

WRTG 33600
FICTION WRITING II
TR 2:35-3:50
Smiddy Hall 112
Fall 2008

Instructor **Dr. Jack Wang**
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Office Phone **274-3493**
Office Hours **TR 4:00-5:00, R 1:10-2:30, and by appointment**
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Course Description

Fiction Writing II is the study of fiction writing for advanced writers, a course designed to move you beyond the principles of craft that you learned in Fiction Writing I to more sophisticated aspects of narrative and aesthetic theory.

This course is as much a course in reading as it is in writing. Those who aspire to write must read, widely and often. Toward that end, we will be reading short stories as well as essays on craft, all of which will deepen your understanding of the art of fiction writing and its attendant historical, aesthetic, and theoretical concerns. Naturally, we'll also be writing, and reading each other's writing—attentively, rigorously, and generously—in a workshop format that will emphasize process as much as product.

This course does not presume that you want to be a professional writer, but it certainly won't stop you if you do. As John Gardner tells us, "The qualities that make a true artist... make it important that the student writer never be prevented from working as seriously as he [or she] knows how to." Your aspirations as writers will be taken seriously in this course; there will be no limitations on how seriously you can work. Those of you who are serious enough to pursue further study will find yourselves prepared after this course for work at the graduate level.

Required Texts

3x33: Short Fiction by 33 Writers, Mark Winegardner, ed.
Creating Fiction, Julie Checkoway, ed.

Coursework

Craft annotations	25%
Short story #1 (portfolio with at least three drafts)	25%
Short story #2 (portfolio with at least three drafts)	25%
Written responses to peers' stories	20%
Participation	5%

The portfolios for both short stories must be complete in order to pass the course.

The Craft Annotations

In this course, you'll be asked to read as writers, which means understanding that "the story exists as it does because the author chose his [or her] form from among other possibilities," as R. V. Cassill reminds us. For six of the stories assigned, you will write a 750-word craft annotation assessing those choices. Guiding questions include "What is a notable aspect of this writer's craft?" "How has the author employed certain techniques to achieve desired effects?" and "What are some things I've learned from this story/writer that I could use in my own work?" Whenever possible, integrate some issue(s) of craft raised by our essays in your analysis.

The Workshop

In this course, we will be using an approach to workshop developed by Jane Smiley, as described in the essays "Interview with Jane Smiley" by Alexander Neubauer and "A Modified Smiley" by Marvin Diogenes. Unlike many workshops in which stories make only a single appearance, which emphasizes the "failure" or "success" of a single attempt, our workshop will consider each of your stories twice. This approach to workshop serves to emphasize (1) the process of writing, (2) an analytical approach to craft, (3) the importance of revision, and (4) the persistence of the work of writing, among other things. In keeping with Smiley's method, the class will be divided into two groups and each group will work through two drafts in workshop. For every draft you read, you will write a one-page double-spaced response using the analytical approach to craft that you have been developing in your craft annotations.

Course Policies

Online Courseware/Blackboard

Most handouts will be distributed electronically through Blackboard, which can be accessed by going to <http://courses.ithaca.edu>, selecting Blackboard (not WebCT), and logging in with your e-mail username and password. You will also distribute drafts of your stories via Blackboard. Please check regularly for updates and assignments.

Attendance

Attendance is crucial to your success in this course, so please come to class every day prepared and ready to contribute. All students are allowed two unexcused absences. **Thereafter, every unexcused absence will result in a one-third letter grade deduction to your final grade. In keeping with department policy, students who have six absences (excused or unexcused) will be dropped from the course, and if the last absence occurs after the period of withdrawal, they will receive an F in the course.** Whenever possible, please let me know ahead of time if you won't be in class. In cases of emergencies and school-authorized events, please document your absence. Remember, you are responsible for anything missed in class, including any changes to the syllabus.

Grading

Specific requirements for each assignment may differ, but in all cases my evaluation of your work will consider content, expression, command of craft, and maturity of thought. General criteria are as follows:

- A An A story is a vivid, artful, and engaging work of fiction that operates fully in the fictional mode—that is, moment-to-moment through the senses. Through convincing characterization and purposeful design, the writer demonstrates a strong grasp of narrative craft. An A story is capable of producing plausible surprise and therefore bears rereading. The language is fresh and evocative and unhampered by problems with mechanics or usage.
- B A B story also operates fully in the fictional mode, though perhaps with less complexity, originality, or artfulness. For the most part, the writer’s intentions are clearly identifiable through the narrative and dramatic choices he or she has made, with only the occasional lapse in characterization or structure. The language is precise and idiomatic with few problems of mechanics or usage.
- C A C story is a clear, coherent story that demonstrates a satisfactory understanding of craft. However, the characters tend to lack dimensionality and the plot veers toward the predictable. Scenes are not fully realized and sometimes glossed over with summary. The language is appropriate but lacking in vividness.
- D A D story is clichéd and reflects consistent weaknesses in numerous areas of craft. Both plot and characterization seem unconvincing. For the most part, the story does not operate in the fictional mode but in abstraction and generalization.
- F An F story is one that does not operate in the fictional mode or one that otherwise fails to meet the requirements of the assignment. Also given in cases of academic dishonesty (please see below).

All written assignments, including drafts, must be typed, double-spaced, titled, paginated, and submitted in MLA format. **Late work will be penalized 10% a day. Assignments more than two days late will not be accepted. Failure to turn in final portfolios of stories within two days of the due date will result in failure in the course. On weekends, late work can and should be submitted electronically.**

Academic Dishonesty

Anyone who attempts to present someone else’s fiction—published or unpublished, in whole or in part—as their own will fail the course and may face further action by the College. It’s simple: tell your own stories.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who wish to receive reasonable accommodations, as required by law, should identify themselves to the professor as early in the semester as possible. Please register with and bring documentation to the Office of Academic Support Services for Students with Disabilities and bring documentation to me from the ACSSD indicating the need for academic accommodation, preferably during the first week.

A Final Note

I look forward to working with you this semester. If we all approach this course with effort and enthusiasm, we can enact in the classroom what all writers hope for: a community of other writers with whom to talk eagerly about literature and writing and what it means to live through art.

What little I've accomplished has been by the most laborious and uphill work, and I wish now I'd *never* relaxed or looked back—but said at the end of The Great Gatsby: "I've found my line—from now on this comes first. This is my immediate duty—without this I am nothing."

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

Schedule

Week 1

R August 28 Introduction to Fiction Writing II.

Week 2

T September 2

- * "Creative Adventures: The Fiction Writer's Apprenticeship" by Charles Johnson (*CF*: 34-41).
- * "The Man Who Knew Belle Starr" by Richard Bausch (*3x33*: 196-210).
- * "Incremental Perturbation: How to Know Whether You've Got a Plot or Not" by John Barth (*CF*: 125-33).

R September 4

Craft Annotation #1 due.

- * "You're Ugly, Too" by Lorrie Moore (*3x33*: 701-14).
- * "Hunters in the Snow" by Tobias Wolff (*3x33*: 1070-80).
- * "Casting Shadows, Hearing Voices: The Basics of Point of View" by Valerie Miner (*CF*: 96-105).

Week 3

T September 9

Craft Annotation #2 due.

- * "Goodbye, My Brother" by John Cheever (*3x33*: 370-83).
- * "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars" by Junot Diaz (*3x33*: 428-37).
- * "A Container of Multitudes, Or When 'I' Isn't 'Me': The Art of First Person" by Alyce Miller (*CF*: 107-13).

- R September 11 **Craft Annotation #3 due.**
 * “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” by Joyce Carol Oates (*3x33*: 826-37).
 * “Icebergs, Glaciers, and Arctic Dreams: Developing Characters” by Kim Edwards (*CF*: 44-55).
- Week 4**
 T September 16 **First draft of Story 1 due. Post to Blackboard before class.**
 * “What Stories Teach Their Writers: The Purpose and Practice of Revision” by Jane Smiley (*CF*: 244-55).
- September 18 Workshop first draft of Story 1.
- Week 5**
 T September 23 Workshop first draft of Story 1.
 R September 25 Workshop first draft of Story 1.
- Week 6**
 T September 30 **Second draft of Story 1 due for those workshopped on September 18th & 23rd. Post to Blackboard before class.**
 Workshop first draft of Story 1.
- R October 2 Workshop second draft of Story 1.
- Week 7**
 T October 7 **Second draft of Story 1 due for those workshopped on September 25th & 30th. Post to Blackboard before class.**
 Workshop second draft of Story 1.
- R October 9 Workshop second draft of Story 1.
- Week 8**
 T October 14 Workshop second draft of Story 1.
 * “Eleven Style Considerations You Can’t Live Without: Editing and Polishing” by Alberto Ríos (*CF*: 256-62).
- R October 16 **Fall Break.**
- Week 9**
 T October 21 **Final draft and portfolio of Story 1 due.**
 * “A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Connor (*3x33*: 898- 908).
 * “Location, Location, Location: Depicting Character Through Place” by Richard Russo (*CF*: 67-79).
- R October 23 **Craft Annotation #4 due.**
 * “Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin (*3x33*: 62-82).
 * “Time and Order: The Art of Sequencing” by Lan Samantha Chang (*CF*: 135-46).

Week 10

T October 28

Craft Annotation #5 due.

- * “Are These Actual Miles?” by Raymond Carver (*3x33*: 342-47).
- * “The Apocalypse Commentary of Bob Paisner” by Rick Moody (*3x33*: 672-85).
- * “Minimalism and Maximalism: A Question of Style” by Karen Salyer McElmurray (*CF*: 207-17).

R October 30

Craft Annotation # 6 due.

- * “Jealous Husband Returns in Form of Parrot” by Robert Olen Butler (*3x33*: 325-29).
- * “Birthmates” by Gish Jen (*3x33*: 590-600)
- * “A Mystified Notion: Some Notes on Voice” by Sylvia Watanabe (*CF*: 197-205).

Week 11

T November 4

First draft of Story 2 due. Post to Blackboard before class.

R November 6

Workshop first draft of Story 2.

Week 12

T November 11

Workshop first draft of Story 2.

R November 13

Workshop first draft of Story 2.

Week 13

T November 18

Second draft of Story 2 due for those workshopped on November 6th & 11th. Post to Blackboard before class.
Workshop first draft of Story 2.

R November 20

Workshop second draft of Story 2.

Week 14**Thanksgiving.****Week 15**

T December 2

Second draft of Story 2 due for those workshopped on November 13th & 18th. Post to Blackboard before class.
Workshop second draft of Story 2.

R December 4

Workshop second draft of Story 2.

Week 16

T December 9

Workshop second draft of Story 2.

R December 11

- * “On Sending Out and Getting Back: Publishing Fiction” by Stephen Dixon (*CF*: 263-71).

Finals Week

T December 16

Final draft and portfolio of Story 2 due.