

ENGL 2161: Introduction to Fiction Writing
UNO Ireland: Writing Workshops & Creative Arts, Summer 2019
Instructor: Jarred Marlatt
jmarlatt@uno.edu +89 497 6697

Course Description

ENGL 2161 is an introductory level workshop focusing on forms and techniques of fiction writing, taught in intensive (short term) format, in residence. Students will write three short stories and provide constructive feedback for the works of their classmates. Readings of published works will introduce the formats and elements of fiction as well as provide common terminology and guidance for workshop critiques. Each student will choose a published short story to analyze as a representation of at least one element of fictional craft and present this analysis to the class. Students should try to read the supplemental stories and craft essays prior to arrival in Cork.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, each student will be able to identify and analyze elements of craft in fiction. These elements will include developing character and voice, creating a complete narrative, understanding conflict and plot, and choosing and maintaining point of view. They will demonstrate this knowledge through annotation of their peers' work, writing and revising their own creative work, and leading a discussion on craft elements in the work of a published author.

Texts

Electronic versions of each short story and craft essay will be provided by the instructor.

Stories May Include:

J.D. Salinger, "Slight Rebellion Off Madison"
 Junot Diaz, "How to Date a Brown Girl"
 Kate Chopin, "The Story of an Hour"
 Ernest Hemmingway, "Hills Like White Elephants"
 Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find"
 Louise Erdrich, "Saint Marie"
 Tobias Wolff, "Bullet in the Brain"

Craft Essays May Include:

Janet Burroway, "Building Character: Characterization, Part I"
 Anna Keeseey, "Making a Scene"
 Chuck Wachtel, "You're Really Something: Narrative Voice in Fiction"
 Janet Burroway, "Long Ago: Fictional Time"
 Janet Burroway, "Far, Far Away: Fictional Place"

Additional stories may be assigned and will be provided by the instructor.

Assignments	Percentage of Final Grade
Short Story 1	15
Short Story 2	15
Short Story 3	15
Short Story Revision	15
Presentation	10
Workshop critiques for classmates	15
Reading Responses and Writing Notebook	10
Attendance and participation at student readings	5

First drafts of creative work will be graded based on effort to produce a complete narrative with developed characters; use of language; originality of ideas and style; and inclusion of the elements of literature. Analysis and presentation will be evaluated for insight based on the story and highlighted element of craft, and on suggestions provided to classmates for writing based on this insight. Workshop critiques will be graded based on quality of constructive feedback created by close reading and consideration.

All dates on the schedule are tentative. The presentations will coincide with the published story being analyzed, and the rest of the schedule will be adjusted accordingly.

Daily Schedule

Section 1: Character & POV

Lessons	Readings	Workshops / Presentations
1. Thurs. July 4 Course Introduction Character	Janet Burroway, "Building Character: Characterization, Part I" <i>J.D. Salinger, "Slight Rebellion Off Madison"</i>	Students will choose or be assigned dates to workshop both stories and to present their published story analysis.
2. Fri. July 5 How to Prepare for Workshop	<i>Junot Diaz, "How to Date a Brown Girl"</i> Guide to Workshop Feedback	
3. Mon. July 8 POV	POV handout	Short Story 1 1.

4. Tues. July 9	<i>Kate Chopin, "The Story of an Hour"</i>	Short Story 1 2.
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Section 2: Scene & Voice

Lessons	Readings	Workshops / Presentations
1. Wed. July 10 Scene versus Summary	Anna Keeseey, "Making a Scene" <i>Ernest Hemmingway, "Hills Like White Elephants"</i>	Presentation 1.
2. Thurs. July 11 * Short Story 2 revision due Friday 7/12 at noon	<i>Justin Torres, "Reverting to a Wild State"</i>	Short Story 1 3. Presentation 2.
3. Mon July 15 Voice	<i>Chuck Wachtel, "You're Really Something: Narrative Voice in Fiction"</i>	Short Story 2 1.
4. Tues July 16	<i>Hari Kunzru, "Magda Mandela"</i>	Short Story 2 2. Presentation 3.

Section 3: Conflict & Plot

Lessons	Readings	Workshops / Presentations
1. Wed July 17 Conflict * Short Story 3 due Fri. 7/19 at 11:59	Janet Burroway, "The Tower & the Net" Introduction to Revision	Short Story 2 3.

2. Mon July 22	<i>Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find"</i> Revision Exercise	Presentation 4.
3. Tues July 23 Plot	<i>Edgar Allen Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado"</i> Revision, Continued	Short Story 3 1. Presentation 5.
4. Wed July 24 *Short Story 1 or 2 Revision due Sunday 7/28 at noon	<i>Louise Erdrich, "Saint Marie"</i>	Short Story 3 2. 3. Presentation 6.

Section 4: Time and Place

Lessons	Readings	Workshops / Presentations
1. Mon July 29 Time	Janet Burroway, "Long Ago & Far Away" <i>Tobias Wolff, "Bullet in the Brain"</i>	Presentation 7.
2. Tues July 30 Revision	<i>Anton Chekov, "The Darling"</i>	Short Story Revision 1. Presentation 8.
3. Wed July 31 Place Revision	<i>Richard Ford, "Rock Springs"</i>	Short Story Revision 2. 3.
4. Thurs Aug 1 Wrap-up	<i>J.D. Sallinger, "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor"</i>	

- * **Bolded readings** should be read prior to arrival in Ireland. *Italicized readings* will be read in Ireland, although prior reading is recommended. All of the readings listed on this syllabus will be provided electronically, in advance of the start of the program.
- * Short Story 1 should be submitted to the instructor on or before Sunday, June 23. The instructor will distribute these to the entire class, and you should plan to read and prepare thoughtful feedback on all of your classmates' work prior to your arrival in Cork.
- * You should read all of the bolded craft essays prior to arrival in Cork. You must choose one to read and write a 1-2 page response paper, which should be submitted on or before Sunday, June 23.
- * Short Story 2 should be submitted to the instructor on or before Sunday, June 30. Based on what we cover during the first two weeks of class, you may revise this and resubmit it to the instructor on or before noon on Friday, July 12. The instructor will distribute these to the entire class on Saturday, July 13.
- * Short Story 3 should be submitted to the instructor by Friday, July 19 at 11:59 pm. This story should incorporate elements of writing and craft covered in the course up to that point. The professor will distribute the story to the class on Sunday, July 21.
- * Your revision of your first or second story should be submitted to the instructor by Sunday, 7/28 at noon. The professor will distribute these to the class on Sunday night.

Guide to Workshop Feedback

Every student will read, reread, and comment upon each workshopped story. Make line-level (grammatical, stylistic, sentence- or paragraph-level) comments on the manuscript itself, and submit 1-2 pages of big-picture (plot, character, conflict, and other story-wide craft elements) feedback on the day each story is workshopped in class. Please bring one hard-copy printout of this feedback for the professor and one for the author. Line-level comments on the manuscript can be submitted either in hard-copy or via email to both the author and the professor on the day the story is workshopped.

Feedback: Suggestions vs. Requirements

You have a lot of leeway in terms of the format of your story feedback, and a little leeway in terms of the content. Each feedback paper should include a few core elements:

1. What was interesting or memorable
2. What is working and why
3. What could use further revision and why
4. Reference to at least one element of craft, how it was used, and why it was effective
5. Plot and character analysis
6. 2-4 questions for in-class discussion of the story.

You can organize this information in either paragraph or list format, but you should include at least a few sentences in each category. You can also choose to address the author in third (she) or second (you) person, or not direct any comments to them at all (the story rather than the author does this...) At first, it might seem difficult to fill an entire page or two with your response to a story, but after we build up your critical vocabularies it will become much easier.

1. Interesting/Memorable

This is just what it sounds like. Without looking back, what thing(s) stick out in your mind. It could be the main character's distinctive voice, or the scene where she stole a carton of yogurt, or his relationship with his dog, or the description of the photographs on the ceiling over her bed. If you found it interesting or memorable, give the writer props for that. This is a good way to start the feedback paper, as it's light and positive and helps ground us in the story about to be discussed.

2. What's Working

This is where you go through and discuss the bigger-picture things that worked well in the story. Give specific examples from the story to support this, as it will help the author understand what is working, how it's working, and why. Try to reference the craft essays when discussing what works, and how these positive elements tied into and improved the story as a whole. This requires some critical thinking on your part. It's not enough to say you like something, but how and why that thing is working well.

3. Further Revision

On the flipside of the what's working section is the suggestions for further revision, which is perhaps the most important part of the entire feedback and workshop process. We already think our writing is pretty good, which is why we're sharing it. We're here now to find out how to make it better. Be considerate here, but also honest. Fall back on the craft essays, published stories, and things I've said to support your points. This isn't you attacking the story or the writer, and should not be interpreted as such. Rather, we are using what he know and are learning about the craft, structure, and creation of fiction to help our peers and ourselves improve.

4. Craft

Every story makes use of multiple elements of craft. It's inevitable. The reason we study elements of craft is because they are already a part of every story. But it's likely that one or two craft elements will stand out in a given story. For instance, we read "Saint Marie" when we're studying conflict because that is a craft element that is very distinctive in the story, but it can also be used to study character, voice, point of view, plot, or any other element of craft. Pick one of the craft elements covered in our essays – conflict, plot, character, point of view, scene, time, and place – or another one entirely, and talk about how that craft element is highlighted in this story and ways it was effective and/or could be used more effectively.

5. Plot and Character Analysis

Write a one or two sentence summary and analysis of the overall plot of the story, and a two or three sentence summary and analysis of the characters' central conflict. When discussing plot, it's simply what do the main character(s) do, to whom, and where/when do they do it? This is kind of a summary of the story when describing it to someone else. The queen died and then the king died. Short, sweet, and to the point.

When discussing conflict, it's focused more on the inner, emotional stuff that provides motivation and drives the story. Where the plot is a discussion of what, this is a discussion of why. The king died of grief after his wife's death. This lets us in on the emotional heart of the story, and also is a good indication of what the author was trying to accomplish and how successful we are in interpreting that.

6. Questions

The final part of your feedback are questions for further discussion. These can be things you didn't quite understand, things you thought were interesting and want to discuss further, craft elements, etc. You can also pose a hypothetical change to an element of the story that you think might help the author achieve her goals. For instance, what if you told this in first person point of view instead of third? How would that allow us to gain greater insight into the protagonist? The questions can be based on comments made earlier in your feedback, and they should provide you with a jumping-off point by which to discuss the story in class.

Sample Feedback

Jarred Marlatt

22 June 2018

ENGL 2161 Workshop Feedback

Smith Story 1: The Dog

1. Interesting/Memorable: One thing that continues to stick with me about this story is the description of the animal trapped in the garage. The scratching, thrashing sounds and the way the characters react to them was vibrant in their details and set the tone for the story.

2. What's Working: You do a great job of introducing us to the characters and conflict quickly and efficiently. In the first paragraph we learn that our narrator and his wife, Sarah, have a wild animal in their garage and they can't currently afford to have it removed. You then proceed to add little elements of additional conflict and tension as we progress toward the climax. Sarah has been married before, to a man who could better provide for her financially. The narrator has a gambling problem. Sarah's brother in law, Tom, is potentially having an affair with her, or is at least trying to. All of this causes the tension to build upon itself until it's finally resolved in that dramatic conclusion.

3. Further Revision: While you initially do a good job of orienting us, the story begins to jump around from scene to scene in such a way that we are at time unsure where we are in place and time. I couldn't tell when we were seeing a flashback and when it was in the narrative present, and it was hard to tell when we were in the narrator's imagination about what Sarah and Tom are doing together or when he is actually observing them. This serves to lessen the tension that otherwise builds beautifully, because we're distracted by trying to orient ourselves. If you help ground us consistently in time and space, we won't be distracted and can immerse ourselves fully in the story you've created.

4. Craft: The conflict in this piece builds really organically. At first, the narrator seems to have a happy marriage and peaceful life, but he slowly ends up in conflict with his wife and her brother-in-law (character versus character), his house and the dog in the garage (character versus environment), and even himself (character versus self). In every case, what starts as a relatively minor issue continues to escalate until it threatens to ruin his entire life. This is achieved through dialogue,

both spoken and unspoken (as in that hilarious scene where he has an entire argument with Tom when he's actually alone in the house), action (as when he breaks his finger trying to open the garage door), and tone (the wry, sarcastic description of everything pokes fun at the narrator while also ratcheting up the tension and his fury. Well done!

5.
 - a. **Plot:** A man tries to get a stray dog out of his garage.
 - b. **Conflict:** A man struggles to maintain his marriage and sense of self after a stray dog gets trapped in his garage.

6.
 - a. What were you trying to achieve in the flashback about how the narrator and Sarah first met?
 - b. Why isn't the narrator ever named?
 - c. Aside from the two sections of inner monologue, we don't really get much access into the narrator's thoughts. Why did you choose to write this in first person POV and how can that choice be more fully utilized?

Ta-da! Only a few sentences in each section and it ended up being a page and a half.