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ENG 4763-600: Advanced Fiction Writing

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Eastern Illinois University

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ENG 4763-600: Advanced Fiction Writing (3 cr hrs) Spring 2021 * Synchronous Online * MW 3:00-4:15pm

Instructor:

Dr. Bess Winter

bwkosinec@eiu.edu

Office: Online

Office Hours: MW 2pm-3pm, T Th 3:15-4:15 pm or by appointment – access office hours

Zoom room through this link, or link on our d2l page: <https://eiu.zoom.us/j/2392840392>

If I'm in a conference with someone, you'll be placed in the waiting room.

Texts & Materials:

Carmen Maria Machado, *Her Body and Other Parties*

Annie Proulx, *Close Range: Wyoming Stories*

Selected readings, available on d2l

Course Description:

The purpose of this class is to get you thinking about the contemporary short fiction landscape and how you, and your writing, contribute to that landscape. This involves not just writing, but reading widely, and considering writers' individual voices. By the end of this course you'll be more familiar with how short fiction collections "work": how an author uses his or her writerly identity to unify 8, 10, even 20 stories into a cohesive whole. If you haven't already, you'll also start to think about your influences: the fiction that inspires you and the writers and artists with whom you want your work to be in conversation.

This class continues and refines the skills you learned in Intermediate Fiction Writing. It assumes that you understand the workshop process and basic concepts of writer's craft and revision (a great primer for these concepts: *Writing Fiction*, by Janet Burroway, Elizabeth Stuckey-French & Ned Stuckey-French). Unit 2 functions as a full workshop; you'll workshop two of your own stories, lead workshop discussion, and read, respond to, and discuss the work of your fellow writers. You'll be expected to use comments garnered from these workshops in your own revisions. **For the purpose of this class, revisions are full rewrites or significantly changed drafts.** We'll also read two short story collections in their entirety.

You will complete 3 major assignments: a presentation on a collection of short stories (Collection Analysis), an Identity Statement and Creative Imitation, and a graded final portfolio.

Objectives:

By the end of this course you will:

- Understand “writerly identity,” and start to think about your own
- Start to be able to identify your influences
- Be more familiar with the process of writing a book-length work and the choices a writer makes when assembling a collection
- Have two workshopped story drafts, and one revised draft (or two revised drafts if you are a graduate student)

If you are experiencing trauma or distress

Please note that, while writing can be a very personal act, this class is not a therapeutic environment and should not be taken in place of therapy. If you are experiencing personal issues, depression, anxiety, trauma, etc, your best resource is always the EIU Counseling Clinic, 1st floor of the Human Services Building, which takes walk-in appointment requests and can also be reached at 217-581-3413 during the day, and 1-866-567-2400 in case of after-hours emergency. Do not hesitate to take advantage of this resource – it’s yours. As a State of Illinois employee, I’m a Mandated Reporter and must also report incidents of sexual assault or violence to our Title IX Coordinator.

Assignments & Grading (out of 1000 points):

Participation (class and workshop discussion, responses, and leadership) – 250

Lions in Winter Reflection – 50

Collection Analysis Presentation – 150

Identity Statement and Creative Imitation – 250

Portfolio – 300

- Story Revision – 150
- Artist’s Statement – 150

Extra credit: English Studies Conference Presentation – 50

Participation

This includes participation in class discussion, attendance, doing the readings, and taking part in Lions in Winter.

Workshop Responses

You will be prepared for every workshop class by doing the following:

- 1) Write comments in the margins of story up for discussion.
- 2) Write a 1-page critique for each peer-written story we read this semester.

Workshop Leadership

You will be responsible for leading two workshop discussions this term. You’ll introduce your peer’s story by a) summing up your understanding of the story’s plot, goals, influences, and possibly its relationship to the writer’s previous work and b)

presenting the class with 2-3 questions/concerns you'd like us to address during the workshop. Your questions and insights should be respectful and deeply considered.

Workshop Submissions

Stories should be submitted a week (7 days) before class via d2l discussion board. Works that are not submitted on time will not be workshopped. Speak to me if an emergency comes up so we have time to make alternate arrangements. Students should post their responses on d2l. **Do not submit stories longer than 15 pages. There is simply not enough time for us to workshop longer stories or selections in this class.**

Lions in Winter Reflection – Due by 5pm March 1 (d2l)

Attend either Joy Harjo or Joan Kane's reading and craft talk at this year's virtual Lions in Winter. Write a 1-2 page summary of and reflection on, or response to, their reading and craft talk.

Collection Analysis Presentation – Due in class Feb 15, 17, or 18

You will give a 10-minute presentation on a collection of short stories. You may choose any of the collections from the "Recommended Reading" list at the end of this syllabus (do not choose one of the titles that we're reading together in class). This collection should be one you haven't read before. In your presentation, you will touch on:

- The collection's fascinations/stylistic choices and how this relates to the author's own background and preoccupations
- The organizing principle of the book – does it work? Why or why not?
- In which publications did these stories originally appear? What is the audience for these publications? Who else is publishing in them, and at what points in their careers are these other writers?
- Your overall evaluation of the book – which stories/moments were most successful? Which were less so? Refer to specific moments in the text (quote from stories).

You may use the screencast function in Collaborate if you so choose.

Identity Statement and Creative Imitation – Due by 5pm Mar 31 (d2l)

We'll spend the first half of the course talking about what makes a writer (or artist's) identity: their voice, their techniques, the ideas and beliefs they bring to their work. Think about our discussions re: Machado and Proulx and then write a 3-4-page statement about your writerly self. Your writerly identity is formed by your many influences and manias: family, religion, community, race, gender, sexuality, music, popular culture, history, film, fiction, poetry, theatre, opera, sports, objects you cherish, etc. However, this statement should be more than a laundry list of things that influence you; it should explain how you use, or hope to use, technique and writer's craft to bring your influences to the page. Consult *Writing Fiction* by Janet Burroway, Elizabeth Stuckey-French & Ned Stuckey-French for a refresher on craft terms and techniques.

Think of this as a critical assessment or manifesto, of sorts. If you'd like, you can divide this into 2 sections: *My Influences* (be sure to explain why you are influenced by them and how they influence you) and *What I Do with Them*. You may also format this part of the assignment as a literary interview like those we read for class, if you so choose.

In the second part of this assignment, you'll write a 500-word creative imitation of either *Her Body and Other Parties* or *Close Range: Wyoming Stories*. This imitation can be based on one story or on the overall preoccupations, tone, themes, and style of the book as a whole. However, this imitation should not simply copy a story and/or its characters; it should bring the fascinations you mention in your Identity Statement to the page, as well—in short, this piece should be Machado or Proulx *as interpreted through the lens of you*. A reader in this class should be able to pick up this imitation and know, from reading, both whom it is imitating and who has written this piece. The imitation doesn't have to be a whole story; it can be a beginning, an end, whatever.

The Final Portfolio – Due Wed May 5th by 11:55 pm (d2l)

This will contain your revised short story – or, if you are a graduate student, *both* revised stories. Fiction should be written in 12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced with one-inch margins, and turned in as a .docx file ONLY. Please include, also, a 3-5 page artist's statement.

Artist's Statement

In this statement you will not only discuss your revision process (the decisions you made, how you made those decisions, and what effect you see them having on your work), but relate your revision choices to the insights you made in your Identity Statement and Collection Analysis. How are your revision choices of a piece with your larger ideas about yourself as a writer, your interests, influences, and manias, and the work you read? Make references to craft/technique, and quote directly from your previous assignments, if you'd like.

Extra Credit: English Studies Conference Presentation – Due Apr 8

Give a fiction reading at the English Studies Conference (be sure to let me know when & where!).

Course Policies

Technical Requirements

To take this course, you must be able to do the following:

- Regularly access the Internet, using a laptop or desktop computer
- Download and upload email attachments
- Use Microsoft Word
- Use Collaborate Ultra for audio/video communications
- Use Adobe Reader (free download) or Preview (for Mac) to read PDF files

- Install software
- Stream online video
- Use a webcam and microphone

Attendance & Late Assignments

Your success in this class depends on full attendance and participation. Don't bother sending excuses for absences after the fact (put the creative energy into your writing), and please do not send emails asking to be caught up or assigned make-up work for an unexplained absence. Do, however, let me know ASAP beforehand if you would like to request an extension on an assignment, otherwise late assignments will receive a deduction of 5% per day.

Email Policy

This policy is borrowed from Dr. Tim Taylor's ENG 1001 syllabus.

I welcome emails if you have questions or concerns about your work in this class. However, I expect you to write emails in a professional manner-not like you are texting a close friend.

If you want to send me an email, follow the guidelines below. Emails should:

- Have a clear and concise subject line that provides gist of the email, such "Absent This Friday" or "Question about Revision" or "Availability for a Meeting?"
- Begin with a formal address, such as "Dr. Winter:" or "Dear Dr. Winter,"
- Use a respectful tone
- Provide questions or information in a succinct manner
- Use paragraph breaks for reading ease and strong organization
- Be edited and proofread effectively so as not to cause confusion
- Refrain from using abbreviations, "text-prose," or emojis
- Close with a short statement followed by a comma and your name, such as "Thanks for your time," or "Sincerely," or "Have a good weekend,"

I do my best to reply to all emails within 24 hours of receipt, but you're not likely to receive an instant reply, particularly if you're emailing within an hour of class. In that case, please speak to me directly after class.

You may also DM me on Slack. Please keep in mind that my reply will not be instant and may take up to 24 hours, or 48 hours on weekends.

Plagiarism

EIU English Department's Statement on Plagiarism: Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism – "The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's own original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language) – has the right and responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignments of a

grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office. Respect for the work of others should encompass all formats, including print, electronic, and oral sources.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

Accommodation for Disabilities

If you have a documented disability and are in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS). All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Stop by McAfee 1210 or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.

Once you have received your accommodations letter, please meet with me immediately, during office hours, in order for us to plan on arrangements specific to your needs and this course's assignments.

The Student Success Center

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (<https://www.eiu.edu/success/>) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to McAfee 1301.

Schedule

Note: I reserve the right to alter the schedule as befits our needs. You will always be notified beforehand via Slack and/or email.

Unit 1: Identity and the Contemporary Literary Landscape

Week 1, Jan 11 & 13

1/11: Intro to the course – Lions in Winter reflection introduced – readings on organizing short story collections (d2l and email)

1/13: Interview with Carmen Maria Machado (d2l) and “The Husband Stitch” and “Inventory” in *Her Body and Other Parties*

Week 2, Jan 18 & 20

1/18: No class – MLK Jr Day

1/20: "Mothers" and "Especially Heinous" in *Her Body and Other Parties*

Week 3, Jan 25 & 27

1/25: "Real Women Have Bodies" and "Eight Bites" in *Her Body and Other Parties*

1/27: "The Resident" and "Difficult at Parties" in *Her Body and Other Parties*

Week 4, Feb 1 & 3

2/1: Interview with Annie Proulx (d2l) and "The Half-Skinned Steer" and "The Mud Below" in *Wyoming Stories*

2/3: "Job History," "The Blood Bay," and "People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water" in *Wyoming Stories*

Week 5, Feb 8 & 10

2/8: "The Bunchgrass Edge of the World," "Pair a Spurs," and "A Lonely Coast" in *Wyoming Stories*

2/10: "The Governors of Wyoming," "55 Miles to the Gas Pump," and "Brokeback Mountain" in *Wyoming Stories*

Week 6, Feb 15 & 17

2/15: Collection Analysis Presentations

2/17: Collection Analysis Presentations

Unit 2: Workshop

Week 7, Feb 18 & 20

2/18: Collection Analysis overflow, Workshopper 1

2/20: Workshoppers 2 and 3

Week 8, Feb 22 & 24

2/22: Workshoppers 4 and 5

2/24: No class – personal wellness day

Week 9, Mar 1 & 3

3/1: Workshoppers 6 and 7

Lions in Winter Reflection due by 5pm Mar 1 (submit via d2l)

3/3: Workshoppers 8 and 9

Week 10 – Mar 8 & 10

3/8: Workshoppers 10 and 11

3/10: Workshoppers 12 and 13

Week 11, Mar 15 & 17

3/15: Workshoppers 14 and 15

3/17: Workshoppers 16 and 1

Week 12, Mar 22 & 24

3/22: Workshoppers 2 and 3

3/24: Workshoppers 4 and 5

Week 13, Mar 29 & 31

3/29: Workshoppers 6 and 7

3/31: Workshoppers 8 and 9

Identity Statement and Imitation due by 5pm March 31 (via d21)

Week 14, Apr 5 & 7

4/5: Workshoppers 10 and 11

4/7: No class – personal wellness day

English Studies Conference Thursday April 8

Week 15, Apr 12 & 14

4/12: Workshoppers 12 and 13

4/14: Workshoppers 14 and 15

Week 16, Apr 26 & 28

4/26: Workshopper 16 & wrap-up

4/28: Wrap-up overflow

Final portfolio due May 5 by 11:55pm – please submit documents as .docx files to their respective dropboxes (there will be one for the revision and one for the artist's statement).

Recommended Reading

Bernard Malamud, *The Magic Barrel*
James Alan McPherson, *Elbow Room*
Lucia Berlin, *A Manual for Cleaning Women*
Donald Ray Pollock, *Knockemstiff*
Steven Millhauser, *The Knife Thrower*
James Joyce, *Dubliners*
Karen Russell, *St. Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves*
Amy Hempel, *Reasons to Live*
Lorrie Moore, *Birds of America*
James Baldwin, *Going to Meet the Man*
Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies*
Christine Schutt, *Nightwork*
Mary Gaitskill, *Bad Behavior*
Kelly Link, *Magic for Beginners*
Annie Proulx, *Close Range: Wyoming Stories*
Alasdair MacLeod, *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun*
J.D. Salinger, *Nine Stories*
Shirley Jackson, *The Lottery and Other Stories*
Ray Bradbury, *The Illustrated Man*
Haruki Murakami, *After the Quake*
Etgar Keret, *The Nimrod Flipout*
Claire Beams, *We Show What We Have Learned*
Denis Johnson, *Jesus's Son*
Danielle Evans, *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*
Claire Vaye Watkins, *Battleborn*
Raymond Carver, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*
John Cheever, *The Enormous Radio*
Carmen Maria Machado, *Her Body and Other Parties*
Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, *Friday Black*
Diane Williams, *99 Stories of God*
Angela Carter, *The Company of Wolves*
George Saunders, *Tenth of December*
Amelia Gray, *Museum of the Weird*
Alice Munro, *Runaway*
Lydia Davis, *Break It Down*
Alissa Nutting, *Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls*
Junot Díaz, *Drown*
Edward P. Jones, *Lost in the City*
Helen Oyeyemi, *What Is Not Yours Is Not Yours*
Flannery O'Connor, *A Good Man is Hard to Find*
Stuart Dybek, *The Coast of Chicago*
Ottessa Moshfegh, *Homesick for Another World*
Octavia Butler, *Bloodchild and Other Stories*
Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Wind's Twelve Quarters*
Jamel Brinkley, *A Lucky Man*
Jenny Zhao, *Sour Heart*

Ken Liu, *The Paper Menagerie*
Lesley Nneka Arimah, *What it Means When a Man Falls From the Sky*
Rion Amilcar Scott, *The Insurrections*
Jen George, *The Babysitter at Rest*
Brad Felver, *The Dogs of Detroit*
AA Balaskovits, *Magic for Unlucky Girls*
Kirsten Valdez Quade, *Night at the Fiestas*
Dorthe Nors, *Karate Chop*
Jen Fawkes, *Mannequin and Wife*
Matt Bell, *A Tree or a Person or a Wall*
Venita Blackburn, *Black Jesus and Other Superheroes*
Erika Wurth, *Buckskin Cocaine*
Barry Hannah, *Airships*