

Professor Rebecca Entel  
rentel@cornellcollege.edu  
Office: 105 South Hall x4225  
Classroom: 100 South Hall  
Office Hours: M 3-4:30, F 11-1, and by appointment

## **ENG 318: Advanced Fiction Writing**

Spring 2019 Block 7

Welcome to Advanced Fiction Writing! This block we'll be delving deep into the nuts and bolts of fiction writing through shared readings, discussions, and lots of writing. This workshop will be generative (you will be producing on a regular basis, both in and out of class) as well as reflective (you will be studying published writing and essays on craft and applying what you observe to your own writing and revisions). We will also focus on what it means to build and participate in a writing community by hosting writers, attending creative events on campus, writing book reviews, honing constructive workshopping skills, and planning a reading. This course is an advanced workshop, so hours of independent work are required each day for your writing to progress; plan to spend at least 40 hours a week working, including time both in and out of class.

Several assumptions guide this course:

- Good reading makes good writing. Your work improves when you expose yourself to a wide range of writers and when you understand the traditions you are contributing to, departing from, or bringing together in a new way.
- We are a community of writers who learn from one another. Commenting on others' writing will improve your own by helping you apply an editor's eye.
- Fiction is not just about "what happens." Fiction is the art of words. Mark Twain reminds us that "the difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter – it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning." The same goes for such aspects of writing as punctuation and sentence structure: each word, comma, etc., you put on the page should be chosen thoughtfully (if not in the first draft, then in the second, third, fourth...). You should also *read* carefully enough to notice word choice, punctuation use, etc., in others' work. (Strong proofreading skills will be required; I encourage you to seek help from me and from the Writing Studio if this is a weaker area for you.)
- There is no secret to becoming a fabulous writer. We will subscribe to Frank Conroy's philosophy of "butt-in-chair" time: writing doesn't occur through lightning strikes of inspiration but through the daily grind of forcing yourself to write on a regular basis; you want to be in that chair when inspiration may choose to come.
- The block system is ideal for focusing solely on your writing for a chunk of time; the block system is not ideal for the kind of revision and development that occurs over time (sometimes years) in the work of writing. We will consider all of your writing this block to be works-in-progress that will call for your attention long after our course ends.
- Part of being a writer is participating productively in the larger writing community; to this end, we'll have several assignments and activities geared toward having each of you actively participate in the creative community of our class and on our campus.

In our study of a range of texts, our exploration of the process of writing and the writing life, and our collaboration as a class and on campus, this course will support the college's educational priorities in the areas of *knowledge, reasoning, communication, intercultural literacy, citizenship, and vocation*.

**Required Texts:** Bring relevant readings to class.

Ed. Roxane Gay, *The Best American Short Stories 2018*

Alice LaPlante, *The Making of a Story*

Shena McAuliffe, *The Good Echo*

Readings on Moodle (print and bring to class)

Your work!

### **Schedule:**

- We will meet at 12:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday and at 9 a.m. on Friday *unless otherwise noted*.
- Readings are to be completed before the times they are listed for discussion; assigned exercises are due to Moodle an hour before class and, when specified, in printed copy at the start of class.
- Please note the 4:00 reading on Monday, March 25<sup>th</sup>. If you cannot attend due to an unresolvable conflict, you should discuss that with me during week 1.

### **WEEK ONE**

M 3/18 **Class meets at 1:00 p.m.**

Introductions

T 3/19 Details

O'Connor, "The Nature and Aim of Fiction" and "Writing Short Stories" (Moodle)

LaPlante, Chapter Three (107-130 and 147-151)

Due (to Moodle and in class): Exercise 1 *or* 2 (in LaPlante 127-130)

W 3/20 Structure

LaPlante, Chapter Four (152-167) and "Ralph the Duck" (521-533)

Iskandrian, "Good With Boys" (in Gay 157-166 and 308-309)

Bell, chapter on "Signs of Life" (Moodle)

Th 3/21 Showing and Telling

LaPlante, Chapter Five (204-245)

Henriquez, "Everything is Far from Here" (in Gay 149-156 and 308)

Solomon, "Whose Heart I Long to Stop with the Click of a Revolver" (in Gay 279-289 and 313-314)

Due (to Moodle): Exercise 1 or 2 (in LaPlante 224-227)

Conferences (Thursday or Friday)

F 3/22 **Class meets at 9 a.m.**

Silverberg, "Suburbia!" (in Gay 251-261 and 312-313)

Baxter, "On Defamiliarization" (Moodle)

DUE in class: a draft of your short short story, based on one of the week's exercises (including in-class writing)

Group 1 exercise

Conferences (Thursday or Friday)

Creative Event: Freewrite Fridays (VEL, 3:00-6:00)—featuring an exciting summer opportunity from the International Writing Program

**Saturday 3/23 DUE by noon to Moodle: Short short story**

## **WEEK TWO**

M 3/25 Author Shena McAuliffe visits class!

McAuliffe, *The Good Echo*, prologue and sections I-IV (pp. 1-201)

Bring questions for Shena McAuliffe

Required Creative Event: Shena McAuliffe reading at VEL **(4:00 p.m.)**

T 3/26

**10:00-11:00** Coffee with the author: with Shena McAuliffe at Zamora's

**1:00**

McAuliffe, *The Good Echo*, section V and Author's Note on research (to end)

Group 2 exercise

W 3/27

LaPlante, Chapter Eleven (465-506) and Chapter Nine (375-390)

Due (to Moodle and in class): Exercise 1 or 2 (in LaPlante 388-390) OR Exercise 1, 2, or 3 (in LaPlante 475-478)

Group 3 exercise

Th 3/28 Joint class with ENG 215 **(meet in Berlin Room, Thomas Commons at 1:00)**

Story from *Best American* TBA (chosen by group 4)

Group 4 exercise

F 3/29 **Class meets at 9 a.m.**

Discussion of book reviews and submitting your work

Book Review readings (article and link to Kirkus Reviews on Moodle)

Due (in class): draft of book review; bring laptop/tablet/etc. for practice with journal search engines

**DUE by 3:00 to Moodle: Book Review (with link to Goodreads, Amazon, etc.)**

Creative Event: Freewrite Fridays (VEL, 3:00-6:00)

## **WEEK THREE**

M 4/1 **Class meets at 1:00**

Bring 10 copies of your workshop piece (OR submit it to Moodle by noon if you want me to copy it for you)

T 4/2 **Class meets at 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.**

Workshop groups A (3 drafts) and B (3 drafts)

Creative Event: Mission Creek Festival in Iowa City (March 2-7; literature events schedule by day here: <http://missioncreekfestival.com/schedule-2019/>)

W 4/3 **Class meets at 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.**

Workshop group C (3 drafts) and workshop wrap-up

Th 4/4 **Class meets at 9:00 a.m.** with poet/playwright Jen Rouse

LaPlante, Chapter Thirteen (542-574)

Due (to Moodle and in class): One revision exercise (in Laplante 553-556), based on workshop piece

F 4/5

Writing Day on your own (and virtual office hours)

Creative Event: Freewrite Fridays (VEL, 3:00-6:00)

## **WEEK FOUR**

M 4/8

Conferences

T 4/9

Class Reading and course wrap-up

W 4/10

**Due to Moodle by noon: Final independent projects (with contributor's notes and submission materials); revision of your short short story (optional).**

## **Assignments:**

- **Exercises:** you will complete exercises out of class regularly throughout the block. These exercises should be uploaded to Moodle at least one hour before class on the days they are due. Bring a printed copy to class when specified in the syllabus (or announced in class). Exercises are not completed works of fiction, but the versions you turn in must be thoughtful and should be as polished as you can make them in the time allotted – *not first drafts*. While each individual exercise is not graded, you will receive an overall exercise grade for completion. Please use office hours to discuss any ungraded exercises you'd like additional feedback on (especially if they are feeding into your independent project). Due: see schedule.
- **Short Short story:** Your first graded piece of fiction will be a short short story (1200 words or less). This piece will develop from a week one exercise (either from the LaPlante assignments or from in-class writing). The challenge of such a short piece is that you must make very careful choices and exercise strong fictional technique to create a complete story within a short space. My grading will be focused on the fictional techniques we work on as a class during week one; more information will be available on Moodle and discussed in class. We will workshop drafts in class and meet one-on-one in conferences on Friday, March 22nd. Due: Saturday, March 23rd.
- **Independent Project:** this project is a piece of fiction you will work on throughout the block, receiving feedback along the way from the entire class and from me. The number of pages you

submit to the class for workshop is limited to 8 pages double-spaced, though your final version will be 10-15 pages (or possibly longer). You may work on a piece you began before the start of the block, however, you may *not* turn in any work you have not worked on since the start of the block. You are encouraged to meet with me in office hours about your independent work, especially after your class workshop. Polished draft due for workshop: Monday, April 1st. Final version due: Wednesday, April 10<sup>th</sup>.

- **Contributor's Note and Submission Materials:** You will turn in the final version of your independent project with several supporting materials. First, you will write a contributor's note (with bio and story genesis/evolution), patterned after those found in Gay's edited collection. (Your bio may be real or fictional). Second, you will research a literary journal that seems like a good fit for your story and will submit a cover note (as specified by the journal's submission requirements) as well as a paragraph about why the journal is a good fit. We'll discuss ways to search for journals in class.
- **Group Exercises and Annotations:** Working in groups of two or three, you will lead class with a writing exercise, designed by your group, related to that day's reading. (You do not have to relate to *all* of the readings for that day; you may choose one.) I will mark off about 45 minutes for your group; if you may need more time, speak with me before your assigned day. Your group will decide how you want to divide the time for the introduction of the exercise (details, relevance, purpose – including relation to the reading), actually doing the exercise, sharing/discussing the results, and concluding the lesson. On the day of your presentation you'll also turn in to Moodle: (a) a written version of the exercise; (b) an explanation of your exercise's relation to the reading and its purpose (about 500 words); (c) a list of at least 10 analytic annotations on the relevant reading modeled after Bell's chapter. Please note the annotations should be in formal sentences and should be as long as necessary to be clear; you will annotate a short story, not a craft reading. Your group need only turn in one version of (a) and (b); each of you will turn in your own version of (c). Due: the day of your group's exercise.
- **Book Review:** online book reviews have become an important factor in whether a book gets public attention from other readers. A good literary citizen can write short reviews on sites such as Goodreads to let other readers know about a book. You will each write a short review of Shena McAuliffe's *The Good Echo* and will post it on at least one online forum. I will provide more details before the deadline. Due: Friday, March 29<sup>th</sup>.
- **Discussion and Workshop:** Each member of the class is responsible for being part of a productive discussion, informed by the readings and your questions about the readings. In addition, we will discuss strategies for effective workshopping (both orally and in writing), and you are each responsible for providing considered feedback to your workshop group members. If at any time you are unsure how to prepare effectively for class, please speak with me in office hours. Participation grades will be affected by absences (more than one); lateness or leaving for portions of class; being unprepared; doing other things in class.
- **Creative Events:** each of you should plan to attend at least two creative events this block. We have one required creative event on Monday, March 25<sup>th</sup>; the second is your choice. These events take place outside of class hours; if you are unable to attend due to work, athletics, etc., *speak with me in week one so we can find an alternative*. Within 48 hours of attending, turn into Moodle a write-up of about 250 words describing the event and discussing what you got out of

it as a creative writer. If you have another event in mind to attend (for example, an event on campus hosted by Lyrically Inclined), you must get the event approved by me *before* you attend.

**Course Policies:** Read these carefully; you will be held responsible for all policies.

**Grading:**

Discussion and workshop	15%
Exercises completed	5%
Short short story (1200 words or less)	20%
Group exercise	10%
Annotations	10%
Book Review	10%
Final independent project	20%
Contributor's note and submission materials	5%
Creative Events	5%

**Reading and writing in class:** Bring readings for the day with you (whether books or printed from Moodle); you'll need to refer to them in class. We will also be writing in class almost every day. You should have plenty of paper on which to write. I prefer not to have laptops or other devices in class due to the distractions they create; if you have a documented learning disability that requires you to write on a device – or if you have other reasons for feeling much more comfortable with typing rather than writing by hand – please speak with me in the first few days of class.

**What you can or can't write:** This course will be driven in many ways by what you, the writers, produce. While I will give you almost full freedom to define your independent project, I also expect your commitment to inventive creation and avoidance of any short-cuts such as clichés of language, structure, or plot. You should not be relying on pre-determined characters or plots or producing work that could be considered fan fiction; in other words, your story should be your own creation. In addition, because we will not be studying children's or young-adult literature, you will not be writing pieces for children or young adults in this particular course. We will read literary fiction in this course and will approach our writing as literary writers; that designation sets no bounds on content but does set an expectation for attention to language and depth of character. Finally, while you may workshop pieces begun before the block starts, you should not workshop something you haven't worked on at all since the block began.

**Attendance and Participation:** This class requires faithful attendance, attention, and participation from all of its members. Your participation grade will rest on whether you are doing your part as a productive and cooperative member of the class: coming to class fully prepared and contributing in ways that advance the discussion. Because we are a smaller group this block, each person's contributions are all the more significant. The better prepared you are and more you contribute and listen to one another, the more you will learn. Make sure your phones are turned off and put away, that you refrain from talking with those around you during class, and that you eliminate any other distractions that may detract from the class atmosphere. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate, to make up assigned work, and to turn in anything that was due that day. Being late to class or not being prepared and engaged may all constitute absences; students who appear to be falling asleep in class will be asked to leave. If you experience an illness that will keep you out of class for more than two days, you will probably need to seek a Health Withdrawal. Fifteen-day Drops will

only be granted according to College policy, which specifies the student has completed all assignments and made a good-faith effort to pass the course. Keep in mind that once the workshop schedule is set, it cannot be revised – i.e., there are no make-up workshops.

**Keeping in touch:** Email is considered an official mode of communication at Cornell; you are expected to check your email at least once a day and to be attentive to any email you receive about our course. If you are having any problems with the course, I strongly encourage you to come talk to me. Not responding to emails or missing scheduled appointments with me will affect your grade. Please make use of office hours.

**Disabilities:** Cornell College is committed to providing equal educational opportunities to all students. 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](http://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. The student must notify the instructor within the first three days of the term of any accommodations needed for the duration of the course.

**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, a student is asserting that the submission is his or her 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 for 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." If you have any questions about your use of others' work this term, see me about citation guidelines and proper use of sources. Our librarians and the Writing Studio staff are also wonderful resources for questions about the use of sources.