M 10/20:

Lit Mag Review (Presentations)
Lit Mag Review short papers due

**T 10/21: CLASS MEETS BOTH MORNING AND
AFTERNOON**

Reading/Celebration of your Work

W 10/22: Final Portfolios Due

CORNELL OUTCOMES

Advanced Fiction Writing aims to contribute to the following Cornell Outcomes and Educational Priorities:

KNOWLEDGE: Students will integrate and apply knowledge from a focused area of study (we will focus on building our knowledge regarding fiction writing), as well as a broad general education, which includes disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives in the arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences. Creative writing is, by nature, interdisciplinary (we must find something to write about, and writing about writing only takes one so far.) During this course, we will seek inspiration from science (specifically anatomy), visual and performing art, music, film, history, and anywhere else our attention wanders. Good writing demands that we graze widely and observe deeply.

INQUIRY: Students will respond to the complexities of contemporary and enduring problems using information literacy tools, research skills. (See “knowledge, above. As writers, we will interpret “research,” and “inquiry” widely, seeking information everywhere, gaining skills in finding that information, and following curiosity where it leads.)

COMMUNICATION: is at the heart of writing. We want to tell our stories and hear each other’s stories. We want to communicate effectively, transmitting our imagined worlds into the minds of our readers.

INTERCULTURAL LITERACY: we will read texts by writers who represent a wide variety of cultural, socioeconomic, racial, sexual, and religious backgrounds. Some of these texts directly address questions of identity and culture, while others communicate about these such questions in less obvious ways. Similarly, each member of our class represents a unique combination of personality traits and cultural backgrounds. By reading and writing together, and through discussing what we find in our reading and writing, we are invited to develop intercultural literacy. That said, it is our goal to develop this literacy in an open and sensitive manner, avoiding assumptions and seeking, as writers and as humans, deeper empathy and more complex understandings of ourselves and others.

CITIZENSHIP: In this class our focus will be on “literary citizenship.” What does it mean to be a writer among writers? What does it mean to be a writer at Cornell College? In Mount Vernon? In Iowa? In the US? In the world? How can we put our stories into the world in a way that will invite readers to engage with them? And where can we find others’ stories? How can we spread literature like a luminous rash or a plague of magnolias? We will form a small literary community, and we will consider the broader literary community that surrounds us. We will complete a writing project that will target unsuspecting readers on the Cornell campus, and we will review literary magazines to gain familiarity with a circle of writers we may soon join by publishing our work within the pages of such magazines.